The White Devil Study Guide

The White Devil by John Webster

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BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

John Webster's *The White Devil* is a story of passion and revenge. Written and first performed in 1612, *The White Devil* is loosely based on a sensational event that happened in Italy some thirty years earlier: the murder of historical Vittoria Accoramboni in Padua, on December 22, 1585. Webster apparently used one or more chronicles of the event for his plot line, his settings, and his characters. According to John Russell Brown, however, Webster had to be very careful as he retold this story. Webster's interest was not so much in the historical accuracy of his retelling, but rather in the way this story could "[depict] the political and moral state of England in his own day."

Although *The White Devil* is an example of the revenge tragedy genre, a popular Jacobean form of drama, Webster's design and purpose in the play are not always clear. Many critics contend that this is a seriously flawed play, one that has no central purpose other than to reveal the corruption at the heart of court life. There are other, more recent critics, however, who argue that Webster's creation of a chaotic world lacking stability is a masterpiece. Indeed, Webster's play is a commentary on the fragmentary, shifting nature of reality itself. As Brown writes, "The white devil herself is at the centre of the story and its staging, but she is by no means a stabilizing factor; she is always changing, and changing the audience's view of other persons." *The White Devil* continues to fascinate audiences and readers alike; Manchester University Press published an easily accessible, updated paperback edition of the play in 1996.

Author Biography

Although some details of John Webster's life are sketchy, some research reveals that Webster was born in London sometime after 1578. He was the son of a coach maker, also named John Webster. It is likely Webster attended the Merchant Taylor's school. Some scholars believe that the John Webster who entered the Middle Temple for legal training in 1598 is the same John Webster who wrote *The White Devil*, although the evidence is largely circumstantial.

In May, 1602, a group of writers, including Webster, were paid for a play. This marks Webster's entry into the theatrical world. He was also paid for another play in October, 1602. In 1604, Webster collaborated with Thomas Dekker to write *Westward Ho*!

About 1604, Webster married and started a family with Sara Peniall. Other than documentary evidence concerning the birth of his children, there is little indication of Webster's literary career until the publication of *The White Devil* (1612). The play was acted by the Queen's Men in the Red Bull Theatre that year but was not well received. Webster blamed both his audience and the ambience of the Red Bull Theatre for the play's failure, although he did praise the acting of Richard Perkins.

About 1613, Webster wrote his most famous play, *The Duchess of Malfi*, and it was performed by the King's Men in 1614 at Blackfriars Theatre. This play was well received. Indeed, it is to *The Duchess of Malfi* that Webster owes his ongoing critical success.

Between 1623 and 1624, both *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Devil's Law-Case* were printed. Records indicate that this period was a time of celebrity for Webster. He directed the Lord Mayor's Pageant of 1624 and also appears to have again collaborated with Dekker. In 1634, it seems that Webster collaborated with Heywood on *Appius and Virginia*. This play apparently belongs to the last years of Webster's career. Although no one knows the date of Webster's death, Heywood lists him as a dead dramatist in 1634.

Webster's work, while in and out of favor, has never entirely faded from public view. Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, critical interest continued to grow and both *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* are often performed. This interest continues unabated in the twenty-first century. New historical studies and feminist critique have opened a variety of interpretations of Webster's texts.

Plot Summary

Act 1

The White Devil opens with a dialogue among Count Lodovico, Antonelli, and Gasparo. Lodovico has just been banished, and he and his friends discuss both the evil acts he has committed as well as his plans for revenge. Significantly, Lodovico questions why he is being banished when Bracciano wants to seduce Vittoria. He is especially bitter since just "one kiss" from Vittoria to the Duke would have been enough to win Lodovico's pardon.

In the next scene, Bracciano professes his love for Vittoria to her brother Flamineo who, acting as panderer, arranges for a meeting between the two. Camillo, Vittoria's husband, enters and reveals that he has not slept with his wife for longer than he can remember. He is worried about being cuckolded by his wife and is ready to shut her up in their home so she will not betray him. Flamineo convinces Camillo that this would be the worst possible thing to do; women who are deprived of their liberty are more likely to go astray. Vittoria enters, and Flamineo, in a series of asides and innuendos, tricks Camillo into thinking that Vittoria wants to go to bed with him, but that he should refuse her. However, the asides to Vittoria reveal that Flamineo is plotting to arrange an assignation with Bracciano.

Camillo exits, and Bracciano enters for his rendezvous with Vittoria. Cornelia also enters and overhears the arrangements. She is appalled. Flamineo is also present and provides a running, nearly obscene commentary to the audience.

Vittoria tells Bracciano of a dream in which she sees the graves of her husband and his wife. At this, Cornelia breaks her silence and reveals herself. She lectures all on their lack of morality and tells Bracciano that his wife has come to court. Bracciano leaves, and Flamineo takes his mother to task for interrupting the affair. He tells her that they are dependent on Bracciano for money, since his father left them penniless. Cornelia replies that she wishes he had never been born, and Flamineo responds that he would rather have a prostitute for a mother than Cornelia.

Act 2

Isabella, Bracciano's wife, comes to court, and asks for help from her brother, Francisco de Medici, and Cardinal Monticelso. The men meet with Bracciano and confront him with his adultery. Bracciano then meets with Isabella. He is cruel to her and announces a legal separation. Isabella expresses her rage at Vittoria, but agrees to a divorce.

Meanwhile, Bracciano and Flamineo plot the murders of Isabella and Camillo. Through the device of a dumb show, Webster portrays the death of Isabella by poison. At nearly the same time, Flamineo tricks Camillo into thinking they will have a vaulting contest.

Instead, Flamineo breaks Camillo's neck and tries to make it appear as if it were an accident.

Act 3

Vittoria is tried for both adultery and murder. Although there is not enough evidence to convict her of murder, she is nonetheless put in a prison by Cardinal Monticelso. Flamineo, who has feigned insanity, is released pending payment of fines. Bracciano is set free.

Act 4

Francisco and Cardinal Monticelso plan their vengeance on Vittoria and Bracciano for the death of Isabella. Bracciano frees Vittoria from prison, and they flee to Padua. Meanwhile, Lodovico is pardoned. He returns to Rome, announces that he was in love with Isabella, and enters the quest for revenge. The Cardinal becomes pope and excommunicates Bracciano and Vittoria. Francisco bribes Lodovico to murder Bracciano.

Act 5

Now married, Bracciano and Vittoria hold a tournament. Francisco, Lodovico, and Gasparo, among others, disguised as Moors and monks, offer their services to Bracciano. Flamineo continues his evil ways, speaking against Bracciano; promising marriage to Zanche, Vittoria's maid, and then breaking his word; insulting his mother's honor to his brother Marcello; and finally killing Marcello in Cornelia's presence. She becomes insane as a result.

In an especially fiendish plot, Lodovico and his fellow assassins sprinkle poison on Bracciano's visor. He becomes violently ill. Lodovico and Gasparo pose as priests offering last rites; however, they expose their identity to Bracciano just before he dies so that he knows he will suffer eternal damnation. Meanwhile, Zanche has fallen in love with the disguised Francisco, and she tells him about Flamineo's role in the deaths of Isabella and Camillo.

Flamineo sees Bracciano's ghost and goes to Vittoria to inform her of the sign. He decides that he, Vittoria, and Zanche should all die. He gives pistols to the women and instructs them to shoot him first, and then kill each other. However, after the women supposedly kill Flamineo, they do not kill themselves, and desecrate Flamineo's "corpse." In a surprise twist, Flamineo next stands up, uninjured; he has not loaded the guns with bullets and used the device as a test of the women. Lodovico arrives with Gasparo and two other assassins, and they kill Flamineo, Vittoria, and Zanche. Ultimately, the English ambassador puts the assassins to death. The play ends with Giovanni, Bracciano's son, ready to inherit his father's dukedom.

Characters

Duke of Bracciano

The Duke of Bracciano, otherwise known as Paulo Giordano Orsini, is a very powerful nobleman. He is married to the lady Isabella, but is infatuated with Vittoria Corombona. Indeed, it is his lust for Vittoria that sets all of the tragic events of this play in motion. Bracciano colludes with Flamineo to set up a tryst with Vittoria. Later, Bracciano legally separates from his wife and plots to kill both Isabella and Camillo, Vittoria's husband. After the murders, he proves himself not a very reliable lover. On the strength of a fabricated letter sent by Francisco to Vittoria, Bracciano accuses her of infidelity. Only after Vittoria manages to convince him of the falsehood of the love letter does he help her escape from her prison and take her to Padua. On the day of their wedding, Bracciano competes in a tournament. He is then murdered by Ludovico who puts poison in his helmet. The character of Bracciano has few, if any, redeeming characteristics. He is motivated by lust, is cruel to his wife and his lover, and is murderous to those who cross him.

Camillo

Camillo is Vittoria's first husband. He is also a cousin to the Cardinal Monticelso. Camillo is portrayed as a weak, older, impotent man. He tells both Bracciano and Flamineo that it has been a very long time since he has been in bed with his wife. In short, Camillo is the stereotypical cuckold of Renaissance theatre. As the result of a plot between Flamineo and Bracciano, he is murdered while vaulting with Bracciano.

Vittoria Corombona

Vittoria is generally thought to be the "white devil" of the title, a woman who betrays her husband and helps to plan the murders of both her husband and her lover's wife. Nevertheless, Vittoria reveals herself throughout the play to be independent, strong, intelligent, and logical. This is nowhere truer than in the scene in which she is on trial for murder and adultery. Rather than acquiesce to the judge, she demands her rights, asserting that it is wrong for her accuser to also be her judge. Although she fares well in this scene, she is unable to find justice in the courts. Despite there being no proof of her role in the murders, she is found guilty of adultery and sentenced to a house for penitent prostitutes. She escapes from there with the help of Bracciano, and she flees with her lover to Padua. There they marry and are subsequently murdered themselves.

In the past, Vittoria's character has been read as villainous; she has been portrayed as an evil temptress. Late twentieth-century readings of the play, however, demonstrate the way that Vittoria is manipulated by the patriarchal power structures of Italy, including first her father, who essentially sells her to Camillo; her brother, who panders her to Bracciano; Bracciano, who mistrusts and nearly betrays her; and finally the Catholic

Church and the political state, represented by Francisco and the pope, who plot to kill her.

Cornelia

Cornelia is mother to Vittoria, Flamineo, and Marcello. Her role in the play, while small, is pivotal. She is the moral voice of the play, confronting Flamineo, Bracciano, and Vittoria in their tryst. She says that she wishes her children had not been born. Bracciano curses her and says that all the harm that will come will be because of her. In the last act, after Flamineo murders his brother Marcello, Cornelia goes mad.

Francisco de Medici

A member of the most powerful family in all Italy, Francisco, the Duke of Florence, is also Isabella's brother. Consequently, when Bracciano has Isabella murdered and runs off with Vittoria, Francisco undertakes revenge. He is also the most powerful civil authority in the play, working hand in hand with the church authority represented by Cardinal Monticelso. Francisco is a man of few scruples, with plots as devious and dark as those of Bracciano and Flamineo. He uses Lodovico to effect the revenge he himself seeks. Late in the play he appears in disguise as Mulinassar, a Moor in service to Bracciano. Through a liaison with Zanche, he learns vital information about the earlier murders that ultimately leads to the deaths of most of the characters.

Duke of Florence

See Francisco de Medici

Flamineo

Flamineo is Vittoria's brother and Cornelia's son. He is a scoundrel in every sense of the word. He serves as procurer of his sister for Bracciano and engages in a series of despicable acts to further his own career. When his mother confronts him about his many evil deeds, he treats her very badly, rejecting both what she says to him as well as her motherly role in trying to help him. Further, Flamineo is utterly immoral; he will do anything, anytime, to advance himself, regardless of the cost to others, even members of his own family. He is a parasite, depending initially on Vittoria's husband for his upkeep and later on Bracciano. He ultimately betrays Bracciano and murders his own brother. There is nothing redeeming about Flamineo; some critics have argued that it is he who is the "white devil" of the title rather than Vittoria.

Count Lodovico

Lodovico is the first character to speak in *The White Devil*. He has just been banished and sets the atmosphere for the entire play. He is a cynical, self-serving man. Later in the play, he is allowed to return, and he announces that he was in love with the murdered Isabella. Consequently, he undertakes the revenge for her death, acting on behalf of Francisco and Monticelso. In the last act, Lodovico, disguised as a Capuchin monk, comes to the household of Bracciano in Padua. He sprinkles poison on Bracciano's helmet, thus killing him. In addition, as the Capuchin monk, he pretends to offer last rites to Bracciano. Moments before Bracciano's death, however, Lodovico reveals himself, and Bracciano dies knowing he is eternally damned. Lodovico also kills Flamineo, Zanche, and Vittoria in the final scene of the play before he himself is murdered in the presence of Bracciano's son.

Marcello

Marcello is Vittoria and Flamineo's younger brother. While his role in the play is not overly large, he provides a contrast to his brother. His most important scenes in the play happen late; he insults Zanche and Flamineo's purported engagement to her. This enrages Flamineo who challenges him to a fight. Finally, Flamineo re-enters the scene and runs Marcello through with a sword, sending their mother into madness.

Cardinal Monticelso

Cardinal Monticelso is the most powerful church figure in the play. His role is significant in that he is both accuser and judge of Vittoria during her trial for the murder of her husband and Isabella. He is unable to convict her of either murder, but he does punish her for committing adultery by sentencing her to a house for penitent prostitutes. Monticelso later becomes Pope Paul IV; as such, he has the power to excommunicate both Vittoria and Bracciano. He also plots with Francisco to effect revenge on Bracciano, Flamineo, and Vittoria.

Mulinassar

See Francisco de Medici

Paolo Giordano Orsini

See Duke of Bracciano

Pope Paul IV

See Cardinal Monticelso

Zanche

Zanche is Vittoria's Moorish maid. She is ill-treated by Flamineo who promises to marry her but who reneges. She falls in love with Francisco, who is disguised as the Moor Mulinassar. In order to win his favor, she reveals the details of the murders of Isabella and Camillo. In the final scene, she reveals her quick thinking as she instructs Flamineo to kill himself first, so that she and Vittoria will know how to do it. Unfortunately, both Zanche and Vittoria are fooled by Flamineo's faked suicide, and both women as well as Flamineo are killed by Lodovico.

Themes

Appearance and Reality

In *The White Devil*, Webster reveals his fascination in the difference between the way events and characters appear and the reality of these events and people. The title of the play itself reveals this interest; a popular proverb of the time, according to Margaret Loftus Ranald in her book *John Webster*, taught that "the white devil is worse than the black." Critics generally apply the title of the play to Vittoria. Her outwardly stunning and radiant beauty stands in stark contrast to "the viciousness of her soul," according to Ranald. She is thus more despicable than an openly villainous character because her beauty hides her deceit.

Likewise, the richness of first Camillo's household, and later Bracciano's household in Padua, belie the corruption present at their core. In the first case, Camillo is a husband who seems unable to fulfill his husbandly duties. Although he has a beautiful young wife, the elderly Camillo values her only for her appearance. In some ways, Vittoria represents what might be thought of as a "trophy wife." Thus, this is a marriage in appearance only. The reality of Camillo's impotence makes the marriage no more than a sham.

Bracciano's household is just as deceitful. It is built on a structure of lies and political expediency. He clearly has no regard for his wife, nor for his child. As such, Bracciano's marriage is also a sham. In response to his lust for Vittoria, Bracciano first divorces, then murders his wife, all the while presenting the appearance of a wealthy, important Duke.

The world of *The White Devil* is one in which, according to Ranald, "appearance is in constant conflict with reality, good and evil are reversed, and humanity attempts to live in a world that accepts the individual as its god." Webster, then, warns viewers to beware of appearances, both in the murky political realm of his Italian play and, by extension, the convoluted and corrupt politics of the court of James I.

Order and Chaos

At the heart of late medieval and renaissance English thought is the concept of the "Great Chain of Being." This is essentially a belief in a hierarchical system that encompasses all of creation, including at its base rocks and other inanimate objects, through the animals who are alive, but not rational, to humans, and finally to angels. There are many representations of the Great Chain of Being in both the literature and art of the period. Such a hierarchical system ensures order and stability in the universe; so long as each member of creation stays in its proper place, the whole of creation can function without danger. However, when one member of the chain refuses to play his or her proper role, then the entire structure is affected.

This context is particularly important for any consideration of *The White Devil*. In this play, characters consistently refuse to act appropriately. Vittoria and Bracciano ignore the strictures of the Church on adultery and homicide. Vittoria herself refuses to stay in the prescribed role for women in her famous trial scene. She appropriates male language in her own defense, saying that she must "personate masculine virtue." In so doing, Vittoria blurs the necessary distinction between male and female that the hierarchical structure of the Great Chain of Being demands.

Further, none of the characters (with the exception of Cornelia and Isabella) acts in anything but their own interest. But it is Flamineo, more than any other character, who places the whole of creation in jeopardy. In the murder of his brother, he reenacts the first homicide, that of Cain's against Abel. Renaissance audiences would have recognized in this action a complete rejection of order and an embrace of chaos. In many ways, *The White Devil* serves as a cautionary tale for its audiences of what can happen when the proper hierarchical structures are ignored: mayhem, death, and destruction.

Style

Revenge Tragedy

The Revenge Tragedy was a popular genre of drama during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* is one of the earliest examples of this type of play. Likewise, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has often been considered a revenge tragedy. According to William Harmon and C. Hugh Holman in their book *A Handbook to Literature*, revenge tragedies generally include the revenge of a father for his son, or vice versa, often directed by a ghost. Other characteristics may include insanity, suicide, intrigue, sensational horror, and a scheming villain.

Webster plays with these conventions in *The White Devil*. Vittoria, Flamineo, and Bracciano are responsible for the deaths of Isabella and Camillo, and the revenge perpetrated on the threesome is not by fathers or sons. Rather, the entire revenge tragedy motif is a study of lust and sexuality. The original set of murders takes place because of an adulterous relationship between Bracciano and Vittoria. Ultimately, although it is Isabella's family who arranges for the slaying of the villains, it is Lodovico, a man who lusts after Isabella himself, who actually kills the three. In addition, Flamineo feigns insanity during the court scene, not to further his revenge plot, but rather to escape punishment for his role as both panderer and murderer. Flamineo himself is visited by the ghost of Isabella; her avengers are not. While Flamineo is the most scheming of villains, he is outdone by the scheming of the revengers□Francisco, Duke of Florence, and, ironically, Cardinal Monticelso, who later becomes Pope Paul IV. Finally, Webster uses sensational horror in this play; nearly all the characters are dead by the end of the play, murdered in spectacular fashion. Although Webster ably uses the conventions, he does so in ways that would be unexpected to his audience. Thus, he uses the conventions of the revenge tragedy genre in order to comment on the corruption and immorality of the royal court of England without seeming to do so.

Dumb Show

Another convention of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage is the dumb show. This is a pantomime included within the structure of the play to show some dramatic scene without dialogue. In *The White Devil*, Webster chooses to include two dumb shows: one to show Isabella's murder, and the other to show Camillo's death. Dramatists such as Webster had specific reasons for choosing to incorporate a dumb show in the play rather than present the action directly. Sometimes, a writer might want to condense a very complicated set of actions into a shorter time frame. Another reason a dumb show might be included is to somehow set the action portrayed in the dumb show apart from the characters in the play and from the audience. Dumb shows often reveal hidden motives, making visible what the characters in the play strive to keep secret. Kate Aughterson in her book *Webster: The Tragedies* argues that the dumb shows are particularly important in *The White Devil*. She writes, "Their silent delivery reinforces our

sense of a claustrophobic, self-interested political world that is propelled by inner desires and demons which remain hidden by the surface world. . . . [T]he ritualistic representation of death enhances the horror of the action." Thus the theatricality of the dumb show itself mirrors the thematic tension between appearances and reality in the play. The dumb show itself becomes emblematic of the larger drama.

Historical Context

The Reign of King James I and the Theatre

When Queen Elizabeth I died in 1603, she did so without an heir, forcing England to turn to James VI of Scotland, the son of Elizabeth's old enemy, Mary Queen of Scots. As James I of England and James VI of Scotland, the King expanded the royal court, making it the center of both political intrigue and power. Consequently, those around him constantly vied for position. James was famous for his favorites, men he seemed almost romantically attached to. His life style, and the gifts he gave to his favorites, expanded the royal debt to such an extent that it led to bitter disagreements with Parliament, who refused to pay for the King's pleasures.

At the heart of James' rule was his utter belief in the doctrine of the divine right of kings. That is, James believed that he was chosen by God to rule absolutely over his subjects and his realm. He believed that he could make and break rules and laws as he saw fit. This led to a chaotic and difficult time for those under him, as statutes of the realm could not be considered stable or permanent. Likewise, although James was a great patron of the theatre of his day, he enforced strict censorship over the content of the plays that could be presented. Thus, playwrights had to be very careful about the subject matter they addressed. Shakespeare, for example, chose to write *Macbeth* in order to flatter James I, who was interested in the Scottish succession that led to his investiture as king of Scotland, and in witchcraft and the supernatural. Webster, on the other hand, had to disguise his contempt for the court of James I by setting his play in far-off Catholic Italy.

Anti-Catholicism and the Gender Wars

Although there was no clear cut understanding of the role of the female monarch in Britain, by the time James I ascended to the English throne, there had been three powerful women on the thrones of the island, dominating the politics of the previous half-century. Queen Mary, who ruled from 1553 to 1558, was the daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. Mary embraced her mother's faith, and her marriage to Philip of Spain placed her squarely in the Catholic camp. During her reign, there was widespread persecution of Protestants, earning her the name of Bloody Mary.

Queen Mary died without an heir, and there was considerable turmoil surrounding the succession. Many English people, particularly Roman Catholics, believed that Mary, Queen of Scots, the granddaughter of Henry VIII's sister, was the legitimate heir to the English throne. Their reasoning was that Henry's divorce from Catherine of Aragon was illegal and that his subsequent marriage to Anne Boleyn, consequently, was not a marriage. In the eyes of Catholics in England, Scotland, and across Europe, this rendered the young Elizabeth, Henry's daughter by Anne, a bastard and thus, ineligible to inherit the throne.

Mary was crowned Queen of Scotland just eight days after her birth in 1542 but was promptly sent to France by her mother, who served as regent in Scotland. In France, Mary was betrothed to the heir to the French crown and raised as a Catholic in the French court. She returned to Scotland at the death of her young husband and assumed the leadership of the country. Her subsequent marriage to Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley, a Catholic, enraged her Protestant advisors. This, in addition to her inappropriate intimacy with her Italian secretary, David Riccio, further alienated her from the Protestant factions in Scotland. Ultimately, Mary was forced to abdicate her throne to her son in 1567 and flee Scotland to England, seeking protection from her cousin Elizabeth, who was crowned queen of England in 1558. She lived under house arrest for nearly twenty years. At the same time, however, Mary continued to hatch plots with her French family abroad and Catholic supporters in Scotland and England to overthrow Elizabeth's moderate Protestant government. Reluctantly, Elizabeth had Mary executed for treason.

Under Elizabeth, the hostilities between Catholics and Protestants went underground. Some of the population continued to object to a female monarch nonetheless. John Knox, for example, wrote a famous tract called "The Monstrous Regiment of Women" in 1558, railing against Queen Mary I, Mary Queen of Scots, and Elizabeth. Thus, the issue of the monarchy became increasingly murky in the midst of both the anti-Catholicism and the misogyny of the Reformed Church.

When Elizabeth died without an heir, English men were relieved to be able to find a monarch of the appropriate gender and religion in James VI of Scotland, who became James I of England. His marriage to Anne of Denmark, who converted to Catholicism, however, again raised the specter of a Catholic succession. In 1605, Roman Catholic hostility toward the English government and monarchy flared in the failed Guy Fawkes gunpowder plot, in which a group of rebels attempted to blow up both the Parliament and the king. As a result, Catholics were subjected to increasing harassment across the country.

The twin anxieties of religion and gender, then, brought about by this historical context, inform Webster's play. He is able in *The White Devil* to demonize both women and the Catholic Church in the characters of Vittoria, Zanche, and Cardinal Monticelso, who later becomes the pope. By couching his play in these terms, Webster is able to make what would otherwise be considered subversive statements about the rule of James I himself, neatly hidden in the familiar language of anti-Catholicism and misogyny.

Critical Overview

The White Devil, along with Webster's other great play *The Duchess of Malfi*, assures Webster of canonical status in Jacobean drama. *The White Devil*, however, has not always been well received by audiences and critics. Webster himself complained about the first staging of the play and its reception, blaming the weather, the venue, and the audience.

Nevertheless, the play continued to be performed throughout the seventeenth century with success. This was not the case in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when, Margaret Loftus Ranald notes in *John Webster* that there were no performances of the play at all.

The chaotic, bleak world of *The White Devil* appealed to audiences and critics alike in the twentieth century; over ten major productions were mounted, including one by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1996. Likewise, scholars who study the play have found much to write about in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. According to Don D. Moore in his book *John Webster and His Critics: 1617—1964*, T. E. Hulme, T. S. Eliot, and F. R. Leavis did much to bring Webster into the critical spotlight. Indeed, Moore writes, "Almost all of the important later Webster criticism owes something to their doctrines." Specifically, Eliot looked to Webster for atmosphere, an atmosphere that found its way into Eliot's famous work *The Waste Land*.

In the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, new historicist (sometimes called cultural materialist) and feminist critics in particular have found much to occupy themselves in the text of *The White Devil*. Dympna Callaghan, for example, examines the way the white Vittoria and the black Zanche mirror each other. Further, she argues that "it is untamed sexual desire that leads to Vittoria's imprisonment."

Others, such as Sheryl Stevenson and Laura Behling, are concerned with the importance of sexual difference in the play. Stevenson, writing in *Sexuality and Politics in Renaissance Drama*, argues that it is through "their sudden accession to unrestrained language [that] these women are perceived by male characters as not simply unwomanly but inhuman." Likewise, Behling, writing in an article for *English Language Notes 33*, demonstrates that Vittoria's use of masculine language initiates an "anxiety of alternative sexualities."

Cultural materialist critic Jonathan Dollimore, in an alternative reading, examines the way that the power structure of a society both defines and destroys identity. He argues, "It is in the death scene that we see fully the play's sense of how individuals can actually be constituted by the destructive social forces working upon them. . . . Vittoria and Flamineo refuse subservience even as they serve and in so doing are destroyed as much by their rebellion as that which they rebel against."

Although the text of *The White Devil* has not changed significantly since its first publication, the way critics view the play has changed dramatically, from a

straightforward critique of the plot of the play, to a consideration of the violation of the unities, to finally a full consideration of the bleak and shifting world Webster creates for his characters. In this, critics use their own historical contexts to find meaning in *The White Devil*.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Henningfeld is a professor of English literature and composition who has written widely for educational and academic publications. In this essay, Henningfeld uses new historical and feminist criticism to demonstrate the ways that The White Devil *reflects and reinforces Elizabethan and Jacobean ideas about women.*

In recent years, new historical and feminist critics have provided some of the most compelling readings of *The White Devil* by placing the play within the contexts of the culture from which it comes. New historicists, in particular, believe that literary works do not exist in a vacuum, but are rather artifacts of a given culture. That is, a play such as *The White Devil* does not exist apart from the other forms of discourse circulating in the culture that produces it. These forms of discourse might include pamphlets, art work, legal texts, religious teachings, and medical knowledge. These texts both reflect and reproduce cultural assumptions, or "what everybody knows." Thus, an individual writer such as Webster, according to new historicist thought, not only produces a literary text, he speaks the culture itself through his text.

Likewise, feminist critics often employ new historical methods to consider the ways that a culture constructs the idea of woman. The assumptions a culture makes about women can sometimes be uncovered by examining the cultural artifacts. Throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as in any age, literary depictions of women necessarily reflect contemporary understandings of the physical, religious, and legal status of women. In addition, the literary constructions of female characters also often reveal deep-seated cultural anxieties about gender, sexuality, and social stability. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that in *The White Devil*, Webster both reflects and reinforces contemporary ideas about women. Moreover, Webster engages the very patriarchal structures that serve to maintain the position of women in the culture, most notably the church and the state. That Webster's female characters seem so ambiguous in their roles reveals the essentially ambiguous position occupied by women in Jacobean England.

To begin, an important, yet often neglected, place to look for an understanding of women of the period is in the medical literature. Throughout the period, writers debate the nature of women and the purpose of their bodies. Because men are seen as the norm, female bodies are considered oddly "other." Many theorists follow Aristotle in his assertion that women are imperfect men; however, by the seventeenth century, most medical writers have at least acknowledged that women are of the same species as men and do, indeed, have souls. Virtually all contemporary seventeenth century writers agree, however, that women are inferior to men physically; whereas men are active and strong, women are weak and passive. In addition, women are more prone to the demands of their bodies. Their monthly periods, their susceptibility to impregnation, and their ability to nurture and sustain children through lactation all demonstrate this concentration on the body. Thus, while men are associated with the function of the mind and reason, women are associated with the function of the body and passion. In this, women are closer to beasts than to men. This thinking, of course, leads to an

understanding of women as the sites of unbridled sexual passion, a passion that was very dangerous for the culture. According to Kate Aughterson, "female sexuality was publicly perceived as dangerous and even murderous, and . . . it was also visibly seen to be subject to systematic patriarchal control and potential abuse."

Webster demonstrates from the beginning of *The White Devil* these ideas. For example, when Flamineo arranges the tryst between Bracciano and Vittoria he says, "Women are like / curst dogs: civility keeps them tied all daytime, but they / are let loose at midnight." Flamineo reveals in this speech his disregard for women as well as his belief that they are all no better than "dogs," fulfilling their sexual desires with whomever crosses their paths. Thus, Camillo's first response to his concern about Vittoria's chastity is to consider locking her up. Flamineo reinforces the commonly held ideas about women by telling Camillo that locking her up might produce the opposite of what Camillo wants. Flamineo states, "These politic enclosures for paltry mutton makes more rebellion in the flesh than all the provocative electuaries doctors have uttered since last Jubilee." In this statement, Flamineo likens women to "mutton," another reference to the animal-like nature of the female, and refers to the "rebellion in the flesh," yet another reference to the fleshly, lust-filled concerns of women. It would be easy to dismiss Flamineo as nothing more than a misogynistic villain; however, these sentiments would have been very familiar to Webster's audiences. While they might reject the speaker of these ideas, it is likely that there would be some nodding in assent to the ideas themselves. After all, for that audience, this is something "everybody knows."

A second important source for information about women is in the religious writing of the period. Much of this thought is based on earlier writings from late antiquity and the Middle Ages, first inscribed by the early Church fathers. These texts provide women with two models: they are either Mary, the virginal mother of God, or Eve, the sexual temptress who causes the downfall of man and the exile from Eden. According to this theology, women as a group bear the entire blame for the loss of Eden. This model, like the medical one, also demonstrates the belief that women are both filled with lust and sexual desire and that this desire is dangerous for all of creation.

The world of *The White Devil*, then, is a very dangerous place indeed, since from the opening lines the reader understands that this is a world reduced to lust, corruption, and sexuality. Lodovico, who both opens and closes the play, considers even Fortune to be female, stating, "Fortune's a right whore." This line signals the audience that in *The White Devil*, there is nothing that cannot be bought and sold. Even Fortune is figured as a prostitute, foreshadowing the traffic in human flesh that underpins the entire play. Clearly, in a world where everything can be bought and sold, everything is prostitution.

Flamineo, for example, sells himself to Bracciano in order to keep himself in the style to which he has become accustomed. Indeed, he tells his mother his history of selling himself: first at the university where for seven years he "heel[ed] his tutor's stockings"; then graduating through connivance with an older man; until finally arriving at Bracciano's service, where he has become "more lecherous by far / but not a suit richer." For Flamineo, then, who has been selling himself for favors for much of his life,

pandering his sister is scarcely a stretch. Moreover, in his willingness to sell himself, he, like Fortune, is a prostitute, and by extension, gendered female.

Ironically, although it is Flamineo, acting as pimp, who sells his sister, it is Vittoria herself who goes to trial and is punished for adultery. Twenty-first century audiences might see Vittoria's choice to engage in the assignation with Bracciano as an opportunity to better herself financially and materially. It is likely, however, that Jacobean audiences would see her acquiescence to Bracciano as the expression of her lust-filled body.

Moreover, for the patriarchal structures maintaining stability in the culture, Vittoria's adultery is far more dangerous than is Flamineo's pandering. The reason for this is clear, as an examination of the legal theory and records of the day reveal. The inheritance of property and wealth in England from the time of the Norman Conquest into the Jacobean period is patrilinear. That is, the wealth moved from father to eldest son. Concurrent with this system, however, is the nagging anxiety that a man can never know for sure that the son who will inherit his property is really of his own bloodline. Should a wife engage in an extramarital affair, it is possible that a husband's wealth could pass to his rival's son. Thus, the culture exhibits ongoing and obsessive preoccupation with cuckolding.

Furthermore, Vittoria's appropriation of male language in her trial presents yet another dangerous challenge to the patriarchal structures of the culture. Legal writing of the period reports that women have no voice in court. They are unable to serve as lawyers or on juries. Rather, except in rare instances of rape or the murder of their husbands, women are legally silenced. Vittoria, however, says,

Humbly thus

Thus low, to the most worthy and respected

Lieger ambassadors, my modesty

And womanhood I tender; but withal

So entangled in a cursed accusation

That my defence, of force like Perseus,

Must personate masculine virtue. to the point:

Find me but guilty, sever head from body,

We'll part good friends; I scorn to hold my life

At yours or any man's entreaty, sir.

That Vittoria's statement is heard at all is rare; that she chooses to liken herself to a man, surprising; and that she "scorns to hold [her] life . . . at . . . any man's entreaty" is

downright dangerous. For the legal, religious, and physiological truths of the day to have any power at all, each member of the culture must agree to play his or her part. In this case, Vittoria clearly does not. Consequently, while her affair with Bracciano threatens his bloodline, her speech in the court threatens the entire world. It is fitting, then, that in the final scene, it is Giovanni, Bracciano's rightful heir, who witnesses the death of Lodovico, and orders all the bodies, including the masculinized Vittoria and the feminized Flamineo, to be removed. By so doing, he reestablishes himself and patriarchy, thus stabilizing the world. Only through the eradication of both Vittoria and Flamineo can proper gender coding be reestablished.

Given the cultural understanding of, and preoccupation with, the subversive nature of women's sexuality, therefore, it is little wonder that this play takes as its central character a woman who refuses to be controlled by the patriarchal structures designed to hold her in her place: the church and the state. Throughout the period, the role of women becomes increasingly problematic as the culture struggles with changing physiological, legal, and religious ideas. Thus, because *The White Devil* is only a play, and not reality, Webster's audience can examine from afar the cultural assumptions underpinning their own changing world view through what John Russell Brown calls "Webster's presentation of an entire world, of a divided and changing society."

Source: Diane Henningfeld, Critical Essay on *The White Devil*, in *Drama for Students*, Gale, 2004.

Critical Essay #2

Guyette, a longtime journalist, received a bachelor's degree in English writing from the University of Pittsburgh. In this essay, Guyette describes how John Webster's depiction of court life in Renaissance Italy can be viewed as a cautionary tale that still has relevance today.

The White Devil is based on a true story that occurred about 30 years prior to the writing of this Elizabethan drama circa 1612. As Matthew Gurewitsch wrote in a story about the play for the *New York Times*

The core of historical truth was this: in 1585 in Italy□that proverbial sink of sensational depravity□the Duke of Bracciano had conceived a passion for one Vittoria Accramboni, who succumbed only after Bracciano had arranged the murders first of his own wife, then of Vittoria's husband. In the black-magic lantern of Webster's imagination, it all made for darkly glittering theater.

Amidst that dark glitter, the play's major themes are relatively easy to discern. Travis Bogard, in an essay that appears in *Shakespeare's Contemporaries*, identifies three prominent threads that run throughout: "first, the rotten prodigality of court life; second, the evils of a social system in which sycophants flatter a lord for an uncertain living; third, the treachery of a prince's capricious 'justice.'" There is no attempt whatsoever by Webster to conceal his complete disdain for the world in which this drama is set. His view is well summarized by the character Vittoria as she utters her dying words: "Oh, happy they that never saw the court, Nor ever knew great men by report." In other words, it would be better to suffer the fate of a commoner than to mingle with the mighty in the court of a prince, because it is a ruthless world indeed.

This is a brutal, blood-gorged play populated by characters that have not a trace of morality. They lie and scheme and kill. They betray each other□even members of their own family□without a second's thought. And for what? To feed their greed for wealth and power. Take for example Flamineo, a truly despicable character that stops at nothing in a desperate, ultimately futile attempt to obtain riches. He falsely flatters those in power, murders his own brother, and offers up his sister as little more than a prostitute in order to ingratiate himself to the duke, Brachiano. The duke, too, is a despicable person, willing to betray and murder in order to obtain the woman he covets. In this sense, lust is greed's close cousin. Both are base motives, and, as this play demonstrates, blindly pursuing them leads to ruin. Like her brother Flamineo, Vittoria has few redeeming qualities. To clear a path to the altar, she encourages Brachiano to murder both his wife and Vittoria's husband. Brachiano complies by having both of them killed. Neither spouse, both of whom are innocent of any wrongdoing, deserves such a cruel fate; that is highlighted in particular by the death of Brachiano's wife, Isabella, who receives her fatal dose of poison by lovingly kissing a portrait of her husband. A more ironic death is difficult to imagine. Bogard's observations are certainly accurate as far as they go. There is no doubt Webster's play is an indictment of a specific time and place. It is also, in terms of the broad picture, historically accurate.

Perhaps the most famous account of the political culture that flourished in Renaissance Italy can be found in the *The Prince*, a book written by Niccolo Machiavelli in the early 1500s. It is from his name that the term Machiavellian is derived. This term is used to describe a person who sees morality as having no place in political affairs. In Machiavelli's view, when it comes to the quest for power and political dominance, any means is justified if it leads to achieving the desired result. In his two-volume book *The Outline of History*, author H. G. Wells describes Machiavelli as the epitome of all that was wrong in the society that spawned him.

This man manifestly had no belief in any righteousness at all. . . . It seemed to him that to get power, to gratify one's desires and sensibilities and hates, to swagger triumphantly in the world, must be the crown of human desire.

Wells goes on to describe Machiavelli as a "morally blind man living in a little world of morally blind men. It is clear that his style of thought was the style of thought of the Court of his time." The politically powerful of Machiavelli's time and place, explains Wells, spent their energy and resources plotting to "outdo one another, to rob weaker contemporaries, to destroy rivals. . . . They had little or no vision of any scheme of human destinies greater than this game they played against one another." It is this milieu, or environment, that Webster so expertly portrays in *The White Devil* and in a second play, *The Duchess of Malfi*. In the introduction to *Webster & Ford Selected Plays*, a collection containing these two dramas, G. B. Harrison describes their overall thrust this way: "The world called Webster is a peculiar one. It is inhabited by people, driven like animals, and perhaps like men, only by their instincts, but more blindly and more ruinously." Harrison goes on to explain in graphic language:

This is ultimately the most sickly, distressing feature of Webster's characters, their foul and indestructible vitality. . . . They kill, love, torture one another blindly and without ceasing. A play of Webster's is full of the feverish and ghastly turmoil of a nest of maggots.

What is it that prevents a society from remaining mired in that sort of primal muck? The answer can be found by understanding exactly what is absent from Webster's world: morality. Whatever its source, a society must have a foundation of rules defining right and wrong. It must have some sort of moral base that dictates what is acceptable conduct. Otherwise, the result is chaos found in this play, with people reduced to the lowest type of life form as they seek to brutally satisfy their greed and lust, their quest for power, and their desire for revenge. Webster seems to be saying that these instincts are indeed primal, and without some sort of social contract to keep them in check, the result will be a world in which no one is safe.

This play is not a pleasant one. It is as bloody as any modern tale of gangsters or drug lords. But the message it contains is important because mankind's baser instincts have not disappeared over the centuries since this play was written. Look around at different parts of the world today and examples of brutal dictatorships, where the only rule is that of the iron fist, can still be found far too often. But the opposite is also true: cultures that construct moral codes, that clearly define ideas of right and wrong, allow the people in

them to flourish. Without such a moral compass guiding society, man is reduced to living under the law of the jungle—even though he may wear jewels and clothes of fine brocade—with survival depending on sheer power, treachery, and cunning stealth. It is a life of torture, a life without peace. By focusing a critical eye on the culture of the Italian court of the sixteenth century, Webster illustrates a more universal lesson, which is that life in a society that lacks a moral foundation is truly hellish.

Source: Curt Guyette, Critical Essay on *The White Devil*, in *Drama for Students*, Gale, 2004.

Topics for Further Study

Research the life and writings of Machiavelli. How does his political theory, particularly that articulated in *The Prince* inform Webster's writing of *The White Devil*?

Examine several heroines of Renaissance tragedy such as Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra, the Duchess of Malfi, and Vittoria. How do each of these female characters embody contemporary Renaissance ideas about women?

Read several revenge tragedies, beginning with Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and including Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet*. As a group, what do these plays have in common with *The White Devil*? How does the revenge tragedy change across time?

How does the animosity between Catholics and Protestants in England in the seventeenth century manifest itself in the play? What historical, political, religious, and social events reflect this animosity? Is the question of religion ever adequately resolved?

Compare and Contrast

1600s: In 1611, King James I authorizes the translation and writing of the Holy Bible into English. The King James Version is a poetic masterpiece and makes the Bible available to a growing number of people.

Today: The King James Version of the Bible is still in wide use among English-speaking Christians, in spite of a growing number of translations in contemporary English.

1600s: Anti-Catholicism grows in England along with the growth of the Reformed movement, leading to the English Civil War in 1648 and the beheading of Charles I, James's son.

Today: While most English people are either secular or members of the state sponsored Church of England, there is little or no discrimination against Catholic citizens.

1600s: Women have few rights under the law in England. They may not serve in any political or legal capacity, their inherited wealth is under the direction of their husbands, and their chances for employment are nearly non-existent.

Today: English women enjoy full privileges of citizenship under the law and serve in every capacity in English culture.

What Do I Read Next?

The Duchess of Malfi (1623) is Webster's other important play. It also features a woman as the main character. The Duchess, however, is virtuous; her only crime is that she tries to assert her own freedom of choice.

Women in Early Modern England (1998), by Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, offers a study of the material lives of English women of all social classes. The book includes excellent chapters on politics, economics, and occupational identities, among other topics.

This Stage-Play World: English Literature and Its Backgrounds, 1580—1625 (1983), by Julia Briggs, offers a fine overview of the drama of the era, including a discussion of both gender and politics.

Shakespeare's so-called "Roman" tragedies such as *Coriolanus* (1608) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606—1607) offer the reader the literary context within which Webster worked.

Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, written in 1513 and published in 1532, is an important text for Renaissance writers interested in politics and power. Webster was clearly influenced by Machiavellian notions of the separation of ethics and state politics.

Further Study

Cave, Richard, *Text and Performance: "The White Devil" and "The Duchess of Malfi,"* Macmillan, 1988.

Cave provides a brief and accessible analysis of twentieth-century performances of both plays.

Forker, Charles, *The Skull beneath the Skin: The Achievement of John Webster*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1986.

Forker's book offers a good summary of earlier critical responses to *The White Devil*.

Goldberg, Dena, *Between Worlds: A Study of the Plays of John Webster*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1989.

Goldberg analyzes the political and social issues in *The White Devil*, considering the play as an "anti-establishment" play.

Kastan, David Scott, and Peter Stallybrass, *Staging the Renaissance: Interpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, Routledge, 1993.

This book offers students excerpts from the most important contemporary critical writers, as well as complete essays on both *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
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- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

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