



Strategic Failures of the Duchess in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*: A Case Study

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Abstract

This article investigates the portrayal of a female ruler, the Duchess, presented in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. It tries to show the socio-political status of women in early seventeenth-century England through Webster's art of characterization and plot construction. It aims to demonstrate the tyrannical abuse of power by the Duchess' brothers Ferdinand and the Cardinal, the social anxiety and the realities of the Jacobean court where intense plotting, intrigue, corruption were very common. It also depicts the Patriarchal society structure where women were treated as property, the intense pressure on women was applied frequently to conform to male expectations and the severe consequences for those who defied them were very common. The paper will examine the Duchess's remarriage to her steward, Antonio, which symbolizes her defiance against class boundaries and will explore the answers of the research questions of this paper, that is, what personal flaws of the Duchess or what strategic failures of the Duchess contribute to her strangulation and final doom. This article applies the theory of conspiracy to find out the answers.

Keywords: Bosola, Cardinal, The Duchess, Ferdinand, Conspiracy Theory

Introduction

The Duchess of Malfi is a significant historical document as it provides insight into Jacobean era and its anxieties about women's agency, marriage, and aristocratic lineage using a specific historical event as its foundation. As a portrayal of Jacobean society, the play depicts the dark themes like social injustice, political and religious corruption, the abuse of power, the complexities of marriage and remarriage. For all these social and moral concerns of the early 17th century, this play is considered as a masterpiece of English Renaissance tragedy and a valuable cultural artifact for understanding early modern England. This play is a proto-feminist work that challenges patriarchal norms through its depiction of a strong female protagonist, the Duchess. Webster through the remarriage of

the Duchess has given a strong blow to that male dominating society.

The Duchess of Malfi by John Webster is a drama about revenge in which the Duchess is the target of retaliation. She has been portrayed as a religious female character in the play. She embodies her persona by handling the circumstances with grace and charm. From the outset till her death, she never wavers in her noble demeanor. By emphasizing the importance of her natural body, the Duchess addresses the issue of confusing the two bodies with matters of succession and bloodline. The play's social structure addresses the issue of Antonio's children and their inheritance at the palace. Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* captures early modern palatial conspiracy through the character of a female ruler, the Duchess. This article attempts to examine some reasons of strategic failures in the character of the Duchess: the first strategic failure of the Duchess is to marry Antonio; the second deals with believing Ferdinand; the third comes from depending on the Cardinal; and the fourth derives from believing shrewd Bosola. By analyzing these four points, this paper will try to explore the fact that, though many factors of her surrounding have worked as the machinations for her failure, the flaws of her own character have the largest share for her doom.

Research Questions

This paper has two research questions. They are:

- a) What personal flaws or defects in the character of the Duchess do contribute to her strangulation?
- b) How strategic failures of the Duchess have driven her life to death?

Research Objectives

Many researchers have shown different reasons such as: social injustice towards women, political and religious corruption, and the orthodox view of the Jacobean society towards the marriage of a widow as the main factor of her failure. Very few works have been attempted where the Duchess's faults have been claimed as the chief machination for her failure. This paper after exploring all possible reasons, will try to prove that the Duchess is the most responsible person for her own failure.

Significance of the Study

From this paper everyone will know about the 17th century feudal society and how the patriarchal society used to suppress the freedom of women. One can learn how palatial conspiracy would victimize others at their worst. People can also know about the social structure of that time and the challenges of feudalism.

Literature Review

Reynolds Andrew (1992) thinks that John Webster deviates from the Shakespearean tragedy in *The Duchess of Malfi* by employing his characters to narrate the tale. The critical analysis facilitates an expansion of our comprehension of Webster's time by enabling us to evaluate the play from a variety of perspectives. Literature will be reviewed under three titles and these are discussed below.

Gender and the body Politic

According to Kathleen McLuskie (1985), the critical analysis of *The Duchess of Malfi* indicates disquietude with a female protagonist who unintentionally seeks autonomy. Jacqueline Pearson (1980) illuminates the Duchess' responsibilities as a mother, a victimized woman, unruly widow, or wife, while downplaying the significance of her public role as a monarch. On the other hand, according to Joyce Peterson (1978), the sustained political interpretation of *The Duchess of Malfi* is effectively conveyed. Peterson also argues that the Duchess naturally prioritizes the private assertions of her body over the public assertions of her body politic. John Russell Brown (1981) argues that the portrayal of the Duchess serves as a female ruler to explore the political condition in Webster's time.

Female Morality and Governance

According to Marie Axton (1977), *The Duchess of Malfi* is an exceptional theatrical production due to its exploration of governance concerns in the context of a female monarch. It examines the inquiries concerning the matrimonial union of the sovereign. By contributing to the discourse on women during the early modern era, the play illuminates the paradoxes inherent in the concept of a female monarch. The examination of these contradictions revolves around the representation of the female protagonist, the Duchess, through her natural and political bodies.

Theodora Jankowski (1990) argues that Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* presents a hierarchical structure wherein the Duchess disregards the potential of her body, both in terms of attaining power and losing it. The widow endeavors to establish political stability through two means: dissolving her personal life and political persona, and establishing an undisclosed second marriage that persists despite her reign as a monarch. Given her dual role as both mother and sovereign, the Duchess assumes an eerie and menacing persona. Tennenhouse (1989) posits that she challenges the prevailing conventions of Jacobean society concerning the portrayal of the female form and the sexuality of women, notwithstanding her inability to devise an effective strategy to establish her sovereignty as a woman.

Richard Bodtke (1972) opines that the description serves as a reference point for

the widely accepted Renaissance concept of court life. It also contrasts the settings of Malfi and Rome, places the play within a political context, and suggests that the entire first act revolves around the political characteristics of the four princes: the Duchess, Ferdinand, the depraved Duke of Calabria, the corrupt Cardinal, and the spirit of the King of France who symbolizes a wise ruler.

Sexuality and Repression

It elucidates the fact that suppression of female sexuality remains the norm in many countries of the world despite the conscious disregard for a female assertion of her right to live in her way. As per Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1985) analysis, Ferdinand's intense want to control his sister, the Duchess, and protect her purity, along with his equally intense dread that she may freely express her sexuality, directly contributes to his terrified fantasies of her as an extremely sexual being. Frank Whigham (2012) argues that *The Duchess of Malfi* explores societal concerns regarding the body politic and its relationship with women. Whigham contends that the play condemns the connection between aristocratic women and their social prestige, vividly depicting the tragic outcomes that result from such associations through the character of the Duchess.

Academics, analysts, and scholars have shown a desire to examine Webster's portrayal and his treatment of women of his time. They are found to analyze the personality of the Duchess. However, I am interested in analyzing the strategic failures of the female protagonist, the Duchess, by applying the theory of conspiracy.

Theoretical Framework on Conspiracy Theory

The purpose of this article is to examine the complex interplay between politics and epistemology in the definition and meaning of conspiracy theory. A conspiracy theory is an explanation of past, present, or future events that attributes its primary cause to a powerful group of individuals known as conspirators who act covertly to further their interests at the expense of the general welfare. Events in politics can give rise to conspiracy theories when they elicit the psychological states associated with conspiracy theories, such as poor political trust, helplessness, uncertainty, and unpredictability.

According to Uscinski and Parent (2014), conspiracy theory refers to a covert plan by a few influential people to steal economic or political dominance, violate established rights, steal important information, or illegally change government structures. Conspiracy theories demonstrate how a powerful group is accused of collaborating in conspiracy. It indicates that a group—such as the president or a legislature, businesses or industries, other nations, multinational organizations, etc. that possesses significant power rarely accuses weaker factions of plotting. It is not common to hear conspiracy theories about transgender persons wanting to assume power in society or about homeless people trying to stage a

coup. Seldom are the weak and disenfranchised able to carry off a successful conspiracy. In this sense, Machiavelli (1996) argues that those who cannot employ force to obtain what they want, there the weak are the very ones who ought to be plotting. In contrast, the powerful should not need to plot to obtain what they want—they may just employ force.

Political scandals, as investigated by Einstein and Glick (2013), reduce public confidence in the government and increase the likelihood of conspiracy theories. Nyhan et al. (2016) point out those individuals who are exposed to government document redactions may develop stronger conspiracy theories. Uscinski and Parent (2014) claim that the conspiracy theories give people a sense of specialness and self-worth; they enable them to believe that they possess uncommon and significant information that others do not. People have an intense urge to feel good about the ethnicities, political parties, and religious groups to which they belong. When a group feels threatened, devalued, or deprived, it is more probable for members of the group to believe that others are plotting against them.

According to D. Coady (2003), conspiracy theory is a theory that put forth to explain a historical event in which conspiracy plays a major causal role. The explanation that is put forth has to posit a conspiracy that is responsible for the historical event that it is trying to explain. This article shows that people who belong to low-status groups and are trying to justify their status are more inclined to believe conspiracy theories. Social, psychological, and political considerations inspire people to promote conspiracy theories through various parameters.

Many critics opine that, this theory of conspiracy is strongly demonstrated in the play *The Duchess of Malfi* by presenting Ferdinand and the Cardinal's elaborate plot to control the life of the Duchess, their strong desire to take revenge and to maintain a patriarchal authority. This palatial conspiracy has brought the Duchess's fatal destruction. Political corruption, patriarchal forces, abusive power and last of all, Bosola, who has worked as a pawn and later as a spy have been used by the brothers to suppress the female agency, the Duchess. To maintain the patriarchal control, Ferdinand and the Cardinal have taken many steps and appointed Bosola as a spy to prevent their sister from remarrying. They think that if she remarries, she will undermine them and produce an heir outside their control. This conspiracy extends to Ferdinand's psychological torment of the sister by giving her a dead man's hand to break her will. The conspiracy is culminated in the tragic death of the Duchess, her children, her maid and her husband, Antonio. Thus, we find the theory of conspiracy serves as a central narrative device that weaves together the themes of betrayal, corruption and uncontrolled patriarchal power.

Strategic Failures of the Duchess

This paper makes an effort to show how the female protagonist, the Duchess, in Webster's play, *The Duchess of Malfi*, fails strategically. I argue that the strangulation is the Duchess' failure. She ought to be able to dominate and control everyone because she

is a ruler though female. We find that, when her brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, abuse her badly and cruelly, she remains silent and does not speak out. The affection she had for her steward, Antonio has led to her encounters with Ferdinand, the Cardinal, and Bosola, all of whom she has failed to strategically plan for. However, to analyze her faults we need to throw light on her character.

The bond between the political and natural bodies further is solidified this identification when a woman of aristocratic descent wielded political power, as is the case with the Duchess. When it comes to this, I agree with Albert Rolls (2000) who says that treating duke like a two-bodied king is not exactly a groundbreaking addition to the theory. Meanwhile, according to Kantorowicz (1997), social philosophy, in a blending of Augustinian and Aristotelian definitions, distinguished five distinct corporate bodies: household, neighborhood, city, kingdom, and the universe during the middle period. Both of these claims represent Webster's stance on dukedom of age.

The Duchess of Malfi depicts the social uneasy surrounding of the female rulers in several ways: first, through Ferdinand's insanity, which results from his failure to distinguish between the political and natural aspects of the body; second, through the Duchess' empathetic attempts to reclaim her natural body through marriage; and third, through the unintended consequences of giving precedence to the political over the natural, as demonstrated by Ferdinand's suspicion. The Duchess is the most insightful and powerful female character who is strong-willed, courageous, passionate, proud, and a devoted wife and mother. Everything that happens in the play revolves around the brave and honorable Duchess. She is considered a devout character in English literature due to her virtues such as kindness, tolerance, patience, devotion, honesty, courage, and beauty. Her charisma and interest are contagious. She begins as an honorable and brave duchess, continues as an ardent, cherished, and dedicated wife, and last, as a genuine and sympathetic mother. She is the one who initiates all that happens. Whether she possesses these qualities naturally or not, she is beautiful, courageous, honest, loving, devoted, patient, and tolerant. Her character proves here Webster's reputation and renown as a playwright in the field of English literature.

The Duchess, who has a son from her late husband, has regrettably been widowed at a young age while she is still in the prime of her youth. The Cardinal and Ferdinand, her two brothers, oppose her marriage to any man of lower or higher than the Duchess' social status or rank, just to seize control of her property and money upon her demise. Contrary to her commitment to her brothers, she develops romantic feelings for her steward, Antonio. Her brothers have sent her executioners; she arranges for Antonio and her eldest child to flee to Milan for their safety. Even as she approaches the brink of death, she expresses gratitude to God by saying her prayer. She directs her maid, Cariola, to care for her daughter and son. She says,

“I pray thee look thou giv'st my little boy some syrup for his cold, and let the girl

say her prayers, ere she sleeps” (p. 100).

In one of the conversations between Bosola and the Duchess, as he approaches to execute her death, he asks her if death frightens her. Her response is full of optimism and noble thinking. The Duchess is a woman of impeccable virtue. She is frequently compared to Shakespeare’s Desdemona in *Othello* due to her innocence, purity, and pathetic end. She is, however, a woman of remarkable tact, bravery, resourcefulness, and heroic endurance. Her nature is like fragrant herbs; when crushed, it emits the richest smell. Adversity brings out her passionate love and heroic courage to her finest advantage. Her final remarks reveal her confidence in religion and God’s grace at the time of her death. She is very devout, which allows her strength to face the awful atrocities inflicted on her and the cruel death that is her fate. The Duchess’ personality distinguishes her in the drama. She expresses her personality at a critical juncture in her life. She is well aware of her position. However, after having all these good qualities her faults in her character are the main machinations for what she suffers.

The Duchess’ First Strategic Failure; Marrying Antonio

The Duchess’s first and most decisive strategic failure is her decision to marry her steward, Antonio, despite her brothers’ warnings. Because of her elevated social status and palatial prestige, her two brothers warn her from ever getting married but she is discovered to have disobeyed the palace’s regulations. Antonio Bologna, a young man of intelligence, wisdom, and virtue who goes by the name Antonio, is a significant character in both the play and the Duchess’ life. He is an extremely astute observer of people and courts. It is admirable that he makes these remarks regarding the French court and courtiers. He appears to be the dramatist’s spokesperson. He is a moral and honest person. Not only do the Duchess and Delio find his honesty to be exceedingly admirable, but the Cardinal and Bosola also think high of his wonderful honesty. The Cardinal says,

“You are deceived in him,
His nature is too honest for such business.” (p. 19)

Antonio is an excellent observer; his evaluation of the personalities of different individuals is precise and deserving of recognition. Delio’s request to know the characteristics of different characters is evident when he says,

“You promised me
To make me the partaker of the natures
Of some of your great courtiers.” (p. 13)

His opinions on the French court and courtiers demonstrate his accuracy and

discernment as an observer. He holds the Duchess in the highest regard and is a loyal lover. The Duchess is left with a lasting impression of his positive image due to his genuineness, honesty, and commitment. Even after they are married, Antonio never compromises on his regard for her or her dignity. He governs her at night, yet during the day he submits to her as if he were her most obedient retainer.

Antonio is unable to disobey the Duchess because of his love for her. He always displays a sense of inferiority. The Duchess and her children would not have suffered the tragedy they did if he had been a man of heroic temperament and strong spirit. He tells her to counsel safely when the Duchess suggests that they must go to Milan with their eldest child. The demands of the narrative heavily influence Antonio's personality. The steward had to be handsome if the play was not to be disgusting. Here, I argue that the Duchess fails to achieve her goal by marrying her steward, Antonio, who has come from a humble family background. On the other hand, she comes from a higher-class society; she is the Duchess of Malfi who has power and pelf. She, finally, falls victim to strangulation and palatial conspiracy due to Ferdinand, the Cardinal, Bosola and her own faults.

The Duchess's Second Strategic Failure; Believing Licentious Ferdinand:

The Duchess's second strategic failure is to have faith in Duke Ferdinand. He always tries to cheat his sister, the Duchess. He warns his sister not to marry anyone. This article aims to look at the character of Duke Ferdinand and how the Duchess becomes victim to his evil motif.

The playwright has presented Duke Ferdinand, one of the two brothers in *The Duchess of Malfi*, as a character who is mostly depended on his brother for guidance and who always tends to act rashly and indiscreetly. About Ferdinand Antonio declares,

“He speaks with others' tongues, and hears men's suits
With others' ears: will seem to sleep o'th' bench
Only to entrap offenders in their answers:” (p. 17)

Webster is increasingly intent on bringing attention to Ferdinand's viciousness, manipulative abilities, and spiteful attitude as he sketches him out. The beginning of the play demonstrates that once their father dies, the Cardinal and Ferdinand focus on their sister, warn her not to marry again and even threaten her to kill if she does. She shows no mercy and gives Antonio her wedding ring to pop the question after her brothers are out of sight. Thanks to Cariola, the Duchess' maid, who acts as a witness when the Duchess and Antonio are officially married in a solemn ceremony.

It seems Ferdinand, who loves the Duchess has given Bosola orders to taunt and murder his sister, rather than a man who loves her riches and possessions. If she starts to care about someone, he will not stand for it. Similar to a bitter ex-lover plotting vengeance,

he wants her sister dead. He tortures and murders the Duchess because of his incestuous love for her and his sexual jealousy. He tells the insane to surround her in the hope that she will go insane. One of the servants informs her,

“I am come to tell you
Your brother had intended you some sport:
A great physician, when the Pope was sick
Of a deep melancholy, presented him
With several sorts of madmen.” (p.93)

At deep night, he visits her and scares her by offering a lifeless hand. Feelings of shame and compassion transform him. He loses all control and passes away from insanity. If he had not been so reliant on the Cardinal, his older brother, he would have been a kinder soul, prone to few vices like haste and excess. Here, I argue that the Duchess should not have married her steward Antonio because she possesses power and self and social prestige. She is known as a ruler in Malfi. I think that she should have left Malfi with her second husband and children. But she is not found to leave the palace and stays alone there before death. So, I think that it is her strategic failure to marry Antonio; not to leave Malfi, and to disclose her secret marriage with Antonio to the spy, Bosola.

The Duchess’s Third Strategic Failure because of Relying on Hippocratic Brother, the Cardinal

This section aims to demonstrate how the Cardinal plans to strangle his sister Duchess by employing a spy. The Cardinal is responsible for all the evil motifs that occur in the play, *The Duchess of Malfi*. The Cardinal has been presented as an antagonist in the play. He is inherently malevolent. He lacks both mercy and pity. He has orchestrated and carried out nearly all of the murders in the play. He embodies the cunning and manipulative nature of Machiavelli while holding the esteemed position as a pastor. About him Antonio says,

“... he is a melancholy churchman.
The spring in his face is nothing but the engend’ring
Of toads. Where he is jealous of any man he lays worse plots
For them than ever was imposed on Hercules...” (p. 16)

He possesses a strong inclination, astute judgment, and deliberate decision-making skills. He is the primary instigator of all the homicides in the play. He carefully observes objects and individuals, interacts with them astutely. Ferdinand and Bosola serve as simple conduits for his intentions; he manipulates them according to his preferences. When employing a spy to monitor the Duchess, Ferdinand proposes Antonio as a candidate.

However, the Cardinal astutely recognizes Antonio's honesty as a major disadvantage in the role of a spy. His countenance perpetually conceals the contents of his innermost being. He possesses exceptional mastery over his thoughts and emotions, which he is capable of concealing to the degree he envisions. He cunningly orchestrates the torture and murder of the Duchess, the banishment of Antonio from Ancona, and ultimately requests Bosola to kill Antonio with a sword. Upon suspecting that Julia may reveal the clandestine act of orchestrating the assassination of the Duchess, he executes her by compelling her to kiss the Bible, which has been coated with a lethal poison. The Cardinal says to Julia,

“Thy curiosity
Hath undone thee. Thou'rt poisoned with that book;
Because I knew thou couldst not keep my counsel,
I have bound thee to't by death.” (p. 119)

The Cardinal is devoid of guilt but harbors a desire for revenge. He lacks compassion for the Duchess, her offspring, and her husband, as well as Bosola and Julia. To fulfill his desire for vengeance, he is willing to go to any lengths. He deliberately causes the death of his sister, exile of her husband, Antonio's flee to Milan from Ancona; commands Bosola to assassinate him; and also plots to terminate Bosola's life. Our Duchess has depended on the brother, the Cardinal after realizing that he does not want any good to her. Here, I argue that the Duchess ought to manage her elder brother, the Cardinal in the sense that she is planning to marry Antonio whom she loves secretly. But finally, it is found that the Duchess fails to manage her brother and falls victim to strangulation.

The Duchess's Fourth Strategic Failure: Eating Apricots Provided by Machiavellian Bosola

This article aims to examine the character of Bosola to foster the Duchess' strategic failure. I argue that she should not have eaten apricots given by the spy Bosola; and should not have believed him. Bosola is the most nuanced and intricate character. As a philosopher, and wise man, he also possesses sharp intelligence, shrewdness, wit, cunning, and manipulation skills, making him a suitable candidate to be assigned as a spy to monitor the Duchess' activities. Bosola is a driven individual who will stop at nothing to accomplish his objective. He accepts the Cardinal's invitation to work as a spy in the Duchess' court. He is a clever, cunning, and fearless spy. Bosola realizes that the Duchess is pregnant and sets out to prove it. As soon as the Duchess steps inside, she takes apricots from Bosola and begins to eat. With an anxious Antonio trailing behind, she withdraws to her chamber and claims to be unwell. She thanks Bosola by saying;

“Indeed I thank you, they are wondrous fair ones.
 What an unskillful fellow is our gardener,
 We shall have none this month.” (p. 38)

Bosola is a cruel vengeful one. On the Cardinal’s and Ferdinand’s orders, he has subjected the helpless Duchess to every kind of torment imaginable. Following the Duchess’ strangulation, he is once more denied his reward. His plan for retaliation changes, and he decides to exact revenge on Ferdinand and the Cardinal. His discourse and statements demonstrate his intellectualism and philosophy. Had it not been for his affiliation with the ruthless and cunning Cardinal, Bosola might have been an eminent academic and sophisticated thinker. This philosopher who has gone evil is the one who makes the majority of the philosophical claims made in the play. Because he betrays the Duchess’ mystery, spies on her, and when the brothers start exacting revenge, he becomes her torturer and then her killer. The Duchess trusts him and discloses her husband’s identity which has brought her death. However, he never gives his task his full support right away. As it becomes increasingly offensive, he withdraws and accepts the brothers’ commands with a bitter distance, complimenting her bravery to them and speaking to her with an odd, tragic irony even as he is creating her agony.

Bosola welcomes the Duchess and informs her that her brother would like to talk to her. She consents to meet her brother under the cover of darkness. When the wax switches off, Ferdinand enters the bedchamber. He gives her a dead man’s hand with her wedding ring on it, making her think that it is Antonio’s. He leaves Bosola and shows the Duchess lifeless representations of her children and husband, as though they have passed away. After she leaves, Ferdinand reappears; Bosola begs him to send his sister to a convent, stating that he will no longer participate in the scheme. That’s why he says,

“Never in my own shape,
 That’s forfeited by my intelligence
 And this last cruel lie. When you send me next
 The business shall be comfort.” (pp. 90-91)

Bosola comes as an elderly man posing as the Duchess, who informs her that he is coming to build her mausoleum. A coffin and executioners with cords enter as she tries to pull rank on him. By leaving Bosola and the executioners with the Duchess, Cariola is taken out of the room. She shows courage by ordering the executioners to pull her tightly so she can embrace death being strangled. In my opinion, there is no evidence where the Duchess ever questions Bosola’s qualifications after Ferdinand appoints him. However, I think that the Duchess should have made an effort to get knowledge regarding Bosola’s espionage activities.

Discussion

Scholars, critics, and researchers have investigated Webster's art of characterization and plot construction. Many researches have been attempted for finding the causes of the failure of the Duchess. In this study, theory of conspiracy has been used to investigate the research questions, that is, how the Duchess contributes for her absolute doom or what strategic failure has caused the Duchess's final destruction. This paper has tried to find out the answer.

The within case analysis of the mentioned evidences substantiate the claim that the weaknesses of the eponymous character of the duchess are the most responsible reason for her own destruction. The Duchess is never found in the play to question any decision taken by the brothers. She could have asked about the appointment of Bosola at her own court. The Duchess' mistake by attempt no extra safety measures when she has found that she is pregnant. Instead, she could have asked for more security in her bed chamber. She has to be careful as a duchess. She has made the biggest mistake by telling Bosola who her husband is. She could have left Malfi with her children, husband Antonio. The Duchess is muted and does not speak out against any conspiracies. The Duchess could have reduced or prevented the tragic instances had she been able enough to take right decision at the right time. Thus, by exploring the questions, this paper will contribute to the research world of English literature.

Final Remarks

The Duchess of Malfi is a play of Elizabethan England that is about a female monarch and palatial conspiracy. The Duchess is punished for trying to keep the body natural from the body politic, for putting an unusually high value on the body natural over the body politic. The people who are punishing the Duchess for the crime she has done against her family and the political elite, are her two dishonest brothers. By depicting how patriarchal power works, Ferdinand's unnatural desires for the Duchess, the sad way she is portrayed as an immoral woman, the play condemns rather than praises the return of patriarchal power or her eventual acceptance of the unity of the body politic and the body natural after she dies prematurely. After investigating all possible ways of her doom, this paper concludes with the opinion that, though there are many reasons for her demise, her own faults in her character work as the most powerful reason for her strangulation and failure.

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