

Tragedies of Blood

The Significance of the Family in Five Renaissance Plays

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine the functions and significance of the family in five English tragedies from the period 1607-30. Drawing on Renaissance texts in which the family is employed as the fundamental analogue of social and moral order, I argue that the prominence of the family in these plays attests to an enduring belief in the need for order and structure in society, which their sensationalist depictions of depravities such as adultery, incest, bastardy and murder should not be allowed to obscure. In doing so, I reject criticism which regards these plays' view of human nature and society as 'progressive', modern and pessimistic, arguing instead that their ethos is implicitly conservative and, if at times cynical, nostalgic.

Introduction

My aims in this study are two-fold, although they are inter-related and pursued simultaneously. The first is to argue that the ways in which family groups and, more intangibly, the idea of the family, are employed in early modern tragedies is an extremely useful indicator of the 'world view' of those plays and, as such, that an understanding of the family, as it is presented in those plays, is important in appreciating their dimensions of social, political and moral commentary. My second objective is to argue against the critical position that tragedies of the early seventeenth century manifest some kind of ontological crisis, whereby a belief in the benign, divinely-ordered universe has been overcome by a proto-Hobbesian (or even proto-Cartesian) view of human nature and society. I will argue, therefore, that a focus on the family is a legitimate tool in this project, the employment of which leads to a perspective on early modern tragedy that is at once more complex, more optimistic and less certain than that which is frequently proposed. This introductory section will expand these aims and establish some underlying principles for the more substantive arguments that will follow.

I will discuss five plays: *The Revenger's Tragedy*, attributed to Thomas Middleton¹ (1607), *The Duchess of Malfi*, by John Webster (1614), *Women Beware Women*, also by Middleton (c1621), *The Changeling*, by Middleton and William Rowley (1622) and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, by John Ford (c1630/1633).² They are difficult to describe collectively, although they undoubtedly have much in common. 'Early modern tragedy', the term I will employ when such generalities seem unavoidable, does not make any distinction between these plays and others such as *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and

¹The traditional attribution of *The Revenger's Tragedy* to Cyril Tourneur, the author of *The Atheist's Tragedy*, has now been rejected in Thomas Middleton's favour.

²There is no specific historical connection between these five plays. It is, however, satisfying to note that Middleton, Rowley and Ford all contributed commendatory verses to the first edition of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*.

Othello, when many important distinctions certainly exist; 'Jacobean tragedy' is inconveniently inaccurate if *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (c.1630-33) is to be included. 'Revenge tragedy', while certainly applicable to aspects of all of these plays, fails to do justice to their complexities, and in some cases misrepresents them by over-emphasising one (often quite limited) aspect at the expense of a better understanding of the whole. A more useful term is 'city tragedy', coined by both Margot Heinemann and Verna Foster, and defined in Foster's 1988 article, '*Tis Pity She's a Whore* as City Tragedy'. In a later article (1994) Lisa Hopkins applies Foster's definition to her discussion of *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Changeling* and *Women Beware Women*. Foster's concepts and terminology are useful tools for considering the common ground between the five texts being discussed here.

Early in her account, Foster describes *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* as 'a social tragedy—more particularly, a city tragedy'. She continues:

Early seventeenth-century tragedy is characterised by its emphasis on a whole social group—Webster's courts, for example—rather than on the tragic individual as in the Elizabethan era. In *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* Ford carries this emphasis further than any of his contemporaries with the partial exception of Middleton. *'Tis Pity* belongs to a small group of plays anticipated by *Romeo and Juliet* and including *Women Beware Women* (from both of which Ford borrows) in which the failings of a specifically urban community provoke the tragedy of the protagonists; their tragedy, in turn, disrupts or even destroys the community by bringing to crisis point its own vice and folly (181-182).

Foster takes her term, obviously, from the analogy with city comedy, a genre in which Thomas Middleton, at least, was a leading exponent. 'City tragedy', of course, cannot be applied to Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* yet, still taking into account Foster's definitions, the label of 'social' or perhaps even more pointedly, 'societal tragedy' is applicable to all these plays. For in all of them, the consideration of fundamental human questions, such as the nature of free will, destiny, good and evil, presented in other tragedies through an exhaustive encounter with an exceptional individual (as in *Hamlet* or *King*

Lear) is instead mediated through (or even overshadowed by) a consideration of the nature of human society, and of people as social animals. The place of the individual in the universe, as a dramatic or tragic subject, gives way (in some respects) to the function and employment of the citizen or courtier in his or her immediate surroundings. The stage is no longer the whole world, but a corner of it very similar to that outside the theatre: the macrocosm has been replaced by the microcosm.

The macrocosm/microcosm relationship is of course important in the political, social and moral theory of the time, and the analogy constructed between family and society is especially significant. In his introduction to the *Women Beware Women*, J. R. Mulryne describes the play thus:

Women Beware Women analyses what happens when marriage, the representative social and moral bond, is undermined by moral blindness or lack of scruple. And it does so in the context of a whole network of family relationships that ought to guarantee social and moral order...Middleton shows...how social order cannot survive the acceptance of such [material] views of human relations (lv-lvi).

If marriage is 'the representative social and moral bond', then the family can equally be described as the representative social and moral unit. My argument is that the five plays being considered here use the family unit, in a variety of permutations, to explore issues of order and disorder in society, morality and government. I will set the ways in which they do so in a contemporary context through comparison with Elizabethan texts, such as the Prayerbook³, the Homilies⁴ and

³The Prayerbook referred to throughout is that of 1559, known as the Elizabethan Prayerbook, as opposed to the better-known *Book of Common Prayer* of 1662, to which it is similar, but not identical. All quotations are taken from Church of England. *The Book of Common Prayer 1559: The Elizabethan Prayerbook*. Ed. John E. Booty. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1976. (The Folger Shakespeare Library). For ease of reference I will refer to it as the Prayerbook.

⁴The Homilies are properly known as *Certaine Sermons or Homilies, Appointed to be Read in Churches In the Time of Queen Elizabeth I*, but are generally referred to as the Homilies, or the Elizabethan Homilies. All quotations are taken from Church of England. *Certaine Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches In the Time of Queen Elizabeth I: A Facsimile Reproduction of the Edition of 1623*. Ed. Mary

Hooker's *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, in which the motif of the family, and its employment as an analogue of society, are particularly prominent.⁵

The idea of a 'representative social and moral bond', identified by Mulryne, and modified here to 'representative social and moral unit' suggests that the family and matters related to it (such as marriage) are ideal indicators of the nature and condition of a community or society, city, court or state. In Renaissance terms the family is a society in miniature; in the context suggested by both Foster and Mulryne, it is an apt forum for demonstrating the influences of social mores, preoccupations and problems on individuals and their close personal relationships. As a representative social and moral unit, the family can be employed to present both ideas of order (for example, those concerned with the maintenance of hierarchy, degree and patriarchal control) and disorder (for example, incest and adultery) on a basic and universally applicable level. The condition of the family, as it is presented in these plays, is fundamental to their presentation of the condition, especially the moral condition, of the communities in which they are set, and those for which they were written.

The Revenger's Tragedy, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The Changeling*, *Women Beware Women* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* present seemingly a infinite variety of depravities and

Ellen Rickey and Thomas B. Stroup. Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968. For ease of reference, I will refer to it as the Homilies.

⁵Although it seems currently to be fashionable to call into question even the hitherto universal assumption that all people in early modern England professed Christian beliefs of one kind or another, it is safe to assume that most people (particularly in areas both closest to centres of government and most densely-populated, such as London and the south-east) shared the same broad religious experiences through the Bible, sermons (especially the Homilies), the Prayerbook and the Catechism. Hooker's text would not have been as widely known among the general population, but that at least parts of it were familiar to the educated (and the literary) is evidenced by its influence on other texts. The best example is Ulysses's speech on degree in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (I.iii.82-134). I do not intend to argue that everyone in England (or London) shared the same religious beliefs, but rather that, because of a common core of religious experience, they would have had shared vocabulary and concepts with which to describe their beliefs.

disorders. One obvious way in which to consider them, therefore, does initially seem to be as being symptomatic of pessimism in a period of transition; as evidence of a fundamental paradigmatic shift from the medieval to the modern. They do, at times, appear to be tokens of a rejection of a medieval view of humanity, society and nature (where order is perceived as both natural and divinely ordained) and a 'modern' perception, where disorder is regarded as natural and human life is described (in the words of Hobbes, the most prominent architect of the viewpoint), as 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'.

No sooner are these principles established, however, than it becomes apparent that such a perspective is simplistic. There are too many imponderables in this solution; furthermore, its very neatness and simplicity are tokens not of elegance but superficiality. Neither the 'before' picture (of the benign medieval universe) or the bleak post-Hobbesian 'after' do justice to the richness and complexities of early modern beliefs and values, or the people who held them. This is particularly true of the period specifically encompassed by these texts, beginning early in the reign of James I and ending as Charles I embarked on the years of personal rule that would culminate in the English Revolution. Because of the religious and political tensions of the period it is unwise to posit uniformity of belief at any point in the period 1558—1651, and especially from 1603 to 1642. Furthermore, it is equally unwise to assume consistency between the various beliefs held by any particular individual. Historians of the period now write of 'puritanism' rather than 'Puritanism', for example; no doubt they will soon write of 'puritanisms'.⁶

I am not going to argue what people 'in general' did or did not think or believe. Neither am I going to suggest that particular playwrights (or their intended audiences) always had particular barrows to push. Fittingly (given its concern for the microcosm) the focus of my argument will be this one small

⁶The relationship between puritans (of whatever persuasion) and the theatre is particularly complex, although it was once assumed to be wholly hostile.

aspect of both the texts and contemporary politico-religious thought: the family. Where I do attempt to suggest what particular concerns or motifs in the five plays might reveal about the preoccupations of their authors or audiences, I will do so in light of the arguments of theatre historian and critic Martin Butler. Essentially, he argues for the influence of 'Elizabethanism' in early seventeenth-century culture, whereby the perceived values and ideals of the reign of Elizabeth I are nostalgically eulogised and resought. Drawing on and expanding this idea, I will argue here that some of the disorder and confusion apparent in early modern tragedies expresses not a rejection of the past, but a yearning for its certainties and securities.

Following this introductory section, there are a further two introductory notes. The first briefly outlines the recent historiography of the early modern family, a minor objective of my study being the rejection of the views of Lawrence Stone on the basis of the portrayal of the family in drama. The second, a critical note, surveys several conflicting accounts of the 'world view' of early modern tragedy, providing both a context for the arguments of Butler, which will be outlined more fully, and further justification for the rejection of the transitional or proto-Hobbesian model of the drama. These frames established, there follow the two major substantive parts of this study. In the first I will examine the ways in which the family is used to present ideas of order, disorder, authority, the natural and the unnatural in these plays, with extensive reference to other contemporary texts. In the second I will consider the ways in which families are constructed, in these plays, as spaces of both enclosure and sanctuary, linking this, through Butler's concept of Elizabethanism, to the political circumstances of early seventeenth-century England, as well as to the views of Lawrence Stone. In both parts I will argue, although on different grounds, that even when the families and societies they portray are depraved and disordered, an enduring belief in order is still affirmed by the centrality of the family itself in these plays.

The Historiographical Background

Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (1977) is a seminal work in the history of the family, and one which has achieved monolithic status in its own field and in the historiography of the early modern period in general. Parts of his thesis have been modified, and some rejected outright, but his influence on historical and sociological thought (and, indirectly, on literary criticism) has been such that his work cannot be ignored in any discussion connected with the family in early modern England.

Stone's basic premise is that the English family, in the early modern period, was in a state of flux, moving from functioning as a distant patriarchal unit to one that favoured affective individualism. He terms the family before 1500 the 'open lineage family', in which the interests of the individual were subordinated to those of his or her class, and that from 1640 onwards, the 'closed domesticated nuclear family', which facilitated individualism, personal decision making and a right to privacy. In the years 1580-1640 he posits the existence of what he calls the 'restricted patriarchal nuclear family', still characterised by emotional distance, but in which local obligations (to patron or community, for example) had replaced those to church or nation. Stone also claims that, because of extremely high mortality rates, especially among children, families necessarily functioned in an atmosphere of emotional disengagement:

About all that can be said with confidence on the matter of emotional relations within the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century family at all social levels is that there was a general psychological atmosphere of distance, manipulation and deference; that high mortality rates made deep relationships very imprudent; that marriages were arranged by parents and kin for economic and social reasons with minimal consultation of the children; that evidence of close bonding between parents and children is hard, but not impossible to document; and that close affection between husband and wife is both ambiguous and rare (88).

The standard opposition to Stone's position is Ralph Houlbrooke's *The English Family 1450-1700* (1984). In his introduction, Houlbrooke lists his six major objections to Stone's approach, findings and theses:

First, the degree of change which took place in thinking about conjugal and parental responsibilities and in the importance of affection within the family is exaggerated. Secondly, the correspondence between official doctrines and actual practice, and consequently the speed with which changes in the former affected the latter, are overestimated. Thirdly, particular effects of ideals, practices and experience upon the individual personality are far too confidently asserted, and the controversial or hypothetical character of much psychological theory is ignored. Of all Stone's major approaches, the economic is perhaps the sketchiest, and the enormous range of familial economic forms and of differences in the extent to which family members fulfilled economically productive roles is insufficiently emphasised. Fifthly, assertions of the importance of wider kindred in late medieval England are based on long exploded sociological myths: they fly in the face of the facts that there were no clearly defined groups of kinsfolk or obligations towards them. Finally, demographic statistics tend to be interpreted in the most pessimistic fashion, which gives an exaggerated impression of the transience of family ties and the neglect of infants (15).

Houlbrooke goes on to say, more generally:

The impression of change over time is exaggerated by failure to pay attention to the likelihood that the character of the source material changed much more radically than the feelings and attitudes reflected in it. Much evidence of love, affection and the bitterness of loss dating from the first half of Stone's period has simply been ignored. The criticisms concerning the assumed relationship between ideals and practice, the perpetuation of sociological myths and the use of evidence strike at the very heart of Stone's scheme of successive family types, the open lineage family, the restricted patriarchal nuclear family, and the closed domesticated nuclear family, which forms the spine of his book. The whole scheme exaggerates the speed, extent and uniformity of change, even with all the qualifications which Stone attaches to it (15).

Houlbrooke himself argues for two major points, themselves almost diametrically opposed to the cornerstones of Stone's arguments. The first is that the early modern period was one of continuity, rather than change, in the structure, life and fortunes of the English family. Secondly, he utterly rejects

Stone's thesis of the three evolving models of the family, arguing instead that the nuclear family was recognisably in existence in the middle ages, and that it existed, essentially unchanged, throughout the early modern period and beyond. In his own words:

[T]he elementary or nuclear family typically occupied a central place in the life and aspirations of the individual between 1450 and 1700 as it still does today. . . [T]he momentous developments of this period, though certainly affecting family life, brought no fundamental changes in familial forms, functions, and ideals (15-6).

Among the thousands of patients of all classes save the poorest who visited the Buckinghamshire clergyman and psychiatric healer Richard Napier between 1597 and 1635, the commonest specified causes of stress were courtship troubles, marital problems and bereavement. 'All of the measures we can devise agree: The emotional lives of ordinary men and women were centered primarily within the nuclear family' (254).

At two hundred and fifty pages in length, Houlbrooke's book is only just over a quarter as long as Stone's mammoth work, the abridged version of which is more than four hundred pages long. Yet Houlbrooke, writing only seven years after Stone, has a far richer historiographical resource upon which to draw, with the advent (perhaps precipitated by Stone) of sustained interest in the history of the family from the late nineteen-seventies onwards.⁷ Many approaches to the history of the family have been purely demographic, based on the exhaustive investigation of court and parish records and employing family reconstitution techniques.⁸ Others treat family history as an obvious (and necessarily politicised) adjunct to feminist or Marxist history; still others are concerned with the history of private life *per se*, drawing on the media of letters and diaries. Houlbrooke draws on all these varieties of history: his study is therefore as much a summary

⁷Houlbrooke gives a brief and useful survey of approaches in his introduction, as does Mary Abbott (1993), in what is probably the most recent contribution to the genre.

⁸The relevance of such histories to a discussion such as this is limited by the fact that, of the over four hundred parish registers which survive more or less complete from the early modern period, none are for London churches.

of scholarship as it is a refutation (or qualification) of Stone's work.

The Critical Frame

I do not wish here to provide a history of the criticism of Renaissance tragedy. Such accounts can be found in the introductions to the Revels editions of the plays. I intend, rather, to summarise the relevant features of four different versions of the 'world view' of early modern tragedies. My intention, in particular, is to locate in the critical tradition the account of Martin Butler, the most recent critic of the four and the one whose arguments provide the starting point for those to be set out here, as well as to establish some general principles that will underlie this discussion.

E. M. W. Tillyard's essay *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943) is still a classic (although no longer definitive) statement about the early modern 'mindset', and as such is a useful, even a vital, starting point for any discussion of the drama of the period. Tillyard unashamedly stretches the term 'Elizabethan' to encompass not only Jacobean drama but also *Paradise Lost*. Drawing on Elizabethan texts, including some which I will refer to in this discussion, he constructs a 'world view' that he characterises as still essentially medieval: it is hierarchical and ordered, with every aspect and element of creation assigned a precise place and a relationship to every other. He writes of the analogies or associations possible between the divine, human, animal, vegetable, mineral and elemental orders, and offers three models of this order: the 'Chain of Being', the 'Corresponding Planes', and the 'Cosmic Dance'.

Tillyard accounts for what even he must admit is a radically different tone in many tragedies of the early modern period—cynical, dark, even nihilistic—in an interesting way. He describes such plays as being frequently aberrant to the Elizabethan world view, but as at the same time also indirectly

affirming it, because they can be seen as symptomatic (albeit in an exaggerated and heightened way) of the perceived disjunction between the beauty and harmony of ideal order and grim reality. 'Men were bitter and thought the world was in decay precisely because they expected so much' (28). Thus to Tillyard these plays, while they may be distorting and intensifying, are still mirroring what he perceives to be the dominant world view of the time. The vision of many renaissance tragedies is dark, therefore, because the perfection of the ideal against which it is set is so acute.

To extract Tillyard's comments on the vision of the tragedies distorts his argument as a whole, since, overall, he devotes far more time and space to arguing for the harmonious, ordered vision, devoted to degree and as much an aesthetic object as an articulation of belief. Tillyard's 'world picture' is an excellent starting point, but it is, in its original form, too simplistic; it must be qualified and modified to be of any further great use. Another possible reservation as regards Tillyard's description of the plays, (his example is *The Duchess of Malfi*) that he regards as aberrant is this: do plays or other texts concerned (perhaps above all else) with the negative depiction of disorder necessarily rely on their being grounded in a received understanding of a prescriptive notion of order (such as that provided by Tillyard) or merely an awareness of the need for order *per se*? This is a question which crystallises the simplicity and hence the vulnerability of Tillyard's schema, and one which this discussion, as a whole, will consider further.

A quarter of a century after Tillyard's essay, George Herndl discussed the relationship between natural law and tragedy in *The High Design: English Renaissance Tragedy and the Natural Law* (1970). He takes a position emphatically (and at times explicitly) opposed to Tillyard's. Because, he says, of the influence of Bacon, Calvin and, ultimately, Descartes, Jacobean tragedy is symptomatic of a world view radically different to the continuously medieval one proposed in *The Elizabethan World Picture*. On occasion, it can be seen as enacting this very opposition between a world view which affirms the primacy of natural law and what Herndl describes

as one that is 'voluntaristic, Calvinistic, mechanistic' (161). He describes a loss of 'affirmative power' (160) in tragedy, and suggests that, through a heightened awareness of the fallen state of humanity, there is less possibility of giving characters 'heroic treatment' (117). In answer to one of the questions raised in the discussion of Tillyard above, he sees the 'darkness' and 'meaninglessness of the world' of the tragedies as being caused not by the 'presence. . . of particular other philosophies or moral systems, but the absence of the traditional natural law' (161). Yet whereas Tillyard sees this sometimes self-conscious absence as affirming an enduring faith in the ideal of order, Herndl infers the opposite.

My reservations regarding Tillyard focus on his apparent preference for simplicity and aesthetic values over depth and complexity, and Herndl, in going to the opposite ideological extreme, is guilty of much the same fault. His formulation is too radical, thus involving too many imponderables. It is always more enticing to argue for change (especially at the elusive paradigmatic level) as opposed to continuity, and Herndl demonstrates both the truth of this principle and the dangers inherent in adhering to it.

Furthermore, it is both difficult and inadvisable to attempt to label the ideologies of early seventeenth-century England. The period was one when many of the 'logical conclusions' to which various political and religious ideas could be taken (which might now be regarded as obvious, such as Presbyterianism, Republicanism and regicide) had not yet been arrived at. Beliefs which might now be thought of as wholly incompatible could be held together. Even the former certainty with which an antagonistic relationship was assumed between those of a 'puritan' persuasion and the world of the theatre is now seen as much less certain and absolute. As Tillyard himself notes,

There has indeed been a mistaken trend to think of the Elizabethans as specialists in things secular or religious, as if no Elizabethan explorer could be a theologian⁹, and no

⁹His example is Raleigh.

Londoner who heard a Puritan sermon ever saw a play (31).

Another question raised by Herndl's book is whether (or to what extent) renaissance tragedy (or any other literary genre) can be regarded as a useful or meaningful indicator of what might be termed ideological ambience. It seems naive, even crude, to expect to be able to extrapolate from literary artifacts (and transient ones at that, far more so than their modern successors) many particularly profound statements about the ontological preoccupations of their time. Surely an examination of evidence as insignificant as a collection of play texts must confine itself above all to the microscopic (or, in this case, the microcosmic), and proceed with caution to any more ambitious degree of analysis? While the same question as to whether or not a portrayal of disorder is predicated on a desire for order remains, Herndl's arguments, nevertheless, function as useful companions (and correctives) to those of Tillyard.

John Danby's *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of King Lear* was published in 1949. Although nominally concerned only with *King Lear*, Danby's study ranges over many other Shakespeare plays, as well as other texts of the period. He discusses *King Lear* in terms somewhat similar to Herndl, although more explicitly and precisely. For Danby, *King Lear* is an essay in two conflicting world views, with Edgar standing for Hooker's school of thought and Edmund for that of Hobbes. Danby goes into great detail in setting up his argument, setting Edmund in the context of a progression in the characterisations of Shakespeare's villains. He ultimately makes the assertion that 'the matter pondered in *Leviathan* Jacobean drama, as a vital organ of thought, had already pondered' (47).¹⁰

¹⁰To introduce *King Lear* into my discussion is in many ways defensible. Its date of first performance (1605) places it just before the first of the plays being considered here, but near enough for it to remain within 'living memory'. Many of *King Lear*'s concerns are shared by the tragedies I have chosen for discussion: the relationships between parents and children, bastardy, madness. The words 'natural' and 'unnatural' occur often and crucially in *King Lear*, as in the other plays. The character of Edmund, too, has obvious similarities (as Danby

Yet the same caveats can be applied to Danby's study as to those of Tillyard and Herndl. Danby's conclusions are too neat, and too self-consciously so. Like the aspects of Herndl's argument which place it within what might be termed the 'transitional model' (which argues that English renaissance tragedies are symptomatic of a paradigmatic shift from a medieval world view to a modern), Danby's argument tends to be simplistic, and to rely too much on argument with the benefit of hindsight. It is difficult enough, for example, to gauge how radical the ideas of Hobbes's *Leviathan* were in 1651, let alone to suggest that they were in some way pre-empted by a dramatic fiction in 1605. *King Lear* will be returned to, but most of the matter of Danby's study, although well worth considering (if only to disagree with) must, somewhat regretfully, be set aside. It has a certain charm, but most of its appeal is aesthetic.

In *Theatre and Crisis 1632—1642* (1984) Martin Butler sets the decade of his main interest in the context of Jacobean and Caroline theatre in general, often referring to developments from the accession of James I in 1603, and even making comparisons with the political nature of theatre under Elizabeth I. Butler's study is highly detailed and very precise. He makes few sweeping assertions, and many of his comments and arguments provide vitally important qualifications and correctives to the accounts of both Herndl and Tillyard.

One point that Butler makes, which should be obvious elsewhere but is not, is that revivals were at times a significant feature of Jacobean and Caroline theatre. It is easy to forget that this was a period of extremely short runs and blatant appeal to the popular taste, in both new plays and revivals. The printing and reprinting of play texts also reflected popular demand. Andrew Gurr points out that, judging from reprints alone, the most popular plays of the period 1574—1642 (besides *Doctor Faustus*, *Hamlet* and the two parts of *Henry IV*) were *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Mucedorus*, *Philaster*, *If You Know Not Me*, and *Pericles* (227). While many plays were produced

points out) with the revenging protagonists of early modern tragedies. Some of these similarities will be discussed elsewhere, pp61-2.

once and never seen again, some were produced on numerous occasions, and even revived long after their original productions. Butler states:

By concentrating on those elements in a period which to hindsight appear progressive we subtly but inevitably misrepresent the way things looked to contemporaries. We tend to describe audience demand in terms of what changes or is new, but clearly a substantial part of Caroline taste was backward-looking, and this is of enormous significance, both theatrically and politically. Caroline refinement was continually modified by more Elizabethan styles, and their survival suggests that the attitudes on which they were founded—their traditional and highly-charged popular sympathies and values—were still felt to be strongly relevant to England in the 1630s. The taste for revivals and for the Elizabethan manner made available a drama that was sceptical, critical and levelling, in which common men rubbed shoulders with kings; the Master of the Revels who required all plays to be re-submitted to him for censorship of the 'offensive matter' they might contain, clearly perceived how suspect they could be (184).

The point is clear: it is misleading to regard plays as succeeding one another in an unbroken linear progression, or to see the popular taste as demanding novelty only.

Revivals were on occasion politically motivated, the best-known example being the specially commissioned performance of Shakespeare's *Richard II* on the eve of the ill-fated Essex rebellion in 1601. Butler cites two other plays: Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* (1605-5) and Rowley's *When You See Me You Know Me* (1604). He describes them as 'Foxean' history plays, bombastically praising the virtues of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Lady Jane Grey and Elizabeth I as Protestant princes. Both (despite their undoubtedly old-fashioned style) were revived in the 1630s, the Rowley play having gone to four editions by 1632. Butler introduces, later in his discussion, the concept of what he terms 'Elizabethanism', of which he sees these revivals as being symptomatic:

Everywhere the government of James and Charles provoked, unintentionally, a quite extraordinary cult of the memory of Elizabeth. . . which for all its veneration of monarchy and attachment to the past, was sweeping the country relentlessly towards the challenge to the king, not away from it. Elizabeth was not merely remembered

fondly; rather, she was enthusiastically revered, and not just for her personal stature which threw Charles the man into an uncomplimentary shadow, but because of the aims and policies which men remembered (or thought they remembered) her as pursuing but which under the Stuarts had been either abandoned or reversed. At the heart of the Elizabethan cult was an emotional concern for *values*—opposition to Spain and the Pope, support for international Protestantism, aggression abroad, unity at home in a church properly reformed under a godly prince—the values of the old national myth of England's greatness which Elizabeth was supposed to have been furthering and which Charles certainly was not, and which cast suspicion on the whole tendency of Stuart government (198).

This is a perceptive and useful qualification of Tillyard's perspective on the continuity of the Elizabethan 'world view'.

Butler, therefore, offers a viable *via media* between Tillyard (and Danby) and Herndl, Hooker and Hobbes. In particular, he makes the significant move away from the binary thinking which has it that if something is not one thing it must by default be another, and its derivative opinion, that if something is not one thing, it must almost by definition be in the process of becoming the other. The approach which I will take in this discussion, already outlined in the introduction, can thus be seen as an expansion of Butler's account of the rise of Elizabethanism in the early seventeenth century. It rejects the emphasis on change and transition at a paradigmatic level found in the arguments of Herndl and Danby, but at the same time qualifies Tillyard's emphasis on continuity, as well as explicitly rejecting his (and other critics') over-simplification of the issues.¹¹ I will refer to texts cited by Tillyard and Danby (such as the Elizabethan Homilies, the Prayerbook and Hooker's *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*) not as evidence for a particular mindset, but as evidence of shared vocabulary and concepts, related to social, moral and spiritual order, common to most educated people in early modern England.

¹¹Tillyard in particular is prone to such statements as '[this belief] must have been common to all Elizabethans of even modest intelligence' (20).

Part One: *Natural and Unnatural*

The family is the smallest discrete unit upon and within which the forces of a patriarchal, hierarchical, class-conscious and increasingly capitalist society can be seen to act. I will begin this first part of my study by giving an account of the types of family groups that are encountered in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *The Changeling*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Women Beware Women* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. This will be followed by an examination of the ways in which considerations of class shape the interactions of family members, linking this to contemporary ideas of order and degree, and I will take a quotation from the Elizabethan 'Homily on Obedience' as a starting point in a discussion of the significance of the moral characters of rulers and their families as they are portrayed in these plays. This will be followed by a consideration of the way in which patriarchal authority in particular is presented. I will argue that, ultimately, these plays are concerned to assert the primacy of traditional forms of patriarchal authority.

The second part of my discussion will also be tied closely to Elizabethan texts, considering questions of role and function in the context of contemporary ideas about the relationship between the natural and the unnatural as determinants of moral and social order. In these plays, I will argue, disorder is symptomatic of the instability of the hitherto assumed relationship between the natural, the unnatural, social order and moral good. However, I will also show that these plays do, in general, affirm either a conservative ideal of social order, or a belief in the value of order *per se*. They do this through explicit affirmations of such principles as patriarchal authority and, more subtly, through the central position given in all of them to that fundamental paradigm of order in early modern England, the family unit.

I

The exact composition of the model early modern family has, since the 1960s, been the subject of much debate.¹² Without entering into the controversy, it is safe to say that the basic unit was, technically, the household rather than the family, which included non-kin members such as domestic servants, but that the household, more often than not, was centred on a core family group that was essentially nuclear, rather than the multi-generational extended kin group posited by some earlier historians. Using these plays as evidence, this indeed appears to be the case, as a catalogue of the composition of their various family groups reveals. In *The Revenger's Tragedy* there are two families which can be seen, as some critics have argued, as being placed in direct moral opposition to each other. One comprises Vindice, his brother Hippolito, his sister Castiza and their widowed mother Gratiana; the other the Duke, his son Lussurioso, his second wife, her sons Ambizioso, Supervacuo and their unnamed youngest brother, and the Duke's bastard, Spurio. This ruling family, which could (anachronistically) be described as 'blended', is, as such, a reasonably accurate reflection of the situation of many noble families of the time. Two other kinds of family are opposed in *The Duchess of Malfi*: the noble (and public) Arragonian family of the Duchess and her brothers Ferdinand and the Cardinal, and the private, domestic grouping of the Duchess, her second husband Antonio and their three children, to which intimate group could be added Cariola, the loyal lady-in-waiting.

In *Women Beware Women* there are not so much family units as their fragments. Leantio and his widowed mother are joined, briefly, by Bianca, their relative lack of means contrasting them with the new alliance formed between Bianca and the Duke, and, implicitly, with the noble family that Bianca has left behind in Venice. The siblings Hippolito, Fabritio and Livia, together with Fabritio's daughter Isabella (and Isabella's dead mother, whose slander by Livia is so important to the

¹²See the historiographical note pp9-12.

plot) form another unit, with the familiar aristocratic concern of marrying off their children to their own best advantage. The play's last 'family' comprises the Ward, his uncle Guardiano and servant Sordido.

The Changeling presents the widowed Vermandero and his daughter Beatrice-Joanna, who form a household with their servants De Flores and Diaphanta; Beatrice-Joanna's first suitor Alonzo de Piracquo appears with his brother Tomazo, and the second suitor Alsemero introduces himself by establishing a connection between his father and Vermandero; he is accompanied by his faithful friend Jasperino. At the play's end Alsemero and Vermandero explicitly establish a new family when Vermandero adopts him as his heir. In the subplot *Alibius*, his wife Isabella and their servant Lollo, together with their household full of madmen, form another household unit. Finally, in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* more fragmented families are encountered. The widower Florio, his children Annabella and Giovanni, together with Annabella's duenna Putana and possibly also Giovanni's tutor Friar Bonaventura form one unit; Richardetto and his niece Philotis (and his supposed widow Hippolita) another. As in *Women Beware Women*, a quasi-familial relationship exists between Donado, his ward Bergetto and Bergetto's servant Poggio, while Soranzo and his servant Vasques function as another household unit. Annabella's final suitor, the soldier, Grimaldi, is able to escape punishment for his murder of Bergetto by claiming kinship with the Cardinal, Parma's Papal Nuncio. It can be seen, therefore, that in all these plays the characters are firmly located in family or household-based units, and their membership of these groups, all of which have various vested interests and defining characteristics, plays a significant part in determining what happens to them in the course of the play.

Several broad observations can be made about the families portrayed in these plays. The first is obvious: among all these various groupings, there is not one that conforms to the modern 'standard' of wife, husband and children. In these texts, the nuclear family appears only in a bereaved, depleted condition: loss of father in *The Revenger's Tragedy*; of mother

and father in *Women Beware Women*; of mother in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *The Changeling*, and husband and father in *The Duchess of Malfi*. Furthermore, the wards in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *Women Beware Women* must have lost both parents. In these plays, therefore, the patriarchal family unit, assumed as the fundamental exemplum of right order and degree by the political and moral theorists of the period, never appears. Its closest approximation is the Duke's family in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, which is surely a ghastly parody of the family as a representative social and moral unit.

In all these plays, furthermore, the absent family members are recalled in ways that emphasise their absence, and draw attention to the remaining family members' self-conscious awareness of their family's incompleteness as a unit. Vermandero, for example, recalls his dead wife when he says to Alsemero (describing Beatrice-Joanna): 'I had her fellow once, sir, | But heaven has married her to joys eternal' (III.iv.4-5)¹³. Livia slanders her dead sister-in-law to persuade Isabella that her affair with Hippolito is not, technically, incestuous (II.i.102-176) and Annabella and Giovanni vow their love in the name of their 'mother's dust' (I.ii.253-59)¹⁴, Annabella later giving her brother the ring which her 'mother in her will bequeathed, | And charged [her] on her blessing not to give't | To any but [her] husband' (II.vi.36-38). Leantio and his mother are poor, in part, because of his father's death, and Vindice justifies his vendetta against the Duke and his family as being partly in retribution for his father's death (III.v.169-73). The Duchess of Malfi's first husband is recollected by her in her courtship of Antonio (I.i.453-55) and her brother Ferdinand invokes their dead father when he reproaches her for merely (as he thinks) thinking of marrying again (I.i.330-32).

¹³All quotations are taken from Thomas Middleton and William Rowley. *The Changeling*. Ed. N. W. Bawcutt. (The Revels Plays). London: Methuen & Co., 1958, unless otherwise stated.

¹⁴All quotations are taken from John Ford. *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. Ed. Derek Roper. (The Revels Plays). London: Methuen & Co., 1975, unless otherwise stated.

In some respects this presentation of bereaved families is a reflection of seventeenth-century social reality, but it can also be seen as evidence for the recognition of a loss of order and structure in society, represented by an instability in society's fundamental unit, while at the same time placing that unit at society's centre. In all these plays, too, marriage and sexuality are presented as largely debased and commodified: marriages are negotiated for financial or social advantage, and this is shown particularly in the satirical or cynical portrayals of wards and their guardians. The interaction of bourgeois or noble characters with their servants (such as Putana, Poggio, De Flores, Diaphanta, Lollo, Sordido, 'Piato' and even Bosola) allows both a bawdy undercutting of the aristocratic idea of love and marriage and the revelation that the only apparent alternative is equally unappealing.

The Revenger's Tragedy, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The Changeling* and *Women Beware Women* draw the majority of their characters from the upper classes, and they have as their settings palaces and citadels. *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* is the exception to this, with an urban setting and largely bourgeois characters. One of all these plays' shared characteristics, though, is an acute sensitivity to the details of social intercourse between the various characters in these settings, and an especially developed awareness of class difference and its effects on the formation of social roles and relationships. This reflects the socio-political and moral thinking of the time which, expressed in texts such as the Elizabethan Prayerbook and the Elizabethan Homilies, presents a view of the world that emphasises hierarchy and degree, continuity between the hierarchies of the natural and the social worlds, and the importance of social relationships:

Every degree of people in their vocation, calling and office, hath appointed to them their duty and order: some are in high degree, some in low, some kings and princes, some inferiours and subjects, Priests and laymen, masters and servants, fathers and children, husbands and wives, riche and poore, and every one have neede of other, so that in all things is to be lauded and praised the goodly order of GOD, without the which no house, no Citie, no Commonwealth can continue and endure, or last (Rickey and Stroup 69).

One of the most obvious characteristics of this description of order is the way in which it constructs order as dependent upon the maintenance of a power structure whereby power is apportioned in terms of a binary opposition between the empowered and the powerless. In this vision of 'commonwealth' the ruled are no less essential than the rulers: 'Every one hath neede of other'. The series of pairings also sets up the implied analogy between their various elements. Thus it is suggested that kings, princes, priests, masters, father and husbands may have other things in common because they share the same fact of superiority in their respective relationships with inferiors, subjects, laymen, servants, children and wives. The awareness of the importance of both class and one's relative position in the binarily ordered hierarchy can be seen in *Women Beware Women*, a play in which the relative positions of the characters on the social scale is an important factor in determining their eventual fates. Bianca's having married beneath her predisposes her to adultery with the Duke, allowing her to reclaim, in material terms, a position more akin to her unmarried status; Leantio is murdered by Hippolito because, as a mere factor, he is an unworthy lover for the aristocratic Livia. Livia's own status as a wealthy widow allows her a high degree of freedom (and licence), whereas Leantio's mother, less well-off, is dependent upon Livia for charity and society. The wealth of the foolish and unpleasant Ward makes it imperative that he marry and produce an heir, while the aristocratic Isabella appears to feel no qualms in marrying him to provide a cover for her affair with Hippolito.

In these plays, the place of the individual in his or her kinship group is, in turn, shaped by the social status of that group. This is particularly true of the emphasis placed, in all the plays examined here, on marriage, which is presented largely in terms of whether it is socially (and financially) advantageous for, and approved of by, the families involved. Thus one of the key issues in *The Duchess of Malfi* is that the

Duchess has married beneath her, and without the approval of her family; in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* the relative social positions of Annabella's suitors are carefully set out, and the fact that (although a wealthy heiress) she is a bourgeoisie is significant, for example in Grimaldi's justification of the murder of Bergetto. Some critics go so far as to discuss the play as an implicit attack on the rising urban middle class and their values¹⁵. Marriage and the formation of sexual relationships is a family, rather than a personal, concern in these plays, and one in which questions of class (as well as of commerce, through the emphasis on dowries and inheritance) are vital.

Given that these plays were popular (if not populist) texts, and the increasing political acumen of the London audiences for which they were first performed, it is fair to assume that they, to some degree at least, reflect the realities and the concerns of both their authors and their intended audiences. On one level this can be seen in their attention to the practical detail of marriage and inheritance; their evocation, through street encounters, masques and banquets, of daily life in a closely-knit community, (although nominally Italian or Spanish in their settings, these plays surely represent a way of living much like that familiar, to their audiences, in London court or City), and their careful depiction of the minutiae of social intercourse: introductions and invitations, gossipy intrigues, banter between masters and servants and, often, a considerable amount of bawdry. The emphasis on the family is part of this pseudo-realistic detail. But, given the context of contemporary ideas about order and hierarchy, the recurrent motif of various permutations of the family unit *per se* in these texts is also central to the way in which they address these underlying and more far-reaching issues.

Although families and family-based groupings are central to these plays—they define the characters, shape their relationships and influence the plot—they give no examples of 'normal' happy families or marriages. Some sort of tranquillity

¹⁵V. L. Jephson, B. T. Boehrer. 'Mythologizing the Middle Class: *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and the Urban Bourgeoisie'. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*. 18.3 (1994): 5-27.

and fulfilment is glimpsed in the domestic life of Antonio and the Duchess of Malfi, but their relationship is concealed and irregular; the love of Annabella and Giovanni is initially presented in conventionally idyllic terms (*à la Romeo and Juliet*, a play with which it is frequently compared) but it is still an incestuous love that, in its self-destruction, also destroys people from all strata of Parmesan society. Parents (especially fathers) are portrayed as weak and corrupt, and children as wilful, selfish and disrespectful. Through the episodes of adultery and real (or suggested) incest in these plays (at a rough count, eight of the former and five of the latter, admittedly sometimes in combination), marriage and the family are presented as debased, devalued and increasingly undermined.

Because, with the exception of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, these plays are concerned with rulers and their families, the ostensibly private details of their relationships and intrigues are presented as having considerable impact on the state and society at large. The Elizabethan Homily on Obedience¹⁶ at one point states that the private morality of the ruler is far more crucial in determining the fortunes of the realm than the morality of his subjects:

For it is indeede evident, both by the Scriptures, and dayly by experience, that the maintenance of all vertue and godlinesse, and consequently of the wealth and prosperitee of a kingdome and people, doeth stand & rest more in a wise and good Prince on the one part, then in great multitudes of other men being subjects: and on the contrary part, the overthrow of all vertue and godlinesse, and consequently the decay and utter ruine of a Realme and people, doth row and come more by an undiscreete and evill governour, then by many thousands of other men being subjects (Rickey and Stroup 278).

This sentiment is perhaps most obviously applicable to *The Revenger's Tragedy*. The Duke in that play is presented as utterly corrupt: he is adulterous and lecherous; his court is a place of licence and violence. The dissolute family which surrounds him, especially Lussurioso and Spurio (very much

¹⁶Properly known as 'An Exhortation concerning good Order, and obedience to Rulers and Magistrates'.

their father's sons) contributes greatly to this negative depiction. When, unusually, the Duke is shown in the business of government, passing judgement on his youngest stepson for the rape of Antonio's wife (I.ii), he appears weak and easily led. Yet at the same time, he seems to be aware of the disgrace that his wife's son's actions have brought upon him as a ruler:

Duchess, it is your youngest son. We're sorry
His violent act has e'en drawn blood of honour,
And stain'd our honours;
Thrown ink upon the forehead of our state,
Which envious spirits will dip their pens into
After our death, and blot us in our tombs (I.ii.1-6)¹⁷

The Duke's dignity and magnificence—his 'state'—is tarnished by the events at his court, but his use of the 'forehead' metaphor also foreshadows his eventual cuckolding by Spurio and the Duchess, introduced later in the same scene by the Duchess: 'I'll kill him in his forehead, hate there feed; | That wound is deepest, though it never bleed' (I.ii.108-9). The private fortunes of the Duke are therefore identified metaphorically with his fate as a public figure.

Secondly, the effects of the immorality of the Duke are demonstrated by the actions of those in the various groups he ostensibly governs. His own family is treacherous, licentious and thoroughly unpleasant. Vindice's family, if they are taken to be representative of the Duke's subjects in the wider context of the realm, are in many respects no better. The wrongs done to them in no way justify Vindice's descent into sadistic violence. The sexual immorality of the ducal family seems also to have influenced Vindice's, for though Castiza remains immune to corruption, Gratiana is quickly induced to act as her daughter's bawd, and it appears that Vindice (and Hippolito) would cheerfully pander for Lussurioso, were they not called upon to procure their own sister. The victims (or objects) of the corruption and immorality of the Duke and his family are thus not presented as occupying the moral high ground. They

¹⁷All quotations are taken from Cyril Tourneur. *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Ed. R. A. Foakes. (The Revels Plays). London: Methuen & Co., 1966, unless otherwise stated.

have (to borrow the famous opening image from *The Duchess of Malfi*) been infected by the vices of their supposed betters. If the prince is the chief determinant of the moral character and the material fortunes of the society over which he governs, then *The Revenger's Tragedy* portrays, in a negative sense, the truth of that doctrine by showing both cause and effects.

In his essay 'The True and False Families of *The Revenger's Tragedy*', Jonas Barish argues that the Duke's family is 'diametrically opposed' (157) in its evil by the 'true', good family of Castiza, Gratiana, Hippolito and Vindice. He reads the play, as others have, as a highly-schematised drama in the morality play tradition.¹⁸ This is in many ways a valid and a useful way of approaching the text, but in seeking a number of pointedly direct contrasts between the two households, Barish pushes his scheme too far. Thus he describes Vindice's family as 'a community linked in affection and bonded together in virtue' (143), and the marriage of Gratiana and Vindice's unnamed father as 'evidently happy' (146), although on what grounds he comes to this conclusion he fails to specify. He concludes:

The finale...despite its sardonic grimness, contains tragic feeling. For in it the best and the brightest, having tainted their luster in the pursuit of honors, *having picked up some of the foulness of their environment*, must go under. But they are no more to be lumped with their victims than *Hamlet* is to be lumped with Claudius because in the process of combating Claudius's wrongs he too dips his hands in blood. There are taints and taints; there is corruption and corruption. *The Revenger's Tragedy*, even before it is a tale of the good contaminated, is a tale of good versus evil (154, italics mine).

But Vindice is not wholly a Hamlet-figure, nor does he seem to be meant as one. He is not an especially noble hero (or anti-hero); his readiness to act as Lussurioso's pander reveals his amorality, and his cruel and opportunistic plan to test the virtue of his mother and sister is not ideal evidence of a family environment of warmth, affection and trust. Furthermore, the pursuit of revenge itself—particularly of the sadistic kind

¹⁸A reading first proposed by L. G. Salingar.

apparently preferred by Vindice—cannot be regarded as an action rooted in deep moral rectitude as, indeed, *Hamlet* criticism has increasingly recognised. Barish's identification of points of opposition and contrast between the two households of *The Revenger's Tragedy* is valid, but he is over-ambitious in using these contrasts as evidence for deeming that the play is a simple study in good versus evil. It is more apt to regard *The Revenger's Tragedy* in the light of the passage from the Homilies, whereby the Duke, in his own private dissoluteness, has determined the moral (or amoral) climate of his court and the realm beyond, as is suggested by 'Piato's' speech at I.iii.56-70. It is significant that Castiza, the play's most—and only—pure character is described as 'a virgin not far from court' (I.iii.90), rather than of the court. The play is therefore more morally sophisticated, and more complex in its didacticism, than Barish allows it to be.

The same sentiment from the Homilies can be applied to *Women Beware Women* and, indirectly, to *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. The Duke, although not central in *Women Beware Women*, is very much at the centre of the court around which the action revolves. He is an agent of disruption and infection: he entices Bianca away from Leantio and later encourages Hippolito to kill Leantio. His means of reforming his moral character and clearing his conscience, at the instigation of the Cardinal, is to have Bianca's husband murdered, so that he can marry her and therefore, by definition, stop committing adultery with her. The amoral widow, Livia, is obviously one of the Duke's intimates, and it is in the setting of the court that the incestuous affair between Isabella and Hippolito, and the repulsive, commodified courtship of the Ward to arrange the marriage that will disguise it, takes place. Finally, it is during the Duke's nuptial banquet that the violence and destruction of the deadly masque is staged. The masque is implicitly an antimasque in the course of which the follies and vices of the court are satirised and punished. Isabella, her masque character torn between two lovers, is punished (for her cynicism and self-prostitution in marrying the Ward) with a shower of burning gold. Guardiano, self-interested and

manipulative throughout, is caught literally in his own trap as he is impaled on a caltrop. The Duke and Bianca become the victims of Bianca's plot to kill the Cardinal as they share a poisoned loving cup, symbolic of the lust and violence at the heart of their relationship. The Duke, therefore, can be seen as a catalyst for much of the immoral action of *Women Beware Women*, both by example and in the amoral environment of the court that he has allowed (and even encouraged) to flourish around him. As such, he too, like the Duke in *The Revenger's Tragedy* (and it is significant that both are known solely by their titles, thus highlighting their supposed nobility and governmental functions) is a source of moral infection in his realm, poisoning the body of the state.

'*Tis Pity She's a Whore*, with its essentially bourgeois setting and characters, is less obviously described by the extract from the Homily on Obedience. There is among the characters no secular prince or duke whose morality can be called into question, yet Parmesan society is dissolute, violent and licentious. There is, however, a Prince of the Church: the Cardinal and Papal Nuncio. It is to him that the citizens go, to demand justice, when Grimaldi has murdered Bergetto. He addresses them rudely as 'saucy mates' (III.ix.30) and takes Grimaldi into the Pope's protection, prompting Donado to ask 'Is this a churchman's voice? Dwells Justice here?' (III.ix.63). Florio replies:

Justice is fled to Heaven and comes no nearer.

.....
Come, come Donado, there's no help in this,
When cardinals think murder's not amiss;
Great men must do their wills, we must obey,
But Heaven will judge them for't another day (III.ix.64, 67-70).

In this instance the corruption of a figure who should epitomise rectitude and morality symbolises the moral malaise which permeates Parma. The Cardinal is given the play's final lines, at the end of the bloody banquet of which he, Donado, Richardetto and Vasques are the only survivors, saying of Annabella: 'Of one so young, so rich in Nature's store, | Who could not say, '*Tis pity she's a whore*' (V.vi.158-9). Just as his

callousness in the matter of Grimaldi and Bergetto (at the end of the third act) destroys what little faith the characters have had in justice, impartiality and moral and spiritual guidance, his sadism (sentencing Putana to be burnt to death), greed (seizing the wealth of Florio and Soranzo for the Church) and cynicism end the play. Although a minor character and a shadowy figure, the Cardinal is another Duke: a powerful man looked to as a leader by others, who epitomises (and in some respects determines) the moral climate of his society.

There is no analogous ruler figure in *The Changeling*, and the moral issues at work in that play are different. However, the image of infection with which Antonio opens *The Duchess of Malfi* is an obvious analogue to the passage from the Homilies:

a prince's court
 Is like a common fountain, whence should flow
 Pure silver drops in general: but if't chance
 Some curs'd example poison't near the head,
Death, and diseases through the whole land spread (I.i.11-15)¹⁹

Yet the world of Webster's play is not as obviously violent and corrupt as that depicted in, for example, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, although its general moral climate is unpleasant, given to gossip and intrigue. It is not the Duchess's immediate circle which is corrupt and amoral, but that which surrounds her brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal. The Cardinal (with apparent unconcern) carries on an affair with Castruchio's wife Julia, and it is his and Ferdinand's crude and reductive attitude to love and sexuality that eventually leads to the spread of rumours and the deposition of the Duchess. The exact relevance of Antonio's initial comments to the rest of the play is problematic, beyond this general sense, for it is difficult to argue that the actions of the Duchess herself, in marrying Antonio, have been immoral enough to warrant either the extreme reaction of her brothers or the spread of general corruption within her realm. In marrying Antonio, the Duchess

¹⁹All quotations are taken from John Webster. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Ed. John Russell Brown. (The Revels Plays). London: Methuen & Co., 1964, unless otherwise stated.

violates the precepts of degree, and she is certainly frank about her enjoyment of the sensual aspects of their relationship. It is as if the Duchess, and the temporary, alternative world of peaceful domesticity that she creates with Antonio, are (like Julia, Castruchio and Bosola) victims of the infecting cynicism and corruption of Ferdinand and the Cardinal.

The question of the violation of degree is important to *The Duchess of Malfi*, and this issue can be related to other concepts from contemporary texts in which the family is used as the fundamental unit in a hierarchical view of nature and human society. Texts such as the Book of Common Prayer, the Elizabethan Homilies and Hooker's *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* portray human society (and its place in the natural world) as highly ordered and hierarchical. The question in the Catechism designed to test the candidate's knowledge of the Ten Commandments, for example, is phrased as: 'What is thy duty toward thy neighbour?' The answer to this question begins in terms of the maintenance of degree:

My duty toward my neighbour is, to love him as myself. And to do to all men as I would they should do unto me. To love, honor and succor my father and mother. To honor and obey the king and his ministers. To submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors, and masters. To order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters (Booty 286).

The answer concludes 'and to do my duty in that state of life, unto which it shall please God to call me'.²⁰ The point is, though, that according to this formula committed to memory by every Confirmation candidate, and so familiar to every communicant member of the Church of England, the fulfilment of one's Christian duty relied, in a significant way, on knowing one's place. The given in all of these Elizabethan texts is the unquestioned authority of the husband and father in the patriarchal nuclear (or proto-nuclear) family, and this given is the ground for most further analogies concerning the centrality

²⁰ Admittedly, between these two excerpts quoted, there is a renunciation of stealing, lying, slandering, covetousness, unchastity and the other familiar misdeeds of the Decalogue.

of the relationship between governor and governed to proper order, *viz* Hooker:

To fathers within their private families nature hath given a supreme power, for which cause we see throughout the world even from the first foundation thereof, all men have ever been taken as lords and kings in their own homes (Hooker 90).

The fullest formulation of the patriarchal theory of government was by Sir Robert Filmer in *Patriarcha* (1635-42; publ. 1680), but its basic elements were well-established and articulated long before this date. In spiritually and morally didactic texts at least, and in many political texts as well, the patriarchal family connotes order—natural, social and divine—at the most fundamental level.

Yet, as has already been observed, the family groups portrayed in the five plays being discussed here do not include a single example of this fundamental unit. In each, the characters show an at times acute awareness of their bereavement, and of the incompleteness of the family units of which they are part. In particular, the absence of the father is felt, and the influence of that absence shown, in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *Women Beware Women*. The death of Vindice's father has given him (as he sees it) grounds for revenge on the Duke, but it can also be seen as having further disordered his moral environment, already corrupted by the influence of the Duke and his family. The Duke's personal immorality which corrupts his entire realm, also makes him a bad father and a bad husband. The events of *The Revenger's Tragedy* perhaps best fit the description of disorder given in the Homily on Obedience: 'For where there is no right order, there reigneth all abuse, carnall libertie, enormitie, sinne, and Babylonicall confusion' (69). The Duke fails to fulfil his various roles as Prince, magistrate (for it is significant that he is shown in the capacity of judge), husband (he is an inveterate adulterer) and father (his children are uniformly degenerate), and throughout society disorder, destruction and death are the result.

Similarly, the father figures in *The Changeling* (Vermandero), *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (Florio) and *Women*

Beware Women (Fabritio) are not the embodiments of strong patriarchal authority. Rather, they appear as foolish, weak-willed (or short-sightedly self-interested) old men, who are gulled by their children and are left symbolically impotent at the plays' ends through the loss of their heirs. In *Women Beware Women* Leantio's father remains an indistinct figure, but he has, at some point, killed a man, and he can scarcely have been a good model for his son if Leantio's materialism and lack of moral scruples are an indicator. It is significant, too, that one way of interpreting Livia's lie to Isabella about her paternity, which persuades her that an affair with Hippolito will not be incestuous, is as Livia's symbolically depriving Isabella of a father, thus removing the central element in her moral environment and precipitating her slide into licence and depravity.

In the plays at the end of which some kind of moral order can be seen as being restored (*The Changeling*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *The Duchess of Malfi* and *Women Beware Women*), the order that is established still reaffirms the value and primacy of patriarchal authority and principles, even if those principles have been debunked or simply ignored in the course of the play. In *The Changeling*, Vermandero adopts Alsemero as his heir in place of Beatrice-Joanna: Alsemero's marriage to her is no longer necessary, thus further excising the disruptive figure of the sexual woman from the play. Alsemero's epilogue credits audience approval with the power to restore to a place of primacy the exclusive relationships between men:

All we can do to comfort one another,
 To stay a brother's sorrow for a brother,
 To dry a child from the kind father's eyes,
 Is to no purpose, it rather multiplies:
 Your only smiles have power to cause re-live
 The dead again, or in their rooms to give
 Brother a new brother, father a child;
 If these appear, all griefs are reconciled (V.iii.220-27)

Beatrice-Joanna's death has not only purged her father's bad blood (V.iii.150-51) but facilitated the formation of a strong homosocial bond between him and Alsemero. Family

ambiguous, not least because he is specifically his mother's son and heir, rather than the heir to the Duchy.²³

At the end of *Women Beware Women* it is not apparent who will become the next Duke of Florence. However, the last word is left to the Cardinal, the play's voice of moral authority, and the play thus ends by reaffirming the principle of the importance of the prince's private morality in good government:

Sin, what thou art these ruins show too piteously.
 Two kings on one throne cannot sit together,
 But one must needs down, for his title's wrong;
 So where lust reigns, that prince cannot reign long (V.ii.222-25)²⁴

The play therefore ends with a figure of (patriarchal) authority upholding conventional morality. This is in contrast to the ending of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* where, as previously discussed, the principles of order and government established by the Cardinal, the most authoritative figure in the play, are as venal and self-interested as those which have precipitated the play's destructive events. The family unit is utterly destroyed and debased as the fundamental analogue for patriarchal order throughout human society. None of the principles of government, order or even morality, set out in writings such as the Homilies, are directly affirmed at the play's end. Yet the results of their absence are so utterly catastrophic that it could be argued that the value of such fundamental guiding principles is affirmed by their absence.

It is obvious, both from these plays and from other contemporary texts, that in early modern English social, moral and political thought the family was regarded as the

²³It is interesting to compare this final scene with that of Webster's *The White Devil*, in which the young duke Giovanni speaks with great presence and authority. It is therefore not just because Antonio's son is a (presumably young) child at the end of *The Duchess of Malfi* that the situation is ambiguous. Antonio's son's problems are compounded by the fact that, unlike Giovanni, he does not speak, and by doing so lay some claim to the prerogatives of patriarchal authority.

²⁴All quotations are taken from Thomas Middleton. *Women Beware Women*. Ed. J. R. Mulryne. (The Revels Plays). London: Methuen & Co., 1975, unless otherwise stated.

fundamental building block of society, and as that society in miniature. This is particularly true of the families of princes, frequently the subject of these plays. They reveal that the private morality of the ruler is still regarded as critical, but they demonstrate an awareness of the truth of this in a negative sense: the dissolute ruler comes to a bad end and generally brings those of his subjects corrupted by his negative influence crashing down with him. He is often slain, intentionally or otherwise, by those who have most fully absorbed his amorality and self-interest.²⁵ It is only in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, the latest play of this group, that this is not the case in the broad sense that it applies to the other plays, in that the cynical and corrupt Cardinal, the most authoritative figure in the play, remains untouched and unchanged at its conclusion. However, the functioning of the patriarchal nuclear family in these plays is more complex. It has been noted that none of them contains a perfect example of this type of family group, and that the absence of family members, especially fathers, is significant, particularly morally, and keenly felt. In portraying master/mistress-servant and guardian-ward relationships, all these plays present alternatives to the patriarchal nuclear family. While still hierarchical and grounded in an unequal distribution of power, these relationships are not themselves the fundamental or representative social and moral unit, but merely defined through their analogy to it. In the context of these plays, therefore, they are defined and given import by their supposed resemblance to something that does not exist. Of course, the representation of a wide variety of household groups is also part of these plays' greater concern for some kind of social realism.

Yet in their conclusions, three of these plays make strong statements about the social and moral value of patriarchal authority, through Antonio in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, constructed as the strong and virtuous patriarch, Alsemero and Vermandero in *The Changeling*, who form a bond that bypasses

²⁵'Hoist with his own petard' would be a fitting epitaph for many of the unpleasant characters encountered in these plays.

the need for contribution by Beatrice-Joanna once she has provided the initial contact between them, and the Cardinal in *Women Beware Women*, who concludes the play with a firm and authoritative reminder of conventional morality. *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* has already been discussed in this respect, but it should be noted that the play's ending is especially dark because it is the Cardinal who fails to affirm positive moral values: were his final remarks given to Vasques, Richardetto or Donado, for example, the effect would not be as bleak.

By undermining the status of the family as the representative social and moral unit (through showing its instability and its vulnerability to self-interest, corruption, lust and death) the five plays under discussion question the stability of the wider community which is meant to be ordered and structured as that family unit's analogue. The family thus functions simultaneously as an emblem of both order and disorder at the most fundamental level. But these plays still keep the family, even in a depleted or debased condition, at the centre of the stage, thus still investing it, as an entity, with some potential for engendering an ordered and harmonious society both within and around itself.²⁶

II

In the first book of *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Richard Hooker (in what is probably the work's most famous passage) describes the dire consequences of the violation of the laws of nature:

Now if nature should intermit her course, and leave altogether though it were but for a while the observation of her own laws; if those principal and mother elements of the world, whereof all things in this lower world are made, should lose the qualities which now they have; if the

²⁶It is interesting to set this in the context of the huge emphasis in Stuart royal iconography on the families of James I and Charles I (and also of Elizabeth of Bohemia, the noble, suffering and remarkably fecund Protestant Queen) and also on the marriage of Charles I and Henrietta Maria, for example in portraiture and popular engravings.

frame of that heavenly arch erected over our heads should loosen and dissolve itself; if celestial spheres should forget their wonted motions, and by irregular volubility turn themselves any way as it might happen; if the prince of the lights of heaven, which now as a giant doth run his unwearied course, should as it were through a languishing faintness begin to stand and to rest himself; if the moon should wander from her beaten way, the times and seasons of the year blend themselves by disordered and confused mixture, the winds breathe out their last gasp, the clouds yield no rain the earth be defeated of heavenly influence, the fruits of the earth pine away as children at the withered breasts of their mother no longer able to yield them relief: What would become of man himself, whom these things now do all serve? See we not plainly that obedience of creatures unto the law of nature is the stay of the whole world? (1989, 60).²⁷

According to Hooker, obedience to natural law is fundamental to human society, which is in itself, in its relationships and hierarchies, ordered through nature by God. To act unnaturally, whether by contravening the laws of nature explicitly (as by committing incest) or by violating the structures of order and degree, is to threaten the fabric of society almost cosmically, questioning its organisational principles at the most fundamental level. The roles and relationships portrayed in the five plays can therefore be considered with regard to the way in which they fit prescribed definitions of normative or natural.

In this part of my discussion, I will take *The Revenger's Tragedy* as the starting point in a consideration of the moral and social function of dramatic role in these plays, paying particular attention to the ways in which various family roles and relationships are constructed and operate, and link this to the 'character' genre of the early seventeenth century. I will also discuss the significance and impact of bastardy, adultery and incest in the environment created by this dependence upon moral and social stereotypes, as well as the ways in which the meaning and associations of 'natural' and 'unnatural' shift in these plays, leading to an ethical and ontological instability at the heart of their vision of order and morality.

²⁷Note Hooker's use of parental imagery.

The Revenger's Tragedy is an unpleasant play about unpleasant people. At times, its structure, plot and characters seem almost over-determined, as the action twists and turns for maximum moral and sensational effect. One of the reasons for this is the way in which so many of the characters are given emblematic names, reminiscent of the medieval morality plays: Vindice the revenger, Lussurioso the lecher, Spurio the bastard, ambitious Ambitioso, vain (and superfluous) Supervacuo, Castiza the chaste, and so on. A striking aspect of *The Revenger's Tragedy's* use of morally emblematic names and characterisations is the way in which they can be further related to the various characters' positions and roles as family members. This is most obvious in the case of the Duke's and Duchess's sons: Lussurioso, Ambitioso, Supervacuo and the Duchess's unnamed youngest son.²⁸ On one level the characters fulfil the moral stereotypes suggested by their names—lechery, ambition, pride—but on another they also demonstrate the aptness of those names to their relative positions within the Duke's family. Thus Lussurioso, the Duke's eldest son and heir, most fully demonstrates the moral qualities of the Duke: he is his father's son in the truest possible sense. Ambitioso and Supervacuo, by contrast, are typical younger sons, in their discontent, their ill-will towards their (step)father's heir and their competitiveness. This is shown when they (mistakenly) believe that they have engineered Lussurioso's death:

AMBITIOSO Was not his execution rarely plotted?
 We are the Duke's sons now.
 SUPERVACUO Ay, you may thank
 My policy for that.
 AMBITIOSO Your policy?
 For what? (III.v.1-4)

They are jealous of Lussurioso and they are jealous of each other, as is shown by their actions during the masque of revengers. Similarly, the Duchess's youngest son's actions in raping Antonio's wife, and his defiant justification of them, can be seen as his fulfilling the role of the youngest son: his mother's favourite (or so it seems, from her impassioned

²⁸Spurio will be discussed elsewhere, pp61-2.

pleading to the Duke), with almost no chance of becoming dynastically powerful, he is a total liability to his family, running wild in the conventional manner of *iuvenes*, with little power but few responsibilities either.

Various stereotypical roles are also played out in Vindice's family. The text does not make it clear which is the elder of the two brothers, but, from his passionate desire to avenge his father's death, it could be inferred that Vindice is the elder, although the fact that it is Hippolito, rather than Vindice, who is at court might conceivably suggest the opposite. The point is, however, that the two brothers emphasise their fraternal relationship by frequently addressing each other as 'brother'—nearly forty times in the course of the play—and they exemplify fraternal loyalty and devotion, albeit directed towards violent ends. The way in which they function as an example of 'brotherhood' is implicitly contrasted with the actions of the other group of brothers in the play: the sons of the Duke and Duchess. Ambizioso, Lussurioso, Supervacuo, the youngest brother and even the illegitimate Spurio also address each other as 'brother' reasonably frequently, but the tone is often ironic, or else their apparent family feeling is undercut by venomous asides. Acting in a brotherly fashion is therefore constructed as a role to be played (or not) at will.

The three women in the play, together with two who are vividly evoked, are also conceived of purely in terms of the roles they play. It is crucial, for example, to their characterisations that both the Duchess and Gratiana, Vindice's and Hippolito's mother, are, or have been, widows. In the case of the Duchess, her situation as a widow who has remarried underlines her calculating and manipulative nature, and especially her lustfulness and immorality in pursuing a relationship with her husband's bastard son. Vindice's opening speech implies that she has had other adulterous relationships. Gratiana's readiness to persuade her daughter Castiza to a liaison with Lussurioso can be seen partly in terms of social realism, in that it is symptomatic of the family's poverty (itself the result of Vindice's father's death), but also as again fulfilling the stereotype of the immoral widow. Castiza initially

seems boring and conventional, as the play's one (live) example of an impossibly good woman, but her performance (and the choice of term is deliberate) in IV.iv, when she tests her mother by feigning acceptance of Lussurioso's overtures towards her, shows her awareness of the principle underlying *The Revenger's Tragedy*: that to be a woman is to play a number of pre-determined roles—maiden, mother (as when the Duchess pleads for the life of her youngest son), wife, widow and whore. Furthermore, the two women who do not speak (or, in the case of one, even appear) but who still have a strong presence in the play, Antonio's wife and Gloriana, Vindice's long-dead mistress, also contribute to this sense of women as socially constructed beings. Antonio's wife is the model wife—'precedent for wives'—and has no other identity. She is eulogised purely in terms of how well she has played this part. At the beginning of the play, Gloriana is reduced to a skull, but she 'appears' most theatrically in III.v, when Vindice dresses her skull in 'tires' and smears it with poison, to seduce and then murder the Duke. Being a woman is thus reduced a further step, from role-play to puppetry, while Vindice's famous silkworm speech (III.v.69-107) dismisses women as conglomerations of externalities: cosmetics, perfume, clothes:

How might a scornful and ambitious woman
 Look through and through herself — see, ladies, with false forms
 You deceive men, but cannot deceive worms (III.v.96-8).

Playing the part of a woman is therefore as contrived as playing other, more specific, roles.

One of the interesting things about *The Revenger's Tragedy*, however, and it is an idea that will be picked up on again with reference to the other plays, is the way in which it depicts what happens when various roles are brought into conflict, as one character is presented as embodying two (or more) incompatible parts. This is particularly true of the women in the play. A fundamental conflict is established by Vindice's and Hippolito's cynical dismissal of womankind, and especially their mother and sister: in their eyes, women are credulous, dissembling, shallow, self-interested and so on. They thus create a negative stereotype for women; a

deterministic and dismissive statement that *women are like that*. But at the same time, they want to believe better of Gratiana and Castiza. The whole virtue-testing scenario is based on the negative stereotype, while simultaneously trying to prove exceptions to it. This tension is best exemplified by Vindice's and Hippolito's confrontation of Gratiana:

VINDICE O thou, for whom no name is bad enough!
 GRATIANA What means my sons? What, will you murder me?
 VINDICE Wicked, unnatural parent!
 HIPPOLITO Fiend of women!
 GRATIANA O, are sons turn'd monsters? Help!
 VINDICE In vain.
 GRATIANA Are you so barbarous to set iron nipples
 Upon the breast that gave you suck?
 VINDICE That breast
 Is turned to quarled poison.
 GRATIANA Cut not your days for't; am I not your mother?
 VINDICE Thou dost usurp that title now by fraud,
 For in that shell of mother breeds a bawd (IV.iv.1-10).

There is thus a central irony in the way in which women are portrayed in *The Revenger's Tragedy*: by fulfilling the stereotype of woman, whose depravity (as seen by Vindice and Hippolito) is determined by her biology, Gratiana has become unnatural. In modern terms, this is an invidious double standard. A woman who is good (like Castiza or Antonio's wife) is an exception to the rule that women are naturally bad, but a woman who is particularly bad can still be described as unnatural. Thus, in a play which appears so concerned with defining and categorising into roles—wife, mother, whore, son, brother, father—the relationship between natural and unnatural, and so their identification as being, respectively, good and bad, is a shifting and unstable one. In particular, the moral value of women is problematic. Antonio's wife can be the 'precedent for wives' and Gratiana can say to Castiza 'Be thou a glass for maids and I for mothers' (IV.iv.157), but their moral status as *women* remains uncertain. 'Unnatural' is still the worst insult that Vindice and Hippolito can muster in a play in which the natural (if the natural is equated with the biologically determined, as in the case of Spurio) is often portrayed in an unequivocally negative way. Similarly, although to a lesser extent, both Vindice and Lussurioso are

acting according to their natures as their fathers' sons, but violating moral codes in doing so. What has broken down is the equation between the natural, the ordered and the good, which is at the heart of the Elizabethan World Picture, as it is constructed by homiletic texts.

Although none of the other plays have morally emblematic names to the same extent as *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the idea of role is still significant to them, and in some cases the choice of name for a character reinforces this. Joost Daalder gives meanings and apt associations for a number of *The Changeling's* characters:

The meaning of a name often gives some—but not a rigid—idea of a character's nature. The following senses seem reasonably clear: TOMAZO — cf. the notion of a 'doubting Thomas', derived from the apostle in the Bible (John 20:25); ALIBIUS — 'he who is elsewhere'; FRANCISCUS — (= 'Frenchman') 'a free — and thus licentious — man'; DE FLORES — (spelled 'Deflores' in Q) 'deflowerer' (homonymically; technically and ironically = 'of the flowers'); BEATRICE — 'she who makes happy' (ironic); JOANNA — 'the Lord's grace' (ironic); DIAPHANTA — (1) 'the diaphanous one' (pretty, but flimsy and transparent); (2) 'the red hot one' (as in a fire — sexually); ISABELLA — 'God has sworn' (as in the equivalent 'Elizabeth'), and *bella* indicates beauty — also 'yellowish white' (1990, 3).

To these may be added 'Antonio', in its abbreviated form 'Tony', a traditional name for a fool, although Bawcutt suggests that the tradition in fact derives from *The Changeling*. The relevance of these names to the characters is obvious.²⁹ The characterisations, however, are in some cases altered better to reflect the moral implications of the chosen names. De Flores, for example, is described by Reynolds as 'a Gallant young Gentleman, of the Garison of the Castle, who follows [Beatrice-Joanna's] father' (122), with no suggestion of the ugly, coarse creature into which he is transformed in *The Changeling*. In the play, the Edenic implications of the straightforward translation of his name are exploited in making him the serpent, at the same time as he becomes, homonymically, the

²⁹Although it should be noted that all the names in the main plot are taken from the main source, *God's Revenge Against Murder* (1621) by Joseph Reynolds.

deflowerer. The doubleness of Beatrice-Joanna's name, especially with the homophonic suggestion of Joanna/Gehenna, is used to emphasise her duplicity, as in Vermandero's desperate cry when she is carried in, wounded, by De Flores: 'Joanna! Beatrice! Joanna!' (V.iii.148).

Beyond this subtle manipulation of naming conventions, however, role-playing, counterfeiting and pretence are central to *The Changeling*, once again especially for the women characters. Beatrice-Joanna pretends to be a virgin, mimicking the positive results of Alsemero's virginity test (which, incidentally, are the 'symptoms' of female sexual pleasure) and Diaphanta pretends to be Beatrice-Joanna on her wedding night. As in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, therefore, maiden and wife (or bride) are parts to be acted out. Diaphanta speaks of herself as taking 'the bride's place' (IV.ii.125), while Beatrice-Joanna says, in an aside before drinking the contents of Glass M, 'I'm put now to my cunning; th'effects I know, | If I can now but feign 'em handsomely' (IV.iv.137-8). The performative element in being a virgin/bride is emphasised by the dumb show which begins IV.i, in which Beatrice-Joanna is described as 'Beatrice the bride. . . in great state'. It can be assumed that Beatrice-Joanna is still dressed as a bride, with her hair loose as a sign of her supposed virginity, as she delivers her soliloquy at the beginning of IV.i proper, speaking of herself as 'undone' (IV.i.1). The bridal finery is a costume, emphasising that the bride is false, the wedding an empty sham and the virginity feigned. Perhaps the point is, though, that Alsemero does not notice the substitution of Diaphanta on the wedding night. Even though it is made clear that the bridal chamber is kept in total darkness, it seems that bride, wife and virgin remain functions only: they do not connote individual identity or personality. This is the principle upon which this bed-trick (and all others) is founded: that a man will not be aware of the identity of his partner so long as he has one; that all women are the same in the dark and in bed.

But Beatrice-Joanna also plays other parts. In particular, she is the dutiful daughter, and the innocent, as when presented with Glass M: 'Sir, pardon me, | I seldom taste of any

composition. . . I fear 'twill make me ill' (IV.ii.133-4, 136). She also quite callously feigns, at least initially, a regard for De Flores, offering to make a lotion for his disfiguring skin condition (II.ii.72ff). The sense of her being chameleon-like in her multiplicity, in the number of roles that she can play, is heightened by the use of the aside. More than one-third of Beatrice-Joanna's lines are spoken as asides or in soliloquy, often with abrupt shifts of tone or mood between these and the lines spoken to other characters.

This idea of role-playing and pretence is reinforced by the subplot, with its real and feigned fools and madmen. Franciscus pretends to be a madman, and Antonio pretends to be a fool, while Isabella, the young and discontented wife of Alibius the asylum keeper, also pretends to be mad, in order to demonstrate that she has seen through the other pretenders' ruses. This underlines the theme of transformation in the main plot, but also foregrounds, once again, the idea of the natural and the unnatural which can, in some respects, be linked to the concept of the changeling and its relevance to the play as a whole. In the madhouse scenes, reflecting early modern (and indeed medieval) thought on mental health, a distinction is maintained between fools and madmen.³⁰ The condition of being a fool was regarded as both congenital and incurable, whereas madness could be cured, or might pass given time. The congenital and incurable nature of folly was identified by the common early modern name for a fool: a 'natural'.

Antonio is identified in the cast list as 'the changeling', a term that has had much critical attention spent upon it. The conventional interpretation is of a changeling as being an ugly or deformed child, substituted for one stolen by fairies. The stolen child could also be described as a changeling; the definition could be widened to include all persons surreptitiously put in the place of another. Daalder also gives 'one given to change, inconstant person' and 'idiot, imbecile', both obviously relevant to the play. I will consider the idea of

³⁰Viz. I.ii.44-7, 59, 210-11; III.iii.14, 17, 29-31, 33-5, 112-14, 204-5, 256, 269, 276, 278; IV.iii.3, 32, 36, 46-7, 56, 125-6, 139-44. Bethlehem Hospital, or Bedlam, had separate wings for madmen and fools (Bawcutt xxxvi).

And made you one with me (III.iv.125-40).

Beatrice-Joanna's vicarious participation in the murder of Alonzo and her subsequent liaison with De Flores rupture her relationship with her father, her family and her class, completely dislocating her. In this passage, many of the possible meanings of 'blood', which run throughout the play, are conflated: Beatrice-Joanna's participation in deeds of blood (= violence and, by implication, sexual desire and its expression) cuts her off from her ties of blood (= family and class, and also her pride in her family and class background, viz. III.iv.131). She becomes the changeling, both in the sense of one changed, and one substituted at birth.

The Changeling thus exploits the fear of parents that their child is not their own, but it also exposes the fear of the child: of being the victim of a congenital curse that will cause it to be taken from its parents. Beatrice-Joanna says, 'Was my creation in the womb so curs'd, | It must engender with a viper first?' (III.iv.165-6). Bawcutt paraphrases this as, 'When I was created in my mother's womb, was a curse laid upon me that I must engender with an unnatural being, a viper, before I could do so with a normal man?', noting also that

the editors who comment on these lines see in them a reference to contemporary lore about vipers, as expressed by Sir Thomas Browne, *Vulgar Errors*, Bk. III, Ch. xvi: 'That the young Vipers force their way through the bowels of their Dam, or that the female Viper in the act of generation bites off the head of the male, in revenge whereof the young ones eat through the womb and belly of the female, is a very ancient tradition' (*Works*, ed. Keynes, 1928, II, 237). But it is difficult to see exactly how this explains the lines (III.iv.165-6n).

It may not explain these particular lines, but it certainly illuminates the connection between sex, death and turning upon one's parents that runs through the play, obvious at the play's denouement, when it is Vermandero who comments upon the ambiguous sounds (of Beatrice-Joanna being stabbed as she copulates with De Flores) issuing from Alsemero's closet: 'What horrid sounds are these?' (V.iii.141). The viper image is part of a chain of Edenic references that operates in the play,

with De Flores figured as the serpent and Beatrice-Joanna as Eve ('that broken rib of mankind' V.iii.146). The Fall can also be conceived of as a conjunction of sex,³¹ death, and the disobedience of paternal authority and the betrayal of paternal trust. The citadel, as will be discussed elsewhere, is a variant of the enclosed garden, and so of the Garden of Eden. In addition, the serpent is the type of the ungrateful or unfilial (or *unnatural*) child: 'How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is | To have a thankless child' (*King Lear* I.iv.290-1). Beatrice-Joanna may play a number of roles, but in her own self she is unnatural: unfilial, unvirginal, unwomanly.

The question the play raises is, in what sense(s) is Beatrice-Joanna a changeling? Is she transformed, changed by the violence of her feelings for Alsemero (and then for De Flores) or by De Flores himself and the *folie à deux* relationship they establish in the course of the play, or is her moral deformity congenital? Peter Morrison ('A Cangoun in Zombieland: Middleton's Teratological *Changeling*') argues that 'changeling' connotes change 'in the primal sense of otherness' (234). The 'cangoun' of his title is an Old French and Middle English word which 'means "changeling," and in particular the monstrous fairy child exchanged for the beautiful human one, a child that only gets progressively worse the longer it survives' (235).

This suggests that we understand the changeling—in its most fundamental sense—as a member of a class of creatures who are aliens by virtue of their mutation, or mutants by virtue of their alienation; this class includes among its members freaks, idiots, retards, monsters, feral children, dwarfs, hunchbacks, Moors, wild men, cripples, giants and the like. It also suggests that there is a primal association, built into language and intrinsic somehow to the act of socialization, that unites the concept of change with the image of the mutant—an etymological heritage misrepresented in the definition of "changeling" in the *OED* but powerfully, numbly articulated within Middleton's play (235).

³¹The knowledge gained through the consumption of the forbidden fruit is traditionally assumed to be sexual knowledge, as Adam and Eve first covered their nakedness.

A changeling is therefore that which is at once natural and unnatural; a freak of nature but congenitally so. The subplot provides the context for this description, and in its terms Beatrice-Joanna is both a fool (a 'natural') and a madwoman. She plays the roles deemed natural for her (daughter, virgin, bride) in the main plot, just as Isabella feigns the unnatural—madness—in the subplot; she is the play's true changeling (in Morrison's sense of primal, congenital, 'natural' deformity and otherness, in this case social and moral) as Antonio is the pretended changeling and 'natural'. As was suggested with reference to *The Revenger's Tragedy*, this double bind which equates the natural with the unnatural is something which particularly afflicts female characters. Beatrice-Joanna is acting according to her nature, but her performance of the 'natural' roles of dutiful daughter and virginal bride is just that—acting—and her natural inclination is no longer towards the moral good. Her aside in her crucial confrontation with De Flores—'I'm in a labyrinth' (III.iv.71)—expresses her sense of entrapment but also her state of dislocation and disorientation. Detached from father, family and class by lust, intrigue and murder, she has lost all sense of moral direction and identity. More amoral than immoral, she demonstrates the disruption of the bond and the transmission of family, social and moral identity between parent and child, so exemplifying the threatening otherness of the changeling.

I will argue elsewhere that in Middleton's *Women Beware Women* one of the main impulses is towards the formation of close, intimate bonds between 'parents' and 'children'. This involves various stereotypical behaviours and role-plays: the 'parents' offer security, protection and material comfort, while the 'children' are pleased to be cosseted and are anxious to gain approval and affection. Other family roles are also important to the play, especially, once again, that of the widow. There are two of the latter in the play: Livia, sister of Hippolito and Fabritio and aunt of Isabella, and Leantio's mother, known only as Mother. The widowed state of both is emphasised (eg. I.ii.50-1; II.i SD; II.ii.2; II.ii.138), but the disparity in their financial and social status allows different

aspects of the widow stereotype to be brought out. Leantio's mother's poverty means that she can be portrayed as selfish, self-interested and greedy, and this is shown in her response to the Duke's summons to Bianca:

MOTHER I'll first obey the Duke,
And taste of a good banquet; I'm of thy mind.
I'll step but up, and fetch two handkerchiefs
To pocket up some sweetmeats, and o'ertake thee.

Exit

BIANCA [Aside] Why here's an old wench would trot into a bawd
now,
For some dry sucket, or a colt in marchpane (III.ii.184-9).

The image of the greedy old woman is grotesque. In many respects, Leantio's Mother is a close cousin of Gratiana, Vindice's and Hippolito's mother in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, for both are cast (Gratiana more explicitly, admittedly) as the unnatural mother, the mother turned bawd out of naked self-interest. While the Mother appears keen to identify herself as a mother in I.i, the other characters tend to identify her more as a widow. The elaborate and excessive use of maternal and filial language and sentiment by the Mother and Bianca in their first meeting suggests, once again, that 'mother' is yet another instance of a role to be played, with stereotypical conventions to be fulfilled. Leantio, too, can be seen as merely playing the part of the son, both in his initial speeches to his mother in I.i, and in his subsequent behaviour towards Livia, his mother substitute.

Livia is also described as a bawd (II.ii.465), but the maternal aspect of her character is less emphasised. The stereotype of the widow that she embodies is of the widow as lustful, wilful and manipulative. She uses her status as a source of power and influence:

FABRITIO Th'art a sweet lady, sister, and a witty—

LIVIA A witty! Oh the bud of commendation
Fit for a girl of sixteen; I am blown, man,
I should be wise by this time; and for instance,
I have buried my two husbands in good fashion,
And never mean more to marry.

GUARDIANO No, why so, lady?

LIVIA Because the third shall never bury me (I.ii.46-52).

The character of Livia is in fact a conflation of two bawd characters in Middleton's sources: Signora Mondragone in Celio Malespini's *Ducento Novelle* (1609), the source of the Bianca-Leantio-Duke plot, and the Nun in *The True History of the Tragick Loves of Hipolito and Isabella Neopolitans* (1627), the subplot source, which Middleton apparently knew either in manuscript or in its French version, *Histoire Veritable des Infortvnees et Tragiques Amours d'Hypolite & d'Isabella, Neopolitains* (1597). In this subplot source Livia is the name given to Fabricio's (Fabritio's) second wife, a minor character cut in Middleton's adaptation.³²

Most of the other names in *Women Beware Women* are taken directly from Middleton's sources. The exceptions are Leantio (Pietro in the *Ducento Novelle*, an alteration for which no critical explanation is offered), the Ward, Guardiano and Sordido, characters apparently invented by Middleton. With them there is a return to the emblematic names of *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Changeling*, through the crude and reductive Sordido, and also an emphasis on identity being conferred by function, with an added element of social satire through the use of the conventional roles of Ward and Guardian. Guardiano is cynical, but still well aware of his duty to secure an advantageous marriage for his charge, and Isabella's father Fabritio responds in kind, telling her

The gentleman's almost twenty, and 'tis time
 He were getting lawful heirs, and you a-breeding on 'em. . .
 You'll say the gentleman is somewhat simple—
 The better for a husband, were you wise,
 For those that marry fools live ladies' lives.
 On with the mask, I'll hear no more, he's rich;
 The fool's hid under bushels (I.ii.78-85).

³²But it could also be argued that Middleton perhaps used the name 'Livia', when an historical identity (Signora Mondragone) was available to him, because of the implications of matronhood and matriarchal power inherent in the name through its association with the wife of Caesar Augustus, who has considerable intrigues attributed to her in some sources. The Roman associations of the name can be seen as being reinforced by the part taken by Livia in the play's final deadly masque: Juno Pronuba, the goddess of marriage. 'The irony of having Livia, the marriage-wrecker, play this part is exceptionally sharp' (Mulryne IV.ii.217n).

For Fabritio and Guardiano, the Ward's status and function (as a wealthy heir) are far more important considerations than his personality in arranging his marriage to Isabella; equally, the fact that he is simple-minded is presented by Fabritio as a positive advantage, given the other circumstances of the match. The Ward is the one major character who does not evolve at all in the course of the play: it is crucial to the terms in which he is portrayed that he not change, for his role as a ward cannot be altered. As a 'fool entailed', a 'congenital idiot' (II.i.81&n) his intellectual, emotional and moral condition is also predetermined and unable to be ameliorated or cured. What the play demonstrates is the way in which a social (and familial) role can be performed or invoked without the slightest reference to the personal identity or personality of the character concerned. The unpleasant nature of the Ward does not have the slightest bearing on his social role and, ironically, his idiocy itself fulfils another, illicit, social function in allowing his marriage to Isabella to act as a cover for her incest with her uncle.

That there are no emblematic names in *The Duchess of Malfi* is indicative of the greater realism and psychological complexity of Webster's characters. Yet even without the morality play obviousness of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *The Changeling* and, to a lesser degree, *Women Beware Women*, the question of role is crucial to *The Duchess of Malfi*, particularly when considering the character of the Duchess herself. In the play's first edition, a list of the actors playing particular roles is given, with the Duchess of Malfi listed simply as 'the Duchess'; however, in the Revels edition the *Dramatis Personae* describes her more fully as 'The Duchess of Malfi, a young widow; later wife of Antonio; sister to the Cardinal and twin sister to Ferdinand' (7). Brown thus emphasises the various family roles that the Duchess is called upon to play, implicitly foreshadowing the conflicts between the demands of the various roles that can be seen, in part, as leading to her downfall. The Duchess is given no personal identity beyond her title, although it should be noted that in this Webster is following his main source. Here the character of the Duchess

will be used as a case study (following Lisa Jardine, although not to the same conclusions) in the way in which Renaissance texts construct women in terms of morally loaded gender stereotypes that frequently remain incompatible, a process already traced, to some extent, in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *The Changeling* and *Women Beware Women*, but which can be seen to be most fully expressed in the figure of Webster's Duchess, a mature and complex woman, who is indisputably the protagonist of her eponymous play.

At the end of the first act, after the Duchess and Antonio leave to consummate (and so legitimate) their marriage, Cariola comments: 'Whether the spirit of greatness or of woman | Reign most in her, I know not, but it shows | A fearful madness; I owe her much of pity' (I.i.504-6). Joan Lord sees this comment as suggesting what she regards as the two key aspects of the Duchess's character: her spontaneity and 'her ability to act with style, to assume the appropriate role for the occasion' (310). For Lord, these two contradictory aspects are finally reconciled in the Duchess's death:

there is still the sense of her taking part in a dignified ceremony, for the exotic images of diamonds, cassia, and pearls endow her, imaginatively at least, with all the magnificence she is so consciously rejecting. This absolute poise is undercut, for the last time, by a brief outburst of petulance when she asks to be released ("any way, for heaven-sake, / So I were out of your whispering") before she achieves that marvellous synthesis of pride and humility in her last gesture of kneeling for her executioners. When she bows her head to receive the noose she creates, in a sense, her own heroic terms, actively embracing a sordid death with the emphasis on "pull" (three times repeated) in her command: "Pull, and pull strongly, for your able strength / Must pull down heaven upon me" (IV.ii.230-231). This uniting of the opposites—ceremonious heroism and spontaneous, willing submission—is what finally reconciles the spirit of "greatness" and of "woman" in the Duchess (315-6).

Lord's arguments about the Duchess's play-acting fit my own very well; however, 'greatness' can also be interpreted as implying the Duchess as a political and public person—the Duchess-as-Duchess—as opposed to the Duchess-as-woman, or

private individual, as much as, if not more so, than Lord's definition of ceremonious style.

This is the position taken by Theodora Jankowski in 'Defining/Confining the Duchess: Negotiating the Female Body in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*' (1990), which she reworks as a chapter in *Women in Power in Early Modern Drama* (1992). Jankowski views the play as an investigation of the question of female rulership, and the potential for conflict or contradiction, in such a situation, between the body natural and the body politic of the ruler:

The Duchess of Malfi is an unusual play not only because it explores questions of rulership as they relate to a female sovereign, but also because it explores these questions as regards the sovereign's marriage. The play thus participates in the discursive construction of women in the early modern period and helps to reveal the contradictions in the notion of a female ruler. These contradictions are explored in the ways in which the Duchess is represented as using her body natural and her body politic (1990, 222).

In terms of Cariola's statement, therefore, the 'body politic' can be identified with the 'spirit of greatness' and the 'body natural' with that 'of woman', an obvious identification that Jankowski herself does not go on to make.

Jankowski is right to attempt to redress the balance of criticism by focussing on the political aspects of the Duchess's character. As she says,

critics have rarely considered the Duchess of Malfi as a political character despite the fact that she rules Malfi as Regent for her son, the minor heir to the Duke of Malfi, her dead husband. Given her role as sovereign ruler, the Duchess needs also to be viewed as a political figure. Yet Kathleen McLuskie observes that the critical history of *The Duchess of Malfi* reflects an "unease with a woman character who so impertinently pursues self-determination" [1985, 88]. This "unease" has led to a criticism that focuses on the Duchess's private roles of wife, mother, unruly widow, or victimized woman, and slight consideration of her public role as ruler (1990, 223)

Jankowski locates the Duchess's failure as a sovereign in her inability to reconcile the demands of her two bodies, but still argues that 'she challenges Jacobean society's views regarding

the representation of the female body and woman's sexuality' (222). In that the Duchess is represented as, for example, both pregnant and in a position of nominal authority, this may well be the case, as new permutations of the ways in which women may be dramatically represented are explored, although the interpretation of the Duchess as primarily a political figure is as open to over-determination as the eulogisation of her as a mother. Jankowski ignores, however, an obvious correlation: if the Duchess's body as a woman, emphatically sexual, fertile and ultimately putrefying, is her body natural, then her simultaneous existence as a body politic is implicitly unnatural.

It must therefore be conceded, albeit reluctantly, that Webster's participation in the debate over women's rulership is far from neutral. In support of this I cite, perhaps unexpectedly, Antonio's famous opening speech on the French court, with its central image of the fountain. I do not dispute that the main source for the passage is probably Elyot's *Image of Governance* (1541) (I.i.5-15n). But it also recalls other texts. John Knox, in a passage in fact quoted by Jankowski (but not related by her to *The Duchess of Malfi*) states that 'the authority of a woman is a corrupted fountain' (1992, 63). Elsewhere in his treatise he states:

To promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion or empire above any realm, nation or city is repugnant to nature, contumely to God, a thing most contrarious to his revealed will and approved ordinance, and finally it is the subversion of good order, and all equity and justice (Aughterson 138).

Critics have overlooked the traditionally feminine associations of fountain imagery in their interpretations of Antonio's speech. The corrupted fountain is an unchaste woman, following the exegetical tradition of the Song of Solomon ('A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed'), and it is the rumours of the unchastity of the Duchess which spread dissension among her people (III.i.24-37). According to the parameters established by Antonio for successful rule, and through the imagery he chooses to express them, the Duchess's inability to separate the body natural from

the body politic is prefigured in peculiarly feminine terms. Implicitly, the only woman able to rule successfully is, like Elizabeth I, a perpetual virgin, in whom the body natural is subsumed into the body politic while simultaneously being celebrated as its emblem.

The Duchess cannot help but fail as a ruler because she is a woman, and every aspect of her characterisation is directed towards demonstrating this. The roles which she plays—widow, wife and mother—are all gendered (and stereotyped) to an extent that those of, for example, Duke and Cardinal are not. While her emotional or social status as a mother is largely constructed through a few well-chosen gestures on Webster's part, the physicality of her motherhood is evoked in great detail. II.i has as its main emphasis the establishment of the Duchess's pregnancy as a physical state, through her swelling body, the description of her morning sickness and the exploitation of her food cravings by Bosola. Jankowski comments:

Women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—if they were not virgins—drifted into and out of pregnancy with alarming regularity. Thus the female body—in direct contrast to the male body—is a body in a state of constant flux. And, as such, it is capable of producing a certain uneasiness. The nature of woman's biology necessitates a flexible image of her body which is in direct contrast to the fixed image of the male body. . . . Women's bodies are threatening because they are ever-changing and cannot be confined to a single shape (1990, 238).

The Duchess's body is no longer intact, and its physical outlines and boundaries have become unclear in the 'loose-body'd gown' that conceals her changing shape. Unchaste and inconstant, as her body transforms itself, she is the antithesis of the Virgin Queen.

It is therefore no accident that Bosola's description of the Duchess's pregnancy follows on from his violent abuse of the Old Lady (and, through her, all women) for their employment of cosmetics, for what is at issue in the scene is women's ability to transform their shape and appearance, either superficially (through the use of cosmetics) or fundamentally, as in pregnancy. Women's ability to dissemble is threatening, but

even more so is their facility in concealing and, indeed, controlling their transformations. When the Cardinal puts off his hat and takes up arms, he does so in a public ceremony in which he first ceases to be a Cardinal by giving up his cross, hat, robes and ring, and then becomes a knight by receiving instead sword, helmet, shield and spurs. The two roles are not permitted any overlap. But when the Duchess marries Antonio, she does so informally and in secret, meaning that she becomes widow (in public) wife (in private) and eventually, in the eyes of her people, whore. Similarly, she has come into her title without coronation or election, ruling as regent rather than as a crowned head of state; she is deposed informally through her exile and imprisonment. Thus she can say, quite truthfully, 'I am Duchess of Malfi still' (IV.ii.142). Grounded in her continuing assertion of her existence as a body politic, it is a response to Bosola's grim reminders of the vulnerability and mortality of her body natural. Her concern for her children in the final moments before her death is thus both a manipulation of sentiment and a necessary corrective to her earlier claim of rank: she dies asserting, in peculiarly female terms, her integrity in multiplicity. By contrast, Ferdinand's attempt to respond to what he sees as the irreconcilable conflict between her body natural and her body politic, the Duchess as his sister and the Duchess as ruler (overlaid with his deep ambivalence about her moral status as a woman), results in the disintegration of his own selfhood and humanity.

In its presentation of the Duchess of Malfi as a woman sovereign, Webster's play acknowledges the existence of an alternative mode of political and social thought but, as is the case with the representation of the private world of Antonio's and the Duchess's family as a possible alternative to the impersonal and venal dynasty of the Aragonian brethren³³, it presents that alternative in a moral context which makes it clear that too great a cost is entailed in its adoption or approbation. The Duchess thus represents a threat to social, moral and political order, at the same time as she implicitly

³³See pp90-9.

evokes the nostalgic and restorative, but impossible, totem of the Virgin Queen.

That the Duchess should be capable of playing many roles is natural, given the negative stereotype of women as dissembling and duplicitous (or multiplicitous) already encountered in *The Revenger's Tragedy*; that she should seek to integrate into her performance of her natural, familial functions a further, political identity makes her unnatural. The Cardinal's and Ferdinand's greatest fear is that the Duchess will give in to the dictates of her nature as a woman and especially as a widow; the unnaturalness (in terms of, for example, Hooker) of the Duchess's violation of degree in marrying Antonio contains the seeds both of hope (in, perhaps anachronistically, the promise of a new familial and social order), and destruction. Thus the natural is, again, not necessarily equated with the morally good, but neither is the unnatural necessarily bad.

It has become almost a commonplace of Websterian criticism to locate Webster's characters in the literary vogue for 'characters' of the early seventeenth century, and particularly to consider the character of the Duchess of Malfi with reference to two of Webster's own character sketches: 'A vertuous Widdow' and 'An ordinarie Widdow'.³⁴ This vogue of the 'character' genre (and Webster's known participation in it) has definite implications for the conception of dramatic role and function, and the view of human nature and the nature of human society and morality as they are portrayed in these early modern plays. I have already been suggested that what appears to prevail in these plays is a kind of pessimistic biological determinism, which is affirmed by Webster's choice of title for his sketches of the 'vertuous' and 'ordinarie' widows. The Duchess's fate is determined by the way in which she takes on an unnatural role—that of ruler—as well as by her having given in to her 'natural' inclination as widow (and woman) to

³⁴The general critical practice seems to have been the measurement of the Duchess against these two models, finding her necessarily wanting in respect to both, for the received wisdom appears to be that she manifests aspects of both stereotypes, perhaps biased, through her remarriage, towards the negative.

marry again. The Cardinal's and Ferdinand's treatment of and attitude towards their sister is, in some ways, very similar to the behaviour of Vindice and Hippolito towards Gratiana and Castiza in *The Revenger's Tragedy*: they are morbidly expecting the worst of her through the triumph of her supposedly depraved nature, while at the same time hoping that their sister will be an exception to the rule. The universal validity of 'the rule' itself, the bitter and destructive view of woman's morality and character, is not itself questioned, as the characterisations of Julia, the Old Lady, and even Cariola, demonstrate. Unlike Gratiana in *The Revenger's Tragedy* or Livia and the Mother in *Women Beware Women*, the Duchess's unnaturalness (in the eyes of her brothers and, although perhaps more ambivalently, those of the play) is fundamental. Rather than violating the prescription for 'mother' by turning bawd, or that for 'daughter' by turning whore, she claims a political identity as an adjunct to (not even as a replacement for) her personal, familial persona, so rejecting the fact of biology as the principal determinant of her fate. She thus violates the prescription for Woman itself. In marrying Antonio, she rejects the constrictions and dictates of her other inherited, congenital quality—her rank—as an unalterable determinant of her future and identity. Pursuing some degree of self-determination, the Duchess of Malfi asserts her right to be identified by more than those things which are hers by birth: her gender and her class. She thus challenges the notion of fixed and immutable identity and function, and the construction of a social and moral order that is itself predicated upon the fixedness of that notion, which can be seen as being manifested in both the drama's concern with role and function (particularly for women) and in the 'character' genre.

It is perhaps because of the Renaissance view of women as essentially private 'individuals' that they appear, in these plays, as being far more likely than male characters to have their characters, moral or otherwise, defined and shaped by their performance of various family roles, the circumstances of their birth, their marital status and the fact of their gender *per se*. There is, however, one notable exception to this: the

character of the bastard. In the five plays being discussed here there is only one bastard character—Spurio, the illegitimate son of the Duke in *The Revenger's Tragedy*—but he is certainly representative of the type. The best example of the bastard in early modern tragedy is Edmund in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. While he is less machiavellian (and also less intelligent) than Edmund, Spurio shares many of his salient features, and he appears to operate in a similar mode of self-justification. Although without the cosmic grandeur of Edgar's and Edmund's final exchange—

EDGAR The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
 Make instruments to plague us:
 The dark and vicious place where thee he got
 Cost him his eyes.
 EDMUND Th'hast spoken right, 'tis true.
 The wheel is come full circle; I am here (*King Lear* V.iii.169-73)³⁵

—Spurio's reasoning (and his encouragement by the Duchess) in I.ii certainly recalls both Edmund's bitterness and his view of his fate (and that of Gloucester, his father) as wholly determined by the illegitimacy of his conception:

My father compounded with my mother under the
 Dragon's tail, and my nativity was under Ursa Major, so
 that it follows I am rough and lecherous. Fut, I should
 have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the
 firmament twinkled on my bastardising (*King Lear*
 I.ii.133-8).

In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the Duchess encourages Spurio to cuckold his father as revenge for ruining his (Spurio's) life by conceiving him illegitimately:

Who would not be reveng'd of such a father,
 E'en in the worst way? I would thank that sin
 That could most injury him, and be in league with it.
 O what a grief 'tis, that a man should live
 But once i'th'world, and then to live a bastard,
 The curse o'the womb, the thief of nature,

³⁵All quotations are taken from William Shakespeare. *The Complete Works*. Ed. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett and William Montgomery. (The Oxford Shakespeare). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Begot against the seventh commandment,
 Half-damn'd in the conception, by the justice
 Of that unbribed everlasting law (I.ii.156-64).

She describes Spurio as 'disinherited' by his father's lust (I.ii.168), but at the same time endows him with the moral consequence of his father's actions. Spurio's soliloquy, with which the scene concludes, ends: 'Duke, on thy brow I'll draw my bastardy. | For indeed a bastard by nature should make cuckolds, | because he is the son of a cuckold-maker' (I.ii.202-4). Spurio thus justifies his proposed unnatural behaviour in cuckolding his father (decidedly unfilial, even aside from the issue of incest) because it is his nature. He is at once the Duke's natural and unnatural son. The bastard thus embodies the same threat to the social and moral order (and in particular the natural=good correlation) as does the (unruly) woman.³⁶

There are other examples in these plays of characters acting in ways that are at once natural and unnatural; participating in an ordered society at the same time as they apparently violate the principles that order it. Perhaps the best example is that of adultery. There is never any question in these plays that adultery is morally wrong, yet it is often presented as something expected, and even, in a sense, natural. Thus it is not questioned that Julia in *The Duchess of Malfi* should have a lover: it is the socially expected and 'natural' thing for her to do, given that her husband (tellingly named 'Castruchio') is old and foolish. This expectation is reinforced by Delio's overtures to Julia in II.iv which, although undeveloped, do arise from Delio's mocking of Castruchio's inadequacies. The fact that the Cardinal has a mistress is not called into question *per se* within the play, although his unpleasant treatment (and eventual murder) of Julia appears as evidence of his depravity, and the liaison itself as evidence of his hypocrisy in condemning his sister the Duchess for her lust. That a Cardinal is presented as far from celibate (and indeed as thoroughly corrupt) can be seen as part of the play's

³⁶Indeed, the two threats are, in some respects, intimately related, as the bastard is the result (to the early modern way of thinking) of woman's unchastity.

Italianate Catholicity, designed to titillate (and confirm the prejudices of) an English audience, but within the play his actions are not questioned in the way that, for example, the question of good government is considered. Society is presented as fully accommodating (and indeed expecting) the infidelity of a noblewoman married to a dotard (a situation seen again in Webster's *The White Devil*) and the sexual immorality of a supposedly celibate priest.

In *Women Beware Women*, similarly, Livia assumes that a rich, middle-aged woman will take a lover, and the Duke appears to assume that Bianca too will be happy to commit adultery, given the advantages that he can offer her:

BIANCA My lord, what seek you?
 DUKE Love.
 BIANCA 'Tis gone already,
 I have a husband.
 DUKE That's a single comfort;
 Take a friend to him.
 BIANCA That's a double mischief,
 Or else there's no religion.
 DUKE Do not tremble
 At fears of thine own making (II.ii.346-50)

The relationship between Bianca and the Duke demonstrates two things. Firstly, the Duke apparently believes that he is above both the law (as in the murder of Leantio) and conventional morality. Bianca's short speech which follows this interchange shows that she is aware of his belief; he in turn persuades her that giving in to his protestations will elevate her also to a position of moral detachment. Part of the security that he offers her is an implicit promise of the moral immunity or untouchability conferred by his power and social status. Secondly, within the structures and mechanisms portrayed in the world of the play, Bianca and the Duke do in fact remain untouchable. They bring about their own downfall and are caught by their own devices, but they are not brought to trial by any civil, spiritual or moral authority. Bianca scores points against the Cardinal when he attempts to censure the Duke. Even the moralising of the Cardinal, although he condemns adultery, focuses far more on the detrimental effect that sexual immorality can have on government, its particular dangers for

a ruler, and the fact that problems arise when lust (and other forces for disorder) can no longer be contained, rather than on a wholesale condemnation of immorality. His cautions are largely conditional and circumstantial: 'So where lust *reigns*, that prince cannot reign long' (V.ii.225, italics mine). Isabella's acceptances of both Hippolito as her lover and the Ward as her husband appear grounded in the assumption that adultery is natural, and, once again, to be expected, within the context of a fiscally-motivated, aristocratic, arranged marriage. Thus behaviour (such as adultery) which is presented as anathema to the ordered society in contemporary texts is at once contained by society and presented as almost an integral part of its functioning.

The best example of this moral relativism is, once again, the incestuous relationship between Giovanni and his sister Annabella in Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. Giovanni does question conventional morality, and he is shown as paying the price for doing so, as he slides into despair, murder and virtual suicide. The point here, however, is that he argues that his relationship with Annabella is licit, good and natural. It is this relationship which most explicitly and radically challenges the hitherto unquestioned correlation between the natural and the good, for Ford makes the incestuous affair appear attractive in many ways, particularly through his employment and manipulation of various aesthetic and dramatic conventions. One of the other reasons that Giovanni's and Annabella's relationship appears natural (in the sense of being an 'obvious' solution to the problem of Annabella's marriage) and attractive is the circumambient violence and lack of principle of the Parmesan community. But at the same time as the lovers appear to offer an alternative aesthetic and ethos, and a diametric opposition to the play's other relationships, they are, morally, a product of and participants in that same violence and lack of principle.

It is valid to see, for example, the tenderness and affection expressed between Giovanni and Annabella as the antithesis of Putana's reductive attitude towards sexuality (as at I.ii.64-130, when she speculates luridly about the sexual

proWess of Annabella's suitors) but they are at the same time points on the same continuum, whereby the pursuit of physical gratification is elevated above all thought of moral context or consequence. Annabella's first sight of Giovanni in the play follows this commentary on the unsuspecting suitors, and so places Giovanni among their number, all of them the objects of Annabella's and Putana's voyeuristic gaze. The sight of Giovanni gives Annabella pleasure, whereas the other suitors leave her indifferent or disgust her, but all her judgements (and those of Putana) are implicitly located in her (sexual) response to the men walking below. As Giovanni attempts to re-order morality on a grand scale, by citing authorities and wilfully misusing his gifts of reason as he confronts and manipulates the fundamental principles and relationships of order, nature, right and beauty, so Annabella demonstrates her own invidious absorption of the same arguments through her passive and accepting existence in an environment where decisions and judgements are to be made on the basis of personal pleasure and self-interest, or aesthetics, rather than with regard to the moral order. Thus it is irrelevant to Putana that Soranzo has had a celebrated adulterous liaison with Hippolita, save that it proves his virility; Florio makes no mention of the affair, while Soranzo is his preference among all the suitors to be Annabella's husband, and Annabella herself tells Soranzo that if she does ever marry, she will marry him (III.ii.61-2). She must immediately afterwards avail herself of him to conceal her pregnancy and also, it may be assumed, to provide a cover for her continuing affair with Giovanni. Once again, adultery among the upper classes appears to be something of a given. Even Annabella and Giovanni can be seen as acting on this assumption. In this respect they are like Isabella and Hippolito in *Women Beware Women*.

Yet even Soranzo's former lover, the stereotypical 'lusty widow' Hippolita, who is a source of disorder in the play, symbolised by her disruption of the wedding banquet, curses Soranzo:

May'st thou live
To father bastards, may her womb bring forth

Monsters, and die together in your sins
 Hated, scorned and unpitied! (IV.ii.97-100)

Thus the immoral woman (but at the same time a woman acting according to her nature—the dictates of the widow stereotype once more) curses the immoral man with the threat of disorder (illegitimate offspring) and unnaturalness (deformed children). The curse is, of course, primarily an example of dramatic irony, given that Annabella is indeed already carrying another man's child, and that deformed children are conventionally thought to be the result of incestuous relationships. But it also acts as a reminder of the unnaturalness of Annabella's relationship with Giovanni—which has been constructed by them and, to some extent, within the play as natural—by allowing an intrusion of ugliness into what has hitherto been presented as a thing of beauty. That Soranzo is far from an innocent victim only complicates matters, highlighting both the corruption and immorality of Parmesan society and the way in which Giovanni and Annabella are active participants in, rather than victims of or refugees from, their moral environment.

Yet Ford has not created a world in which the natural has fully *become* the unnatural, in which human nature is seen as wholly depraved and irremediably so. It is true that Parmesan society is portrayed as utterly corrupt, with no final and redemptive stamp of moral authority, and that the false hope offered by the love of Giovanni and Annabella is shattered. But Ford's concern (as well as creating riveting theatre) is to show *how* the unnatural—in this case, incest—can be made to appear natural and appealing. In this respect, the play's central characters, and their audience, are placed in something of the same state of moral dislocation and alienation experienced by Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling*. As Hippolita's curse shows, incest is still fundamentally disordered and unnatural in the world of the play, no matter how deceptively and alluringly it may be painted. Annabella's and Giovanni's incest is thus at once a symptom of the depravity of their society and a catalyst for the exposure of the capacity of the human mind for self-deception. No solutions for the wilful and self-deluding

unnaturalness of Annabella and Giovanni are offered, but that the lovers are unnatural is certainly affirmed by the play's bleak and grisly denouement. As Giovanni rips Annabella's heart from her body and precipitates wholesale slaughter at Soranzo's birthday feast, he destroys his own fragile equation of love, truth, beauty, right and good, demonstrating, in the destruction that explodes around him, the only possible consequences of such profound and fundamental disorder.

Incest functions in all these plays³⁷ as an indicator of the depravity and corruption of a community and a reference point of ultimate disorder and unnaturalness. It violates, in some cases (Hippolito and Isabella, Spurio and the Duchess) the hierarchical and distinct ordering of the generations. It distorts the relationship, based on an unequal distribution of power, between parents and children, which is central to the early modern vision of an ordered society, especially in spiritual and moral terms. To the seventeenth-century way of thinking Spurio's incest is, for this reason, the most reprehensible, although the Duchess is not his relation by blood: 'incest of the worst sort, that a man should have his father's wife' (Bishop Arthur Lake, *Sermons with Some Religious Meditations*, 1629, quoted McCabe 81). In other cases (Giovanni and Annabella, Isabella and Hippolito once again, the much-remarked incestuous feelings of Ferdinand for his sister the Duchess of Malfi and, by implication, even Antonio and the Duchess and Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores) the act (or thought) of incest violates the principle of exogamy, whereby a woman must be married outside her immediate kin group to further the interests of that group, while at the same time observing the principle of class endogamy. As Verna Foster observes, 'incest is a crime against society as well as a violation of divine law, for incest endangers the viability of marriage alliances as a form of social and economic cohesion' (197). Richard McCabe begins his Epilogue to *Incest, Drama and Nature's Law 1550-1700* thus:

³⁷With the possible exception of *The Changeling*, although it could be argued that Beatrice-Joanna's relationship with De Flores has many of the characteristics of an incestuous affair.

That family life was not as pure as it should be, but was perhaps incapable of the sort of purity traditionally associated with it, was a major preoccupation of English drama in the period from 1550 to 1700 as normative ideals of natural law gave way under the combined onslaughts of Calvinism, scepticism, rationalism and empirical science. During that period the theme of incest, inherited from the ancient world and mediated through centuries of biblical exegesis, served as a powerful focus for scrutinising all forms of allegedly 'natural' authority in both the private and the public domains (292).

McCabe's contention that natural law 'gave way' is open to debate, as it implies the pessimistic or transitional perspective on early modern tragedy that is being rejected here, but the rest of his statement, and also his earlier observation that 'the incest theme may be employed as a focus for a wide variety of anxieties stemming from the paradoxical perception of 'nature' as both social ideal and moral enemy' (21) are much what I have been arguing here. In addition, the ways in which incest is portrayed and the types of incest that these plays present, are further indicative of the moral relationship being constructed between the natural and the unnatural, order and disorder.³⁸

Why incest, though, and not that equally titillating byword for the unnatural and the disordered—male homosexuality—which was, like incest, associated with the most fundamental and dangerous disorder of atheism in early modern Europe? Several explanations are possible. One possibility is that male homosexuality remained largely taboo and that, in any case, given the known proclivities of James I, its dramatic representation or consideration would have had little hope of getting past the censors.³⁹ A second is that it is in fact anachronistic to speak of homosexuality *per se* in the

³⁸I have noted elsewhere Martin Butler's observation about the increase in incest-related plays in the period leading to the Civil War.

³⁹Incest was also taboo, of course, but the kind of incest portrayed in these plays (that is, a consensual relationship between adults), where the central issue is not the abuse of power or the coercion of children but the violation of the prohibited degrees of kinship, would have been familiar and reasonably public as the subject of court scandal and also as a matter for serious consideration in the negotiation of aristocratic marriages.

early modern period, when there appears to have been little concept of it as a state, but rather only an awareness (and a condemnation) of homosexual acts. Thus the disguised Vindice's greeting to Lussurioso in *The Revenger's Tragedy* ('how dost, sweet musk-cat? | When shall we lie together? I.iii.34-5) is not an indication that either Lussurioso or Vindice is homosexual but rather indicates the depth of Lussurioso's licentiousness and sexual depravity. A motif of incest is employed in these plays rather than one of homosexuality because incest implicates the role of the family as both symbol and guarantor of moral, social and spiritual order in a way that male homosexuality does not. Male homosexuality can (and did, as the sizeable family of James I himself demonstrated) coexist with the dynastic, and often even the nuclear, family, whereas incest utterly undermines it, especially on a symbolic level.

These plays are not whole-heartedly cynical (if such a state is possible) and they do not always present their depraved states of affairs neutrally, without implicitly condemning them. They accurately depict, rather, a degree of slippage or overlap, or even a state of interdependence not wholly based on mutual exclusivity, between order and disorder, the natural and the unnatural. These plays are certainly underpinned by the old binary, black and white divisions of the Prayerbook, Hooker and the Homilies, at the same time as they demonstrate the blurring of many of their outlines. They depict a state of moral relativism (albeit occasional and circumstantial, rather than universal) in which morality and the idea of what are good, bad, natural, unnatural, ordered or disordered is subtly shaped by the considerations of birth, gender and class. All these plays can therefore be seen as investigating the wider issues suggested by Cornelia's question to her son Flamineo in *The White Devil*: 'What? Because we are poor | Shall we be vicious?' (I.ii.312-3). In a startlingly modern way, these plays present relationships, families and communities that are (in both early modern and twentieth-century terms) deeply dysfunctional, yet functioning. Furthermore, they function largely without their

participants questioning the strictures of conventional morality that would condemn them: many of them appear to consider themselves above (or *outside*) the law, which do not amount to the same thing. The prominence of incest in these plays attests to the way in which the family is at the heart of the vision of order, morality and nature that they portray. Through the emphasis on the family, a belief in the need for structure, order, harmony and hierarchy in society is affirmed, even—or perhaps above all—in its absence.

Part Two: *Prison and Sanctuary*

This second part of my discussion of the nature and function of families in early modern tragedies will itself fall into two sections. In the first, the motif of the enclosure of women will be located within the traditions of both the enclosed garden and Elizabethan iconography. I will argue that these five plays make a fundamental connection between women's enclosure, their chastity, and the integrity and security of their families and, by implication, the wider communities of which they are part. I will link this contention to Butler's idea of nostalgic Elizabethanism, and locate it in the political circumstances of England in the early seventeenth century. It will thus be seen that the function of the family as an archetype of social or moral stability, is simultaneously promulgated and questioned by these plays.

I will begin the second section by taking up the theme of enclosure once again, showing how (with *The Duchess of Malfi* as the prime example) the family can be constructed simultaneously as an enclosure (in the negative sense previously traced) and a sanctuary; as both impersonal dynasty (in the interests of which, for example, women's chastity must be closely guarded) and highly emotional domestic entity. I will argue that these two models of the family coexist, and that they are often mutually dependent. This will be used as evidence against the arguments of Lawrence Stone, although it will also be seen that his theories have held considerable appeal for some literary critics. I will argue, however, that these plays do not present the principle of emotional investment in close family relationships in an entirely positive light, and that, in many respects, they represent the misplacement of affection, or the over-investment of emotion, as socially destructive and morally dangerous.

It will therefore be seen that families, in these plays, often function as a focus for confusion. Family relationships, whether rigidly patriarchal or domestic and emotional, are presented as potential sources of meaning and stability for both the individual and society, but at the same time as they

appear to offer this hope, their ability to do so is called into question or undermined. Yet because it is the family unit which is at the centre of this state of confusion, and because the family unit (as these plays present it) still carries with it all the associations of order, hierarchy and stability that it has in the Elizabethan homiletic texts referred to throughout this discussion, I will argue that, while these plays do depict a state of confusion and uncertainty that is, at times, profound, they are not expressions of chaos and anarchy. Presenting disorder of all kinds, they never question the need for order in human morality, relationships and society.

I

In courtly literature, the device of the enclosed garden occurs with almost monotonous regularity. It can be found in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, in the great *Roman de la Rose*, in some of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and in parts of Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, to name but four examples. In all these various texts certain features are constant: the garden's enclosure, (whether by wall, hedge or other, more magic, means, such as a wall of air) and its fecundity, represented by flowers, laden fruit trees and lush, inviting grass. A woman is usually found within such a garden, and thus enclosed gardens, in the romance tradition (going beyond the characteristics of the *locus amoenus* of classical literature) are feminine and eroticised spaces; places of love and perhaps the temporary suspension of social stricture and conventional morality. A key text comes from the Song of Solomon: 'A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed' (4:12). Passing over the conveniently incestuous implications of this text (given the predilections of several characters in the plays being discussed here) this short verse is useful in that, even in the headily erotic context of the Song of Songs, it places emphasis on the fact of enclosure. In the Christian tradition, the Song of Solomon is a rich source of material involved in the

veneration of the Virgin Mary.⁴⁰ The obvious correlation between the situation of a woman, perhaps specifically the Virgin Mary, in an enclosed (and perhaps residually eroticised) space, and her own physical integrity, need not be laboured.

This, briefly, is the medieval tradition of the enclosed garden. Aspects of this tradition are transformed, in Elizabethan England, into the identification of the physical integrity of the body of the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I, with the security of her realm. Elizabeth's reasons for remaining unmarried have been the subject of much speculation, as has, rather more productively, the so-called 'cult of Elizabeth', in which the celebration and mythologisation of her chastity played such an important part. The iconography associated with Elizabeth abounds with references to her chastity: her colours of white and black, for virginity and constancy; the crescent moon identifying her with the goddess Diana, and her emblems of pearls, the ermine and the eglantine all standing for chastity. Perhaps the most striking representation of her chastity is the so-called 'Sieve Portrait'. Elizabeth stands in front of a pillar (another symbol of constancy) holding a sieve, which refers to the story of the Vestal Virgin Tuccia.⁴¹ Other images of Elizabeth associate her more explicitly with the geographical or territorial integrity of her realm. In the 'Ditchley Portrait' she appears in pearl-studded white, eglantine rose tucked into her collar, standing on a map of England, simultaneously protective of and identified with the country. In one engraving, her body is portrayed as enclosing the whole of human society and the cosmos as well, her virgin perfection emphasised by the repeated circles of the diagram. In political terms, the unmarried status of the Queen ensured England's freedom from foreign control, while at the same time (at least in the first half of her reign) giving her considerable bargaining power in Europe.

⁴⁰Its exegesis leads to, for example, the tradition of representing the Annunciation as taking place in a walled garden or room. The garden aspect is often reduced to the Virgin-typifying lily in pot or vase, which itself becomes an iconic representation of the Immaculate Conception.

⁴¹She proved her chastity by carrying a sieve full of water from the Tiber to the Temple of the Vestals without spilling one drop.

The maintenance of the boundaries of the body of the Queen can thus be equated with the maintenance of the boundaries of the realm. In his essay 'Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed' Peter Stallybrass argues that:

the normative "Woman" could become an emblem of the perfect and impermeable container, and hence a map of the integrity of the state. The state, like the virgin, was a *hortus conclusus*, an enclosed garden walled off from enemies (131).

This, then, is the ideological and iconographic background to this discussion: the female body is, ideally, an eroticised and, eventually, a politicised space, and the policing of its literal and metaphorical borders can be seen as closely related to the maintenance of the integrity of family, society and state. In the plays that I am considering, there are obvious connections made between the chastity of women and the security and status of their families (and therefore, by implication, their society and even their nation). This association is, indeed, only logical in capitalist, exogamous, patrilineal societies, such as are portrayed in these texts, and such as they were written for.

The Changeling is a good place to start. Both the main plot, concerning Beatrice-Joanna, Alsemero and De Flores, and the sub-plot, involving Alibius, Isabella, Antonio and Franciscus, manifest an interest in women's chastity that verges on obsession. Enclosure imagery is central to the way in which this obsession is represented. Throughout the play there is an identification made between the person (and moral character) of Beatrice-Joanna and the castle of her father, Vermandero, which guards the city of Alicante. In the first scene of the play, where Beatrice-Joanna and Alsemero meet and are then joined by Vermandero, Beatrice-Joanna tells her father: 'And in discourse I find him [i.e. Alsemero] much desirous | To see your castle: he hath deserved it' (159-60). Vermandero himself goes on to say to Alsemero: 'our citadels | Are plac'd conspicuous to outward view, | On promonts' tops; but within are secrets' (164-66), adding 'You must see my castle, | And her best entertainment, ere we part' (201-2). Yet the identification of Beatrice-Joanna and the castle is not quite

the straightforward Petrarchan conceit of woman-as-impregnable fortress,⁴² since the citadel also functions as an emblem of Beatrice-Joanna's duplicity. The heroine's name can be glossed as 'she who makes happy' and 'the Lord's grace', but Sara Eaton suggests that 'Joanna' can be read as 'Gehenna', or 'hell' (286). Alsemero first encounters Beatrice-Joanna in a church—"Twas in the temple where I first beheld her" is the play's opening line—thus identifying her, initially, with a divine space, but the castle itself, with which she is identified thereafter, is presented in traditional hell-castle terms, with winding, narrow passages and perilous descents. Anne Lancashire suggests that a model castle, such as are known to have been constructed for civic pageants in the City of London (in which Middleton is known to have been involved), which in turn often recalled the allegorised castles of virtues and vices familiar from medieval literature, may have formed part of the stage furnishings in early productions of the play (223).

The implied identification between Beatrice-Joanna and the castle becomes one of the chief sources of dramatic irony in the play, as Beatrice-Joanna's moral failings become more apparent. Interchanges such as

ALONZO I hear the beauty of this seat largely.
 VERMANDERO It falls much short of that (III.iv.9-10)

reinforce this, as the superficial image of the chaste Petrarchan fortress is superseded by that of the castle of hell. Beatrice-Joanna herself, later in the same scene, states 'I'm in a labyrinth' (III.iv.71), her choice of image stereotypically Petrarchan but also, more pertinently, recalling the winding passages implied in the tour of the castle at the beginning of Act III, during which De Flores murders Beatrice-Joanna's first intended husband, Alonzo de Piracquo. Thus the castle, which has initially functioned as an image of Beatrice-Joanna's worth as a trophy, and as an emblem of a particular discourse of love—the Petrarchan—becomes a symbol of Beatrice-Joanna's

⁴²Although it should be noted that, in this context, the motif is being not being employed by a lover with reference to his beloved, but by a father of his daughter.

duplicity, amorality and ultimate entrapment. The first words of Vermandero to his daughter, when he is confronted with both the true nature of her moral character and her mortally-wounded body, are: 'An host of enemies enter'd my citadel | Could not amaze like this' (V.iii.147-48). He too, etymologically speaking, now uses language which demonstrates the transformation of the heavenly citadel into the infernal labyrinth, as Joost Daalder notes (1990, V.iii.148n).

This employment of the woman-castle identification as an indication of the moral environment and action of *The Changeling* is merely one example of the associations of women with enclosed spaces which occurs throughout the play. None of the other plays being discussed here is as explicit as *The Changeling* in its identification of women with buildings, and they lack the subversive Petrarchan dimension suggested by the emphasis placed on woman-as-fortress in that play. However, in both *Women Beware Women* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, images of women as buildings, especially as locked buildings, occur significantly, if not as frequently as in *The Changeling*.

In *Women Beware Women* Leantio decides that the best way to ensure the happiness of his marriage is to keep his young wife Bianca at home, and preferably locked in. In this he is supported by his mother, who is suspicious of the young noblewoman whom her son has suddenly produced as his wife. In some respects, their insistence on keeping her indoors is representative of English writers' attempts at verisimilitude, for it was generally agreed (with some justification) that Italian women were kept indoors and closely guarded by their husbands and families. At the same time, however, the locked house functions as an emblem of women's chastity in a far more direct sense than the castle. Peter Stallybrass states: 'normative "Woman" [has as] her signs. . . the enclosed body, the closed mouth, the locked house' (1986, 129).⁴³

⁴³The proscription of women's speech is an area of great interest, not least in these plays, but, in the interests of brevity, it must remain outside the scope of my study.

The construction of a normative woman in terms of the equation of enclosed body and locked house is one that can be particularly applied to *Women Beware Women*. After introducing Bianca to his mother in the first scene of the play Leantio comments, in soliloquy:

'Tis great policy
 To keep choice treasures in obscurest places:
 Should we show thieves our wealth, 'twould make 'em
 bolder.
 Temptation is a devil will not stick
 To fasten upon a saint; take heed of that.
 The jewel is cased up from all men's eyes;
 Who could imagine now a gem were kept
 Of that great value under this plain roof? (I.i.165-72)

He goes on to implicate his mother—ironically, as it turns out from the play's subsequent events—in the projected enclosure of his new wife: 'Old mothers know the world, and such as these, | When sons lock chests, are good to look to keys' (I.i.175-76).

Leantio's troubles begin when Bianca starts to question the limitations placed upon her. The Duke of Florence sees her at the window as he passes through the streets in procession, and he engages Livia (whose marital status guarantees her a great degree of social autonomy) to procure her for him. Livia does this by enticing Leantio's mother, and so Bianca, from their house to join her at supper and chess. She then arranges for Bianca to be taken on a tour of her house, during which she is seduced (or raped) by the Duke. At the beginning of the third act, the mother describes Bianca's apparent change of character, explicitly linking it to her having left the house to visit Livia: 'She was but one day abroad, but ever since | She's grown so cutted [abrupt, curt, querulous] there's no speaking to her' (III.i.3-4). The mother goes on to suggest that the sight of the luxurious fashion in which Livia lives has made Bianca dissatisfied with her own, more modest, circumstances in the house of Leantio, and this does indeed seem to be the case, when Bianca enters and speaks disparagingly of the furnishings.

In the next scene, however, Leantio returns home from business and, in soliloquy, describes his feelings on returning to his new wife:

How near am I now to a happiness
 That earth exceeds not! Not another like it;
 The treasures of the deep are not so precious
 As are the concealed comforts of a man,
 Locked up in woman's love. I scent the air
 Of blessings when I come but near the house.
 What a delicious breath marriage sends forth —
 The violet-bed's not sweeter. Honest wedlock
 Is like a banqueting-house built in a garden,
 On which the spring's chaste flowers take delight
 To cast their modest odours; when base lust
 With all her powders, paintings and best pride,
 Is but a fair house built by a ditch side.
 When I behold a glorious dangerous strumpet,
 Sparkling in beauty and destruction too,
 Both at a twinkling, I do liken straight
 Her beautified body to a goodly temple
 That's built on vaults where carcasses lie rotting. (III.iii.1-18)

The implications are obvious. In some respects Leantio's choice of the image of the house has a similar function to the castle in *The Changeling*, in that the potential for disjunction between interior and exterior makes it an ideal emblem for possible duplicity. In the context of *Women Beware Women* the choice of the imagery of houses is especially apt because it reflects the concern for women's enclosure that is expressed in its plot. When Leantio is greeted by his wife, she tells him almost immediately, in response to his solicitous enquiries as to her happiness:

Methinks this house stands nothing to my mind;
 I'd have some pleasant lodging i'th'high street, sir,
 Or if 'twere near the court, sir, that were much better:
 'Tis a sweet recreation for a gentlewoman
 To stand in a bay-window, and see gallants. (III.ii.46-50)

When a knock is heard at the door, Leantio dismisses Bianca with the words 'Thou art a gem no stranger's eye must see' (III.ii.94). A messenger has come to fetch Bianca to the Duke and, although Leantio protests 'Y'have mistook the house, sir' (III.ii.101)—ironic as a disclaimer since, given the imagery of his previous soliloquy, it is becoming apparent that Leantio

himself has mistaken the house—the messenger insists that he has been sent for Bianca Capella.⁴⁴

The messenger is fobbed off, and Leantio turns on Bianca and his mother:

BIANCA How should the Duke know me? Can you guess, Mother?
 MOTHER Not I with all my wits, sure we kept house close.
 LEANTIO Kept close! Not all the locks in Italy
 Can keep you women so; you have been gadding,
 And ventured out at twilight to th'court-green yonder,
 And met the gallant bowlers coming home—
 Without your masks too, both of you, I'll be hanged else.
 (III.ii.129-35)

Leantio discovers that the Duke has seen Bianca at the window, and reproaches his mother for allowing him to catch more than a brief glimpse of her. She retorts:

Why, once may do as much harm, son as a thousand:
 Do you not know one spark has fired an house
 As well as a whole furnace? (III.ii.156-58)

Leantio then decides that he must conceal Bianca by enclosing her even more securely within the house:

You know, Mother
 At the end of the dark parlour there's a place
 So artificially contrived for a conveyance,
 No search could ever find it. When my father
 Kept in for manslaughter, it was his sanctuary.
 There will I lock my life's best treasure up,
 Bianca. (III.ii.161-67)

But Bianca defies him and goes to the Duke's banquet, and, deciding to cut his losses, Leantio joins her. At the feast, the Duke singles out the disgruntled young husband and rewards him—by giving him the Captaincy of 'Rouans citadel', one of Florence's chief defences. Mulryne suggests that Middleton had in mind a Florentine fort mentioned in one of his sources, known as 'le Ruinate'—the Ruined (III.iii.39n). It is impossible to know whether the irony is intended. As the scene ends, in a final irony, Livia invites Leantio to become her lover—by taking

⁴⁴It might, however, be over-determined to suggest that the name, which Middleton takes from his source, also recalls Leantio's speech: is Bianca herself here implicitly identified as 'the goodly temple | That's built on vaults where carcasses lie rotting'?

him on a tour of her house: 'You never saw the beauty of my house yet' (III.iii.358).

This is, roughly, only the half-way point of the play, and there is a second plot that runs parallel to and intersects with that concerning Bianca and Leantio. The references to houses largely disappear at this point, although other strands of imagery, as well as events, commodifying women continue throughout. The references to houses and other buildings can be used, however, to construct a neat and nicely ironic emblematic summary of one series of the play's events. Leantio initially conceives of Bianca as a concealed treasure; a 'gem. . . under this plain roof'. He wants her to remain safely within his house, while he conceptualises marriage as a sound and attractive building, and a whore as a painted exterior concealing decayed foundations. His reaction to the summons of the Duke is to try to enclose Bianca still further, but the damage has been done: she has already left his house. He is eventually compensated for the Duke's appropriation of what can be seen as a fair exterior concealing moral decay, by the gift of what appears to be a ruined fortress. The house, or building, is therefore a significant emblem in this text, functioning both as a symbol of (ultimately futile) patriarchal control and of the disjunction between external appearance and the reality within. Bianca, in the first three acts of the play, demonstrates the violation of the prescription for the normative woman—silence, chastity and the locked house—and the image of the house itself is used to mark this process.

The Revenger's Tragedy has nothing like the density of enclosure images of the two plays discussed so far, but there are three particular elements of the play which repay consideration. The first is straightforward. At one point, Gratiana says, when trying to persuade her daughter to accept Lussurioso's advances:

Virginity is paradise, lock'd up.
 You cannot come by yourselves without fee,
 And 'twas decreed that man should keep the key. (II.i.157-59)

This is an obvious example of the traditionally erotic employment of the image of the enclosed garden. When the virtue-testing plot is resolved at the end of the fourth act, after Castiza herself feigns compliance to test her mother, she states that 'A virgin honour is a crystal tower' (IV.iv.152)—another straightforward and conventional image.

Near the start of the play, however, is a short incident of far more interest to my discussion of women's enclosure (literal or metaphorical) and the fortunes of family and state. It is learned in the play's opening scene that the Duchess's youngest son (who is unnamed) has raped the wife of Antonio, a prominent nobleman, during a court masque. This event sets in motion one of the play's revenge plots, and at the play's end, when the Duke and his degenerate family have all come to various fitting and unpleasant ends, it is Antonio who becomes the new duke. I.iv opens thus:

Enter the discontented Lord ANTONIO, whose wife the Duchess's youngest son ravished; he discovering the body of her dead to [PIERO], certain Lords, and HIPPOLITO.

That is, the body of Antonio's wife is revealed, tableau-like, possibly by drawing aside the curtain across the 'discovery space', a curtained alcove at the centre back of the stage. Antonio begins:

Draw nearer, lords, and be sad witnesses
Of a fair, comely building new fall'n,
Being falsely undermined. Violent rape
Has play'd a glorious act; behold, my lords,
A sight that strikes man out of me. (I.iv.1-5)

A few lines later he continues:

Dead!
Her honour first drunk poison, and her life,
Being fellows in one house, did pledge her honour. (I.iv.9-11)

This is a quintessential example of the equation of the chaste woman with the locked house. Antonio's wife (she is given no

other name) is presented as having her life and her identity as a 'virtuous lady' and the 'precedent for wives' entirely bound up in her chastity, and the image used to present this identification is a variation on a now-familiar theme: the house. One of the movements in the play thus depicts the causal relationship between an act of violence and sexual licence, a violation of married chastity, the 'undermining' of a 'fair, comely building', and the subsequent overthrow of a corrupt dynasty.⁴⁵

This implied association between the maintenance of chastity—the boundaries of the body—and the security of government—the boundaries of the realm—is reinforced by a comment at the beginning of V.iii, the last scene of the play. Lussurioso is being installed as duke, although by the scene's end he too will be dead and Antonio installed in his place. In an aside to the audience, he says 'That foul, incontinent duchess we have banished; | The bastard shall not live' (V.iii.7-8). Thus even the dissolute and soon-to-be-punished Lussurioso is here used to give recognition to the importance of removing the reminders of disruptive sexual impropriety from the realm; of maintaining the boundaries of the 'clean and proper body' of the state by the implied privileging of chastity and bodily integrity.

The recurrent motif of the literal enclosure of women in these plays can also be related to the security of family and state. The suggested imprisonment of Bianca in *Women Beware Women* is straightforward but, more subtly, the action of *The Changeling* can also be modelled as a series of increasingly restrictive acts of enclosure. The play is set in the town of Alicante which, being a sea-port (Edward Jones argues) suggests the possibility of escape (47). The subsequent action, however, is all set indoors, in the castle. As the emphasis on virginity grows, with Alsemero's virginity tests (themselves in bottles in a locked cabinet) and the bed-trick, and the moral claustrophobia of the characters increases, the action becomes

⁴⁵It is not too far-fetched, I think, to suggest that the imagery associated with Antonio's perfect wife is reinforced by the presentation of her corpse, the pinnacle of her perfection having been her death, in the closely-bounded setting of the discovery space.

more confined, to private apartments, passages and bedchambers. The increasingly suffocating atmosphere is reinforced by the subplot, in which Isabella is confined to the madhouse by the jealous Alibius (with the recurrent stage direction of *'Madmen within'* suggesting the possibility of further degrees of imprisonment), herself retreating into a feigned madness for a time. In the play's climactic final scene Alsemero, upon confronting Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores, shuts them into his closet, that is, his small private room, from which issue ambiguous noises equally open to interpretation as those of sexual pleasure as of De Flores stabbing Beatrice-Joanna to death. Enclosure, in this text, can therefore be seen as increasingly ironic, for it becomes more extreme as Beatrice-Joanna's violations of social and moral codes grows in enormity, so emphasising her lack of bodily and moral integrity.

But how can this be related to the tradition of the enclosed garden? In the first place these plays, by replacing the garden with the house, are in some respects reflecting the experiences and the environment of the audiences for whom they were written. For these plays were written, although not necessarily exclusively, for an urban audience engaged in trade and commerce. This is not as much of an assertion as it sounds if it is set in the context of the imagery (and, in some respects, the actions) that depict women as tradeable commodities in these plays. The topos of woman-as-enclosed-space has also, simply, been updated: it is now, generally speaking, grounded in an environment that is urban and often realistic, as opposed to pastoral and idealised; concerned with the man-made edifice rather than the (nominally) natural environment. Because of this more realistic, everyday dimension, the mechanisms of enclosure are far more literal and prominent: the locked house, whether it exists as a setting or as a symbol, is surely far more oppressive than an enclosed garden. The languid eroticism of the *hortus conclusus* has given way to an atmosphere of prurience, if not paranoia. In no sense could the imagery associated with the enclosure of women in these texts be described as courtly; stripped of Edenic reference, the love

encountered in these texts is rarely spiritual or potentially redemptive.

Women are enclosed in these texts because their unchastity, or even the possibility of their unchastity, is regarded as socially destructive. Women's unchastity has the potential to produce illegitimate offspring, the ultimate threat in a patrilineal society. The bastard, in the literature of this period, is portrayed as a socially, morally and, indeed, almost cosmically, disruptive element.⁴⁶ Women's unchastity also represents rebellion and anarchy: because it threatens the family, it threatens society, and there is much evidence for this equation in the homiletic literature of the period. In the Homily on Obedience, for example, disorder is conceived of in primarily sexual terms, as 'abuse, carnall libertie, enormitie, sinne, and Babylonicall confusion' (Rickey and Stroup 69). In these plays, as in early modern social and moral commentary, perceived disorders of sexuality (such as incest, adultery, rape and promiscuity) often stand for other, more fundamental, disorders within society and state. Significantly, the Homily which follows that on obedience is entitled 'A Sermon Against whoredome and uncleannesse', and argues that sexual impropriety can itself lead to wider disorder in the state:

The outrageous seas of adulterie (or breaking of wedlocke) whoredome, fornication and uncleannesse, have not only burst in, but also overflowed almost the whole world, unto the great dishonour of GOD, the exceeding infamie of the name of Christ, the notable decay of true religion, and the utter destruction of the publike wealth (78).

It goes on to make the point that 'whoredome' is not 'lawfull' for anyone, of no matter what degree, and that it is the cause of many social problems that threaten the integrity of the state, such as profligacy, venereal disease, illegitimacy and general corruption. The passage concludes: 'how much is the publike and common weale impoverished and troubled through whoredome?' (83)

Between these plays and the society of which they are a product, a more complex relationship than the directly

⁴⁶See pp 61-2.

reflective, didactic or cautionary can, however, be posited. I began this part of my discussion with an account—albeit brief—of the associations between both chastity and enclosed space, and the Virgin Queen Elizabeth I and the boundaries of her realm. These plays, in their emphasis (in both plot and language) on the preservation of women's chastity via their enclosure, and the implied association between that preservation and the maintenance of social (and even national) cohesion, express a complex blend of cynicism and nostalgia. The idea of nostalgia immediately recalls the arguments put forward by Martin Butler in his account of the London theatre in the decade leading up to the Civil War.⁴⁷ He describes a revived cult of Elizabeth (which he terms 'Elizabethanism'), with features including the celebration of the reign of Elizabeth as a time of stability in religious and foreign policy, with a generally agreed and fairly constant enemy in Catholic Europe, especially Spain, and the revival and republication of old plays which portray Elizabeth as quasi-messianic Protestant saviour of the English nation. This national stability, perceived as 'Elizabethan', was notably lacking in the subsequent reigns of James I and Charles I. England's very insularity, previously identified with the integrity of its virgin sovereign's body and regarded as a source of power and strength, was being repeatedly compromised: through Scottish union, colonies in Ulster and Virginia, a Danish consort for James I, and the pursuit of a Spanish, and then French, marriage for Charles.

The emphasis, in plays such as *The Changeling*, *Women Beware Women* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, on the enclosure of women, and the association between the integrity of the body and the security of society and state, can be seen as further evidence of this Elizabethan nostalgia. It is, in some respects, a cynical nostalgia, for, in these texts, the point is made that, very often, women's bodies, homes, families, societies and nations do not remain inviolate. That the enclosure topos is recalled at all is evidence for the aspect of nostalgia; that it is, as has been suggested, negated, particularised, commodified and debased is evidence for the

⁴⁷See pp16-8.

cynicism. In some respects, although it would be simplistic to argue that this is their dominant underlying ethos, these plays, in recalling and exploiting such salient aspects of a myth of national unity and security, are evidence of a society in a state of growing division and confusion.⁴⁸

To conclude, a final example drawn from a play hitherto not cited in this part of my discussion: *'Tis Pity She's A Whore*. There is only one obvious image of enclosure in this play and, although the heroine, Annabella, leaves the domestic setting of her family home only infrequently, the plot is not overly restrictive of her movements either. But at the beginning of the fifth act she laments her situation:

Here like a turtle, mew'd up in a cage
Unmated, I converse with air and walls,
And descant on my vile unhappiness. (V.I.14-16)

The language is conventional and even, with its reference to the dove, quite courtly; the distress is palpable. But what the beautiful Annabella is lamenting is a situation almost entirely of her own making: she has been married off, with some haste, to the violent and unprincipled Soranzo, because she has been found to be pregnant. She remains totally devoted to her lover and the father of her child—Giovanni, her brother. Martin Butler notes the increase in the number of plays concerned with incest in the years leading up to the Civil War.⁴⁹ In the context of the argument here the implication is clear: the blend of cynicism and nostalgia which is expressed in the topos of the enclosure of women, and the simultaneous recognition of the apparent futility of that enclosure, gives way to an awareness that the real threats to the stability and security of family and state can now be found within their walls.

⁴⁸I will argue elsewhere that *Women Beware Women* in particular is an acutely political text, pp108-9.

⁴⁹As does Richard McCabe, in his full-length study of the incest motif in the drama of the Renaissance and Restoration. The incest motif in the plays being discussed here has been examined more fully elsewhere, pp66-9.

II

The first part of my discussion of the motif of enclosure in these plays, and how it relates to the integrity of the family and so the security of society and state, did not include discussion of *The Duchess of Malfi*. Here, however, I will take that play as a starting point in a consideration of what is the inverse of the idea of marriage and family relationships as being closed and restrictive in a negative sense, for in some respects these plays also construct families and marriages as places of security, safety and sanctuary; as enclosed in a positive and nurturing sense. This will also take into account ways in which the family is constructed as an affective entity, with its members depicted either individually or collectively in terms that are meant to make a strong appeal to the emotions.

The Duchess of Malfi can, like *The Changeling*, be thought of as a series of actions of enclosure. In the first part of the play the Duchess's relative autonomy, personal and political, is reinforced by her own actions and language relative to enclosure. She is presented, in many respects, as a woman who is in control of the various spaces in her life: her realm, her palace, her court and her body. In the first scene of the play, for example, the Duchess conducts her own secret marriage to her steward Antonio, with her maid Cariola concealed behind the arras as a witness. She is the initiator of the marriage; she places the ring on Antonio's finger. Cariola's concealment demonstrates the Duchess's mastery and manipulation of her surroundings, and her appropriation of what can be seen as a male convention (the hidden spy) for the purpose not of political intrigue, but of personal fulfilment. The Duchess rejects the restrictions of the role socially constructed for her, saying of herself, 'This is flesh and blood, sir; | 'Tis not the figure cut in alabaster | Kneels at my husband's tomb' (I.i.453-55). She is thus presented as a woman able both to evade or destroy those things which threaten to enclose her (such as the conventions of rank, gender or marital status) and to control territory and restrict others. As Frank Whigham (among others) points out, Antonio's passivity is an important aspect of

his characterisation, reinforcing the power of the Duchess in the marriage scene and elsewhere in the play (1985, 173-4).

Ferdinand, however, expresses his disapproval of his sister in terms of wanting to destroy the property of which she is in control:

CARDINAL Why do you make yourself
So wild a tempest?
FERDINAND Would I could be one,
That I might toss her palace 'bout her ears,
Root up her goodly forests, blast her meads,
And lay her general territory as waste
As she hath done her honours. (II.v.16-21)

Passages such as this can be interpreted as evidence of Ferdinand's incestuous feelings towards his sister, but interpreting them as expressions of patriarchal frustration at the territorial control and the social (and sexual) autonomy of a woman is equally as valid. When the fortunes of the Duchess and Antonio change, they are forced to leave Amalfi, feigning a pilgrimage to Loretto. But at Ancona they meet the Cardinal, and the dumb show that begins III.iv makes it clear that Antonio, the Duchess and their three children are being banished. The Duchess is conducted back to her palace by Bosola, and thereafter she is under house arrest. The fact that she is in her own palace and in her own chamber (previously an emblem of autonomy in her private life) but as prisoner, rather than mistress, emphasises her loss of control. The Cardinal does not act as extremely as Ferdinand has in his fantasy, but his simultaneous curtailing of his sister's territorial powers and restriction of her movements express his impulse to control her in much the same terms.

When Bosola appears to the Duchess in her chamber, he greets her with 'I am come to make thy tomb' (IV.ii.116). This recalls the tomb of her husband which, earlier, symbolised those restrictive expectations placed upon her which she has previously managed to escape. Bosola follows his greeting with a long speech describing the state of the human soul: 'Did'st thou ever see a lark in a cage? such is the soul in the body' (IV.ii.128-30). Executioners appear, with rope (with which the Duchess is to be strangled) and a coffin, which Bosola describes

as her 'last presence chamber' (IV.ii.171). The Duchess then meets her death bravely:

I know death hath ten thousand several doors
 For men to take their exits; and 'tis found
 They go on such strange geometrical hinges,
 You may open them both ways (IV.ii.222)

But she makes her final 'appearance' in the third scene of the fifth act, as an echo from the grave, once more resisting enclosure.

The question of the Duchess's chastity is not as obviously central to her imprisonment as is, for example, Bianca's in *Women Beware Women* or Beatrice-Joanna's in *The Changeling*. Yet in this play, too, tracking the Duchess's movements from being a woman in relative control of the spaces she inhabits (reflecting her control over her own body and sexuality, as well as her political power), via an episode of banishment to imprisonment and death (conceptualised, paradoxically, in terms of both confinement and liberation) is a useful way of examining the treatment of power in *The Duchess of Malfi*. It is obvious, too, that the Duchess's independence, in the matter of her marriage to Antonio, threatens the authority of her brothers, and therefore of the patriarchal family. They see her marriage as corrupting the 'purity' of their family's bloodlines, and her children, whom they regard as illegitimate, as evidence of what they can only imagine to be socially-transgressive relationships with tradesmen. Her independent regency in Amalfi is also problematic in their eyes, and it seems that the autonomy she has in this area cannot be separated from the control she has taken of the other parts of her life.

Thus far I have considered only negative portrayals of enclosure in *The Duchess of Malfi*, and I have shown that in this play, as in others, women's freedom and autonomy is seen as threatening to social order and hierarchy, whereas the maintenance of proper boundaries leads to security. Countries, palaces, rooms, families and the body itself thus become prisons or agents of enclosure in *The Duchess of Malfi*, and the Duchess herself resists enclosure at many points. However, throughout the play runs a subtext of an alternative

valorisation of enclosed spaces as positive and nurturing spaces.

When the Duchess has placed the ring on Antonio's finger, raised him from his knees and made her speech about no longer being like the effigy on her husband's tomb, Antonio replies: 'Truth speak for me: | I will remain the constant sanctuary | Of your good name' (I.i.459-61). The (literal) dead end of the Duke of Malfi's tomb is thus superseded by another symbolic enclosed space—the 'sanctuary' of Antonio and his love—which offers safety, hope and a new beginning. A few lines later, Antonio worries 'But for your brothers', to which the Duchess answers: 'Do not think of them— | All discord, without this circumference, | Is only to be pitied, and not fear'd' (I.i.468-70). The Duchess's embrace of her new husband, their marriage, their future family and even the private, domestic space in which the scene is set are similarly privileged as enclosed spaces, which operate under a different set of values. Enclosure in these spaces is a source of security and comfort for those who are enclosed, rather than a source of power for those (as is the case later in the play) who seek to confine others.

In III.ii the idyll of Antonio and the Duchess ends. The Duchess, Antonio and Cariola have been bantering playfully as they prepare for bed, once more in the private, domestic setting of the Duchess's bedroom, which recalls the circumstances of Antonio's and the Duchess's marriage. The Duchess sits brushing her hair and talking to herself; she says of Antonio 'You have cause to love me; I enter'd you into my heart | Before you would vouchsafe to call for the keys' (III.ii.61-2). Her brother Ferdinand enters, an intruder talking of death, bringing the Duchess a dagger and describing Antonio as a 'lecher' (III.ii.100) and their marriage as 'lust'. The sanctuary is violated: Antonio and the Duchess will soon be banished, and the Duchess imprisoned and murdered.

Yet the alternative world created by Antonio and the Duchess leaves a strong impression in *The Duchess of Malfi*, and central to its impact is the different idea of marriage and family that it seems to represent. One of its features is the affective way in which the family of Antonio and the Duchess is

constructed. This begins in the play's first scene, when Antonio makes a comment to the Duchess about fatherhood:

Say a man never marry, nor have children,
 What takes that from him? only the bare name
 Of being a father, or the weak delight
 To see the little wanton ride a-cock-horse
 Upon a painted stick, or hear him chatter
 Like a taught starling (I.i.398-403)

A few lines later a similarly vivid picture of the actions and demeanour of children is created in the Duchess's choice of metaphor in kissing Antonio: 'I have seen children oft eat sweetmeats thus, | As fearful to devour them too soon' (I.i.466-7). Already, the Duchess and Antonio are associated with the minutiae of normal family life, presented in touching detail.

Although without reference to children, a similar kind of domestic detail contributes to the 'sanctuary' atmosphere of III.ii. There is playful (even quite bawdy) banter between the three characters, during which many of the considerations of rank are set aside, and the relationships of Antonio and the Duchess with Cariola are also shown to be close and affectionate. Cariola tells Antonio, for example, that he does not want to sleep with the Duchess because 'she's the sprawling'st bedfellow' (III.ii.13). The Duchess is only left alone when Ferdinand appears because Antonio and Cariola have played a trick on her:

Pray thee, Cariola, let's steal forth the room
 And let her talk to herself; I have divers times
 Serv'd her the like, when she hath chaf'd extremely:
 I love to see her angry:— softly, Cariola (III.ii.54-7)

It is into this carefully constructed atmosphere of private intimacy that Ferdinand intrudes.

Banished, in III.v the Duchess once again uses child-related imagery to describe her situation: 'I have seen my little boy oft scourge his top | And compar'd myself to't: naught made me e'er | Go right but heaven's scourge-stick' (III.v.79-81). The children never speak, but appear in several scenes, notably III.iv and III.v. In the dumb show that begins III.iv, for example, they form, with the Duchess and Antonio, a

metaphorical references, of an alternative family unit. But there is a tendency, in the critical literature, to exaggerate the pathos engendered by the children in the play (especially the Duchess's last invocation of them), and to overlook the sparse and functional way in which they are used. The Duchess and Antonio are never seen interacting with their children, for example, and, as already observed, the children (even the surviving son at the play's end) never speak: there is no scene equivalent, for example, to that between Lady Macduff and her son in *Macbeth* (IV.ii). The children have little more than symbolic value in the play: they are included more as props or accessories than characters, with the purpose of emphasising the fundamental differences between Ferdinand and the Cardinal and Antonio and the Duchess.

Margaret Mikesell, though, argues that the play is evidence for a radically changing ideology of marriage in early modern England, exemplifying Lawrence Stone's theories on marriage and the family:

Profound changes occurred in the institution of marriage during the Renaissance. Love was gradually replacing fiscal and dynastic considerations as the foundation considered crucial for a binding union (97).

Rejecting what she terms the 'conventional' view of *The Duchess of Malfi* as 'a late variant of the "weak king" tragedy', in which the Duchess's downfall is caused by her 'abrogation of her duties to the political and social hierarchy which she heads' (97), Mikesell argues that

viewing *The Duchess of Malfi* primarily as a commonweal tragedy tends to displace its thematic and structural center. A powerful ruler is not presented as the antidote for the sick society of this play. Rather, it is the Duchess as wife and mother who confronts the political and social corruption. The love marriage, then, far from generating chaos in the world of the play, provides a foundation for restoring order (98).

Mikesell's arguments can be reinforced with reference to the two types of enclosure found in the play. The traditional arranged, dynastically and fiscally motivated match is represented by the Cardinal's and Ferdinand's desire to

imprison the Duchess, and the 'new' companionate, affection-based marriage is represented by the 'sanctuary' of Antonio's and the Duchess's relationship.

There are, however, valid objections to a wholehearted adoption of Mikesell's account of the play. In the first place, she conveniently overlooks the extremely unconventional circumstances of the marriage of Antonio and the Duchess. She suggests, for example, that the Duchess's marrying so far beneath her is merely more evidence in support of her theory of the growing approbation of love-based marriages. Antonio is certainly portrayed as being of fine moral character, with many noble qualities, and this is one reason why John Selzer sees the play, in an argument in many respects analogous to Mikesell's, as 'an unblinking assertion of the primacy of personal worth over inherited position' (70). He schematises the play thus:

On the one side is the Duchess, motivated by worth, attempting to institute a rule by merit in her kingdom; on her other side are her adversaries, the Cardinal and Ferdinand, the conservative representatives of degree and aristocracy, the spokesmen for rule by blood. And caught in the middle, vacillating, is Bosola (75).

Selzer even goes so far as to say that 'for her part, the Duchess clearly stands on the side of merit; while she never challenges the concept of an ordered society, she does strive to substitute a meritocracy for her kingdom's aristocracy' (72).

The objection to both these accounts of the play is a simple (and familiar) one: both critics over-read certain elements of the play while ignoring others that are, from their points of view, anomalous, but which are, in a wider context, significant. Mikesell, for example, imbues the Duchess's position as wife and mother with transhistorical, essentialist moral and political value and influence. Yet the Duchess is represented enacting these roles only in tiny, vignette-like scenes. She certainly never speaks of herself as a wife and mother: indeed, one of her most memorable lines is her majestic 'I am Duchess of Malfi still' (IV.ii.142). Similarly, Selzer sees the Duchess as 'striv[ing] to substitute a meritocracy for her kingdom's aristocracy' when the Duchess is never

actually seen in the business of government. Selzer cites as evidence the Duchess's enthusiastic appointment of Bosola as Master of the Horse, but the appointment is a household one, rather than political. She also appoints Bosola on her brother's recommendation, which means that it can be read as evidence of her desire to please him as much as it could signify some agenda of her own.

The fable of the salmon and the dogfish, which the Duchess tells Bosola at the end of III.v can be read as advocating the primacy of merit over degree, but the lines 'Our value never can be truly known | Till in the fisher's basket we be shown' (III.v.136-7) suggest that virtue (or merit) will be rewarded in heaven, not on earth. The Duchess's speech on the wearing of hats, also cited by Selzer, is not a serious consideration of the vacuity of court custom, but instead a flirtatious private joke shared with Antonio, testing the boundaries of the secrecy of their relationship. The Duchess certainly defends her marriage to Antonio, in terms of his virtue, to Bosola well after the event (III.v.116-21), but there is no suggestion before the marriage that she is marrying him having duly considered his virtues and capabilities, and how they will enhance her performance as a ruler, for example. Without going as far as Lisa Jardine, who describes the Duchess⁵⁰ as 'lower in her sexual drive than 'a beast that wants discourse of reason' [as she] steps out of the path of duty and marries for lust' (1983a, 207), it misrepresents both the Duchess and the play to cast her in the role of figurehead to some kind of ideological struggle, particularly one as potentially anachronistic as that, perceived by Selzer, between merit and degree.

Mikesell's thesis encounters other problems. She ignores, for example, the secretive, irregular and indeed illicit nature of the Duchess's marriage to Antonio. Such secret marriages, although legally binding, were condemned by the Church, and often by the Crown too (Elizabeth I was known to imprison those of her favourites and maids of honour who married

⁵⁰She adopts Hamlet's description of his mother, rendering it somewhat more sensationalist out of context.

without her knowledge or consent) precisely because they eroded the power of social hierarchies, through institutions such as arranged marriages and the sale of wardships, to control the transfer of wealth, titles and property through marriage. It is therefore anachronistic to regard the Duchess's actions as either progressive or wholly positive, because they would have been seen as socially disruptive in Webster's own time. Hers was not the sort of marriage that the Church or the Crown wanted to encourage, even without the added complication of the Duchess's having married so far beneath her.

Secondly, the marriage of the Duchess to her steward is in no way the 'normal', proto-bourgeois companionate marriage so eulogised by Mikesell: that normalcy is precluded by its prevailing secrecy. The argument that *The Duchess of Malfi* is evidence for the ideal of marriage as an essentially private contract between individuals is not well-served by the play's representative marriage, because Antonio's and the Duchess's relationship, although it fits that description, is so far removed from the public arena as to have no community status or value whatsoever. A companionate, love-based marriage must still be seen to function in society, possibly even more so than the dynastic, fiscal marriage, given the emphasis in contemporary Protestant marriage tracts on the spiritual life and responsibilities of the family unit, and on the ideology of the family as a little commonwealth. Webster's play makes it obvious that Antonio cannot even sleep the whole night in his wife's company (III.ii.17-8), and when Delio asks Antonio what the people of Amalfi make of the Duchess's behaviour, he replies that 'the common rabble do directly say | She is a strumpet' (III.i.25-6), and that the 'graver heads. . . never dream of. . . other obligation of love, or marriage, between her and me' (III.i.35-7). With the possibility of social or community recognition denied it, it is surely not going too far to see Antonio's and the Duchess's 'marriage' as a mere liaison, at least in the first half of the play. The affectionate bawdry of III.ii, cited earlier as evidence of the closeness and intimacy of the relationship, can also be viewed as evidence of its

sinfulness, for the couple are not acting as a responsible and sober Christian couple should. 'The husband who, transported by immoderate love, has intercourse with his wife so *ardently* in order to satisfy his passion that, even had she not been his wife he would have wished to have commerce with her, is committing a sin' (J. Benedicti, *Somme des Péchés* (1584), quoted Stone 303). Thus the Duchess's marriage to Antonio is emphatically not what the good Protestant divines advocating companionate marriage had in mind.

In addition, Mikesell contrasts the love-based model of matrimony she sees Antonio and the Duchess as embodying with the old, fiscally and dynastically motivated model epitomised by Ferdinand and the Cardinal. She makes some interesting points about the thematic significance of adultery in the play, citing the relationship of the Cardinal, Julia and Castruchio, but her association of the Cardinal and Ferdinand with the old matrimonial order is based largely on inference and extrapolation. It is obvious that they are obsessed with their sister's chastity and sexuality, but they are far more concerned with preventing her marrying again at all than with exploiting her marital eligibility as a pawn in financially-motivated dynastic power games. In III.i Ferdinand abruptly announces that he is 'to bespeak | A husband for [her]...The great Count Malateste' (III.i.39-40), but there is no further mention of the possibility after the Duchess rejects it out of hand, and it may be part of Ferdinand's scheme to test the Duchess's honour rather than a genuine attempt to see her remarry. It is difficult to know what is the main motivation behind the brothers' ill-treatment of her, but their revulsion at what they perceive to be her lust, and only later at Antonio's low social status, seem to be more significant than her perceived appropriation of their patriarchal prerogative to marry her off in the best interests of the Aragonian dynasty.

Having claimed that 'Webster's dramatic representation of the changing institution of matrimony demonstrates how *unequivocally* the play's balance is thrown toward endorsement of the love marriage' (101, italics mine), Mikesell

modifies her thesis somewhat in her closing paragraphs, emphasising that the marriage

is destroyed. . . not by any flaw in its conceptualization or practice—it is the only institution containing any integrity to be found in the play—but by the power of the older order, exemplified by the Aragonian brothers. . . the values of the Duchess and Antonio, and the image of loving union that their marriage represents, may *one day* triumph, politically and socially (107-8, italics mine).

Mikesell is, in effect, saying that *The Duchess of Malfi* demonstrates that companionate marriage is a good idea whose time has not yet come, but it is, in fact, presented in the play as seriously flawed, in practice if not in conceptualisation. The same could be said for Selzer's arguments about the play's supposed elevation of the claims of merit over those of degree. Both critics tend to over-emphasise, even to romanticise, in search of evidence for their anachronistic models of social evolution.

It is, of course, still perfectly valid to see Antonio and the Duchess, Cariola and their children as representing some sort of alternative to Ferdinand and the Cardinal (and Julia and Castruchio), but by exemplifying an alternative ethos or a different way of relating to each other rather than as institutionally innovative or even revolutionary. It is true that Webster constructs the Duchess's private family in terms that are emotionally appealing (especially to a modern audience thoroughly convinced of the 'sanctity' of the nuclear family and of children in particular) through references to the toys, illnesses and piety of children, and the relaxed bedroom banter. Webster uses these references economically and calculatngly. It is also true that Ferdinand and the Cardinal are morally and emotionally repulsive, both in their dealings with the Duchess and in general. The temporary sanctuary created by Antonio and the Duchess is, in the corrupt world of the play, indeed appealing, but it is still a flawed sanctuary, some aspects of which, such as the illicitness of the marriage, its continued concealment (which leads to popular discontent and rumours of the Duchess's immorality) and, inevitably, the Duchess having married beneath her, must be condemned.

To an early seventeenth-century London audience, about to witness the protracted marriage negotiations for the future Charles I (and still perhaps retaining in living, or at least folk-memory some record of the interminable and ultimately fruitless marriage negotiations of Elizabeth I) an impolitic, ill-advised match on the part of a female ruler would have been a serious matter. The affective, companionate ideal of matrimony was still essentially a bourgeois one, for it was recognised that the ruling and upper classes had financial and dynastic obligations for which the consequences of an inappropriate match could be catastrophic. This is reinforced by some of Lawrence Stone's demographics:⁵¹ that fifteen percent of the daughters and nearly twenty-five percent of the sons of peers in the early seventeenth century never married suggests both the imperative of class endogamy and the highly restrictive (and competitive) nature of the 'marriage market' (41). The modern romantic gloss on the Duchess's marriage to Antonio cannot be allowed to obscure the contemporary seriousness of her violation of this code. After all, that byword for romantic tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*, establishes in its first line that it is concerned with 'two households, both alike in dignity'. A play entitled *Juliet and Samson* would have operated in a quite different dynamic, and could hardly have acquired the same mass appeal and totemic status. *The Duchess of Malfi* at most posits a different aesthetic of marriage, rather than a radical reordering of the institution itself.

Leaving aside values-based judgements of the opposition between Antonio and the Duchess, and Ferdinand and the Cardinal, it should be noted that the concerns of Ferdinand and the Cardinal—for the honour of their family, for example—are in many respects as emotionally grounded as those represented by the Duchess and Antonio. Ferdinand's obscenely punning caution to the Duchess which begins, 'You are my sister— | This was my father's poniard: do you see? | I'd be loth to see't look rusty, 'cause 'twas his' (I.i.330-32, italics mine), is usually

⁵¹ I am not questioning Stone's demographic statistics *per se*, only the inferences he draws from them.

regarded as evidence of Ferdinand's obsession with his sister's sexuality, and so it can be. But his obsession is constructed in terms of intense family feelings, and in particular through his invocation of their dead father. If the Duchess violates the prescription for class endogamy, Ferdinand, whose obsessions are often described as incestuous, takes that prescription to the opposite extreme. The vehemence with which he condemns his sister in II.v shows the intensity of his emotional investment in her, and his eventual slide into madness, manifested as lycanthropy, reveals the extent to which he has internalised the disorder and disruption which he perceives to have been visited upon his family. The behaviour of the Duchess (his twin and so by implication his mirror self) and his violent reaction to it completely ruptures his emotional and psychological integrity. This demonstrates the degree to which his identity is bound up in the intactness and inviolability of the dynasty of Aragon (through its honour) and the family unit formed by the Cardinal, the Duchess and himself. The affective family unit formed by Antonio and the Duchess does not, therefore, have the monopoly on intensely-felt emotion in the play. The obsessions with honour and dynasty of the Aragonian brethren, and the actions to which these obsessions give rise, are predicated on emotions that are equally intense and, in their time, valid, if less recognisably so to a modern audience.

Similar observations can be made about *The Changeling*. I discussed its use of enclosure imagery earlier, showing that this can be seen as evidence of the traditional patriarchal view of the preservation of women's chastity as central to the preservation of the honour and integrity of the family. Beatrice-Joanna is eventually imprisoned by her own moral failings, trapped in the labyrinth of her compulsive attraction to De Flores, but she (initially, at least) also sees Alsemero as a figure of protection and security, and he constructs a similar role for himself. In his opening speech he envisages the two of them as enclosed and united by the church where he first saw her: 'The church hath first begun our interview, | And that's the place must join us into one, | So there's beginning and perfection too' (I.i.10-2). Later, Alsemero gallantly offers to

challenge Alonzo de Piracquo to a duel and, as he leaves Beatrice-Joanna, assures her that 'My love's as firm as love e'er built upon' (II.ii.56). He is a protector and a champion, and his love is a building, a temple (to borrow the image used in *The Duchess of Malfi*) offering 'sanctuary'. When Alsemero has been convinced of Beatrice-Joanna's virtue by the virginity test, he embraces her with 'my Joanna! | Chaste as the breath of heaven, or morning's womb, | That brings the day forth; thus my love encloses thee' (IV.ii.148-50).

Thus, when Alsemero learns of Beatrice-Joanna's guilt, he accuses her in terms of wanting to destroy both herself and, so his choice of imagery implies, the edifice of their love that he has constructed:

I'll all demolish, and seek out truth within you,
If there be any left; let your sweet tongue
Prevent your heart's rifling; there I'll ransack
And tear out my suspicion (V.iii.36-9)

Her betrayal is for him a violation of the church where they first met, which became an emblem of his love for her:

O the place itself e'er since
Has crying been for vengeance, the temple
Where blood and beauty first unlawfully
Fir'd their devotion, and quench'd the right one,—
'Twas in my fears at first, 'twill have it now:
O, thou art all deformed! (V.iii.72-7).

When Beatrice-Joanna protests, 'Remember I am true unto your bed', he responds with 'the bed itself's a charnel' (V.iii.82-3). But Beatrice-Joanna's insecurity and her desire to be protected is played on by De Flores. As they wait for Diaphanta to emerge from the nuptial chamber, for example, he baits her:

DE FLORES Who'd trust
A waiting woman?
BEATRICE-JOANNA I must trust somebody (V.i.14-15).

De Flores then goes to set the fire that will distract the household's attention from his murder of Diaphanta, leaving Beatrice-Joanna to say of him: 'How heartily he serves me! His face loathes one, | But look upon his care, who would not love him? | The east is not more beautiful than his service' (V.i.70-

2). De Flores has taken over from Alsemero in the role of Beatrice-Joanna's protector and champion. The play's final image of the transformation of sanctuary to prison, the divine to the infernal, is given to De Flores and Vermandero:

DE FLORES The while I coupled with your mate
At barley-brake; now we are left in hell.
VERMANDERO We are all there, it circumscribes here (V.iii.162-4).

In her search for figures of protection, Beatrice-Joanna forsakes a relationship constructed as a holy sanctuary for one painted as a hellish labyrinth, transforming the temple into a sepulchre and the play's central symbol—the citadel—into a hell.

Vermandero is obviously fond of his daughter, and equally obviously keen that she marry well, since she is his sole heir. Yet, as Beatrice-Joanna tries to formulate a plan that will free her from her engagement to Alonzo, allowing her to marry Alsemero, she gives a telling insight into her relationship with her father:

What's Piracquo
My father spends his breath for? And his blessing
Is only mine, as I regard his name,
Else it goes from me, and turns head against me,
Transform'd into a curse: some speedy way
Must be remembered; he's so forward too,
So urgent that way, scarce allows me breath
To speak to my new comforts (II.i.19-26)

Vermandero, she feels, will bless her, and by implication act affectionately towards her, only so long as she maintains the family's reputation and honour, and advances its interests (II.i.20n). He is hastening her marriage to Alonzo in a way that discomferts her, albeit because she wants more time to pursue a relationship with Alsemero. Furthermore, Vermandero is never shown speaking of or interacting with his daughter unless a potential suitor—Alsemero—is present. She is his 'treasure' both emotionally and materially, but the two ways in which he values her, as daughter and heiress, are far from mutually exclusive, just as Ferdinand's concern for his family honour in *The Duchess of Malfi* does not preclude his having strong emotional ties to his sister: the two relationships are interdependent. Hence, when Vermandero discovers the

apparent flight of Alonzo de Piracquo, his first concern is for his honour, given that Alonzo has been his guest. As he says to a servant: 'I tell thee, knave, mine honour is in question, | A thing till now free from suspicion, | Nor ever was there cause' (IV.ii.1-3). Yet a few lines later, when Tomazo de Piracquo reproaches him over Alonzo's disappearance, Vermandero condemns Alonzo:

his breach of faith
Has too much marr'd both my abused love,
And mocked my daughter's joy, the prepar'd morning
Blush'd at his infidelity; he left
Contempt and scorn to throw upon those friends
Whose belief hurt 'em: oh, 'twas most ignoble
To take his flight so unexpectedly,
And throw such public wrongs on those that lov'd him (IV.ii.24-32).

Alonzo's apparent departure has offended Vermandero by (as he thinks) hurting Beatrice-Joanna's feelings and insulting her family, violating the formal protestations of affection that have obviously been made between the two families. Vermandero is thus obviously concerned both for his family honour, as it consists in finding a worthy match for his daughter and in maintaining his reputation as a host, and for the protection of his private family unit, of which Alonzo has himself been temporarily made a member.

Vermandero feels personally betrayed because he has specifically regarded Alonzo as a son. He describes him to Alsemero as

A courtier and a gallant, enrich'd
With many fair and noble ornaments;
I would not change him for a son-in-law
For any he in Spain (I.i.213-6)

Later he has welcomed Alonzo and Tomazo thus:

Y'are both welcome,
But an especial one belongs to you, sir,
To whose most noble name our love presents
The addition of a son, our son Alonzo (II.i.96-9)

and he addresses Alonzo as 'son' twice in the next few lines. Alonzo is 'noble': his marriage to Beatrice-Joanna will enhance the honour of Vermandero and his family. But he has also become Vermandero's surrogate son, and a source of pride grounded in Vermandero's affection as much as in his ambition.

At the end of the play, following the deaths of Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores, it therefore becomes the turn of Alsemero to offer himself to Vermandero as a son: 'Sir, you have yet a son's duty living' (V.iii.216). Alsemero's offer at the play's end is restorative of Vermandero's family in both the private and public senses, providing him with a son and heir in place of the daughter and heiress that he has lost and so filling the old man's desire for both reputation and affection. In his quest for a 'son', Vermandero is in some respects like Beatrice-Joanna herself as she seeks a protector: both are searching for meaning and identity through the formation and protection of close, emotional, quasi-familial bonds with other people. In *The Changeling*, as in *The Duchess of Malfi*, the instinct for this is often inseparable from the impulse towards the preservation of dynasty and family honour.

Women Beware Women is a play in which the perceived imperative to make a socially or financially advantageous marriage or extra-marital liaison provides the plot with a great deal of its interest and momentum. Yet at the same time many of the characters appear to yearn for the same close 'family' relationships desired by the central figures in *The Changeling*. This is expressed, by a wide variety of characters, through maternal, paternal and shelter images and related language. Earlier, I argued that the image of the (locked) house functions, in *Women Beware Women*, as an emblem of women's duplicity, as well as as a device of the literal, and ultimately futile, patriarchal control of women's sexuality. Framing this, however, is again the motif of the family (and marriage in particular) as shelter, or sanctuary.

Women Beware Women opens with fulsome declarations of maternal affection, as Leantio is addressed by his mother: 'Thy sight was never yet more precious to me; | Welcome with all the affection of a mother, | That comfort can express from

natural love' (I.i.1-3). One of the chief functions of this scene is to demonstrate the absorption of Bianca into the affective unit of Leantio's family. Near the end of the scene, the Mother formally addresses Bianca as 'daughter' (I.i.116), and Bianca begins her subsequent speech (her first in the scene) 'Kind mother' (I.i.125). She goes on:

I have forsook friends, fortunes, and my country,
 And hourly I rejoice in't: here's my friends,
 And few is the good number...
 I'll call this place the place of my birth now,
 And rightly too: for here my love was born,
 And that's the birth-day of a woman's joys (I.i.131-3; 139-41)

The two women, perhaps rather too obviously, labour the point as they exit:

MOTHER Will't please you to walk in, daughter?
 BIANCA Thanks, sweet Mother;
 The voice of her that bare me is not more pleasing (I.i.149-50)

Earlier in the scene, Leantio relates the circumstances under which he has brought Bianca to Florence. His marriage is, he tells his mother, 'The best piece of theft | That ever was committed' (I.i.43-4), adding:

From Venice, her consent and I have brought her
 From parents great in wealth, now more in rage.
 But let storms spend their furies; now we have got
 A shelter o'er our quiet innocent loves,
 We are contented. (I.i.49-53)

Leantio's choice of image recalls that of the Duchess of Malfi as she embraces her new husband Antonio, describing the possible reaction of others to their union as 'discord, without this circumference' (I.i.469). Leantio's speech emphasises both that Bianca has been transferred from one parental home to what is, in effect, another, and the transgressive nature of that shift. Leantio constructs his family and his marriage as a little domestic sanctuary, going so far as to reject explicitly the implication that he has married Bianca for money (I.i.53-6), although the terms of his seduction by Livia, and his

acceptance of Bianca's infidelity, testify to his underlying materialism and self-interest.

The terms of reference established in the first scene become crucial in Bianca's seduction by the Duke. He tells her:

Take hold of glory.
Do not I know y'have cast away your life
Upon necessities, means merely doubtful
To keep you in indifferent health and fashion—
A thing I heard too lately, and soon pitied?
And can you be so much your beauty's enemy
To kiss away a month or two in wedlock,
And weep whole years in wants for ever after?
Come play the wise wench, and provide for ever;
Let storms come where they list, they find thee sheltered.
Should any doubt arise, let nothing trouble thee;
Put trust in our love for the managing
Of all to thy heart's peace. We'll walk together,
And show a thankful joy for both our fortunes (II.ii.374-87)

The Duke is not so simplistic as to play only on Bianca's materialism, but rather takes advantage of her obvious immaturity and her desire for material and emotional security. Older, more powerful, and therefore more paternal than Leantio, he is able to construct himself more explicitly as a father-figure, and it is to this that Bianca responds. Using the same images of shelter that Leantio has employed earlier, the combination of wealth and paternalistic care that the Duke offers her more closely approximates that to which Bianca has been accustomed in her father's house than that which Leantio can provide. It is interesting, too, that the Duke prefaces his speech thus:

She that is fortunate in a duke's favour
Lights on a tree that bears all women's wishes;
If your own mother saw you pluck fruit there
She would commend your wit, and praise the time
Of your nativity (II.ii.370-4)

By giving in to the Duke's demands, Bianca will be acting as a dutiful daughter, and will be rewarded by being cared for, in comfort, peace and security, like the child that she is. It is no wonder that she accedes.

and his unrealistic expectations that Bianca will be content to lead a quiet life, (coupled with his materialism and ambition) he fails, in eloping with Bianca, to respect both the principle of class endogamy and the need for parental approval. Bianca's marriage with the Duke, likewise, cannot be allowed to endure because of its adulterous beginnings and the murder which has made it possible.

Anthony Bromham argues that *Women Beware Women* 'makes a contribution to the contemporary debate about James I's peaceful foreign policy which was intense in the early 1620s' (310), and many critics argue for an identification of James I with the Duke of Florence in the play—the king was fifty-five, the same age given as the Duke's, in 1621, the date most frequently given for the play.⁵² With its emphasis on the need for peace, security and stability, and especially with the portrayal of the Duke as the man most able to assure these conditions (at least in the case of Bianca) some more sophisticated parallels do seem possible, given the king's desire to be seen as *Rex Pacificus* and his chosen motto, *Beati pacifici* (Bromham 310).

In 1621 James's foreign policy was much discussed.⁵³ The situation was exacerbated by the plight of the king's daughter Elizabeth and her husband, the king and queen of Bohemia: Elizabeth had been forced to flee Bohemia in the winter of 1620. Bromham states that 'at court and in the Council there were those who held the view that James's failure to support the elector [Palatine] was a failure to support true religion, and also the failure of a father to support his children in time of trouble' (311). Protectiveness and paternalism are thus linked: if this identification was indeed topical, it further reinforces the Duke's role in the play. According to Bromham, the word 'peace', which recurs in the play has as its emphasis the 'morally irresponsible pursuit of security' (318). It is also closely linked to the 'false sanctuary' of marriage, as it is constructed in the play. The political implications of this

⁵²See Mulryne xxxiv-xxxv for a summary of the reasoning and its proponents. It is hard to see how this identification could have flattered James. This is perhaps the point.

⁵³Parliament had in fact demanded the right to debate it in the House.

association, not explored by Bromham, are significant: in 1621 negotiations were underway for the marriage of Prince Charles to the Spanish Infanta, surely, in the eyes of those critical of James's foreign policy, the perfect example of the pursuit of a false peace through an ill-advised marriage.

In some respects, though, it is difficult to see the play's relationships as marriages at all. Setting aside Leantio's marriage to Bianca, Stephen Wigler notes that

the love interests which pattern *Women Beware Women* are themselves formed by an internal pattern. All three love affairs [between the Duke and Bianca, Livia and Leantio, and Hippolito and Isabella] share two distinctive traits. The first is that the ages of the partners in each liaison differ substantially: Bianca is sixteen and the Duke is fifty-five; Isabella is probably Bianca's age, and her uncle Hippolito is presumably old enough to be her father; Leantio cannot be much older than Bianca, and Livia is thirty-nine. The second characteristic seems almost a corollary of the first; the older partners in the relationships seem to possess parental stature while the younger partners seem to share the status of children. One might naturally expect such overtones in the case of the explicitly incestuous Isabella and Hippolito, but their presence in the other two affairs suggests that the pattern of love in *Women Beware Women* is something very close to incest (184).⁵⁴

Wigler goes on to suggest that Isabella's and Hippolito's oft-voiced repugnance for incest 'seems to conceal an unconscious attraction to it', citing the alacrity with which Isabella allows herself to be convinced by Livia of her mother's infidelity. He also argues, in psychoanalytic terms, that Isabella's entry into a relationship with the father-figure Hippolito is understandable because his 'relation to Isabella [is] comfortingly oral rather than disturbingly genital, as in the case of the Ward' (193). It could also be argued that, having been deprived of Fabritio as her father by Livia's lie, Isabella replaces him with Hippolito to protect and maintain her emotional identity and security. Wigler sees the relationship between Leantio and Livia in child-parent terms, with Leantio's oft-noted vulgarity

⁵⁴His subsequent arguments as regards Bianca have already, more or less, been covered; he particularly discusses the way in which Bianca constructs herself as infantile, and her encouragement of the other characters to do the same.

explained, again in psychoanalytic terms, as an infantilising device:

Leantio's lewd language seems to me to be a species of self-exposure that is motivated by sexual anxiety or defensiveness. Like the child who exposes himself to show that he still possesses the genital whose loss he fears, Leantio tries to belie his worried virility through boastful vulgarity that borders on the obscene (195).

According to Wigler, Leantio becomes Livia's 'child' when Hippolito consummates his relationship with Isabella, ending the maternal hold his sister has had over him. Roma Gill, quoted by Wigler, suggests that

[Livia's] tenderness towards [Hippolito] and her readiness to serve his will at whatever cost to herself and her own 'honesty' speak a more than natural affection and hint a one-sided incestuous attraction. If this is admitted, then the procuring of Isabella seems less like an evil game and more an attempt to provide some acceptable substitute for herself. Through Isabella, Livia can indulge, vicariously, her own desires.

Wigler adds, 'I suspect that Livia's feelings for Hippolito express something that is closer to mother-son, than brother-sister, incest' (197). Livia certainly plays the role of matron to perfection, exploiting her status as a twice-married widow in order to manipulate others and organise their lives.

Psychoanalysis aside, Livia's seduction of Leantio certainly offers him care, protection and material comfort:

Could'st thou love such a one that, blow all fortunes,
Would never see thee want?
Nay more, maintain thee to thine enemy's envy?
And shalt not spend a care for't, stir a thought,
Nor break a sleep; unless love's music waked thee,
No storm of fortune should. Look upon me
And know that woman (III.iii.301-7)

Leantio acquiesces when she, even more explicitly, offers to make him financially secure for life:

You never saw the beauty of my house yet,
Nor how abundantly fortune has blessed me
In worldly treasure; trust me I have enough
To make my friend a rich man in my life,
A great man at my death — yourself will say so.

If you want anything, and spare to speak,
 Troth I'll condemn you for a wilful man, sir.
 LEANTIO Why, sure this can be but the flattery of some dream.
 LIVIA Now by this kiss, my love, my soul and riches,
 'Tis all true substance.
 Come, you shall see my wealth; take what you list;
 The gallanter you go, the more you please me
 I will allow you, too, your page and footman,
 Your race-horses, or any various pleasure
 Exercised youth delights in; but to me
 Only, sir, wear your heart of constant stuff—
 Do you but love enough, I'll give enough (III.iii.357-74)

Like a child plied with toys he cannot resist, Leantio accepts: 'Troth then, I'll love enough, and take enough' (III.iii.375). Mulryne notes that III.iii.358 is 'deliberately recalling the circumstances of Bianca's seduction', and the whole passage, in fact, echoes not only the circumstances but also the terms of the Duke's persuasion of Bianca, in that Livia offers Leantio material (and so emotional) comfort and security.⁵⁵

Although Wigler's emphasis on the psychoanalytic is, at times, both over-determined and anachronistic, taken in conjunction with the theories proposed by Bromham, some of his ideas are useful. Beneath the layers of cynicism and

⁵⁵Wigler reads the play as being 'unquestionably ambivalent about the involvement of sexual partners of widely varying ages' (199). He locates the source of this ambivalence in what is known of Middleton's biography:

The dramatist's parents were in their forties when he was born, and Middleton lost his father when he was only five years old. Within a few months, Mrs. Middleton rashly remarried a man twenty years her junior. Her second husband—like Leantio, a factor—was a dissolute adventurer. Although he did not live with the family for long, he brought upon the Middletons endless quarrels and litigation...one can probably assume that [Middleton] was contemptuous of the urgings that led a woman in late middle age to choose a man young enough to be her son as a sexual partner. Middleton must have displaced some of his hatred of his stepfather onto the factor Leantio. The latter does not love Livia but merely uses her for his own purposes. Because of Livia's almost maternal care of Leantio, however, one imagines that Middleton could easily have identified with Leantio when he remembered how his mother protected him from financial and emotional ruin (200).

Fortunately Wigler, in his next breath, acknowledges that 'reading Middleton's biography into the life of his drama is, of course, unsafe'.

outrageous amorality, *Women Beware Women* is, morally and emotionally, a serious and often deeply conservative play. This is emphasised by the highly conventional moral aphorism with which the Cardinal, a traditional figure of moral authority, concludes the play. Even though all the relationships it presents may in some way be perverted, the play firmly locates value in strong, affective bonds between parents (or 'parents') and children. Though it would be going too far to say that the play depicts a crisis in human relationships, it does portray a state of great confusion. The characters seek stability and security—'peace' in the play's terms, as Bromham demonstrates—and they do so by attempting to form new 'families'. These couple the affective dimension of close emotional bonds with the need for 'parental' approval and material comfort for the children and an emotional outlet, or focus, for the 'parents' as well as, at least in the case of Leantio and Livia, an heir. The play begins with a marriage which, as already noted, violates the need for that approval: both Leantio and Bianca spend the rest of the play trying to please their parents or their surrogates.

Women Beware Women demonstrates the strength of the human desire for affection and approval, and what results when that desire is misplaced. The prescription for class endogamy which is implicitly upheld in the two failed marriages which frame the play is perhaps called into question when it is carried to extremes in the forced marriage of Isabella to the Ward. But affection is shown to be grounded in approval, and approval arises from obedience, often to the dynastic ambitions of the family. This is demonstrated by the language of the Duke as he congratulates Fabritio, after Hippolito and Isabella have danced before the Ward and the assembled company: 'Signor Fabritio, y'are a happy father, | Your cares and pains are fortunate you see, | Your cost bears noble fruits ' (III.iii.201-3). Earlier, the Duke and Fabritio have punned about Fabritio's 'investment':

FABRITIO She's a dear child to me.

DUKE That must needs be; you say she is your daughter.

FABRITIO Nay, my good lord, dear to my purse I mean—
Beside my person, I ne'er reckoned that (III.iii.104-7).

Isabella herself agrees to marry the Ward because the marriage will provide a cover for her relationship with Hippolito: this can be read as her wanting the (parental) approval of Hippolito rather than that of Fabritio, which she gains incidentally.

Once again, there is no clear division or mutually exclusive relationship posited between family affection and family ambition; between the family as affective unit and as fiscally-motivated dynasty. *Women Beware Women* provides no ideal family or marriage that fulfils both the emotional needs of the individual and a prescription for moral and social order, but it certainly (to modern ways of thinking at least) implies one: a companionate marriage, parentally approved, between two people of the same social class. Like Wigler's infiltration of Middleton's biography into *Women Beware Women*, this model is, however, unsafe to infer the play as affirming. It can safely be said, though, that the play presents the relationships between parents and children, husbands and wives, as central to both the individual's emotional security and the social order, and demonstrates that the manipulation (or perhaps mutation) of these relationships is a catalyst for (or an indicator of) societal and emotional confusion. 'In *Women Beware Women*, the consequences of freedom from the old rules [of family, church and class] without new directions [such as, as may be inferred, a wholehearted investment in the ideology of companionate marriage] are anarchy, anxiety, and alienation' (Bromley 312).

In *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, by contrast, Ford demonstrates the consequences of a over-investment in the affective dimension of relationships, particularly family relationships. In the corrupt and violent society of Parma, the love of Giovanni and Annabella offers beauty and sanctuary. Indeed, Florio's whole family is a comforting presence in its affectionate normalcy: a doting father, concerned for his children's health, among other things and keen, but not anxious, that his daughter marry well; a studious and intense son, recently returned from success at university; a beautiful daughter and

her down-to-earth (in a charitable interpretation) companion; a dead mother, affectionately remembered.

But the play clearly articulates the dangers of such close and emotional family ties, for it is upon the intensity and propriety of Giovanni's feelings for Annabella as his sister that he predicates his defense of the legitimacy of his desire for her as a woman:

Shall a peevish sound,
A customary form, from man to man,
Of brother and of sister, be a bar
'Twi'xt my perpetual happiness and me?
Say that we had one father, say one womb
(Curse to my joys!) gave both us life and birth;
Are we not therefore each to other bound
So much the more by nature? by the links
Of blood, of reason? nay, if you will have't,
Even of religion, to be ever one,
One soul, one flesh, one love, one heart, one *all*? (I.i.24-34)

In the next scene, just before he and Annabella consummate their love, he tells her:

You [are]
My sister, Annabella; I know this;
And could afford you instance why to love
So much the more for this; to which intent
Wise Nature first in your creation meant
To make you mine: else't had been sin and foul
To share one beauty to a double soul.
Nearness in birth or blood doth but persuade
A nearer nearness in affection. (I.ii.232-40)

One of the characteristics of Giovanni's arguments is his use of spiritual or philosophical authorities, manipulated or taken to their 'logical' conclusions. Thus, in arguing with the Friar, he twists (according to Roper) Montaigne's recollection of Aquinas, and in his persuasion of Annabella Neoplatonic theory. The Friar's initial warning ('Dispute no more in this, for know, young man, | These are no school-points' I.i.1-2) emphasises that there is great danger (in this case, mortal sin and even atheism) in intellectually over-reaching oneself, in following so absolutely and self-confidently the potentialities revealed by the individual mind. Similarly, the play forces the audience (perhaps particularly a modern audience) to confront its own investments in such principles as the inviolable 'truth' and

'beauty' of freely-chosen romantic love, demonstrating how moral judgements can be swayed by questions of aesthetics.

Ford makes the moral and aesthetic opposition between Parmesan society and the lovers credible by drawing upon a number of aesthetic conventions. The portrayal of their relationship as a sanctuary from the world at large, for example, is emphasised by the lovers' association with the private, enclosed space of the bedroom, as at the beginning of the second act. Annabella and Giovanni, furthermore, create their sanctuary within another sanctuary, their family, which is, in its ordinariness and easy affection, already such a contrast to the other groups of characters in the play. As previously noted, Annabella is not enclosed, literally or metaphorically, but her sanctuary has become her prison by the end of the play's fifth act. Soranzo will not let her out of her bedroom, and it is there that Giovanni kills her. Like the transformation of citadel to labyrinth in *The Changeling*, this is thematically significant, underlining the moral danger inherent in strong emotion and a seductive aesthetic of love.

Ford also creates the lovers as a distinct affective unit by emphasising their isolation from the other characters, and their self-sufficiency. This is shown in scenes such as I.ii, where they swear fidelity to each other in parallel oaths, and by the number of shared lines, which is a characteristic of their dialogue. They frequently complete each other's metrical units, as in I.ii and II.i. The parallel between *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *Romeo and Juliet*, by now a critical commonplace, reinforces, through that association, a positive assessment of the relationship between Giovanni and Annabella, and heightens the implied opposition between them and their society at large, as well as, perhaps, contributing to the (modern) audience's uncritical emotional investment in their love. This is particularly true of passages such as the quasi-aubade which begins II.i. *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* can thus be seen as widening the consideration of this misplaced or inappropriate investment of emotion (which has been identified, in *Women Beware Women* and *The Changeling*, in the characters' searches for pseudo-parental affection, approval

and protection) to include not only the hero and heroine but the audience as well.

One other family grouping briefly offers sanctuary in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, before it too is overcome by the venality that surrounds it. This is the relationship between the foolish ward Bergetto, Richardetto's friendly and obliging niece Philotis, and Bergetto's faithful servant Poggio. Bergetto is a fool, but with his murder, the loss of his essentially affable idiocy (compared with, for example, the unmitigated unpleasantness of the Ward, his counterpart in *Women Beware Women*) darkens the play considerably. Genuine and simple affection appears to exist between Bergetto and Philotis: their relationship is entered into freely, and is seemingly uncomplicated by material calculations. The servant Poggio's cry of 'o my master, my master, my master' at the end of III.vii is genuinely touching. The loss of hope that the destruction of this affectionate trio represents is compounded by the fate of Philotis, who is advised by her uncle Richardetto to enter a convent:

My counsel is that you should free your years
 From hazard of these woes, by flying hence
 To fair Cremona, there to vow your soul
 In holiness a holy votaress;
 Leave me to see the end of these extremes.
 All human worldly courses are uneven;
 No life is blessed but the way to heaven.
 PHILOTIS Uncle, shall I resolve to be a nun?
 RICHARDETTO Ay, gentle niece, and in your hourly prayers
 Remember me, your poor unhappy uncle.
 Hie to Cremona now, as fortune leads,
 Your home your cloister, your best friends your beads;
 Your chaste and single life shall crown your birth:
 Who dies a virgin lives a saint on earth.
 PHILOTIS Then farewell world, and worldly thoughts adieu!
 Welcome, chaste vows, myself I yield to you. (IV.ii.15-30)

Philotis's forthcoming 'chaste vows' are implicitly contrasted with the marriage vows she was prevented from making, while Richardetto's choice of 'home', 'best friends' and 'chaste and single' emphasises his point that sanctuary, peace and security can be found only by withdrawing completely from the world into an environment that is the antithesis of domesticity, family, society and marriage.

'*Tis Pity She's a Whore* can thus be seen as denying the potential of marriage and the family as a source of hope and optimism, presenting close emotional bonds between family members as, when taken to extremes, dangerous and destructive. Even the alternative ethos or aesthetic, represented by Giovanni and Annabella (or, less sensationally, by Bergetto, Philotis and Poggio) deluded though it may be, is ultimately destroyed by the society which surrounds it and of which it is, inevitably, a product. I suggested in the first part of this discussion that the lack of negative enclosure images in '*Tis Pity She's a Whore* can, in conjunction with its incest theme, be read as expressing a profound cynicism about social cohesion in the years leading up to the Civil War, recognising that the threats to the order and stability of society were no longer external (and therefore able to be guarded against by the maintenance of proper boundaries) but to be found within the enclosing entities of society, in Parliament, cities, towns, communities and, microcosmically, families. The debunking and destruction of the affective family unit as an alternative locus of moral and aesthetic value reinforces this cynicism.

In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, conversely, there is almost a parodic element in the sheer nastiness of the two main family groups portrayed, and the way in which the individual family members relate to one another. The 'family' scene between Vindice, Hippolito, Gratiana and Castiza at I.i.107-33, for example, is not close, warm and intimate, but rather cold and formal. The scene is framed by the brothers' cynical and misogynistic comments:

We must coin.

Women are apt, you know, to take false money;
But I dare stake my soul for these two creatures,
Only excuse excepted— that they'll swallow
Because their sex is easy in belief (I.i.103-7).

Similarly, at the scene's end, Vindice adds '*Wives are but made to go to bed and feed*' (I.i.132). Moreover, the scene seems designed not to establish Vindice's family as a unit, emotional or otherwise, but to convey to the audience two pieces of

information that are vital to the plot: the rape of Antonio's wife, and the fact that Vindice's father is dead.

In the following scene, the trial of the Duchess's youngest son for the rape of Antonio's wife, the Duchess pleads for her son's life in conventional, although not overly fulsome, terms. But once the trial has ended and she is left alone, she speaks vituperatively of her husband and plots her incest with his bastard son. Similarly, in II.iii *Ambitioso* and *Supervacuo* feign affection as they plead for mercy for Lussurioso, and the Duke sees through them: 'Here's envy hid with a poor thin cover o'er't, | Like scarlet hid in lawn, easily spied through' (II.ii.104-5). His choice of image is also an apt one for the way in which the language of familial affection is employed in the play: as a light-weight concealment of self-interest. The image suggests this transparency but also the self-conscious way in which the characters employ the tropes of familial affection. Taken to extremes, this cynical attitude is shown in Vindice's speech to Lussurioso in I.iii, where family intimacy is conceived of only in terms of incest. Conversely, even Antonio, presented as the play's one potential model of virtuous patriarchal authority, speaks of his dead wife not with deeply-felt affection, but in recognition of the way in which she has contributed to his honour: her chastity and wifely perfection are valued not as evidence of a strong emotional bond between husband and wife, but because her virtue has enhanced his noble status.

What is interesting to note about the two main family groups portrayed in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is the apparent social realism with which they are sometimes presented.⁵⁶ One socially-realistic aspect of the play is the poverty of Vindice's family. Although the virtue-testing aspect of Vindice's pandering for Lussurioso overshadows any other interpretation, it is Castiza's lack of marriage prospects that makes her an especially vulnerable target for Lussurioso. Yet even Castiza's brief lament at her plight ('How hardly shall that maiden be beset, | Whose only fortunes are her constant

⁵⁶I have commented elsewhere upon the 'blended' nature of the Duke's family, and the sibling rivalry that its members display, which are other socially-realistic aspects of the play.

thoughts. . . II.i.1ff) seems clichéd, because Castiza, in the cynical world of the play, is simply too good to be true. Like the pleas for mercy made by Ambitioso and Supervacuo, the genteel poverty of Vindice's family is merely another colouring in the play; a convention to be exploited. It certainly does not help to construct the family as a sanctuary from the venality that surrounds it, but rather makes it more vulnerable to corruption.⁵⁷

With the partial exception of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the idea of the family as a close and emotionally-bonded entity is an important one in these early modern plays. Furthermore, this concept cannot, in many instances, be divorced from the idea of the family as a place of enclosure, the boundaries of which must be maintained for its security. The family can therefore be constructed as both enclosure (in extreme cases, as prison) and sanctuary. If these two ideas are equated with the concepts of the family as what might be called a fiscal, dynastic unit and a domestic unit, it can be seen that in fact these categories are far from mutually exclusive; that indeed they are often mutually dependent. Even in *The Changeling* and *Women Beware Women*, where the impulse to form relationships that are socially, fiscally and dynastically advantageous seems paramount, the desire to form close emotional bonds with others forms a vital and often complex subtext.

This can be related to the theories of Lawrence Stone⁵⁸. In terms of what I have argued here, aspects of all three of Stone's family types seem to exist simultaneously in these plays, especially the subordination of the individual (especially a woman) to class or dynastic interests, as well as the affective aspects of the closed, domesticated nuclear family. Relationships fostering both these apparently irreconcilable ends are sought by the characters in these plays, and often the interests of class or dynasty are pursued (or upheld) in highly

⁵⁷ I have argued elsewhere that the main significance of the family in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is as a source of stereotyped roles, relationships and conventions to be employed in a largely symbolic fashion by the dramatist.

⁵⁸ See the historiographical note pp9-12.

emotional terms, as in *The Duchess of Malfi*. In addition, some of these plays demonstrate a great degree of emotional investment in the relationships between parents and children that accords not at all with Stone's reading. *The Revenger's Tragedy* fits Stone's schema quite well, but the more psychologically complex *Women Beware Women*, *The Changeling* and *The Duchess of Malfi* less so; *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, (although the latest play in the group, and so closest to Stone's starting date for the closed domesticated nuclear family) seems to present a profound pessimism about the restorative value of affective family relationships, and the dangers that they present.

Essentially, the same reservations initially expressed about critics who argue that Renaissance tragedies are evidence for this or that view of the world can be applied to Stone: his one-way, evolutionary model is too linear, too simple. These plays present concepts that Stone regards as contradictory as coexisting and sometimes interdependent; they also present a yearning for emotional intensity and intimacy that Stone does not allow. Stone cites some literary texts (although none of those discussed here) in support of his arguments, and Houlbrooke refers to none, but what has been argued here about the ways in which families function and are presented in these plays is further evidence for the account of the early modern family advanced by Houlbrooke.⁵⁹

It might be expected that Elizabethan homilectic texts would uphold the ordered, impersonal, hierarchical view that, by implication, Stone sees as characterised by the open linear family and, to a lesser extent, the restricted patriarchal nuclear

⁵⁹See the historiographical note pp9-12. Another prominent family historian of the period, Alan Macfarlane, cites examples from Jacobean texts to support his argument that the love-based (or, as he calls it, the 'Malthusian') marriage was both the ideal and the norm in the early modern period. Unfortunately, among the quotations he gives as examples are *The Duchess of Malfi* I.i.208-9 (Antonio praising the virtue of the Duchess), *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* V.v.11-14 (Giovanni protesting his love to Annabella) and *Women Beware Women* II.ii.383-5 (the Duke persuading Bianca to adultery). They are hardly, set in their proper contexts, evidence for a belief in romantic love and companionate marriage. A footnote appears to identify Macfarlane's source as the *Penguin Dictionary of Quotations*.

family. This is certainly true in some respects, and the family, as the fundamental unit of social order and control, is central to this. But what is striking, on re-examining these texts, is the emotionalism upon which their particular employment of the patriarchal nuclear family as a symbol of social and moral order is often based:

Take away kings, Princes, Rulers, Magistrates, Judges, and such estates of GODs order, no man shall ride or goe by the high way unrobbed, no man shall sleepe in his own house or bedde unkilld, no man shall keepe his wife, children, and possession in quietnesse (Rickey and Stroup 69)

The worst possible consequence of the erosion of the enclosing structures of society, such as degree, is the violation of the sanctuary of the family. The desire of the individual to uphold order, hierarchy and degree is thus predicated upon his or her desire to protect an emotional investment in the family unit. The analogous relationship constructed between family and state in both homiletic texts and the plays being discussed here plays on the fear of public anarchy and private (sexual) subversion, but also on the emotiveness of the concept of the nuclear family.⁶⁰ They all encourage the identification of the personal as political, so exploiting the resulting obligation of a private investment in public order as a means of social control.

By its very nature, a family functions as an organ both of perpetuation and of regeneration for itself and the society of which it is a component. Early seventeenth-century English society increasingly questioned the hierarchical systems of Church and State to which it was subject, while at the same time retaining a nostalgic affection for many aspects of those

⁶⁰Given the climate of nostalgic Elizabethanism in which, I am arguing here, these plays were produced, and the jingoistic anti-Catholicism which underpins many of the Elizabethan Homilies, it could be argued that these plays are also exploiting the emotionalism associated with nationhood. Their Italian and Spanish settings, although almost 'stock' for the revenge tragedy genre, firmly locate sexual depravity and corrupt government in the emphatically foreign and Catholic environments of England's traditional enemies, who were, under the Stuarts, meant (at least in the case of Spain) to be her friends. They therefore have a cautionary dimension to them—but also, perhaps, one of comfort, as they confirm their audience's historical prejudices.

institutions and an enduring belief in order and hierarchy *per se*. The drama reflected those social concerns.

Conclusion

My discussion has been grounded in the premise that the family unit is central to the five early modern tragedies that I have discussed here: *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The Changeling*, *Women Beware Women*, and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. I have shown that family matters—the relationships between parents and children, marriage, adultery, incest, illegitimacy, to name a few—provide a significant proportion of their material, and that this, coupled with the common Renaissance analogue between family and state and the patriarchal nuclear family's function (in moral and political theory) as the fundamental unit of society, allows them to address more profound issues of order and morality, as well as to make some topical points about contemporary politics. I have argued that, through their employment and emphasis on the family, these early modern plays manifest a strong belief in order, structure and morality, even if they no longer assert the power of existing institutions to provide direction in these areas.

More specifically, I have made connections throughout this discussion with the idea of Elizabethanism, proposed by Martin Butler and freely adapted and applied here. The value placed upon two powerful totemic figures, the Virgin Queen and the Good Father (neither of which appears in any of the five plays) has been seen to be asserted through their absence. The Virgin Queen, referred to especially in the context of the discussion of women's enclosure, but also with reference to the Duchess of Malfi, epitomises the nostalgia of Elizabethanism, representing national security and identity, inviolability and certainty. I have argued that these plays, through their depictions of unchaste women, corrupt government, broken unions and violated homes, express the fear that the age of such nostalgically recalled values and principles, like the age of the Virgin Queen herself, has passed. The actual appearances of good fathers in these plays are similarly elusive, but the ideal is again implied in the way that patriarchal authority is so often sought or invoked. That it is frequently promised, but as

frequently shown to be corrupt or weak, can be seen as expressing a similar mistrust or uncertainty regarding contemporary English figures of patriarchal power in Church and State, notably (as I suggested with reference to *Women Beware Women*) James I.

Contrary to the arguments of Lawrence Stone, these plays depict a great deal of emotion as being invested in family relationships; furthermore, they often portray a family's emotional life as being, in many respects, inseparable from its dynastic or material interests, although not necessarily in a positive way. These plays, however (particularly *Women Beware Women* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*) also demonstrate the negative consequences of over-investment in close family relationships.

The nuclear family unit in itself, however close, is thus not presented as either guarantor of order or source of hope in these plays. It functions, rather, as a sign of an enduring belief that social structures, institutions and ideals which provide the individual with identity, a sense of place and a knowledge of right and wrong are of lasting value. Perhaps cynically, these are implicitly located in the past by these plays, and the possibility of their existing again is certainly questioned. But their value is not, and the centrality of the family unit, however debased it may appear, in all these early modern plays, attests to that.

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