

BODIES AT WAR: THE FEMALE RULER IN JOHN WEBSTER'S  
*THE DUCHESS OF MALFI* AND LOPE DE VEGA'S  
*EL MAYORDOMO DE LA DUQUESA DE AMALFI*

by

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A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of English  
in the Graduate School of  
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2014

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis uses the theory of the king's two bodies to interrogate the portrayal of the female ruler in both Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* and Lope de Vega's *El mayordomo de la duquesa de Amalfi*. These two plays are based upon the same source text, and therefore illuminate the differing concerns of both playwrights and both nations. Lope's text portrays the female ruler in a much less positive light because it is more concerned with questioning whether *honra* (inner virtue) or *honor de opinion* (bloodline/nobility/reputation) should be prioritized in male rulers. Through its portrayal of Antonio, the male steward and de facto ruler, *El mayordomo* advocates for a new social order based on merit rather than nobility, although the play does ultimately end with the restoration of the traditional patriarchal order.

Like *El mayordomo*, *The Duchess of Malfi* also advocates for a new social order based on merit rather than blood, but it does so through its portrayal of the Duchess and the problems of her two bodies. Her brother Ferdinand displays incestuous desire for her body as a result of his conflation of the body natural and the body politic. The Duchess prioritizes the body natural over the body politic despite the traditional prioritization of the body politic. This prioritization extends to the end of the play, when Delio suggests that Antonio and the Duchess's son, rather than the young Duke of Malfi, will inherit the duchy. The Duchess's murder ensures the audience will be on the Duchess's side, and consequently the new social order suggested at the end of the play. More research needs to be done on the effect of Elizabeth I on both plays, as well as the connection of the theory of the king's two bodies to hermaphrodites.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am pleased to have this opportunity to thank all the faculty members, colleagues, and friends who helped me through this process. Most of all I would like to thank Dr. Sharon O’Dair, my committee chair, who helped me through this process and who provided valuable assistance and expertise not just for this thesis but for my academic growth as well. I would also like to thank Dr. John K. Moore and Dr. Jennifer Drouin, whose insights and comments were immensely helpful in the revision of this thesis. I could not have made it through this process without the support of my colleagues, fellow graduate students, and friends. They provided valuable intellectual and moral support. Finally, I owe an immense debt of gratitude to my husband Donovan, who continually helped me refine my thoughts by talking them over with me, who edited my thesis, and who took on many of the household responsibilities to allow me to focus more on writing, researching, and editing my thesis.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster and *El mayordomo de la duquesa de Amalfi* by Lope de Vega Carpio are two plays written from the same source text. The plays are based upon an historical event which apparently took place between 1510 and 1513. Matteo Bandello first recorded the story in his Italian *Novella* I, 26 in 1554. It was then loosely translated and expanded by Belleforest in his French *Histories tragiques* in 1565, and in 1567, William Painter translated Belleforest's tale into English in *The Palace of Pleasure* (Baker and Whitenack 54). The two plays diverge from the source texts in ways that are both very different from one another and strikingly similar, which has led some scholars to posit that Lope's play was a source text for Webster; but this is almost impossible (Loftis 67). *El mayordomo* was most likely written between 1599 and 1606, probably after 1604 (Rodriguez-Badendyck 16), but it was not published until 1618 when it was collected in his Parte XI (Baker and Whitenack 54). *The Duchess*, although it was not published until 1623 (Baker and Whitenack 54), was performed in mid-December 1614 and written sometime shortly before then; some scholars posit it was written as early as 1613 (García 55n4). Although it is possible that Webster had access to "an early *suelta* (a Spanish approximation of an English quarto), of which no record remains, before writing his play" (Loftis 67), it is improbable, improvable, and based solely on speculation.

Because the two plays are not based on one another, and yet derive from the same source, they provide an excellent opportunity to understand the different cultural and political concerns of each text, playwright, and the society in which he lived. Because they are nearly

contemporary, we can discover a great deal about the respective concerns of each playwright, as Baker and Whitenack articulate: “To consider what two great dramatists independently make of the same Bandellian materials highlights their individual achievements and, perhaps more important, hints at something of their cultural specificity” (62). In order to begin to explore the texts for information about their cultural perspectives and importance, we must first understand how they differ from each source text and from one another. Most scholars agree that Webster primarily used Painter as his source for *The Duchess* (Baker and Whitenack 54). Likewise, most scholars believe that Lope read straight from Bandello, not from the Belleforest translation. However, Marina Brownlee speculates that Lope had access to the Belleforest translation as well, noting parallels in structure and similarities between the figurative language found in both Lope’s play and in Belleforest’s translation (and not in Bandello) (18). Regardless of whether Lope used Bandello, Belleforest, or both, in consulting sources, it is important to understand the differences between each play.

*El mayordomo* is, of course, written in the three act formula of the Spanish *comedia*,<sup>1</sup> despite its tragic nature. Judith Whitenack provides an excellent summary of the first two acts of *El mayordomo*:

Act 1: Camila, the widowed Duchess of Amalfi, and her *mayordomo* Antonio, an *hidalgo* (i.e., a member of the lower nobility), fall in love and are married secretly by a priest. Act 2: two years of successfully concealing the marriage have passed, and their second child is on the way. On the night of its birth[,] Livia, the Duchess’s lady-in-waiting, thinks that she is passing the baby to Antonio for safekeeping in the country but actually hands it to Urbino, her own suitor and the Duchess’s secretary. The jealous Urbino, thinking that the child belongs to Livia and Antonio, informs the Duchess, thereby forcing her to dismiss Antonio from her

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Gascón defines the Spanish *comedia* as “the three-act play that eschews Aristotelian unities in favor of variety and entertainment value perfected by Lope de Vega in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century” (17) In his *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias*, Lope argues for abandoning Aristotle’s unities in favor of a mixed genre that features both tragedy and comedy because it is truer to life.

service in order to protect the honor of her household. (199-200)

In the third act, the Duchess, after another six years and a third pregnancy, makes public her marriage, turns the duchy over to her young son the Duke of Amalfi, now old enough to rule, and leaves the duchy to live with Antonio. Ottavio, the Duchess's rejected suitor, tells Julio, the Duchess's proud brother, and they seize the Duchess and her children who have, until now, been secretly raised by peasants in the country. The Duchess's other brother, the Cardinal, orders Julio to make peace, and the young Duke of Amalfi encourages it as well. Antonio comes to the palace, where Julio murders him and the Duchess's young children before poisoning the Duchess and revealing to her the heads of Antonio and her children right before she succumbs to the poison. Ottavio is driven mad by guilt and grief; Julio flees; and the young Duke vows vengeance for his slain mother.

John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, likewise, is written in the traditional five act play famous in early modern England. In the first act, Antonio, speaking to his friend Delio, introduces the audience to the character of each Aragon sibling: Ferdinand (Webster's counterpart to Julio) and the Cardinal are represented as corrupt, and the Duchess as nearly perfect. Ferdinand instructs Bosola to remain in the Duchess's household as his spy, informing Ferdinand of whom the Duchess prefers. Ferdinand and the Cardinal warn the Duchess not to remarry, and almost immediately, she confesses her love to Antonio and they are married in a *per verba de praesenti* ceremony, witnessed by the Duchess's lady-in-waiting, Cariola. In the second act, Bosola suspects that the Duchess is hiding a pregnancy, and his suspicions are confirmed when, after Antonio orders everyone to their rooms, claiming the Duchess has been poisoned, he finds an astrological chart for a child born that day. He writes to Ferdinand, who vows revenge, but not until he knows the name of the man who impregnated his sister.

The third act opens several years later, with Antonio telling Delio that the Duchess has had two more children. The Duchess, after a surprise nighttime visit from Ferdinand during which the Duchess confesses she is married, must dismiss Antonio from her service in order to protect the secret of their marriage. The Duchess confesses to Bosola that Antonio is her husband after he praises Antonio upon hearing the news of his dismissal. Bosola tells Ferdinand and the Cardinal, who raise an army to bring the Duchess back to the duchy. She and Antonio part ways, the oldest son with him, the youngest two with her. Ferdinand's army catches up to her, and she returns to the duchy with them. In Act four, Ferdinand tortures the Duchess in a number of ways, the cruelest of which is showing her wax dummies of Antonio and her children in order to convince her that they are dead. The Duchess then is strangled to death, as are her children and Cariola. Ferdinand is stricken by grief and guilt the moment the deed is done, and he turns on Bosola. Bosola in turn becomes the Duchess's avenger, vowing to kill all those who made him kill her. In the fifth act, the audience learns that Ferdinand has gone mad. Bosola enters the castle where Ferdinand and the Cardinal are staying. He kills Antonio in the dark, believing him to be the Cardinal, and then in the Cardinal's room, Ferdinand kills both the Cardinal and Bosola before Bosola kills Ferdinand. Bosola lives long enough to relate the tale to those who arrive. Delio enters last and suggests that everyone work to make sure Antonio's young son receives his inheritance "in his mother's right."

Although, as John Loftis points out, "the Spanish and English plays include resemblances not present in *Bandello*, even such a striking one as the grotesque revelation to the Duchess, in waxen counterfeit in Webster and in harsh reality in Lope, of the mangled bodies of her husband and two of her children" (67), it is the differences that are most illuminating about the concerns of each text. One of the primary differences between the two plays is the way each articulates, in

different degrees, the theory of the king's two bodies. *The Duchess* clearly expresses and engages with the idea of the two-bodied king throughout the play, whereas the theory has only minor relevance to *El mayordomo*. The way each play explores the theory of the king's two bodies, and its potential problems, will form the bulk of my analysis, first in a comparison of the two plays, and then in a close analysis of *The Duchess of Malfi*.

### **The Critical Conversation**

The modern conception of the theory of the king's two bodies was first introduced and dismissed as "metaphysical nonsense" (Axton 13) by F.W. Maitland in his essay "The Crown as Corporation." It was then fully introduced, expanded, and explained by Ernst Kantorowicz in his book, *The King's Two Bodies*, published in 1957. Kantorowicz finds the evidence for his articulation of the theory of the king's two bodies predominantly in Edmund Plowden's *Reports*, published in 1571. Since the publication of *The King's Two Bodies*, the theory has gone through several permutations and inspired many works, including *The Queen's Two Bodies* by Marie Axton, *The King's Body* by Sergio Bertelli, and *The Theory of the King's Two Bodies in the Age of Shakespeare* by Albert Rolls. These books all further examine the concept of a double-bodied monarch as first articulated by Kantorowicz. In 1977, Marie Axton used this in *The Queen's Two Bodies* to look specifically at its application to Queen Elizabeth and how it illuminated the issue of succession. In 1990 (translated into English in 2000), Sergio Bertelli used the theory to examine medieval and early modern conceptions of the physical body of the king, particularly in religious contexts. In 2000, Albert Rolls published *The Theory of the King's Two Bodies in the Age of Shakespeare* in an attempt add nuance to the theory, positing that there were multiple

versions of the theory, rather than just the one espoused by Edmund Plowden and discussed by Kantorowicz and Axton.

More recently, in 2009, a special forum on Kantorowicz's book and theory was published in the Spring volume of *Representations*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt. In this forum, the critical conversation shifts away from the focus on the theory's description of the two-bodied monarch to a discussion of political theory and Kantorowicz's positioning in relationship to Cassiler and Schmitt. Bernhard Jussen suggests that Kantorowicz's "concern was less about the body than about the much less sexy 'State'" (104). Jussen goes on to claim that, perhaps in part because of the success of the image of the double-bodied king, Kantorowicz's larger concerns about the emergence of an early modern concept of state have not been successful in generating discussion (104). Jussen therefore argues that "consideration of its relevance today might for a moment put aside the doubled body and instead focus on the relevance of the book's main concern – the conceptual prehistory of the early modern 'commonwealths' (or 'States')" (106). He expresses concerns over the methodology used by Kantorowicz in the evidence he uses and analyzes (112-113), but Jussen ultimately argues for the inclusion of Kantorowicz in discussions about the movement from a church-centered to a state-centered political institution (109).

Like Jussen, Lorna Hutson also tracks how "the critical emphasis has turned from the embodying metaphor of the first half of Kantorowicz's title to the theological implications of the second half, from representations of royal bodies to the sacredness of the monarchy" (119). Throughout her article, she argues that rather than depicting a character as the embodiment of the monarchy, plays engage with questions of the workings of the monarchy through "their own engagement of the audience in complex acts of equitable judgment" (119). She links the use of "legal fiction-making" in the development of the common law to "the development of popular

drama” that made audiences engage with the drama by forming judgments about the circumstances in the play (123), arguing that the importance of audience engagement to drama shifted the depiction of justice from being embodied in the monarch to being depicted as existing in the commonwealth (123). She ends her article by using *Richard II* as an example of the importance of the audience’s involvement in the tragedy. She asserts that if *Richard II* is a tragedy of the king’s two bodies, it is so only if the audience is able to see the tragedy in the distinction between Richard’s private self and his public crown (139).

Victoria Kahn, like Jussen and Hutson, explores Kantorowicz’s contributions to the field of political theology, looking at his work in relationship to Carl Schmitt and Ernst Cassirer. However, she supports the theory of the doubled body’s application to literature through political theology’s connection to both legal and literary fiction, arguing that for Kantorowicz, “political theology is inseparable from the work of legal and literary fiction” (77). She explores how Kantorowicz charts the appropriation of theological metaphors of the Eucharist and the body of Christ for “secular political purposes, showing their distinctive use by English common lawyers for the crown” (78). Kahn argues that because, for Kantorowicz, a legal fiction is merely a type of artistic fiction, early modern drama “can shed so much light on the working of fiction in the law” (87). She concludes her article with the observation that in “Kantorowicz’s history of the king’s two bodies, the body falls away to be replaced, ultimately, by fiction or, in Lefort’s terms, by the distinction between symbolic and real power” (95). Kahn sees in Kantorowicz an affirmation of the powers of fiction rather than the physical body to help us understand and negotiate the difference between power structures.

The critical conversation about *The King’s Two Bodies* has shifted since the late 1980s from an emphasis on the body to a discussion of political theory, but Kantorowicz’s theory

remains an important aspect of understanding Renaissance political theory and drama. While Jussen, Kahn, and Hutson all propose a move away from the image of the double-bodied king toward Kantorowicz's discussion of political theology, my analysis on *The Duchess of Malfi* will demonstrate the continuing validity of the image of the two-bodied king in an understanding of the play's thematic concerns as well as its importance to changing political ideology. In so doing, my project does not deviate as far from Jussen's, Kahn's, and Hutson's arguments as it might seem. This paper both supports and challenges their claims. Jussen, quoting Kantorowicz, argues that all the different subjects Kantorowicz discusses in *The King's Two Bodies*, including the image of the two-bodied king, "are ciphers of what Kantorowicz desired to grasp, 'ciphers' for 'political creeds such as they were understood in their initial stage and at a time when they served as a vehicle for putting the early modern commonwealths on their own feet'" (105-6). The quotation Jussen cites from Kantorowicz illustrates precisely why it is so important to study *The Duchess* in the context of the image of the double bodied king: by so doing, as will become clear later, the portrait of a new social order as imagined by Webster's text begins to emerge.

When Victoria Kahn argues that "Kantorowicz finds in literature an exemplary self-consciousness about the symbolic dimension of human experience, about the human capacity to make and unmake symbolic forms... [revealing] both its capacity for ideological critique and for enabling fictions of human community" (81), she is upholding the use of the theory to reveal ideological critiques within the text. Kahn uses Kantorowicz's assertion about Richard II – that in the moment Richard accepts he must no longer be king, "the fiction of the oneness of the double body breaks apart" (Kantorowicz 31) – to explore the ability of literary fiction to unravel the legal fiction of the theory of the king's two bodies (Kahn 85-6). This power to unravel the legal fiction of the double-bodied king is precisely what I argue *The Duchess of Malfi* is, at least

on one level, accomplishing through its portrayal of the tragic consequences of the Duchess's decision to prioritize her private self (body natural) over her public function as a monarch (body politic).

Likewise, when Lorna Hutson argues that

the increasingly nonallegorical drama of the later sixteenth century and early seventeenth – the period between the publication of Plowden's *Reports* in 1571 and the first eleven volumes of Sir Edward Cokes's *Reports* in 1610 – identifies the 'commonwealth' or public good less as vicariously embodied in the sacred figure of the monarch than as located in the myriad acts of hypothesis, judgment, and interpretation demanded of the audience in response to the complex ethical and political dilemmas of quasi-forensic, yet popularly accessible, plots (129)[,]

she articulates an aspect I explore and uphold in my analysis on *the Duchess of Malfi*: that the engagement of the audience is crucial to the full articulation of justice in the play. That said, my analysis will question her suggestion that the "commonwealth" cannot be embodied "in the sacred figure of the monarch." My argument will suggest that precisely *because* the commonwealth is embodied in the Duchess, the engagement of the audience in the judgment and punishment of those responsible for the Duchess's murder makes the audience part of the new social order that promotes the commonwealth and the public good. The play aligns itself against those promoting the traditional patriarchal order based on primogeniture, and because the play at least suggests the audience judge those the play itself judges, the audience, through its participation, subtly becomes part of the new social order based on merit rather than birth. While all three scholars do argue for a move away from the focus on the two-bodied monarch, Jussen admits that "what endures in today's debates is mainly an inspiration seeded by Kantorowicz's central image of the doubled body" (105). The close analysis of the theory's relationship to the thematic concerns of *The Duchess of Malfi*, undertaken in the section on Webster's text, will help illuminate why this image of the doubled body has endured, and why it is important that it

has done so. The image of a two-bodied monarch is central to a full understanding of the political and social implications of *The Duchess of Malfi*.

### **The Theory of the King's Two Bodies**

As Kantorowicz explains, the theory of the king's two bodies was developed during the Medieval period and refined in the Renaissance. It was a legal fiction designed to answer the paradox of the king dying but "the crown surviving" (Axton 12), or, in other words, how the expression "The King is Dead. Long Live the King!" functioned as a political reality. This theory stated that the king had two bodies: a body natural and a body politic. This theory was popularized by Edward Plowden, a common lawyer during Elizabeth I's reign, who recorded it in his *Reports*:

For the King has in him two Bodies, *viz.* a Body natural, and a Body politic. His Body natural (if it be considered in itself) is a Body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age, and to the like Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other people. But his Body politic...is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to (26-7).

The two bodies were a perfect union, each entirely contained in the other, although the body natural was always subservient to the body politic (Kantorowicz 12).

The idea of the king's two bodies created a distinction between the private body of the ruler and the political office he or she held. This created a continuity between monarchs; rather than a series of monarchs each with individual wills and individual priorities, the theory of the king's two bodies created a link between monarchs, as every monarch contained the same political Soul (Kantorowicz 13). This both gave the monarch his legitimacy and limited the extent to which he or she could alter what the previous monarch(s) had accomplished. For example, this theory was used throughout Elizabeth's lifetime, both by her to increase her power,

and by others to try to control her or limit her power. In the *Case of the Duchy of Lancaster at Serjeant's-Inn*, the common lawyers used the theory to frustrate Elizabeth's wishes. The Queen wanted to invalidate a grant given during Edward VI's reign and give it instead to a person she chose, arguing that as Edward was underage, and therefore ineligible to grant land, the grant should be invalid. The judges denied her request, "stress[ing] the continuity of the monarch and remind[ing] Elizabeth Tudor that as Queen she is bound to observe the grants made by the monarchs whose office she holds" (Axton 17). According to Axton, these men were Catholics who stressed the "continuity of the monarch" to mitigate their own loss of power with the ascension of a Protestant monarch (16).

To effect this, they had to emphasize the indivisibility of the two bodies while simultaneously admitting to a distinction between the two:

[The King] shall never be defeated by reason of his nonage. For although he has or takes the Land in his natural Body, yet to this natural Body is conjoined his Body politic, which contains his royal Estate and Dignity, and the Body politic includes the Body natural, but the Body natural is the lesser, and with this the Body politic is consolidated. So that he has a Body natural, adorned and invested with the Estate and Dignity royal, and he has not a Body natural distinct and divided by itself from the Office and Dignity royal, but a Body natural and a Body politic together indivisible, and these two Bodies are incorporated in one Person, and make one Body and not divers, that is, the Body corporate in the Body natural, et e contra the Body natural in the Body corporate. (Plowden 28)

Here, the lawyers are clearly trying to eliminate any distinction between the two bodies in order to keep Elizabeth from changing what the previous monarchs had already done. If there is no distinction between Elizabeth's two bodies, then it is impossible for one body to go against what the other wants, and, therefore, Elizabeth cannot actually want to go against Edward VI's wishes. This allows the Catholic lawyers to frustrate the Queen's desires while insisting they are actually assisting her in fulfilling her duty as monarch – they are protecting the interests and decisions of

the body politic at the expense of the body natural. Of course, that the Queen wants to invalidate the grant reveals the fiction of the indivisibility of the two bodies and makes apparent the problems of the theory: the Queen's two bodies are at odds with one another, thereby signifying that her two bodies are not one and the same.

And, in fact, the lawyers acknowledge that the two bodies cannot be one and the same mere sentences later by drawing a distinction between the two bodies:

And so if the King aliens Land which he had by Descent from his Mother, he shall not defeat it by reason that he was within Age at the Time of the Alienation; for his Body politic, which is annexed to his Body natural, takes away the Imbecility of his Body natural, and draws the Body natural, which is the lesser, and all the Effects thereof to itself, which is the greater, *quia magis dignum trahit ad se minus dignum* [because the greater draws itself to the less great]. And yet if the Land descends to the King from his common Ancestor, he shall have it by reason of his Body natural, for this Body is privy to the Descent, but the Body politic is not privy to this Descent. (Plowden 28-9).

Here, the lawyers distinguish between the functions of the two bodies. The body politic cannot inherit what the body natural can, meaning that the two bodies are not completely indivisible after all. Clearly, while the two bodies are contained within one individual, they are not perfectly aligned. On occasion, the body natural and the body politic must be distinguished in order to protect not the rights of the body politic, but the rights of the body natural. This leads to ambiguity about the two bodies: if they are not one and the same, where does the individuality of the body politic stop and the individuality of the body natural begin? How does one distinguish between the two bodies while still acknowledging that they are contained within each other? This also begs the question of how the body politic can always be prioritized if the two bodies must be distinguished in order not to infringe on the rights of the body natural.

Since the two bodies are not indivisible, and there is room for ambiguity in determining the specific outline of one body or the other, this means that rather than the King or Queen

having one nature with two aspects (i.e., she happens to be both female and a queen), he or she actually has two separate natures (i.e., she is both a female human (body natural) and an immortal ruler (body politic)). This dual-natured role of the monarch leads Kantorowicz to claim that the theory of the king's two bodies was "linked...to the two sexes of an hermaphrodite...What fitted the two sexes of the hermaphrodite, fitted juristically also the two bodies of a king" (10-11). Whereas a hermaphrodite has two perfectly functional sexes, the king has two perfectly functional natures within his body. The idea of two natures combined in one body also points toward conjoined twins, and even regular twins, who, as Alan Bates asserts, at the time, were considered, at least by some, to be two parts of one body (506).

The inherent problems of the theory can be seen clearly in the necessity of the analogy to hermaphroditism. In the early modern period, hermaphrodites, along with conjoined twins and even regular twins, were considered monstrous births. It seems problematic that in order to understand the position of the monarch, he or she must be compared to something monstrous. And, in fact, the monstrous nature of the theory of the king's two bodies was used against Charles I as justification for his regicide: "concerns with the decline of right authority in kingdom and household were expressed through the language of monsters in the form of hermaphroditism...literal and satirical accusations of monstrous hermaphroditism played an important role in Civil War polemics" (Burns 189). The idea of a monstrous body politic or a hermaphroditic ruler led to strife in James's reign and culminated in Charles's demise. Nevertheless, the idea of the hermaphroditic ruler was in use as early as Elizabeth I's reign. During her reign, the theory was used to frustrate her wishes, but, unlike Charles, she was able to overcome attempted obstruction and use the theory to her political advantage. The question, then, is how Elizabeth was able to use the idea of an hermaphroditic monarch while Charles was not.

Kantorowicz argues that the theory of the king's two bodies was linked to hermaphroditism because the twinned king had two natures, just as a hermaphrodite did. The hermaphroditic, as opposed to just twinned, nature of the king's two bodies worked particularly well with Elizabeth: her body politic was, arguably, male, while her body natural was female. Elizabeth herself discussed this in her famous speech at Tillbury:

I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realm; to which rather than any dishonour shall grow by me, I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field. (Tudor 699)

Elizabeth herself stressed the hermaphroditic nature of her role as Queen of England: she was physically female, but she was mentally and spiritually male. This is not to say, of course, that Elizabeth *explicitly* described herself as an hermaphrodite, but, rather, that the relationship of her power to her femininity is best understood as an hermaphroditic relationship, and this was something both she and her subjects understood. Mark Franko describes how the problem of early modern hermaphrodites was not in their sexual duality but in the signs of gender – in the possibility for a confusion of masculine and feminine traits, in the existence of masculine women and feminine men (Franko 124). While the confusion of gender may have been a problem for hermaphrodites in general, it was exactly what enabled Elizabeth to rule England.

From the division of Queen Elizabeth's two bodies and the acknowledgement that the two bodies are not exactly identical, Kantorowicz sees but a small leap "to the Puritan cry of 'fighting the king to defend the king,'" where Puritans successfully deposed and executed the king's natural body without damaging the king's body politic (23). Charles I's execution illustrates the problems of the theory of the king's two bodies. Its distinction between the two bodies of the monarch, combined with its emphasis on the body politic's importance, has the

potential to lead to tragedy. When the body politic is disconnected from the body natural, the body natural of the monarch becomes unimportant, and therefore, expendable. *The Duchess of Malfi*, like Charles I, demonstrates the consequences of the two-bodied monarch, by illustrating both the consequences of conflating the bodies and of drawing a distinction between them. By comparing *The Duchess of Malfi* to *El mayordomo de la duquesa de Amalfi*, *The Duchess's* concerns with the theory of the king's two bodies can be seen more clearly, and from this clearer picture emerges the political concerns of the text, represented through Ferdinand's incestuous desire resulting from his conflation of the Duchess's two bodies, as well as through the unorthodox power of the Duchess's natural body to disrupt the traditional patriarchal flow of power and to create a new social order based on inner nobility rather than bloodlines.

## Chapter 2: *El mayordomo de la duquesa de Amalfi*: A Foil for *The Duchess of Malfi*

Although Lope de Vega's *El mayordomo de la duquesa de Amalfi* and John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* are based upon the same source text, each playwright's representation of the story results in two very different plays. Dawn Smith asserts that Lope's and Webster's "treatment of the original [source text] diverges in a number of ways – particularly in emphasis and mood" ("Text" 83.). She later explains what she means by mood: "Lope's play balances the contrasting elements of tragedy and comedy, while Webster creates a tragedy that is almost obsessive in its doom-laden intensity" ("Text" 86). The different moods of each play not only reveal the different cultural attitudes toward tragedy,<sup>2</sup> but they also help illuminate the different societal and political concerns of each text. *El mayordomo* is more interested in questions of honor and who makes a good ruler than with *The Duchess*'s concerns with critiquing the monarchy and current political system. In Lope de Vega's 1609 treatise on drama *Arte Nuevo de hacer comedias*, he suggests one theme that he believes is particularly appropriate for representation on the Spanish stage: honor. "Los casos de la honra son mejores / porque mueven a fuerza a toda gente, / con ellos las acciones virtuosas, / que la virtud es dondequiera amada" (327-30); "Better still are the subjects in which honor has a part, since they deeply stir everybody; along with them go virtuous deeds, for virtue is everywhere loved" (35).<sup>3</sup> That Lope

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<sup>2</sup> Unlike England, Spain's great plays were not tragedies, but tragicomedies (Loftis 65). In Spain, the heavy Catholic influence on the theater did not allow for the same development of tragic circumstances – "the idea of Christian redemption precludes the emotional experience of either earthly or cosmic tragedy" (García García 51). The mixture of the genres was also popularized by Lope de Vega's defense of a mixed genre in *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias*.

<sup>3</sup> The Spanish quotations from Lope de Vega are taken from Enrique García Santo-Tomás's 2006 edition. English quotations are taken from William T. Brewster's 1914 prose translation.

includes this as a precept in his manifesto on drama indicates the importance of honor to early modern Spanish society.

The Spanish language has two words that both translate into “honor” in English despite having different definitions in Spanish. *Honra* refers to inner virtue, while *honor*, sometimes referred to as *honor de opinión*, refers to reputation and public opinion. It is easy to confuse outward perception with inward virtue, and *El mayordomo* reflects by questioning who makes the most honorable ruler, those with nobility of blood or those with inner nobility. In *Arte nuevo*, Lope also defends the mixed mode of the Spanish *comedia*, arguing that it is both more enjoyable and more natural: “que aquesta variedad deleita mucho; / buen ejemplo nos da naturaleza, / que por tal variedad tiene belleza” (178-80); “this variety causes much delight. Nature gives us good example, for through such variety it is beautiful” (30). Lope advocates for a dramatic tradition that is based on nature – that imitates life. The importance to Lope of accurately mimicking reality leads to his advocacy for the mixture of tragedy and comedy, whereas Webster is less concerned with reality and more concerned with creating a tragic atmosphere that allows the audience to engage with the play’s ideological concerns.

Given Lope’s concern with drama representing life, *El mayordomo*’s depiction of a female ruler and its representation of attitudes toward female rulers, particularly when compared to *The Duchess*’s characterization of the female ruler, illuminate early modern Spanish concerns about women and nobility. Although women ruled in Spain, in one form or another, for over one hundred years before *El mayordomo* (Cruz and Suzuki 103), Spanish plays reflect a cultural hesitation toward female rulers that was exacerbated by their fraught relationship with English queen Elizabeth. Despite the number of plays depicting female monarchs, there are few about the two “Isabels” – Isabel of Castile and Elizabeth I (Quintero 38). Isabel of Castile features in only

a handful of Spanish plays, and most predominantly in plays by Lope de Vega. Elizabeth, in contrast, features in only one known early modern Spanish play: *El conde de Sex* [The Earl of Essex] by Antonio Coello. The absence of these two powerful female monarchs in Spanish drama is striking, and any analysis of a Spanish play featuring a female ruler must address this absence. It is possible that Lope's play, not just Webster's, looks back to Elizabeth's reign in the way it presents the female ruler.<sup>4</sup> This possibility makes a comparison of the two plays even more instructive. While *The Duchess* depicts female rulers positively, *El mayordomo* seems almost anti-feminine in its misgivings about female rulers. In this way, *El mayordomo* provides a foil for *The Duchess of Malfi* in identifying the primary thematic concerns of Webster's play. In particular, *El mayordomo* illustrates Webster's concerns with the theory of the king's two bodies, English ideas about female monarchs, and the importance of choice rather than fate in Webster's Duchess's actions.

### **The King's Two Bodies in *El mayordomo***

In *The Duchess of Malfi*, the thematic concern with the theory of the king's two bodies is prevalent throughout the play. The Duchess's two bodies, heightened by the fact that she is a female ruler, lead to Ferdinand's incestuous desire for the Duchess, his attempts to place strictures on her natural body in order to control her political power, and her eventual murder.<sup>5</sup> In *El mayordomo*, however, although references are made to Camila's two bodies, they do not play nearly as great a role: they do not drive the plot, and the two bodies are not bound up in the

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<sup>4</sup> An analysis of *El mayordomo*'s relationship to Elizabeth I and her troubled relationship with Spain should be undertaken; however, the scope of this project does not allow for this in-depth analysis. I will return to this in another project, but for now *El mayordomo* must serve primarily as a foil for the concerns of Webster's text.

<sup>5</sup> The importance of the theory of the king's two bodies to *The Duchess* will be further explored in the section on *The Duchess of Malfi*.

reason for the Duchess's murder. It would be easy to dismiss this as the result of the Spanish and English differences in the theory's relevance: the theory was never as popular in Spain as in England (Quintero 28, Kantorowicz 20, 447). However, as María Cristina Quintero points out, in political documents of the time, although there were not explicit references to the body natural and the body politic, the documents did express ideas about the dual nature of the monarchy: "although political treatises in Spain tended to avoid a legalistic separation of the two bodies, we do encounter frequent allusions to a binary conception of kingship in reference to two types of majesty" (165). Quintero cites Álamos de Barreintos to support this claim: "El Príncipe tiene dos personas, de particular y de Rey [The Prince has two persons, a private one and that of a King]" (qtd in Quintero 165). While the theory of the king's two bodies is not perfectly analogous to the idea of the king having two functions, the two are alike in that they create a similar distinction between the function of a king as a monarch and the function of a king as an individual. Consequently, the difference in the texts' focus on the theory cannot be explained away solely by the theory's popularity in England versus Spain. We must therefore look deeper for an explanation of the play's differences.

In order to analyze the theory's differing emphasis in each play, we must first examine the ways in which each play's depiction of the theory overlaps. Although Webster's text relies much more heavily on the theory of the king's two bodies to drive the action of the plot, Lope's play also uses the distinction between the two bodies: Camila, like Webster's Duchess, explicitly draws a distinction between her two bodies in the wooing scene:

Dexemos la autoridad.  
Háblame familiarmente,  
que, aunque tu señora soy,  
no siempre en el trono estoy

del título impertinente. (1.347-351)<sup>6</sup>

Come, leave off “indulgence” and “noble.”  
Speak familiarly to me.  
Although I am your lady,  
I am not always installed  
on the throne of my tedious title.” (1.350-354)

Camila here is making a distinction between her public function (body politic) as the regent of the duchy of Amalfi and her private function (body natural) as a young widow desirous of love.<sup>7</sup> She also understands that her body politic and body natural are in conflict with one another: in order to pursue her interest in Antonio, she must temporarily vacate her position as duchess. She cannot simultaneously pursue her private interests and fulfill her public function. This reveals a subtle tension between the two bodies, as well as Camila’s decision to prioritize the body natural. She is willing to vacate her position as the regent, both temporarily and permanently, in order to follow her private interests. This suggests, like Webster’s *Duchess* expresses, a desire to prioritize the body natural rather than the body politic when the desires of one body interfere with the proper functioning of the other.

Despite the tension between Camila’s two bodies, the young Duke of Amalfi resolves the issue by recognizing the power of Camila’s body politic. Marie Axton explains that one belief associated with the theory of the king’s two bodies was that the political body of the king was so powerful that it not only does away with the defects of the natural body of the *king*, but also with the defects of the natural body of the king’s *spouse*: “the king’s body politic protects the realm,

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<sup>6</sup> All Spanish quotations are taken from Avelino Sotelo Alvarez’s 1995 critical edition. All English quotations are taken from Cynthia Rodriguez-Badendyck’s 1985 translation. When I reference the citation but do not actually quote from the text, the first citation will always be to the Spanish edition.

<sup>7</sup> Compare to the scene in Webster: “This is flesh and blood, sir: / ‘Tis not the figure cut in alabaster / Kneels at my husband’s tomb. Awake, awake, man! / I do here put off all vain ceremony / And only do appear to you a young widow / That claims you for her husband” (1.2.363-368).

never errs, is never under-age, is never senile, transforms to English a foreign wife, or foreign-born heir” (97). If the body politic can make someone foreign-born English, it should also be able to raise the rank of a nobleman (Antonio is an *hidalgo*, a member of the lower strata of the nobility) who is not quite of high enough rank to marry a Duchess. The young Duke of Amalfi acknowledges this when, after he learns of his mother’s marriage, he says to Antonio:

Alçate, Antonio, no es bien  
que estés ansí, ya que Dios  
puso en estado a los dos,  
que soy tu menor también.  
Fía de mi voluntad,  
que te estimo como a padre,  
que a mí me dio ser mi madre  
y a ti te dio calidad. (3.3149-56)

Rise, Antonio. You ought not  
to be on your knees to me,  
since God has sanctioned your house.  
I am your junior, Antonio.  
Trust my good willingness:  
I esteem you as a father;  
for my mother gave me being,  
and she gave you nobility. (3.889-896)

The young Duke in this speech accepts the power of his mother’s body to engender political power: first in him by giving him life as the heir to the duchy of Amalfi, and then in Antonio by marrying him, thereby transferring the forgiving power of the body politic to his social status.<sup>8</sup> In so doing, the young Duke realigns Camila’s marriage within the traditional patriarchy. The play therefore suggests that Camila’s marriage “does not finally threaten the status quo” (Baker and

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<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Webster’s text ignores this possibility. Ferdinand and the Cardinal murder the whole family because Antonio and his children have tainted their bloodline. No character considers the power of the body politic as able to raise Antonio’s status.

Whitenack 59), and this is in part because the play acknowledges the powers of the body politic in general and of Camila's female body in particular to engender nobility.

The young Duke's acceptance of his mother's husband questions the rightness of Julio's cruel revenge at the end of the play. This subtly critiques the honor code that makes Julio feel justified in murdering Camila's new family and brings to the forefront questions of whether *honra* or *honor de opinión* should be prioritized. Baker and Whitenack suggest that the young Duke's acceptance "calls into question Julio's extreme actions in defense of the family honor" (60). The end of *El mayordomo*, consequently, can be read as a critique of the confusion of *honor* with *honra*. Julio pursues *honor de opinión* (protecting the bloodline) at the expense of his personal *honra*, becoming the villain in his decision to abandon inner virtue for the sake of reputation. The young Duke's acceptance of his mother's marriage both reminds the audience of the difference in *honor* and *honra* – by accepting his mother's new husband, the young Duke demonstrates the importance of *honra* over *honor* – and realigns the Duchess's marriage within the traditional patriarchy. The issue of choosing between *honra* and *honor* is remedied by Camila's body politic's ability to raise Antonio's status to her own.

Comparing the presentation of the power of the body politic in each play illuminates the perceived balance of power between the body politic and the body natural. Lope's play follows the traditional schema of the theory of the king's two bodies: the body politic is much more powerful and more important than the body natural. Webster's play, however, is more equivocal: the body natural is continually prioritized over and given a greater power than the body politic. *El mayordomo*'s position on the theory of the king's two bodies highlights the unorthodox position it is given in *The Duchess*. This underscores the importance of exploring why Webster's

play would reflect a prioritization of the body natural over the body politic when the traditional understanding of the theory prioritized the body politic.<sup>9</sup>

Part of this vision becomes clear when we examine these two plays about female rulers written shortly after Queen Elizabeth's death, in particular each play's portrayal of the female ruler. As previously discussed, the theory of the king's two bodies was particularly important to Queen Elizabeth. Quintero reminds us of Elizabeth's

contention that the eternal body politic (understood to be male) was only temporarily embodied in the weak vessel of a woman, Elizabeth herself. For the English queen, the importance of this controversial theory was determined by the question of gender: she and her supporters frequently used the language of the king's two bodies to justify the undesirable rule of a woman. (165)

Elizabeth's use of the theory to cement her political power and to justify her reign makes understanding the plays' relationship to the theory of the king's two bodies that much more important. It is therefore vital to examine each play's portrayal of the female ruler in order to understand the major concerns of each play and the way each play uses the theory of the king's two bodies to further its internal ideology.

### **Camila and the Duchess: Power Dynamics**

In order to discuss the different portrayals of the female ruler in each play, we must begin with a list of the most important differences between the two. The most obvious difference lies in their names. Lope's Duchess is given a name, Camila, whereas Webster's Duchess is never named: she is referred to only as "the Duchess" or "the Duchess of Malfi," as though she has no

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<sup>9</sup> The section on *The Duchess of Malfi* in this essay will investigate much more thoroughly Webster's vision of a new social order.

life or personhood outside her role as the ruler of the duchy of Malfi.<sup>10</sup> It is as though Webster's Duchess is less a character in her own right and more a personification of a female ruler. Kinney suggests that by not giving the Duchess a name, "it is as if her position more than her person were his main subject" (639). While Camila can give up her right to rule the duchy in order to live peacefully with Antonio, the Duchess, by reason of her name alone, cannot. She is "the Duchess of Malfi still" (4.2.152). This makes her efforts to divorce her body politic from her body natural that much more significant and underscores her tragic inability to effect the divorce of the two.

The most important difference between Camila and Webster's Duchess lies in their power as a ruler. Webster portrays the Duchess as a ruler in her own right, and the young Duke of Malfi appears to have no role in the governing of the estate. He is, in fact, only mentioned once in passing by Ferdinand in Act 3. In Webster's play, the young Duke seems to be a convenient device by which the Duchess is given her power, and this privileging of the Duchess's role allows Webster to explore the issues associated with a female ruler's two bodies. This theme, so predominant in Webster's text, is almost completely absent from Lope's: Camila is merely the regent for the young Duke of Malfi, who makes several appearances throughout the play and is first mentioned early in the first act, making the audience aware of his existence early on. As Dawn Smith points out, this is a deviation from the source text, where the young Duke also has almost no role in the action of the story ("Text" 82). This allows Lope to avoid potential problems associated with female rulers and focus instead on other social and political concerns, such as honor and class differences. Camila's power as regent is so narrowly defined that she

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<sup>10</sup> From this point on, whenever I distinguish between the two duchesses, I will refer to Lope's Duchess as Camila and Webster's Duchess as the Duchess. I will still, on occasion, refer to both of them as "the Duchess" when necessary.

cannot remarry without losing her powers as regent. When Ottavio confesses his love of Camila to Antonio, Antonio tries to dissuade Ottavio by reminding him that, should the Duchess remarry, she will lose her wealth and power:

Ese día  
Que el cassar la dé cuydado,  
De su hijo y de su estado  
Perderá la tutoria (1.82-5)

when I yield up her care to a husband  
she loses the ward of her son,  
and of her estate as well.” (1.83-5).

Perhaps for this reason, Camila’s brothers urge her to marry (2.1168-72/ 2.16-20) specifically because they hope she will lose her position of power, whereas the Duchess’s brothers order her not to marry (1.2.208-217) because they know they will lose what little control they have over her and her duchy when she remarries.

*The Duchess* and *El mayordomo* not only create different roles for the Duchess as ruler, but they also present different attitudes toward female rulers. Whereas *The Duchess* presents the Duchess as a capable ruler (despite her decision to abandon it in act three), *El mayordomo* reminds the audience of the negative consequences of a female ruler. Camila, and those around her, make continual references to the disastrous consequences of female rule. Camila herself acknowledges that she cannot make a good ruler:

nunca he querido, en efeto  
a mi discreción creer,  
que gobierno de muger,  
¿cómo puede ser discreto?  
Por esso te traxe aqui,  
y pues que me has governado  
hijo, casa, hazienda, estado  
con el valor que ay en ti,  
quiero que de aquí adelante

me hables de otra manera. (1.356-65)

In effect, I have never chosen  
to believe in my own judgment.  
A woman's government –  
well, how could it be wise?  
For that I have brought you here.  
And since you have governed for me  
son, house, dukedom, and estate,  
with merits that are your own,  
I wish from this time forward  
that you speak to me otherwise. (1.359-368)

It is clear from these lines that Camila is not the true ruler of the duchy of Amalfi in any capacity other than name: Antonio actually runs the estate. Because Camila has ceded her power to Antonio, despite his inferior rank, he has more actual control over the duchy than Camila does. Whereas *The Duchess* more explores the consequences of female rule and collapsing the distinction between the two bodies, *El mayordomo* more interrogates who makes a good (masculine) ruler and whether noble blood is what makes a person a noble ruler. Allowing Antonio to effectively rule the duchy of Amalfi allows the play to question the commonly held belief that nobility alone makes one an effective ruler.

Through Antonio, *El mayordomo* engages with the question of *honra* versus *honor*. *Honor* suggests a priority on bloodline and nobility, whereas *honra* prizes inner virtue and strength. Camila clearly believes in the triumph of *honra*: she believes her brothers will be moved to forgiveness by “el valor, partes, y ingenio / del señor Antonio, a quien, / con ser quien soy, no merezco” (3.2483-5); “the mind and courage / of my lord Antonio, of whom I, / being who I am, am not worthy” (3.215-7). Camila believes Antonio is more worthy of ruling the duchy not just because she is female but because his virtue trumps her nobility. *El mayordomo* appears to agree with her assessment. Of all the adult male rulers in the play (Julio, Ottavio, and

Antonio), Antonio is the most noble in virtue, and the only powerful adult not represented as murderous or corrupt. Although Ottavio is partially redeemed by his horror at Julio's cruelty at the end of the play, his earlier role in the conspiracy to kill Antonio underscores his corruption. The portrayal of the male rulers, with the exception of the young Duke at the end of the play, suggests that *honra* rather than *honor de opinión* should be prioritized in a ruler.

Despite Antonio's inferior status, it is commonly accepted knowledge that Antonio, not Camila, runs the estate. This allows the play to explore its concerns with the attributes of a good ruler. Urbino, Camila's secretary, tells Ottavio, Camila's suitor, as much:

*Urbino.* Antonio su mayordomo,  
es el señor de su estado.

Por él se vive, él da leys.

*Ottavio.* ¿Buena persona?

*Urbino.* Muy buena. (2.1226-30)

*Urbino.* Antonio, her steward, is the one  
that governs her estate.

She lives through him: he disposes.

He gives, takes away, makes the law.

*Ottavio.* A good man?

*Urbino.* A very good man. (2.74-78)

Urbino's words indicate that Camila has no real power – “she lives through him” –and, consequently, Ottavio is more concerned with Antonio's morals than with Camila's power. Ottavio's concern with goodness becomes ironic in the face of Ottavio's own corruption. The ease with which everyone accepts Antonio as the de facto ruler underscores the play's ambivalence toward female rulers. While Antonio is murdered for his presumption in marrying Camila, no one objects to Antonio's de facto reign. Because Camila is a woman, it is better for an inferiorly-ranked man to run the realm rather than risk the dangers of a female ruler. In Spain, Quintero asserts, the body politic, and the qualities associated with ruling, are assumed to be



You play the wire-drawer with her commendations.  
*Antonio.* I'll case the picture up. Only thus much –  
All her particular worth grows to this sum:  
She stains the time past, lights the time to come. (1.2.108-27)

Because Antonio focuses the Duchess's virtue in her physical person, discussing the looks she gives and her countenance, he grounds her virtue not only in her body politic, but also in her body natural. This passage lays the groundwork for *the Duchess's* prioritization of the body natural as superior to the body politic by acknowledging that the Duchess's body natural is equally responsible for her virtue. Antonio believes the Duchess's perfection not only makes the past look grim by comparison but provides hope for the future. This, of course, is borne out by the end of the play, when the power of her body natural suggests a new social order.<sup>12</sup> Antonio's rapturous description of the Duchess is so passionate that Delio refers to him as Antonia, a slip that Leah Marcus suggests is because "Antonio has compromised his masculinity through his adulation of the Duchess" (1.2.123n). This speaks not only to the Duchess's power as a virtuous woman but to the subversive potential of that power. It has the ability to unman even the most virtuous men, and is therefore a tool the Duchess has at her disposal to control the duchy.

In *El mayordomo*, however, despite Camila's repeated concerns with her personal honor and doing right in the eyes of God, the person whose virtue inspires rhapsodies of praise is not Camila but Antonio. Camila says of him:

¡Qué bien habla, qué bien mira,  
qué bien escribe, y entiende!  
Qualquiera cosa que emprende,  
¿Su condición no te admira?  
¿No te espanta su buen modo,  
su verdad, su trato honesto,  
su vestir noble y compuesto,

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<sup>12</sup> Delio advocates this new social order when he says "Let us make noble use / Of this great ruin; and join all our force / To establish this young hopeful gentleman / In's mother's right" (5.5.108-111).

y su verdad sobre todo?  
¡Qué bien que pone los pies  
a un caballo, qué bien canta,  
qué gracia! (1.236-46)

So well-spoken a man! So handsome!  
How well he writes, and grasps  
Whatever he undertakes.  
How can you not admire him?  
His fine manners, Livia. Tell me,  
Are you not amazed  
By his truth, his honest bearing,  
His noble and impeccable dress –  
But his truth above all else?  
How well he sets his spurs  
To a horse! How well he sings!  
What grace! (1.239-250)

In each play, this scene is designed to introduce the audience to the almost overwhelming goodness of the character, and in each play, this ensures that the audience aligns their sympathies with this character. Rodriguez-Badendyck explains the importance of Antonio's virtue/*honra* to Lope's text: "Antonio's character is crucial to the meaning of the story. He is the measure of the Duchess's error, and it is the audience's evaluation of his worth which to a large extent determines whether she will appear to us as having broken a law or merely a convention" (23). It is important for the audience to buy into the idea that Antonio's *honra* is more honorable than Camila's and the Aragon family's *honor de opinión* in order for them to applaud, or even excuse, Camila's decision to marry Antonio. Why Webster chooses to focus his audience's attention on the Duchess and Lope on Antonio may be explained in part by cultural differences, as articulated by Luciano García García:

Biographical factors and a widespread social view...makes it customary that the sympathies of the audience lie with the humble or poor knight (the *hidalgo pobre*), more as a mechanism of release of the social contradictions of the aristocratic order of seventeenth century Spain than as a social recognition of the

new strength of the low gentry and emerging bourgeoisie. (53-4)

This is in contrast to England, where, García García asserts, society was “self-divided” and “in crisis, but highly dynamic and recovered” (54). Because society in Spain was more rigid and less dynamic, it is important for the audience to sympathize with Antonio even more so than with the Duchess, and Lope plays with the customary sympathy for the poor hidalgo.<sup>13</sup>

The similarity between Webster’s *Duchess* and Lope’s Antonio extends beyond their virtue to which character drives the action in each play.<sup>14</sup> Cynthia Rodriguez-Bayendick explains that “Lope has shifted the emphasis, subtly but decisively, to the steward Antonio” (33). In Webster’s play, however, the Duchess drives nearly all the action, making the decisions, creating the solutions, and Antonio, while supportive, seems almost weak and feminine in comparison. Dawn Smith articulates this when she says, “it is the Duchess who dominates the action. Even when she is not actually on stage, her presence is felt since the attention of the other characters is constantly fixed on her. Indeed, she will continue to dominate the action even after her death in act 4[,]” while Antonio is “little more than a bystander who is drawn into the tragedy, albeit as a compliant victim” (“Text” 80-1). In *El mayordomo*, however, while Camila introduces the idea of marriage to Antonio, Antonio drives most of the rest of the action. It is Antonio, not Camila, who presents subversive potential through his ability to govern despite his socially inferior status. Whereas *the Duchess of Malfi* subverts normal gender expectations in its portrayal of the Duchess, *El mayordomo*, by creating Antonio as the virtuous ruler, presents Camila as a woman who acts within the normal expectations for her gender: “This Duchess is no fiery individualist,

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<sup>13</sup> Webster, in contrast, because of his text’s concern with female rulers, spends more time developing the audience’s relationship with the Duchess to further his text’s ideological concerns.

<sup>14</sup> The two plays indicate their focus on the different characters in the titles of the play: *The Duchess of Malfi* versus *El mayordomo de la duquesa de Amalfi* (*The Steward of the Duchess of Amalfi*)

but a woman worthy to be a regent, in whom Christian and secular love are reconciled”  
(Rodriguez-Badendyck 24).

Camila, not only “no fiery individualist,” repeatedly denigrates women as rulers and as human beings: “Sé que mi casa anda mal, / al fin casa de muger” (2.1906-7); “I know if my house goes poorly, / well, it is a woman’s house” (2.755-6). Camila frequently seems the mouthpiece of a masculine fear of female rulers: women should not be allowed to rule because they are not men, and therefore, when they are given power, it is unsurprising when something goes wrong. This attitude toward female rulers is surprising, given that, according to Cruz and Suzuki, women ruled in one form or another in Spain from 1474 (Isabel of Castile) to the mid-sixteenth century (Juana of Austria, Isabel’s great-granddaughter). “None of these royal women has been viewed as governing independently from their husbands or sons...yet, as historians are now conceding, Spanish queens enjoyed a high level of autonomy at court” (103). Spanish men should, therefore, have been accustomed, at least at some level, to the existence of powerful women. And yet, as Quintero argues,

In my point of view, the portrayal of queens and the feminization of defective rulership in Calderón and other playwrights reflect a real ideological ambivalence toward female agency in general and female rule in particular. In the face of a political and historical reality where women had often assumed the throne in multiple principalities throughout Europe, there was still serious anxiety surrounding female sovereignty...there are questions raised by the staging within the *comedia* of extraordinary women wielding power that remain to be addressed.  
(3)

Almost two hundred years of female Spanish rule and, more recently, nearly fifty years of Elizabeth's reign in England, rather than assuaging the fears of the consequences of a female ruler, had brought them to the forefront. It is possible that the tense relationship with Elizabeth I resulted in a more complex attitude toward female rulers: while the women who ruled or helped

rule Spain did not ruin the country, Elizabeth I caused Spanish men to question the suitability of a female ruler. This concern with female rule was then, true to Lope's desire to reflect reality in his drama, filtered into early modern Spanish plays.

These masculine fears about female rule are reflected in various characters in *El mayordomo* who question not only the efficacy of female rule but also demean women in general. A strain of misogyny runs throughout several characters' dialogue, although it comes predominantly from Camila: "porque desde que nacen las mugeres, / comienza la desdicha de los hombres" (2.1884-5); "when a woman's born, a man's ruin begins" (2.734). It is significant that a great deal of the misogyny and doubting of a woman's ability to rule originates with Camila rather than the male characters. Men in the seventeenth century, especially those criticizing women, had for the most part a shared feminine ideal: "virtue, humility, modesty, tenderness, silence, diligence, and prudence were still the most desirable attributes in a daughter and a wife," although these virtues were not always represented in the woman depicted in seventeenth century drama (McKendrick 12). While Camila is not silent, she does meet most of the rest of these qualities. It is possible that, by having Camila repeatedly comment on women's inability to rule, the text is emphasizing her role as the feminine ideal. This raises the question of whether Camila truly believes the anti-female words she spouts, or whether she says them in order to use them to her advantage, as Josefina Ludmer suggests women such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz did in real life. Ludmer says of Sor Juana: "her stratagem (another characteristic tactic of the weak) consists in changing, from within one's assigned and accepted place, not only its meaning but the very meaning of what is established within its confines. As does a mother or homemaker who says, "I accept my place, but as a mother or homemaker I will engage in politics or science" (93).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The English quotation is from Stephanie Merrim's translation. See Ludmer's original Spanish: "La treta (otra típica táctica del débil) consiste en que, desde el lugar asignado y aceptado, se cambia no solo el sentido de ese

Following Ludmer's reasoning, it is possible that Camila acknowledges that she is not fit to rule (and, in fact, leaves most of the ruling to Antonio) in order to use the excuse of her weakness in order to accomplish what she wants.

Given the repeated attack on female rulers in *El mayordomo*, it might be tempting to assume that Lope de Vega opposed female rulers, and he used Camila to make his opinions known. And yet, as several scholars have pointed out,<sup>16</sup> Lope de Vega frequently wrote, at least for the sixteenth and seventeenth century, intelligent and capable female characters, several of whom ruled; and many of his plays at least seem to champion women's abilities and rights. For example, in *La prueba de los ingenios*, as Daniel Heiple points out, Lope seems to refute a misogynist tract, *Examen de ingenios* by Juan Huarte de San Juan, in which Huarte argues that the dumbest man is smarter than the most intelligent woman (125). In *La prueba*, Lope's women win the debate, which, according to Heiple, "would argue for Lope's dissatisfaction with Huarte's conclusions. The explicit refutation of Huarte's arguments gives us a standard by which to judge Lope's position on the feminist question" (130). Likewise, as Margaret Hicks discusses, in *La boba para los otros y discreta para sí*, Lope presents a female character, Diana, who inherits her father's dukedom and must contend with those who wish to take it from her. She successfully navigates court and outsmarts those who wish to control the duchy instead. Hicks asserts that "without openly challenging the assumption of woman's inferiority and without stepping outside the bounds of acceptable feminine behavior, Diana executes a performance that dramatically contradicts this negative valuation of women. Moreover, the contradiction itself

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lugar sino el sentido mismo de lo que se instaura en él. Como si una madre o ama de casa dijera: acepto mi lugar pero hago politica o ciencia en tanto madre o ama de casa" (53).

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Heiple makes the claim that, traditionally, scholars have viewed Lope as a "strong proponent" of feminism (121). Other scholars also offer textual evidence of Lope's pro-feminine leanings: Christopher Gascón (69), Margaret Hicks (137), Thomas Case (215-6), and Michael McGaha (166-7).

forms an ironic commentary on the validity of such anti-feminist sentiments” (137). As evinced by his plays, Lope clearly did not agree with Huarte’s assertions about women.

Because Lope presents pro-feminine ideas in several of his other works, Lope’s portrayal of Camila and the play’s repeated assertions of the negative consequences of female rule and female existence should perhaps be seen as effecting something other than reinforcing the traditional patriarchy. Quintero argues that in Spanish *comedias*, “women’s bodies are deployed in the service of bolstering absolutist power, and at the same time they are used – overtly or implicitly – to call the structures of power and gender categories to account” (10). Following Quintero’s line of reasoning, as well as taking into account scholars who present evidence of Lope’s pro-feminine leanings, it is possible that *El mayordomo* uses Camila to demonstrate not why women cannot rule, but to question why people unabashedly accept that noblemen, rather than noblewomen or men of slightly inferior rank, are best suited to govern the realm. *El mayordomo* seems far more interested in exploring problems in the current attitudes about ruling in general and with the question of *honor* versus *honra* rather than the problems associated with female rule. Ismael Rivera-Rodriguez points out that Lope purposefully “deviates from the audience’s accepted standards only enough to captivate its curiosity without arousing its disgust. Thus, he presents a love affair between two people of different social ranks, but emphasizing that Antonio, although a major-domo, is of noble birth” (110). By emphasizing that Antonio, too, is noble, *El mayordomo* focuses less on the transgressive nature of Camila’s and Antonio’s marriage and more on the disproportionate responses of Julio and Ottavio. *El mayordomo*, through its presentation of the other nobility, Ottavio and Julio, as willing to murder a man because he married a woman of a slightly higher rank, questions the traditional patriarchal social order and hierarchy, siding with those concerned more with *honra* than with *honor de opinión*.

Although Camila possibly represents a questioning of the traditional patriarchal order, she does at least partially believe in the patriarchal system in place. This reality is highlighted by the difference in the two plays' depiction of the Duchess's attitude toward her duchy and her family's honor. When Camila's maidservant Livia suggests that Camila's desire to marry Antonio is the result of "human frailty," i.e. the desire to have sex, Camila responds:

Luego piensas, Libia mía,  
que por mortal interés,  
a Dios, primero, y después  
a mi honor ofensa haría. (1.212-5)

Why, Livia, do you imagine  
that for mere human frailty  
I am willing to offend  
first God, and then my honour? (1.213-215)

There are two possible interpretations of these lines. The first is that Livia suggests that Camila just wants to sleep with Antonio, not marry him, and Camila responds, horror-struck, to the suggestion that she would so stain her honor. The other interpretation is that Livia understands thoroughly that Camila plans to marry Antonio, and she believes Camila is motivated by sexual desire she will not consummate unless she is married. If this is the case, then Camila's response acknowledges to Livia that she knows that because of their disparity in rank, marrying Antonio will offend both God and her honor. It is unlikely that Livia believes her mistress might descend to base fornication because Camila's protestations of her concern for her honor throughout the play suggest that Livia is well-acquainted with Camila's views on honor. Rather, it is more likely that Camila is concerned with the problem of marrying beneath her. The text supports this interpretation when, even after she has told Antonio, "No mires a mi nobleza, / habla como mi cabeza / y no como Mayordomo" (1.429-31); "Don't look upon my rank. / Speak as my head, Antonio, / not merely as my steward" (1.427-429), she says only a little later: "Antonio, a nobles

mugeres / nunca las trates así” (1.849-50); “You must never treat a noble woman thus” (1.848). Camila clearly still believes in the system she was born into: noblewomen deserve to be treated a certain way by a certain lower station of man. She might love Antonio, so she may make an exception for him, but she does so still deeply concerned with the propriety of her decision and with the importance of maintaining the family honor and name.<sup>17</sup>

Camila’s concern with maintaining the family honor extends to a concern for the duchy itself. While when Webster’s Duchess flees the duchy, she does so with apparent disregard for what will happen in her absence, Camila responsibly makes provisions for the duchy after she leaves it. She is willing to give up her position as the Duchess of Amalfi in order to live with Antonio and to allow the duchy to be unsullied by her decision to openly live with her husband. John Loftis argues that Camila “assumes humility in her misfortunes. She is in fact no longer the reigning Duchess, having abdicated in favor of her son by her first marriage” (72). Abdicating allows her to protect the duchy, herself, and Antonio. It also removes the problems of allowing a lower-ranked nobleman to govern to avoid a woman’s reign, returning Amalfi to rule by a traditional patriarchal figure. Webster’s Duchess, in contrast, despite her efforts to divorce her body natural from her body politic, does not abdicate her position when she flees. Rather, the closer she gets to her death, the more strongly she asserts her body politic: “I am Duchess of Malfi still.” The Duchess, nameless except for her title, cannot escape the duchy. She cannot be other than the Duchess of Malfi. *The Duchess of Malfi* uses the Duchess’s political power and

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<sup>17</sup> Compare to Webster’s Duchess, who cares so little for her family that she says, after her brother warns her not to marry, “Shall this move me? If all my royal kindred / Lay in my way unto this marriage, / I’d make them my low footsteps” (1.2.256-8). Webster’s Duchess also removes all distinction between her rank and Antonio’s, in contrast to Camila: “I do here put off all vain ceremony / And only do appear to you a young widow / That claims you for her husband” (1.2.366-8). The Duchess is unconcerned with rank, and this is borne out by the ending of the play and Delio’s new social order.

inability to escape it to question the traditional social order, whereas with Camila's abdication, *El mayordomo* restores the duchy of Amalfi to the traditional patriarchy.

*El mayordomo* represents Camila as concerned with not just her family honor but with her personal honor as well. In *Camila*, the play presents the portrait of a seventeenth-century woman concerned with virtue and propriety. She worries about her honor and doing right in the eyes of God:

pero como yo me case,  
y no padezca mi honor,  
que muerte por tanto amor  
no sera justo que passe. (1.705-8)

But as long as I am married  
and my honour does not suffer,  
for such a love as this  
death is an easy bargain. (1.704-7)

She is willing to die for her love – but only if her honor does not suffer. This suggests that her honor is more important to her than love; honor, as any Spanish noblewoman in the early modern period would have been expected to believe, is more important than life itself. When Antonio suggests that he will “har[á] abeja mi desseo / y flor de [su] boca har[á]” (1.893-4); “make [his] desire a bee / and make [her] mouth a flower” (1.891-2), Camila immediately corrects him:

¿Tal cosa osaste dezir?...  
no has de tocarme en parte, de que sienta  
mi honor alguna afrenta...  
por escusar deshonra, y por la ofensa  
de Dios, que ha de ser piensa, amado Antonio,  
en justo matrimonio mi desseo;  
si lo entendiessen, creo que mi vida  
y la tuya perdida fuesse a manos  
de aquellos dos hermanos generosos.” (1.896, 905-6, 909-14)

How dare you suggest such a thing?...  
You may not touch me anywhere that honour

may feel an affront...  
Antonio, beloved, so that we may shun dishonor,  
and more than that, avoid offense to God,  
my consent must be to proper marriage only.  
And even so, if my brothers should learn of it,  
I do believe my life and yours are lost (1.894, 903-4, 907-11)

In both of these passages, although Camila knows that her brothers will be furious if she marries someone against their will, she is willing to undertake that risk not just for Antonio's sake but because she cannot and will not go against her honor by entering into a sexual relationship outside the bounds of marriage.<sup>18</sup>

Where Webster's Duchess appears to defy her brothers by marrying Antonio as an assertion of her own power and her brothers' inability to prevent her – when Ferdinand confronts her about her marriage, she responds, “Why should only I, / Of all the other princes of the world, / Be cased up like a holy relic?” (3.2.135-7) – Camila seems to enter into the marriage because she must if she is to retain her honor, despite her fears of what her brothers will do. Judith Whitenack suggests that “Lope presents Camila and Antonio to us as true and virtuous lovers who, because of the presence of a male relative obsessed with the honor code, are doomed to die undeservedly for their love” (215). Regardless of the almost impossibility of secrecy, she insists on an official church-sanctioned marriage, and while the marriage takes place off-stage, much careful planning, and consequently subterfuge, goes into how to be married by a priest while maintaining the Duchess's anonymity.<sup>19</sup> This contrasts with Webster's Duchess, who prioritizes

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<sup>18</sup> Compare to Webster's Duchess, who says of her decision to marry Antonio, “Let old wives report / I winked and chose a husband” (1.2.263-4), or, in other words, that she does not care what gossips say about her choice of a mate (Marcus 1.2.263-4n)

<sup>19</sup> This is in direct contrast to both the source text and Webster, where the Duchess and Antonio are married by a *per verba de praesenti* ceremony in which there is no priest, only a declaration of an intent to marry in front of a witness (1.2.386). The Duchess demonstrates an almost heretical lack of concern for the Church's blessing. When she and Antonio exchange their vows, the Duchess declares:

*Duchess.* What can the church force more?  
*Antonio.* That fortune may not know an accident,

personal choice rather than institutional blessing in her marriage ceremony. While Webster's Duchess is depicted as acting outside of and against socially acceptable behaviors for women, Camila acts within the bounds of her traditional patriarchal society and its demands. Rodriguez-Badendyck argues that Lope "reveals himself in *The Steward*<sup>20</sup> to be the subtle and intelligent advocate of a human and moral value system against an aristocratic code. The means by which he wins audience consent to the marriage of Antonio and the Duchess is not, as we have said, the verbal exposition of reasons and principles, but the presentation of character, situation, emotion and humour" (28). In order to advocate this human and moral value system and the prioritization of *honra* over *honor de opinión*, Antonio and Camila must both be above reproach, and, consequently, the text must carefully depict them as remaining within the bounds of traditional patriarchal society in everything but their socially transgressive marriage to one another.

### **Fate, Choice, and Tragedy**

The Duchess's emphasis on the importance of her and Antonio's choice for the marriage ceremony reinforces *The Duchess's* emphasis on the power of choice rather than fate in driving the action. This is in contrast to *El mayordomo*, where, although choice does factor into the tragic ending, fate plays a large role in the denouement of the action. Despite Antonio and Camila's repeated comments in Act I that their actions will lead to their death if Julio and the

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Either of joy or sorrow, to divide  
 Our fixed wishes.  
*Duchess.* How can the church build faster?  
 We now are man and wife, and 'tis the church  
 That must but echo this. (1.2.397-99)

Webster's Duchess places more importance on personal promise and conviction than on the church's ritual or sanction. This would have been an extremely unorthodox view of marriage. John Loftis cites John Russell Brown's explanation: "When a couple declared that they were man and wife (with or without a deposition in writing), they were legally married. The church's official attitude was that these marriages were valid and binding, but also sinful and forbidden; offenders had to solemnize their marriage *in facie ecclesiae*" (qtd in Loftis 69).

<sup>20</sup> "*The Steward*" is the English translation for "*El mayordomo*"

Cardinal find out, Camila and Antonio are both optimistic about the outcome of their revelation. They believe that “amor cualquiera yerro abona” (3.2297); “love must redeem any fault of ours” (3.28), and when Bernardo tells Antonio that Camila’s brothers will come for Antonio once they discover the truth, he replies

mas yo fío de principios tan buenos,  
que aquella espada contra mí desnuda  
embaynará piedad de dos sobrinos,  
como a la sangre la nobleza acuda...  
mas pienso que serán en esto humanos. (3.2305-8, 2314)

But I trust that for two such worthy princes  
The naked sword that is drawn against me  
Will be sheathed by pity for their niece and nephew;  
Nobility seconds blood in that...  
I think they will be human in this. (3.36-39,45).

These lines, juxtaposed with the violent events of the third act, demonstrate the almost unbelievable naiveté of Camila and Antonio in the face of her brothers’ greed and pride.

Julio’s reaction to their marriage should have been exactly what they were expecting, given that in the first act alone, they say no fewer than five times that if Camila’s brothers discover their marriage, it will result in their death (1.258-9/1.261-2; 1.653-5/1.651-4; 1.702-708/1.701-7; 1.912-4/1.907-11; 1.969-72/1.965-970). Granted, eight years have passed since they repeatedly declared the danger of their decision to marry, but even so, such a complete reversal in their belief about Camila’s brother’s reactions to their marriage should strike the audience as strange. Although Camila and Antonio choose to reveal their marriage to the world, their almost willful ignorance in the face of what they know about her brothers demonstrates an intertwining of fate and choice throughout *El mayordomo*. All reason suggests they should at least proceed with caution, instead of blindly assuming their love and their children will win over Julio, and their blindness in the matter hints at the involvement of tragic fate in the course of

action. *El mayordomo* early on introduces fate as one agent controlling the actions of Camila and Antonio. When Camila and Livia first speak of Camila's decision to marry Antonio, Livia says:

Mas pues ya tu mala estrella  
a tanto mal te inclinó  
que tu autoridad baxó  
donde Antonio la atropella:  
Por Dios te ruego que adviertas  
al secreto de tu honor. (1.248-53)

But if some malignant star  
Eggs you on to such folly, madam,  
That you lay down your pomp and power  
For a steward to trample on,  
At least, pray you in God's name,  
Take some care for your honour's secret. (1.251-256).

Livia clearly believes, despite Camila's repeated assertions that she knows exactly in what danger she is putting herself and Antonio, that fate is forcing Camila into such a terrible decision, a belief supported by the almost unbelievable naiveté Camila and Antonio display when they decide to make public their marriage.

Livia's belief about the malignant star controlling the Duchess's decisions calls to mind the "star-cross'd lovers" of Romeo and Juliet. Romeo and Juliet also willingly enter into a marriage they know will bring trouble upon them, and fate, too, conspires against them. Romeo kills Tybalt in a fit of rage and vengeance and is therefore exiled; Juliet's father tries to force her to marry Paris, causing Juliet to fake her own death; the letter telling Romeo she is not actually dead does not reach him before he hears of her death, purchases poison, and decides to return to Verona; he takes the poison in her tomb moments before she awakes; and then she kills herself in despair. While Romeo and Juliet willingly make a choice to marry each other, the rest of their story plays out through a series of accidents, as if controlled by fate. This series of accidents in Romeo and Juliet, clearly depicted as the result of fate and being "star-cross'd," is reminiscent of

the series of accidents that lead to the discovery of Camila's second child and the way the action unfolds in the second half of the play.

While Lope de Vega did write a play on Romeo and Juliet based on the same source text from which Shakespeare's sources wrote (Richmond 82), there is no evidence to suggest he was familiar with Romeo and Juliet when he wrote *El mayordomo*. However, the unfolding of the action in Romeo and Juliet, as well as its emphasis on fate, is useful in understanding the parallels to the unfolding of the action in *El mayordomo* as also a result of fate. Edward Friedman, in his discussion of Lope's *El castigo sin venganza* discusses Lope's adherence to classical tragedy in his use of fate:

The characters are enacting predetermined roles in which a tragic impulse – a tragic push – is felt at all times. One might say that passion predominates over reason, but that would imply a choice denied to the protagonists...*El castigo sin venganza* is not an allegory of the theological battle of determinism versus free will, but instead a projection of determinism onto a formula for tragicomedy. (217)

Friedman's words about *El castigo sin venganza* also fit *El mayordomo*. While Camila and Antonio do choose to be together, the suggestion of fate by Livia, as well as the way the action of the play unfolds, suggests that, like Romeo and Juliet, like the characters in *El castigo sin venganza*, Camila and Antonio are compelled by fate to enter into a relationship doomed to end in death.

John Loftis suggests that in *El mayordomo*, Urbino takes the role Bosola plays in *The Duchess* (68), and it is significant to note that while Bosola is an agent of choice – the Duchess is led to her death predominantly through the choices he and others, including the Duchess, make – Urbino predominantly acts as the agent of fate. After Livia hands Antonio a piece of paper with the name of Camila's beloved, Urbino sees the exchange and demands to see the note; Antonio gives him the last four letters on the sheet of paper, declaring to himself that from those four

letters Urbino “no sabrá concertar / por escusar de criar / enemigos contra mí” (1.646-8); “can in no way construe / or use as an excuse / for enmity against me” (1.643-5). This declaration seems almost unbelievably foolish, given that less than thirty lines later, Urbino figures out that “oino” refers to Antonio, although he erroneously believes Livia, not Camila, is the one who loves Antonio. After Camila gives birth to her daughter, Antonio briefly exits the stairwell, and Urbino enters. In the dark, Livia believes Urbino to be Antonio and puts the newborn daughter into Urbino’s, not Antonio’s, arms. Antonio shows up late, revealing that he was held up by Ottavio who chose the most inauspicious moment to return to renew his suit for Camila’s hand. When Antonio realizes that someone else is in the hallway, he exclaims

¡Válgame Dios!, nunca vi  
de noche en este lugar  
gente ni passer ni estar,  
oy es todo contra mí. (2.1482-5)

Heaven help me. I’ve never seen  
anyone here at night,  
not even passing by.  
Everything conspires against me. (2.331-4).

The hallway by Camila’s chambers is never frequented by people, except on the one night the Duchess has a child. This is either a terrible coincidence, or, more likely, given that fate as the agent of tragedy has already been introduced, this is fate in execution.

Despite this unfortunate occurrence, fate seems to, at least temporarily, favor Antonio and Camila; however, this supposed fortune helps lead to their downfall. Urbino, blinded by jealousy and his love for Livia, determines that the child is Antonio and Livia’s, rather than Antonio and Camila’s. Antonio expresses his relief at fortune’s seeming grace: “de mi fortuna humanamente fiera, / pues ya que tanto mal me ha sucedido, / ha errado el blanco donde el tiro ha sido” (2.1563-5); “fortune has been mercifully cruel to me: / after all that has happened today,

the worst / has missed its mark at which it was aimed” (2.412-4). However, what seems to be fate being merciful is actually fate being cruel. Given Urbino’s reaction to the revelation that Camila and Antonio are married – “Quien mereció ser tu esposo, / ¿por qué no sera mi dueño?” (3.2526-7); “Who was worthy to be your husband / - why should he not be my lord?” (3.257-8) and “no he servido / al Duque, sino solo a mi señora” (3.2903-4); “I have not / served the Duke, but only my lady” (3.634-5) – had Urbino discovered the truth of the baby’s parentage, he most likely would have been loyal to Camila and kept her secret. But, precisely because of his misunderstanding of the situation, he confides in Ottavio that Livia has had a child, and Ottavio determines, correctly, that the child is actually Camila’s. Because the power of Urbino’s love and jealousy blinds him, he is unable to see the truth in front of him (had the child actually been Livia’s, she probably would not have been up and about but in bed recovering). This blindness is what drives him to tell Ottavio, which leads Ottavio to discover the truth and to inform Julio, which, of course, leads to the tragic end of the play. Through a combination of fate, foolishness, and jealousy, Antonio and Camila are led to their tragic end.

The role of fate in the denouement of *El mayordomo* contrasts directly with the way the action plays out in *The Duchess of Malfi*, in which the Duchess and Antonio arrive at their own tragic ends through a series of deliberate choices by various characters. Unlike Camila and Lope’s Antonio, the Duchess and Webster’s Antonio are not so thoroughly convinced of Ferdinand’s and the Cardinal’s murderous intentions should they discover the marriage. Antonio asks her right before they perform their *per verba de praesenti* marriage ceremony:

*Antonio.* But for your brothers?  
*Duchess.* Do not think of them.  
 All discord without this circumference  
 Is only to be pitied and not feared.  
 Yet should they know, time will easily  
 Scatter the tempest. (1.2.377-81)

The Duchess does not fear her brothers as much as Camila does, no doubt in part because of the difference in their roles: as the ruler of the duchy of Malfi, the Duchess has considerable more power than Camila, as the figurehead regent of the duchy of Amalfi, who leaves the actual governance to her steward, yields. Loftis compares Webster's Duchess's courage with Camila's: "that the Duchess, after such admonitions, proceeds at once with her courtship of and marriage to Antonio accentuates her independence of spirit," whereas "Lope's Duchess and Antonio are aware of the danger posed by her brothers, but the brothers' absence diminishes the impression of audacity conveyed by the marriage" (68). The Duchess's independence and political power are part of what drives Ferdinand to murder her because he is so obsessed with controlling her, and yet she cannot be controlled. Perhaps because of the Duchess's willpower and political power, fate does not control her outcome. Her own choices lead to her downfall. Her maidservant Cariola's words after the marriage ceremony contrast with Livia's fearful warnings about fate: "Whether the spirit of greatness or of woman / Reigns most in her, I know not; but it shows / a fearful madness. I owe her much of pity" (1.2.410-12). Unlike Livia, Cariola does not believe that fate is controlling the Duchess's actions, but that she is making her own choices, wise or unwise. Her choices, not fate, lead to the discovery of her marriage to Antonio. After she banishes Antonio to prevent their marriage from being revealed, she makes the choice, which ultimately leads to her downfall, to reveal her marriage to Bosola.

Choosing Bosola as a confidante is not done out of some foolish impulse, as is Lope's Antonio's decision to give Urbino the last four letters of Camila's note, but in response to his glowing endorsement of Antonio:

*Bosola.* Since the malice of the world would needs down with  
Thee, it cannot be said yet that any ill happened unto  
Thee, considering thy fall was accompanied with  
Virtue.

*Duchess.* Oh, you render me excellent music!  
*Bosola.* Say you?  
*Duchess.* This good one that you speak of is my husband.  
*Bosola.* Do I not dream? Can this ambitious age  
 Have so much goodness in't as to prefer  
 A man merely for worth, without these shadows  
 Of wealth and painted honours? Possible?  
*Duchess.* I have had three children by him. (3.2.273-283)

The Duchess is not tricked into revealing her marriage – Bosola does not suspect that Antonio is the Duchess's husband, so he does not praise Antonio to try to draw the Duchess into revealing him as her husband. Rather, his (probably) honest outpouring of indignation at Antonio's downfall prompts the Duchess to confide in him, not knowing he is Ferdinand's spy. Likewise, she is not tricked into returning to her palace under the false pretense of her brother's acceptance of and reconciliation to her marriage.<sup>21</sup> When Bosola brings soldiers to take her home, she does not believe his protestations that her brothers love and pity her and mean to keep her safe – “With such pity men preserve alive / Pheasants and quails, when they are not fat enough / To be eaten” (3.5.109-11) – and in the end she chooses to go with him rather than fighting or fleeing: “But come, wither you please, I am armed ‘gainst misery - / Bent to all sways of the oppressor’s will. / ‘There’s no deep valley but near some great hill” (3.5.140-2). Even in her choice to go with Bosola, she demonstrates her strength rather than her weakness. She will not be defeated; she inverts a common proverb (“There’s no hill without its valley” (3.4.142n)) to declare that she will not be beaten but will come out on top in the end. Despite the failure of her prophecy to come to pass, the Duchess is strong and undefeated to the end. Unlike Camila, who despite her defiance in the face of Julio unjustly arresting her, at the end is only able to react to what

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<sup>21</sup> As Judith Whitenack and John Loftis both note, Camila does display a certain sense of defiance in the face of Julio's anger and lack of justice. She demands to know if he has the king or pope's approval to arrest her (Whitenack 207, Loftis 76). Camila is not tricked into returning to the castle, either. However, she is tricked by her own willful ignorance into thinking her children and her love for Antonio will abate Julio's anger.

happens and is the victim of chance and fate, the Duchess makes her choice, and through those choices she is brought to her death.

The Duchess is not tricked into her death like Camila, whom Julio poisons, but, like her marriage, like her trust in Bosola, like her imprisonment, she enters into it willingly, at least seemingly still in control. She issues orders to the executioner:

Pull and pull strongly; for your able strength  
Must pull down heaven upon me.  
Yet stay – heaven gates are not so highly arched  
As princes' palaces; they that enter there  
Must go upon their knees. [*Kneels.*]  
Come, violent death –  
Serve for mandragora to make me sleep.  
Go tell my brothers, when I am laid out,  
They then may feed in quiet. (4.2.222-9)

The strength of the Duchess in her final moments and the ways she controls her death is in direct contrast to Camila's murder. In *El mayordomo*, Camila's death is tragic: she sees her dead husband and children's severed heads; she knows she is poisoned and dying; she promises Julio that God will punish him for what he has done; she laments the loss of her children and her husband in her final moments; and she dies (3.977-990). Her death causes Ottavio, the man who has loved her throughout the play despite everything, to go at least temporarily insane, and causes her young son the Duke of Amalfi to vow revenge for his dead mother:

*Amalfi.* Viles y infames soys todos,  
a todos os desafío,  
y a esta Cruz la mano pongo  
de no quitarla del lado,  
de no vestir seda ni oro,  
de no comer en mesa alta,  
ni el Tusón ponerme al hombro,  
hasta que tome vengança.  
Llevad el cuerpo, vosotros.  
*Urbino.* Aquí dio fin la tragedia,

Senado del Mayordomo,  
que como passó en Italia,  
oy la han visto vuestros ojos. (3.3274-86)

*Amalfi.* Vile and infamous, all of you!  
I defy every one of you;  
and I lay my hands on this cross  
not to quit it from my side,  
not to dress in silk or gold,  
not to eat from any raised table,  
nor wear the Fleece on my shoulder  
till I have taken vengeance!  
Look you, take up her body.  
*Urbino.* Here the tragedy ends  
which is entitled *The Steward.*  
As it happened in Italy  
you have seen it with your own eyes. (3.1007-1026).

Thomas Case suggests that, although Lope does not advocate for equality of the sexes or women in power, “[Lope] does show, on the other hand, that despite their subservient role in Spanish society, women can take action that forces men to undertake the duties assigned to them” (215). This is the power *El mayordomo* gives Camila in the end. Because she is represented as the regent, the audience can assume that the young Duke of Amalfi is not yet an adult, and yet, by the end of the play, the young Duke is acting the part of a man.

Dawn Smith asserts that “women are perceived as an essentially subversive force. Yet, while on the one hand, their presence is unsettling, even disruptive, they are also cast in the role of restorative angels, the repository of the enduring values of the hierarchical status quo” (“Introduction” 26). Camila is the restorative angel of the hierarchical status quo in her role in the passage of her son from childhood to adulthood. Judith Whitenack notes that “juxtaposed directly with the scene of Julio’s raving and threats of vengeance is the series of very human reactions for the young Duke: shock, jealousy, and then finally a generous acceptance of his

mother's husband and children...we can observe the Duke progressing gradually from passion to reason" (205-6). The Duchess's actions and then her death effects her son's transition into the role of patriarchal leader, thereby underscoring her importance as the restorative angel of the patriarchy. The young Duke goes from a childish reaction upon the revelation of his mother's marriage in which he decides his mother must love her new children more than she loves him (3.404-7), to quickly demonstrating adult understanding and abilities, culminating in his decision to "tak[e] up the terrible responsibilities of manly revenge" (Rodriguez-Badendyck 27).

By vowing vengeance for his mother, the young Duke is participating in the Spanish honor code interrogated throughout the play. However, because her death occurs in the very last lines of the play, the young Duke's vengeance is unrealized in the action of the play, and the audience is not given the satisfaction of seeing Julio punished. Furthermore, given what the audience knows of Julio's wealth and prestige, it is perhaps unlikely that the young Amalfi will be able to fulfill his promise of vengeance. Luciano García García certainly believes Amalfi will almost certainly be unable to avenge his mother, calling the vow an "inconclusive suggestion of poetic justice through the ineffectual promises of revenge by the young Duke" (55). The ending is therefore tragic in the way that *King Lear* or *Romeo and Juliet* is tragic – the deaths are tragic and there is a suggestion of justice, but it is unrealized and perhaps unrealizable. By representing the honor code as ineffective, *El mayordomo* is subtly critiquing the honor code, revealing its hollowness through not just Julio's and Ottavio's corruption but the young Duke's inability to effectively avenge his mother's death.

In Webster's play, however, because there is an entire act after the death of the Duchess, the audience is allowed to see the revenge take place. The Duchess's death is not just tragic but powerful and awe-inspiring. She is pitiable yet dreadful in the way she orders the executioner to

pull hard, the way in which she invites her death, and in the cold message she sends to her brothers. John Loftis argues that, through her torture, death, and vengeance, the play is able to “achieve sustained tragic horror of an intensity seldom encountered in Jacobean tragedy” (71). Her death affects not just the audience but Bosola, and he vows to avenge her death. This vengeance does take place, and all of the players involved in her death, including Bosola himself, are punished for their part in her murder. This not only allows the audience to have a sense of justice and closure about the Duchess’s death but also demonstrates the power of the Duchess even in her death. Whereas Camila’s death changes next to nothing, the Duchess’s death changes everything: it causes Ferdinand to go mad; it brings about Antonio’s, Ferdinand’s, the Cardinal’s, and Bosola’s deaths, and it allows for the possibility of a new social order.

From the two endings of the plays, we can clearly see a major difference in the greater thematic concerns of the plays and potentially the playwrights themselves. While Whitenack points out and cautions that “some have called Lope a chameleon for the various attitudes he appears to defend in different plays” (216), Lope’s play is undoubtedly deeply tragic in the end. However, while it hints at revolutionary ideas in its advocacy for prioritizing *honra* over *honor* and its suggestion that Antonio, not Camila, and not Julio, is truly noble and deserves to run the duchy the play ends solidly in line with the traditional patriarchy and social order. Whitenack and Baker argue that “Lope presents family honor as a legitimate (and legitimizing) principle with valid claims upon people” (58), that the young Duke only accepts his mother’s marriage when he determines that it will not affect the status quo (59), and that “the aberrant transgressive desire is endorsed only insofar as it does not affect the social order” (60). Julio may be corrupt, but the young Duke of Amalfi is noble both in character and in blood. The play therefore ends with a promise of the restoration of the rightful order: Julio will be punished, but the young Duke

of Amalfi will rule the dukedom in the place of Antonio and Camila and all will be as it was and as it should be. Baker and Whitenack observe that “in *Lope*, the social order is intact: we may question *who* is honorable, and we may question what may outweigh a commitment to honour, but the honor code itself remains normative. We surely mourn Antonio and the Duchess, but the order of succession is undisturbed” (61). I do not agree exactly with Baker and Whitenack: the representation of Julio, combined with the ineffectualness of the young Duke’s promise to avenge his mother’s death, does critique the status quo of the honor system that prioritizes *honor de opinión* over *honra*. However, despite this critique, Baker and Whitenack are correct in asserting that *El mayordomo* still ends within a traditional patriarchal system that is mostly undisturbed: the young Duke retains the duchy, and Antonio, after all, despite his inferior rank, has always been a member of the nobility, having both *honra* and *honor*. *The Duchess of Malfi*, however, ends with a call to revolution. In Delio’s final words, we see the play’s proposal for a new social order based on merit and inner nobility, based on the power of the female ruler’s body and will, and at least partially removed from the traditional patriarchal scheme determined by the traditional view of the theory of the king’s two bodies and the divine right of kings, as will be expanded and explored in the next section focusing solely on *The Duchess of Malfi*.

### Chapter 3: *The Duchess of Malfi*

John Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* explores early modern anxieties about a female ruler, the particular succession issues facing Elizabethan England, the controversial nature of the theory of the king's two bodies, and its particularly problematic link to women. According to the theory, the king had two bodies: the body politic and the body natural. The two were a perfect union, each entirely contained in the other, although the body politic was always held to be superior (Kantorowicz 9, 12). This theory allowed the succession to proceed untroubled and prevented discord between the death of the old king and the coronation of the new king (Halpern 70). Despite these benefits, the theory of a two-bodied king created legal and social conflicts. These became especially apparent during the reign of Elizabeth I, when the problematic nature of this theory was complicated by the ascension of not one but three female rulers in the British Isles within a relatively short period of time (Jankowski 221). This created a tension in early modern society between the woman's position as subservient to her husband and father (the body natural) and her political power as ruler (the body politic), and this tension radiated from the throne, affecting the status of women all over the country. The emphasis on the two bodies of the Queen created a peculiar link between women and their family's aristocratic status that resulted in women coming to symbolize their family's aristocratic position (Tennenhouse 79). This link placed great pressure on women to behave within the confines of their gender roles and their socially mandated roles as women of the aristocracy because the sin of a woman became the sin of her station and her family.

When an aristocratic woman also had political power, as in the case of the Duchess of Malfi, this association was only strengthened by the connection between the body politic and the body natural. Although the Duchess is not a monarch, Albert Rolls establishes that “the treatment of a duke as a figure analogous to a king with two bodies is by no means a radical addition to the theory. In the Middle Ages, Kantorowicz tells us, ‘social philosophy, in a blending of Augustinian and Aristotelian definitions, distinguished five [distinct corporate bodies]: household, neighborhood, city, kingdom, and universe’ (209). The head of each corporate community was thought to have two bodies like a king” (106). Therefore the Duchess, as a ruler with two bodies, physically embodies the problem of the theory of the two bodies. *The Duchess of Malfi* expresses social anxiety about a woman ruler and challenges the theory of the two bodies through Ferdinand’s confusion of the body politic and body natural leading to an unnatural, incestuous concern for his sister’s body and sexuality, through the sympathetic nature of the Duchess’s repeated attempts to reclaim the right to control her natural body by divorcing it from her body politic, and through the consequences of valuing the body politic over the body natural as illustrated by Ferdinand’s madness.

The theory of the two bodies was a well-known, popular idea during the early modern era. Axton tells us that “the peculiar circumstances of Elizabeth’s reign caused diffusion of this legal concept through quite popular channels of print” (15). As discussed in the introduction, early in Elizabeth I’s reign, the problems inherent in the body politic revealed themselves through the *Duchy of Lancaster Case*, where Catholic statesmen used the body politic to frustrate the wishes of the Queen’s natural body by refusing to invalidate a grant Edward VI had given. Perhaps because of the judges’ early frustration of her will through a carefully drawn distinction between her two bodies, Elizabeth I took pains to emphasize the relationship between the body

politic and her natural body: “Elizabeth insisted upon representing her body as one and the same as England. She made this equation on the grounds that her natural body both contained and stood for the mystical power of blood which had traditionally governed the land and made it English” (Tennenhouse 80). Elizabeth repeatedly compared the health of her natural body to the health of the state (Tennenhouse 79), a link that became more problematic as she aged: “Visible signs that her natural body was failing called into question the relationship between the queen’s two bodies upon which hinged in turn the monarch’s symbolic control over England” (Tennenhouse 81). As the relationship between the two bodies became simultaneously more nebulous and more important, the previously unconsidered question of which of the two bodies held precedence over the other took center stage, quite literally (Tennenhouse 87).

The problem of the succession only enhanced these concerns with the two bodies, and when James I took the throne in 1603, he went further than Elizabeth in his determination to make the two bodies one. He declared not that his body represented England, but that in his body natural the body politic was thoroughly united. This eliminated the discrepancies between the two bodies that Elizabeth’s lawyers used to try to control her because his two bodies were one and the same. In so doing, he “pre-empted the very theory by which [the lawyers] might have criticized him” and created discord because his “vision of union within his body natural did not correspond to political realities as the Commons saw them” (Axton 146). Many people, the lawyers included, were unhappy with James I for collapsing the distinction between his two bodies. According to Tennenhouse, in Elizabethan England, opposition to the monarchy manifested itself in contemporary drama through violence done to aristocratic women on stage. Because of this association of the aristocratic woman’s body with critiquing the monarchy, in Jacobean England, when a woman was no longer reigning, the aristocratic female was different

enough not to *be* the monarch (and therefore not a direct critique of James), and yet close enough that she could still *represent* the monarch. Tennenhouse therefore suggests that the aristocratic female in Jacobean England “was the site on which to stage an assault on the monarch” (79). As such, one possible interpretation of Webster’s text is a criticism of James’s decision to consolidate power by collapsing the distinction between his two bodies. Leah S. Marcus suggests in her introduction to the 2009 Arden edition of *The Duchess of Malfi* that Webster was a part of a group of playwrights who wrote predominantly through the lens of “anti-court sentiments” (14), although Marcus is careful to clarify that *The Duchess* cannot be boiled down to “the status of an anti-Catholic or anti-Jacobean tract” (14). Nonetheless, *The Duchess of Malfi* does present an implicit criticism of, if not James I, certainly the idea that the two bodies of the monarch are indivisible.

The play critiques the indivisibility of the two bodies by representing the ramifications of the theory through the figure of the Duchess, as well as by questioning the immortality of the body politic. At the end of *The Duchess*, where is the body politic? The play ends without a clear understanding of who has the Duchess’s political soul within his body. The confused succession at the end of the play suggests an uncertainty about the next ruler and who should receive the Duchess’s political inheritance. In addition to the radical new social order envisioned at the end of the play, *The Duchess of Malfi* conveys its criticism of the idea that the two bodies of a monarch are completely indivisible through the portrayal of the complex relationship between the Duchess and Ferdinand. The play also demonstrates the tragic potential of conflating the two bodies through the problems associated with the emphasis on the bloodline’s importance. The natural body and the bloodline’s link to political power and inheritance (through the conflation of the two bodies), magnifies to murderous proportions the necessity of a perfectly pure bloodline.

Because Ferdinand confuses the two bodies, he confuses the body natural's ability to engender life with the body politic's ability to engender political power. As a consequence, he fears that children from the Duchess's second marriage will be able to inherit the political power associated with her first.

### **The Conflation of the Two Bodies and the Problems of the Bloodline**

*The Duchess* links the problem of conflating the two bodies to issues of succession and bloodline through its emphasis on the Duchess's prioritization of her natural body. This prioritization leads to the problem of Antonio's children's confused inheritance, as explored by the new social order proposed in the last scene. Webster's Duchess, in contrast to both Lope's and the historical representation of the Duchess, cares very little for her family name and the nobility of her bloodline. From William Painter's historical account in *The Palace of Pleasures*, we know that "this Duchesse was of the house of Aragon" (363), that she was cousin to "Ferdinando and Federick of Aragon" (374), and that Federick was "sometime king of Naples" (361). Whether or not the Ferdinand mentioned is Ferdinand of Aragon, King of Spain, the Duchess's lineage and blood are undeniably royal. In the historical account, the Duchess shares her brother Ferdinand's concern (in the play) for the maintenance of their blood and name: "It appertaineth unto me to shew myself, as issued forth of the Noble house of Aragon. To me it doth belong to take heede how I erre or degenerate from the royall bloud wherof I came" (367). Significantly, in the play, the historical Duchess's preoccupation with the bloodline is ascribed to her brothers Ferdinand and the Cardinal, not to the Duchess, who does not seem concerned with the bloodline or political power at all. Even more significantly, this concern with the purity of the bloodline manifests as something aberrant. The Cardinal is depicted as evil, and Ferdinand's lust

for the Duchess's political power and money, coupled with his obsessive concern for the family status and bloodline, displaces itself as an incestuous desire for the Duchess's natural body.

From his first scene, Ferdinand displays an unseemly concern with the Duchess's body and sexuality resulting from this confusion. He instructs Bosola

To live i'th' court, here; and observe the Duchess,  
To note all the particulars of her 'havior;  
What suitors do solicit her for marriage  
And whom she best affects. She's a young widow;  
I would not have her marry again.<sup>22</sup> (1.2.169-173)

Ferdinand's emphasis is not on who comes to court her, but whom specifically *she* desires – whom the Duchess is considering marrying and who will control the duchy he wants for himself. In wanting to know whom she “affects”, Ferdinand wants to know who will be his political – and because of the conflation of the two bodies, his sexual – rival. His determination to know whom she favors also reveals Ferdinand's desire to control the Duchess and ensure the bloodline remains pure and unpolluted. Frank Whigham suggests that Ferdinand's desire for his sister is a “desperate expression of the desire to evade degrading associations with inferiors” (169). While Whigham's suggestion helps us better understand Ferdinand and partially accounts for Ferdinand's behavior, it does not fully explain the cause of his incestuous desire. Certainly, Ferdinand is anxious to avoid associating the Aragon name with socially inferior individuals, and his obsession with keeping the bloodline pure and keeping the power in the family (or, rather, in the control of Ferdinand and the Cardinal) does express itself as incestuous longing. However, this desire arises primarily not from the fear of degrading associations but from his confusion of

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<sup>22</sup> Although I consulted Arthur Kinney's edition as well, all quotations are from Leah Marcus's 2009 Arden edition.

the Duchess's body natural with her body politic. His lust for her political power expresses itself as lust for her physical body.

*The Duchess of Malfi* is not the first play to explore the potential for the theory of the king's two bodies to lead to incestuous associations when connected to a female monarch. Marie Axton in *The Queen's Two Bodies* discusses the potentially incestuous nature of a female ruler's body politic by relating an incident in which Elizabeth claimed, through her body politic, to be both mother (through her natural body) and spouse (through her body politic) to England. While she arguably did so to increase the importance of her relationship with her subjects, many were horrified by the incestuous association her body politic allowed her: "Gentlemen of Gray's Inn...pointed out the disastrous implications of her claim to be both spouse and mother of her realm by presenting the tragedy of state consequent on the unnatural marriage of Jocasta" (39). In a not-so-subtle hint, they commissioned a play featuring Jocasta and Oedipus in order to convey their horror to Elizabeth. Jocasta, as the mother and wife of Oedipus from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* who hangs herself upon discovering she has married her son and had his children, presents a particularly vivid illustration of the problems of an incestuous relationship resulting from the theory of the king's two bodies. This anecdote from Axton indicates that the idea of the body politic as potentially incestuous had already been explored in drama by the time Webster was writing *The Duchess of Malfi*, and he takes the concept of the body politic as incestuous one step further. For him, the potential for incest is not in the dual role of the body politic as mother and wife but in the potential for the confusion in a female ruler of the body politic, her political power, and the body natural, her sexuality. Ferdinand's concern with and lust for his sister's body illustrates the ease with which a female's political power can be confused with her sexuality.

The play emphasizes Ferdinand's confusion of the two bodies and his concern with the family power structure when he mentions their father's sword immediately after instructing his sister never to marry again:

*Ferd.*                                You are my sister.  
This was my father's poniard. Do you see?  
I'd be loath to see't look rusty, 'cause 'twas his...  
And women like that part which, like the lamprey,  
Hath ne'er a bone in't.

*Duch.*                                Fie, sir!

*Ferd.*                                Nay,  
I mean the tongue. Variety of courtship –  
What cannot a neat knave with a smooth tongue  
Make a woman believe? Farewell, lusty widow! (1.2.245-7, 251-5)

Like many conversations in *The Duchess of Malfi*, the disparate elements combined at first seem to make little to no sense. If Ferdinand is expressing his desire for his sister through the phallic symbol of the poniard, this leaves us with two questions: why does he mention their father, and how does the comment about the poniard rusting and the lamprey pun fit into the passage?

Theodora Jankowski provides us with a partial answer: "Ferdinand's reference to the poniard (and his implicit threat to use it) and to the lamprey/tongue/(penis) imply the demand (and desire) for more intimate sexual knowledge" (229). While this is certainly true, Jankowski's suggestion does not fully explain Ferdinand's confusion: the desire for sexual knowledge goes beyond Ferdinand's desire for a carnal relationship with his sister, and, I would argue, has little to do with a literal wish to copulate with his sister.

The sexual knowledge Ferdinand craves is a product of his desire for her power and wealth, his concern with the purity of their bloodline, and his anxiety about her, as a woman, having such political power. Because of his confusion of the body politic and the body natural, Ferdinand believes he can control her politically by controlling her sexuality. The poniard as a

phallic symbol expresses Ferdinand's desire to dominate his sister, who, because she is a Duchess of her own realm, a sovereign ruler, cannot be commanded as a man would normally instruct a woman in his family. By specifically recalling their father and emphasizing the poniard that belonged to him – “do you see?” – Ferdinand is attempting to remind the Duchess what is due to her family. In the early modern period, a woman's body “was seen as an object of trade to be owned by either father or husband... Thus, as Ferdinand and the Cardinal feel justified in controlling their sister's ‘use’ as a wife, they also feel justified in controlling the biological uses of her body – its ability to produce offspring” (Jankowski 228). Ferdinand reminds the Duchess that, despite the political power she wields as Duchess, despite the power given her natural body by her body politic, in the end, she is still a woman to be governed by her family. The Duchess may rule a duchy, but Ferdinand does not believe her capable of – or, perhaps, more accurately, does not want to allow her the power of – ruling her own heart and deciding wisely for herself, her family, and her subjects.

Through the poniard, Ferdinand wants to remind her that as a woman she still is under the power of her brothers, and that, furthermore, while her body politic may give her power beyond a normal woman's, her body natural is as weak as any other female's. He threatens the Duchess implicitly with their father's sword, saying he doesn't want it to rust, implying he does not mind using it if necessary. That he uses his father's sword rather than a sword of his own, that the phallic symbol and implied threat of penetration comes not from his instrument but from his father's, suggests how little power Ferdinand believes he has and how emasculated he feels by the Duchess's power. Stephen Orgel suggests that “women are dangerous to men because sexual passion for women renders men effeminate” (14), and while Ferdinand's passion is less for her physical sexuality and more for her political power, it expresses itself as incestuous desire,

thereby rendering Ferdinand emasculated by the very power he most desires. Perhaps Ferdinand must offer his father's poniard – an act that, according to Laura Behling, further emasculates him (39) – because he fears he has no power of his own. That he threatens the Duchess physically reveals how little power he has, or believes he has, over her politically and as the head of her family. He has to threaten her body natural because he “is threatened also by the Duchess, who he feels is capable of castrating his power, or subsuming his power, by re-establishing the bloodline” (Behling 36), or, in other words, because he is threatened by her body politic. Politically she is on equal footing with him, and he has no authority over her. That he has no control over her greatly disturbs Ferdinand, leading him to desire her wealth and power not only for their own sake but as a reassertion of the dominion of the traditional patriarchal system.

By casting the Duchess as a woman easily fooled, unable to distinguish truth from reality, Ferdinand expresses his anxiety about the family's social status at the same time he is, through his conflation of the body natural and body politic, trying to limit her power by denying her acumen in personal matters as well as political. By turning her into a simpleton, by denigrating her natural body and womanliness, he attempts to denigrate the power of her body politic in order to tip the scales of power in his favor. Hwa-Seon Kim rightly suggests that Ferdinand's desire is to reclaim his “political and economic power by reinforcing [his] logic that the Duchess's body should be inspected and controlled” (135). Ferdinand seems to be drawing on a common Renaissance trope that held widows to be lusty and promiscuous, unable to contain their sexual urges (Callaghan 3). If Ferdinand can convince himself, and the Duchess, that her widowed, womanly body cannot be self-controlled, then it follows that she must submit to the control of her brothers, and if so, they regain their proper role in the family dynamics. Ferdinand's logic does not work on the Duchess, but throughout this exchange, his primary

concerns reveal themselves again and again: he is concerned with the purity of the Aragon bloodline and the political power the Duchess wields as sovereign ruler, at odds with the subservience she should, as a woman, display within the family dynamics.

Ferdinand's conflation of the two bodies leads to an unseemly concern with his sister's bloodline. Her natural body, in the conflation of the two bodies, is given the power to engender not just life but political power. Because the Duchess is a woman, and female bodies were seen as having the potential to disrupt the flow of power from one man to another (Tennenhouse 81), the purity of the Duchess's bloodline becomes paramount to her brothers lest she disrupt the transfer of power from one royal male to another in favor of her inferior children produced from her marriage to a socially inferior man. Ferdinand's anxiety about being unable to control the Duchess and therefore the Aragon bloodline, consequently, is not just about preventing young Aragon half-breeds, but about controlling the flow of power from one male to another. His lamprey/tongue pun emphasizes this concern. Jankowski suggests that "Ferdinand's implication that all a woman can enjoy of a man is his tongue/penis suggests that all *she* is[,] is a mouth/vagina, a container for these objects" (229). It is the Duchess as a container with which Ferdinand is concerned: "what cannot a neat knave with a smooth tale / Make a woman believe?" The key to understanding why he mentions the lamprey at all is in the word "knave." Knave can mean simply a male boy or a dishonest man, but it can also mean a servant ("knave"), and herein lies Ferdinand's anxiety. He is worried that some well-dressed, well-spoken ("neat") man of a lower social status will come in and, with sweet, meaningless words, woo the Duchess into marrying him. By marrying him, the Duchess will become a container for his socially inferior child, who will have polluted the Aragon family's pure bloodline, and Ferdinand, with so little power, will be unable to stop it. As the end of the play makes clear, because of the potential for a



sex with a variety of lower class men. That Ferdinand fixates on the lower social status of the men in his fantasy reveals how his confusion of the body natural and the body politic intensifies his concern with the bloodline and the family name. It is almost inconceivable that she would have married a bargeman or a smithy. When Bosola discovers that Antonio knows about the Duchess's baby, he does not even consider that Antonio might be the husband, assuming instead that Antonio must be the Duchess's pander, because Antonio, as her steward, while still a gentleman,<sup>23</sup> is considered far too low to be a potential suitor to the Duchess (2.3.53-66).

But because Ferdinand's obsession with the Duchess's political power has been displaced onto her body natural, her sexuality is directly linked to her political power and social status. Sergio Bertelli in *The King's Body* cites examples of obsessive concern with royal sexuality, including nude portraits of monarchs as well as tales of tests of virility in which the man had to sleep with the virgin in order to prove that he was capable of producing an heir before a marriage contract could be agreed upon. He concludes that "the body of the sovereign was a fetish that contained a particular vision of the 'low life' of sexual reproduction" (165). Ferdinand certainly supports this conclusion, when he jumps immediately to a "low life" vision of the Duchess's sexuality. In Ferdinand's mind, a transgression against the one body (having sexual desire that results in her marriage) automatically means a transgression against the other (the marriage must be with a servant). The Duchess cannot be sexually transgressive without also being socially and politically transgressive. Her natural body comes to symbolize for Ferdinand her body politic, and, as this scene demonstrates, he cannot separate the two. Ferdinand's confusion of the two is clearly represented as problematic, as it leads to his incestuous, socially transgressive, sexual fantasy.

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<sup>23</sup> The rank of Lope's Antonio and Webster's Antonio is slightly different. Lope makes his Antonio an *hidalgo*, a member of the lowest nobility in Spain. Webster's Antonio is a member of the gentry but not the nobility.

## **Separating the Two Bodies: The Duchess and Ferdinand**

By demonstrating the problems of the theory of the two bodies through Ferdinand's conflation of the body politic with the body natural, the play first calls the theory into question, and then, through the Duchess's attempts to separate the two bodies, continues to explore the problems of the theory and begins to question the valuing of the body politic over the body natural. According to the theory of the king's two bodies, the body politic was "indivisible" from the body natural; the one was perfectly contained in the other (Kantorowicz 9, 12). As previously discussed, Elizabeth I encouraged the connection between her natural body and her body politic. She emphasized the idea that within her natural body all of England was contained, and vice versa. *The Duchess of Malfi*, however, presents a female sovereign who rebels against the unity of the two bodies: despite their purported indivisibility, the Duchess tries to divide them and, more importantly, consistently values the natural body over the body politic. In the courtship and marriage scene with Antonio, the Duchess tries to separate her political and natural bodies: in response to Antonio's reticence, the Duchess responds, "This is flesh and blood, sir; / 'Tis not the figure cut in alabaster / Kneels at my husband's tomb" (1.2.363-5). With this statement she is making a distinction between her two bodies: her body politic that has a duty to remain unmarried for the good of the dukedom, and her body natural that has the desires, and even the duty, of any woman to remarry.

The Duchess's separation of her two bodies at least partially succeeds until her natural body forces a collision with the body politic when her private marriage brings about a public pregnancy. In a normal "princely marriage," the pregnancy would be cause for celebration in the court (Sandberg 237), but, as the Duchess resolutely separates her marriage from her political

life, her pregnancy represents a larger problem for the court, as they do not know who the father is and what his pedigree is:

*Delio.* What say the common people?

*Antonio.* The common rable do directly say  
She is a strumpet.

*Delio.* And your graver heads,  
What would be politic, what censure they?

*Antonio.* They do observe I grow to infinite purchase  
The left-handed way, and all suppose the Duchess  
Would amend it if she could. (3.1.24-30)

The Duchess's pregnancy forces her to be largely absent from the workings of her court, which leads the commoners to believe she has become a strumpet, and the nobility to believe Antonio is robbing her. Both her political stability and that of the realm are threatened by her natural body's functions. Despite the Duchess's desire to separate her private from her public life, to separate entirely the two bodies, she cannot: "the boundaries of the Duchess's two bodies are indistinct and perpetually slipping" (Jankowski 229). This occurs precisely because the two bodies are never supposed to be separated, and therein lies the crux of the matter and the problem *The Duchess* explores. The Duchess cannot separate the two bodies because, as Elizabeth I so often reinforced, and James I preemptively attempted to use to his political advantage, the one is indivisible from the other.

Given the ideas about the two bodies in Elizabethan and Jacobean England – that the body politic cannot be separated from the body natural except upon death, and that the body politic should always be superior to the body natural (Rolls 58-9) – one would expect that the Duchess's attempts to separate the two bodies, and, even more importantly, to value the body natural over the body politic, would be depicted negatively in the play. While distinctions were made during Elizabeth's reign between the two bodies, the two bodies were always

acknowledged together, and the body politic was always prioritized over the body natural. When James came to power, he went even further than Elizabeth, declaring his bodies natural and politic to be exactly the same. Albert Rolls, in his discussion of *The Duchess of Malfi*, following the typical early modern ideas about the theory of the king's two bodies, negatively describes the Duchess's prioritization of the body natural, stating that the Duchess has "absented herself from her state...for the sake of her marriage. Her political body thus becomes, by definition, an absence as evil, though her natural body remains exemplary" (83). The audience and the play, therefore, should, be aligned with Ferdinand.

Despite this, the sympathetic portrayal of the Duchess throughout the play, combined with the portrayal of Ferdinand as cruel and unbalanced, invites the audience to view the Duchess's inability to separate the two bodies as a problem. The play's representation of Ferdinand and the Duchess suggests that the audience will fall on the Duchess's side, not the murderers', and when she chooses to abandon her body politic entirely to be allowed to live her private life as she wishes, fleeing her duchy when her marriage to Antonio becomes too dangerous (3.2-3), the play encourages the audience to applaud, or at least not condemn, this choice. Dawn Smith states that "we know from contemporary accounts that the play moved the audience, and it is difficult to believe that by act 4 they were not sympathetic with the Duchess, even if they may not have approved entirely of her behavior in act 1" ("Text" 85). The Duchess does not succeed in her attempts to flee the duchy and her body politic, but her failure to succeed is less a condemnation of her attempt to divorce the two bodies and more a condemnation of the patriarchal powers (Ferdinand and the Cardinal) that will not let her go. As Barbara Correll posits, "the careful staging of the duchess's failure to achieve her desire for life with Antonio because of the clearly unjust imposition of her brothers' cruel desires, through their intelligencer

and henchman, seems designed to provoke the audience” (82). The play aligns itself with the Duchess and invites the audience to question the patriarchal power and the theory of the body politic that leads to the persecution of the Duchess’s private family.

The play not only aligns itself with the Duchess and her belief in prioritizing the body natural over the body politic, but it actively shows the characters who most believe in prioritizing the body politic over the body natural as cruel, unbalanced, and evil. *The Duchess* demonstrates the consequences of this decision to value the body politic exclusively through its portrayal of Ferdinand and the Cardinal, particularly after they discover that the Duchess has had a child, proving she remarried against their wishes. The two are concerned only with the bloodline, heightened as it is by the conflation of the two bodies, whereby the Duchess’s natural body’s desires threatens the stability of the flow of political power from one male to another. Because of this, Ferdinand and the Cardinal react so that they can protect the body politic without regard to the filial affection they should have for the Duchess’s body natural. The unsettling, unbalanced nature of Ferdinand’s opening remarks sets the tone for their conversation about the proof that the Duchess has given birth:

*Ferd.* I have this night digged up a mandrake.

*Card.* Say you?

*Ferd.* And I am grown mad with’t.

*Card.* What’s the prodigy?

*Ferd.* Read there – a sister damned; she’s loose i’th’ hilts.  
Grown a notorious strumpet.

*Card.* Speak lower.

*Ferd.* Lower?

Rogues do not whisper’t now, but seek to publish’t  
As servants do the bounty of their lords  
Aloud; and with a covetous, searching eye  
To mark who note them. (2.5.1-8)

This disjointed conversation makes sense only when understood through the lens of Ferdinand's concern with the purity of the bloodline and the family status, increased as it is by his conflation of her two bodies. The news makes him angry for two reasons: first, because people are gossiping about the family name, and, second, because they do not know whether or not she has a husband, the pregnancy is not only a scandal besmirching the noble Aragon line but a threat to their own plans for political control of the Duchess and her duchy. Ferdinand is again, as in the scene with the lamprey/tongue pun, threatened by the power the Duchess demonstrates by defying her brother's wishes. Because of his conflation of her two bodies, his anxiety is heightened by the knowledge that not only can he not control her political power, but he also cannot control her sexuality.

The key to understanding this passage lies in the words *rogue* and *mandrake*. A *rogue* could mean a vagabond or a dishonest person, but it could also mean a servant, and when used as such, it is always derogatory ("rogue"). It galls Ferdinand that people of a lower social status – servants! – are talking about his noble family, and the political position he covets, in such a familiar and impertinent way. It is this he cannot get past, this why he mentions the *mandrake*. A *mandrake* is a root shaped like a small man that "was said to feed on blood (and commonly found near a gallows); to shriek when pulled from the ground; to madden those who sought it" (Kinney 2.501n). According to the *OED*, a *mandrake* could also mean "an unpleasant or unwanted person or thing, something to be rooted up" ("mandrake"). Taken together, these definitions form the final problem the Duchess's pregnancy causes Ferdinand: a *mandrake* root feeds on blood, and it is blood which concerns Ferdinand. As he does not know who the father is, he does not know whether the child will pollute his bloodline. Because the Duchess has kept the marriage a secret, Ferdinand aptly suspects that the husband is a man of lower social status. As

such, the child is the mandrake, literally and metaphorically: it is an unwanted person that must be rooted out and destroyed because it is unfit to carry Ferdinand's blood in its socially inferior veins. Ferdinand's and the Cardinal's assertions about the importance of restoring the family honor are undercut by their ignoble actions: "the Duchess's brothers voice a code of honor, but nothing they do seems to reflect a concern for honor, either as virtue or reputation" (Baker and Whitenack 57). Their personal lack of honor both invites the audience to see their hypocrisy and suggests that it cannot just be honor with which they are concerned. Ferdinand's conflation of the Duchess's two bodies gives the Duchess's natural body the power to transfer political power to her young, socially inferior child. Consequently, the child's presence indicates the potential for the disruption of the patriarchal flow of power and it therefore must be destroyed. The additional association of the mandrake with the gallows, a place of punishment, foreshadows what Ferdinand will inevitably do: destroy the whole impure bloodline, father, mother, child, in order to restore the integrity of the body politic, the purity of his family's social status, and to remove the threat of a new social order brought about by the disruption of the flow of power from one male to another.

### **The Hermaphrodite: Ferdinand and the Duchess**

*The Duchess of Malfi*, through its portrayal of the conflict between Ferdinand and the Duchess and their conflicting desires, sets up Ferdinand and the Duchess in direct opposition to one another. When the interest of the Duchess's body politic and body natural come into conflict, the Duchess chooses her natural body, whereas Ferdinand consistently values, and lusts after, the body politic. While the Duchess wishes to rid herself of her political body in order to be allowed

to do with her natural body what she wishes, Ferdinand expresses his desire to divorce himself from his natural body in order to focus more on his role as prince:

*Castruccio.* Methinks, my lord, you should not desire to go  
To war in person.

*Ferdinand.* Now for some gravity – why, my lord?

*Castruccio.* It is fitting a soldier arise to be a prince, but  
not necessary a prince descend to be a captain.

*Ferdinand.* No?

*Castruccio.* No, my lord. He were far better do it by a deputy.

*Ferdinand.* Why should he not as well sleep or eat by a  
deputy? This might take idle, offensive, and base office  
from him, whereas the other deprives him of honour. (1.2.10-19)

Ferdinand, concerned as he is with his status and political power, would abandon his natural body in order to prioritize his body politic. This contrasts directly with the Duchess's decision to focus on the desires of her natural body at the peril of her body politic.

This conflict between Ferdinand and the Duchess can perhaps be explained by what Kantorowicz calls the “twinned nature” of the theory of the king's two bodies (25). Kantorowicz claims that not only did the theory of the king's two bodies create the idea of a twinned nature of the sovereign, it actually was “linked...to the two sexes of an hermaphrodite...What fitted the two sexes of the hermaphrodite, fitted juristically also the two bodies of a king” (10-11).

Likewise, Axton suggests that the theory of the king's two bodies is at least partially responsible for the appearance of twinned characters in the fifteenth and sixteenth century plays (x), claiming that “the twinned person of the monarch appears frequently in the art and iconography of the period” (27). If we look at Axton's and Kantorowicz's claims together, then, Ferdinand and the Duchess, as fraternal twins, represent the conflict between the two bodies of the sovereign: the Duchess values the body natural, and Ferdinand values the body politic.

In the early modern period, there was thought to be a connection between twins and hermaphrodites. Alan Bates asserts that “Twins...were symbols of ambiguity: two and yet one. Hermaphrodites, male-female intermediates, were another ambiguous type regarded as monstrous births” (6). Because of their association with ambiguity and other ambiguous beings like hermaphrodites, twins were considered unusual and were sometimes regarded as monstrous births as well, simply because they were uncommon (Bates 6). For some writers, however, the connection between twins and hermaphrodites goes beyond both having ambiguous identities and being considered monstrous births. According to Katherine Park, several early modern writers, following Aristotle, “treated hermaphrodites not as intersexual beings but as a special case of twins” (180). Aristotle believed that hermaphrodites occurred “when the matter contributed by the mother at conception was more than enough for one fetus but not enough for two” (Park 180). Early modern doctors, such as Jean Riolan, who wrote *Discours sur les hermaphrodites* (1614), echoed Aristotle’s beliefs (Park 179, 181). Consequently, for those who followed Aristotle or Riolan, twins and hermaphrodites were believed to be essentially the same thing: they came from an overabundance of seed within the mother’s womb; whether they became a hermaphrodite or a set of twins was determined only by the quantity of seed.

*The Duchess of Malfi* seems to be playing with the early modern relationship between hermaphrodites and twins. Ferdinand and the Duchess are fraternal twins, two separate individuals, but because of the ambiguity associated with twins, they are also one being: they are the two sexes, the two natures, that make up the hermaphroditic whole. Throughout the play, Ferdinand confuses himself with the Duchess: “I could kill her now / in you or in myself, for I do think / It is some sin in us heaven doth revenge / By her” (2.5.63-6). Ferdinand believes that by killing himself, he could kill the Duchess. In this passage, he does not seem able to distinguish

between himself and the Duchess as separate individuals. In Marcus's footnote, she explains that "[Ferdinand's] inability to separate himself from his siblings, particularly from his twin, causes him to see in the Duchess an incestuous lust that is actually in himself" (2.5.63-6n). While I disagree with her reading of the cause of Ferdinand's incestuous desire, I agree that in this passage, Ferdinand demonstrates an inability to distinguish between himself and the Duchess, just as he cannot distinguish between the Duchess's two bodies. This trouble separating his identity from his sister's occurs because on one level, Ferdinand and the Duchess are two halves of one hermaphroditic whole. But Webster does not represent them as a harmonious unit – rather, Ferdinand and the Duchess violently oppose one another, and ultimately cause one another's deaths.

The tension between Ferdinand's and the Duchess's priorities comes to its climax in the Duchess's death scene. This scene also reinforces the idea that Ferdinand and the Duchess are not merely twins but also two halves of one hermaphroditic whole. The Duchess eerily echoes Ferdinand's conversation about mandrakes, although she could not have possibly known that this conversation occurred. It is Ferdinand's conversation about mandrakes that initiates the events that culminate in the Duchess's tragic end, and it is just before her death that she references mandrakes. The brother and sister, the two halves of the hermaphroditic whole of the ruler, have been opposed to one another throughout the play. It is only as one half is prepared to die that they begin to mirror one another, to act as two halves of one whole. The echoed reference to the mandrakes is the first indication that the bodies might be able to reunite as one whole. The Duchess, as she knows she is about to die, says:

Come, violent death,  
Serve for mandragora to make me sleep!  
Go tell my brothers, when I am laid out,  
They then may feed in quiet" (4.2.226-9).

This quote serves not only to reinforce the connection of Ferdinand and the Duchess as two halves of one hermaphroditic whole echoing one another, but it also reinforces Ferdinand's conflation of the two bodies. As there is no evidence of vampirism or cannibalism elsewhere in the play, it is unlikely that the Duchess is referring to her natural body and to the idea that her brothers will literally feed on her dead flesh. Rather, she is referring to her body politic and to her brothers' desire to control her political power and wealth. In this moment, the Duchess is asserting what Elizabeth I understood much earlier in her reign and then used to her political advantage, that despite attempts to separate the two, her body politic cannot be separated from her natural body. Through the disturbing image of Ferdinand and the Cardinal feeding on the Duchess's body, this scene clearly depicts the consequences of James's decision to unite his two bodies. Because the two bodies are the one and the same, for the Duchess's brothers to assume her body politic, they must consume her natural body. While her brothers do not literally feed on her, the image underscores the violent consequences of uniting the two bodies. This violence is borne out in the play through the brothers' need to divorce the two bodies from one another, a feat accomplished only through the Duchess's murder.

The reference to feeding on the Duchess is also, perhaps, a reference to the Eucharist and to the concept of real presence: by participating in communion, by taking the host and consuming it, we are actually taking and consuming the body of Christ. According to Kantorowicz, the Eucharist and the Church came to be viewed in the twelfth century as the "Lord's Two Bodies": "Here, at last, in that new assertion of 'The Lord's Two Bodies,'...we seem to have found the precise precedent of the 'King's Two Bodies'" (199). The Eucharist was defined as the physical body of Christ, and the Church was represented as the spiritual or mystical body of the church. *The Duchess of Malfi* seems to be playing with the parallels

between the Lord's Two Bodies and the King's Two Bodies in order to criticize the theory of the king's two bodies as James conceives of it. So when the Duchess tells Bosola that her brothers can feed on her, she is linking herself to the Eucharist – identifying her body natural with the physical body of Christ. By associating her natural body with the Eucharist, she is affirming the power of her body natural. When instructing his disciples to eat his flesh and drink his blood, Christ says, "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (*King James Version*, John 6:53-58). Of course, in the protestant England of James I and John Webster, the church no longer believed that the host *literally* became Christ's flesh. Instead, the host became a metaphor for Christ's flesh. It is this metaphoric eating of Christ's flesh that causes Christ and his disciple to be one, and it is, perhaps, the metaphoric eating of the Duchess's flesh that allows the two hermaphroditic halves of the two bodied whole, represented by the Duchess and Ferdinand, to finally dwell fully in each other. If this is the case, the two bodies, then, can be fully brought together only through violence. That the play depicts a united body natural and body politic as possible only through violence suggests a criticism of those, particularly James, who believe they can unite their body politic and body natural solely by declaring that the two are now one. Uniting the two bodies is not that simple, *The Duchess* suggests, and, given the tragedy of this scene, the play indicates it should not be done. *The Duchess* re-emphasizes the consequences of uniting the two bodies through the association of the Duchess with the body of Christ. While the violent death of Christ allows souls to finally reach heaven, the violent death of the Duchess allows – what? The parallels between Christ and the Duchess, between his body and hers, are never fully realized. The purposefulness and necessity of the death of Christ only underscores the pointlessness and tragedy of the Duchess's. Christ sacrifices himself for all of humanity and invites his disciples to feed on him to dwell fully in him, thereby allowing his

followers to eventually ascend to heaven. The Duchess, in contrast, is sacrificed not for the good of humanity but for the selfish gain of her brothers who wish to possess her body politic.

However, despite the violence done to the Duchess's body natural, it is unclear whether or not the two bodies have, in fact, been fully reunited, further underscoring the pointlessness of her death.

The denouement of the fifth act clearly demonstrates the consequences of trying to fully unite the two bodies by collapsing any distinction between them. Just as Christ's natural body rises after three days to reveal his status as God, the Duchess's natural body, although she does not return from the dead, is given power in death that it was denied in life. Although Ferdinand, invested of both halves of the hermaphroditic whole of the two bodies, should be able to go about his business as a duke, he descends into madness and effectively vacates his position as ruler. The end of the play also clearly emphasizes the difficulty of knowing exactly to whom the Duchess's body politic has transferred upon her death. Delio says, in the last lines of the play

Let us make noble use  
Of this great ruin, and join all our force  
To establish this young hopeful gentleman  
In's mother's right.<sup>24</sup> (5.5.108-111)

The body politic should, upon the Duchess's death, have migrated to the young Duke of Malfi, but the last lines muddle what should be straightforward and suggest that the Duchess's natural body has the power to disrupt the natural movement of the body politic. This indicates that perhaps the Duchess died, not so her brothers could reunite the two bodies, but to usher in a new society based on merit rather than blood. Consequently, the fifth act can be read as an affirmation of the Duchess's natural body and desired way of life, as well as a warning for those who too

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<sup>24</sup>These lines will be revisited in a more in-depth discussion at the end of this section on *The Duchess of Malfi*.

willingly collapse all distinction between the two bodies of the monarch despite the violent consequences of such an action.

Certainly, the grotesqueness of the image of the Duchess's brothers feeding on her body, literally consuming her, is meant to disturb both Bosola in the play and the audience watching the play. Lorna Hutson establishes that "the circumstantial, densely plotted, characterological drama that, in the late sixteenth century, begins to replace allegorical drama is, by its very nature, an *equitable* drama – it asks audiences to infer and imagine character's intentions and motives," (135), thereby requiring the audience to actively participate in the action occurring on stage. Webster uses this to his advantage in *The Duchess* to create a sense of horror in the audience at their part in the Duchess's murder. Martha Lifson articulates this when she suggests that "we can't escape our own participation, can't leave the theatre, can't stop looking at what we don't want to see, can't get distanced from a sense of our own participation" (54). The disconcerting and devastating nature of the Duchess's final scene and the strangling of the children afterwards leaves both Bosola and the audience thoroughly unsettled and questioning the power of the body politic, as it has so thoroughly destroyed the natural body of the Duchess. The traditional patriarchy is never celebrated and never fully restored in *The Duchess of Malfi* because of this scene: we cannot applaud the re-merging of the body politic, and we cannot condone the patriarchal powers that try to control and manipulate the Duchess to the end. To the end, the Duchess defies them, controlling her death as she did her life by asserting "am I not thy Duchess?...I am Duchess of Malfi still" (4.2.129, 137), by kneeling in the face of death, demonstrating her undeniable nobility, and by leaving her executioners and her audience so thoroughly disturbed by her final lines. In her defiance, the play defies the normal patriarchal society and the valuing of the body politic over the body natural.

Despite the Duchess's attempts to separate the body politic from the body natural during life, the divorce of the two occurs only with her death. According to the theory of the two bodies, the link between the body natural and the body politic is separated only upon the demise of the sovereign, when the body politic instantly transfers itself to another natural body, the body of the next ruler ("King Henry VIII was still 'alive' though Henry Tudor had been dead for ten years" (Kantorowicz 14)) Thus the body politic remains immortal, while the natural body, expired, becomes unimportant, with all focus remaining on the body politic (Kantorowicz 13). The emphasis on the political body rather than the dead natural body was so pervasive that at the funerals of sovereigns, the focus was not on the actual dead body but on the wax effigy representing the monarch in his or her function as the body politic: Bertelli tells us that "at the funeral ceremony for Elizabeth I, attention was focused on her effigy," (51), citing Henry Chettle's description of "the lively picture of her Highnesse whole body, crowned in her Parliament robes, lying on the corpse balmed and leaded, covered with velvet, borne on a chariot, drawn by four horses draped in black velvet" (qtd. in Bertelli 51). This focus on the body politic rather than the natural body, however, does not occur in *The Duchess of Malfi*. After the Duchess's death, the emphasis is entirely on her natural body with no mention of what happens to the body politic, except maybe in the controversial last lines of the play. This emphasis on the natural body mimics the Duchess's own prioritization of her natural body over the body politic. It is the sight of her dead body, perhaps even holding it in his arms, that changes Bosola from her murderer to her avenger: "Here is a sight / as direful to my soul as is the sword / unto a wretch hath slain his father" (4.2.355-7). Divorced from her political power, the Duchess's slain natural body fills Bosola with the same remorse he would feel upon killing his

own father, a remorse that leads him to vengeance against those that made him kill her. Her natural body is thus given a power in death that the body politic denied it in life.

### **The Duchess's Legacy: The Power of Her Body Natural**

The power of her natural body is further reinforced by Ferdinand's reaction to it once it has been divorced from the power of her body politic. Once her body politic has been divorced through death, Ferdinand can see the Duchess as his sister rather than as the embodiment of the political power he coveted and of his own powerlessness to control her:

Let me see her face again.  
Why didst thou not pity her? What an excellent  
Honest man mightst thou have been  
If thou hadst borne her to some sanctuary!  
Or, bold in a good cause, opposed thyself  
With thy advanced sword above thy head,  
Between her innocence and my revenge!  
I bade thee, when I was distracted of my wits,  
Go kill my dearest friend, and thou hast done't. (4.2.284-292)

With the threat of her body politic removed, the affection he has for her natural body as his sister returns. He calls her his "dearest friend," providing further insight into Ferdinand's unbalanced mental state, and revealing how driven the murder was by his conflation of her two bodies. The severing of the body politic from the natural body allows the return of filial affection, and Ferdinand is able to recall his old affection for his sister. Frank Whigham points out that it is not until after the Duchess's death that Ferdinand reveals they were not just brother and sister but twins, and by revealing this, Ferdinand is "restoring a lost unity between them even as her death makes him singular" (171). Ferdinand admits that he murdered her because of the marriage (4.2.275), and yet, once the threat of her political power is removed, he feels only remorse and compassion for his dead sister. "What was the meanness of her match to me?" he says, although

he has just murdered her and her children because of the meanness of the match (4.2.271). With the return of his filial affection comes the guilt he feels upon murdering her, and he tries to displace this guilt onto Bosola by blaming Bosola for not standing up to him and saving the Duchess and by telling Bosola that “the wolf shall find her grave, and scrape it up / Not to devour the corpse, but to discover / The horrid murder” (4.2.298-300), thus revealing the murder and allowing for true justice.

In no place in the play is the consequence of valuing the body politic over the natural body more clear than in Ferdinand’s increasing madness after the Duchess’s murder. Bosola tells Ferdinand, “You, not I, shall quake for’t” (4.2.300), and, in the end, Bosola’s words prove true. Ferdinand cannot escape his guilt, no matter how he tries to displace it, and it drives him mad:

One met the duke, ‘bout midnight in a lane  
Behind Saint Mark’s church, with the leg of man  
Upon his shoulder, and he howled fearfully,  
Said he was a wolf, only the difference  
Was, a wolf’s skin was hairy on the outside,  
His on the inside; bade them take their swords,  
Rip up his flesh, and try. (5.2.13-19)

In Ferdinand’s madness, he tries to make his words to Bosola true: he becomes a wolf, the very animal he tells Bosola will dig up the Duchess’s bones, thus revealing the murder and punishing those responsible, i.e. himself. Ferdinand’s guilt forces him to want justice for his sister’s murder, but as the murderer himself, unwilling to confess – “What I have done, I have done: I’ll confess nothing” (5.2.47) – no justice can be had. This drives him mad, and in his madness he believes the way to justice is to become the wolf that digs up the Duchess’s bones to reveal the murder and bring justice upon the murderers.

Ferdinand’s desire for punishment further reveals itself through his asking his friends to rip him open to find the hair on the inside that marks him as a wolf. What Antonio recognizes

from the beginning, that Ferdinand is two-faced, - “The duke there? A most perverse and turbulent nature. / What appears in him mirth is merely outside” (1.2.87-8) – Ferdinand only learns about himself after he kills his sister. Ferdinand, despite his madness, now fully understands exactly who he is, a murderer, and he understands that he has his friends fooled: the face he presents to the world is not an accurate representation of who he is. Ferdinand, like the Duchess, recognizes a difference between his two bodies. Unlike the Duchess, however, this difference is not portrayed sympathetically. Whereas the Duchess distinguished between the two in order to prioritize her body natural and her private life, Ferdinand, with his inability to distinguish between the Duchess’s two bodies, does not understand how to navigate the difference between the two bodies in himself. When, talking to Castruccio, Ferdinand expresses a desire to divorce his body natural in order to emphasize his body politic – “Why should he not as well eat or sleep by a / deputy? This might take idle, offensive, and base office / from him” (1.2.16-19) – he is expressing his inability to navigate between the two bodies. Maneuvering between the two bodies becomes especially difficult when his body natural has become so corrupt that it affects his body politic’s capability to reign over his duchy. Rolls asserts that when the distinction between the two bodies was erased, as James had done, the natural body must be admitted the power of “effect[ing] changes in the body politic” and, consequently, that the body natural could corrupt the body politic (74). Because his madness prevents him from functioning in his role as the duke of Calabria, Ferdinand illustrates this potential for the body natural to corrupt the body politic.

The power of the Duchess’s natural body over the body politic is further reinforced through the deaths of those involved in the plot to murder her. It is not the force of the body politic but the power of the Duchess’s natural body on Bosola after he holds it, dead, in his arms,

that turns Bosola into her avenger and brings about justice for the Duchess through the death of her conspirators. Ferdinand's guilt and madness do not, could not, abate until he is finally punished for his sorricide upon his death. Bosola kills him to avenge the Duchess, and Ferdinand's last words are of his sister: "My sister! Oh, my sister! There's the cause on't: / 'Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust, / Like diamonds, we are cut with our own dust'" (5.5.69-71). Even as he is about to die, Ferdinand seems to accept the justice of his own death, recognizing the Duchess's murder as the cause of his own and understanding that his actions led to this result ("we are cut with our own dust"). Ferdinand welcomes his death, perhaps as the only way to be fully reunited with the sister he should have protected, perhaps as the only way to rid himself of his guilt-induced madness. Significantly, Ferdinand gives three ways one can fall: through ambition, through blood, or through lust. In his case, a combination of the three is what leads him to be "cut with his own dust:" his ambition and his concern with blood leads him to conflate the Duchess's bodies, confusing his lust for her political power with her physical body. With these words, in Ferdinand's final moments, the play reinforces the problem of conflating the two bodies while demonstrating the consequences of valuing the body politic over the body natural. The strange and quickly following deaths of the Cardinal and Bosola provide nearly absolute justice for the Duchess. The Cardinal receives his death-wound from Bosola, intent upon avenging the Duchess, and Bosola receives his from Ferdinand flailing around his sword in his own attempt to murder the Cardinal for his part in the Duchess's murder (5.5.40-53). It seems almost fantastical that Bosola too should die here for the Duchess in such a confusing rush of swords and murders. That the play removes all of the Duchess's conspirators, even the one reformed, allowing the Duchess to have what justice she can, reinforces the rightness of her actions and the wrongness of her death.

The final, and perhaps most powerful, assertion of the body natural over the body politic comes in the form of the Duchess's first son from her second marriage. The audience knows that the Duchess has a son from her first marriage who is the young Duke of Malfi. This child, despite his apparent political importance, barely figures into the play. There is one brief mention of him by Ferdinand, who tells the Cardinal to "write to the Duke of Malfi, my young nephew / She had by her first husband, and acquaint him / With's mother's honesty" (3.3.67-9). This is the first and only mention of the Duchess's first child in the course of the play. And despite this child's existence, despite that he is already the Duke of Malfi, already the inheritor of his mother and father's dukedom, that fact is curiously disregarded at the end of the play. In Act 5, after the deaths of Antonio, Ferdinand, the Cardinal, and Bosola, Delio enters with the son of Antonio and the Duchess:

*Malateste.* Oh, sir, you come too late.

*Delio.* I heard so, and was armed  
For't ere I came. Let us make noble use  
Of this great ruin; and join all our force  
To establish this young hopeful gentleman  
In's mother's right. (5.5.107-111)

The consolation Delio provides for all the death and murder, aiding the young son to inherit the dukedom, should strike the audience as strange, considering the young Duke of Malfi already holds, or at least should hold, the duchy. As Kinney points out in the introduction to *The Duchess of Malfi*, Delio "promises the duchy to the wrong son, for as Jacobeans well knew, the children of a second marriage could not inherit the titles of a first" (645). Either Delio provides false comfort knowingly, or something other than normal patriarchal primogeniture is at play here. With Delio's speech, the play seems to be advocating for a new social order based not on the transference of the body politic from one male to another through primogeniture but based on the

preference of the female ruler's natural body and the figurative rather than literal nobility of the father.

What Tennenhouse suggests happened as Queen Elizabeth aged, that “writers and performers of all kinds... began to imagine the aristocratic female as having the potential to disrupt the flow of power from one male to another” (81), appears to be exactly what has occurred in *The Duchess of Malfi*. Lynn Hunt suggests in the introduction to *Eroticism and the Body Politic* that “women's bodies had their own representative power. They could stand for nurture or corruption, for the power of desire or the need for domination, *for the promise of a new social order or the decay of an old one*” (2, emphasis mine). The Duchess's body throughout the play stands for most of these things: she is nurturing in her final moments, thinking of her children; her dead body, held by Bosola, provides a visual representation of the consequences of corruption; and Ferdinand both desires her and needs to dominate her. But the Duchess's body is given its greatest power through her young son, who stands at the end of the play as the embodied promise of a new social order.

While this new social order is not unequivocally embraced, neither is it condemned, and it even seems to be supported: “the boy at Delio's side has been, her vivid pregnancy reminds us, formed in and by her body, and embodies therefore her values and her life as well” (Lifson 56). As Lifson suggests, this young son, as the fruit of her union with Antonio and in his potential to inherit the dukedom, embodies the Duchess's struggle to value the natural body over the body politic by separating one from the other. If he, the product of prioritizing the natural body over the body politic, is allowed to inherit what primogeniture and the theory of the king's two bodies should deny him, this suggests that placing a higher value on the natural body is right and rewarding. It also questions the efficacy of the body politic by denying it the traditional avenues

of succession. “The boy’s physical presence indicates the open-ended power of the future, of his body, and one might dare to hope, of the body politic” (Lifson 56). Axton argues that “the development and popularization of the theory [of the king’s two bodies] are inextricably connected with the Elizabethan succession questions” (x). If this is true, then the new future symbolized by the Duchess’s young son is not just the future of the duchy of Malfi but of England as a nation. The end of the play, then, in one respect, can be seen as a caution for Jacobean England and an implied criticism of James’s desire to eliminate the distinction between the two bodies and to emphasize his own power through the association of his body natural with his body politic.

The Duchess can perhaps be seen as the opposite of James: she continually tries to separate the two bodies in order to be allowed to live her private life as she wishes. While the consequences of this decision are clearly demonstrated through the murder of the Duchess and her family, her young son’s potential to inherit the dukedom supports the Duchess’s unorthodox choice to prioritize her natural body over her body politic and questions the power and efficacy of primogeniture to determine the next best ruler and the next best container for the body politic. At the end of *The Duchess*, it seems clear that Delio, at least, believes the body politic, disrupted by the power of the Duchess’s natural body, has transferred not to the young Duke but to Antonio’s young son. Despite the power of the Duchess’s body natural, the young son’s potential may be impossible to realize, and it may be that *The Duchess of Malfi* leaves us with what should be rather than with what could ever be, but regardless, the play leaves the audience certain of the consequences of valuing the body politic over the body natural and sympathetic to the values and decisions of the Duchess as embodied in her young son.

*The Duchess of Malfi* is a play concerned with the anxieties about a female sovereign and the issues of succession in Elizabethan England, as well as the problems of the theory of the king's two bodies when applied to a female ruler and when no distinction is made between the two bodies, as in James's reign. These problems are dramatized in the life and death of the Duchess, who significantly is never given a name. The play illustrates these problems through the Duchess's attempt and ultimate failure to divorce her two bodies during her life, through Ferdinand's confusion of the body politic with the body natural displacing itself as incestuous desire, and through the consequences of valuing the body politic over the natural body dramatized by Ferdinand's madness. The play then concludes with the embodiment of an alternative to the traditional patriarchy of the body politic in the Duchess's young son. Taken together, these elements in the play form a critique of James's attempt to unite his two bodies. In the play, the Duchess is punished for her attempts to separate the body politic and the body natural, for the unorthodox prioritizing of the body natural over the body politic, and for using her power to go against the interests of her family and bloodline. Those punishing her for her sins against the body politic and her family, however, are not the heroes, but the villains, of the play, and the Duchess emerges as the sympathetic character. The play does not applaud the restoration of the patriarchal power or the Duchess's final acceptance of the unity of the body politic and the body natural upon her death but, rather, condemns them through its representation of the patriarchal powers in control, its emphasis on Ferdinand's unnatural desires for the Duchess resulting from his conflation of her two bodies, the sympathy which with it follows the Duchess's attempts to divorce the two, its sorrowful portrayal of her ultimate failure, and the final subversive possibility of hers and Antonio's son inheriting the dukedom. *The Duchess of Malfi* explores the societal anxieties about the body politic and its connection to women,

ultimately condemning the relationship the body politic causes between aristocratic women and their family's social status through its vivid portrayal of the tragic consequences of such an association, as embodied in the figure of the Duchess of Malfi.

#### Chapter 4: Conclusion

Judith Whitenack, in “Moral Vision in Lope de Vega’s *El mayordomo de la duquesa de Amalfi*” laments that *El mayordomo* has been studied almost exclusively in its relation to Webster’s play or the Bandello source material. She argues that scholars have paid “insufficient attention to *El mayordomo* vis à vis Lope de Vega’s corpus of dramatic works, particular his other plays on those two crucial issues for the Spanish *comedia*: honor and class differences” (199), listing only three studies on *El mayordomo* that she knows have been undertaken, all of which use the play as a point of comparison. While several more studies have been undertaken since Whitenack wrote “Moral Vision,” still, not enough attention has been paid to *El mayordomo*. Although the scope of this project has not allowed for a more detailed discussion of *El mayordomo* as considered for its own merits, its merits are considerable, and there is much remaining to discuss. In particular, further study needs to be undertaken on Camila’s use of derogatory language toward women as potentially subversive, on the repeated imagery of fire and divinity in descriptions of Camila, and on the play’s study of class difference and whether inner virtue, *honra*, or bloodline, *honor de opinion*, makes one qualified to rule. A detailed analysis of the characters of Antonio and Camila would also be fruitful for critical study of *El mayordomo*. More study should also be done on *The Duchess of Malfi*, in particular how our historical understanding of conceptions of hermaphrodites at the time affects not only the theory of the king’s two bodies but our understanding of *The Duchess*’s reference to Antonio as an hermaphrodite. Further study into how early modern attitudes about and depictions of Elizabeth

might enhance our understanding of not just *the Duchess* but *El mayordomo* as well could generate fruitful discussion about both plays and their historical significance.

I plan to take up these issues in a later work, but for the purposes of this analysis, *El mayordomo* provides an interesting contrast to *The Duchess of Malfi*, particularly in the way each presents the female ruler and in the way each play aligns, or does not align, itself with the traditional patriarchal order at the end of the play. Although further work should be done on the subversive potential of Lope's portrayal of the Amalfi tale, when compared to *The Duchess*, there can be little doubt that, despite its sympathetic portrayal of Antonio and Camila, *El mayordomo* realigns itself with the traditional patriarchal order, represented by the young Duke of Amalfi, at the end of the play. Perhaps because in Spanish plays "the least ideological dissent in matters of religion or politics was absolutely prevented" (García García 52), *El mayordomo* must revert to the traditional hierarchy of society by the end. Although Camila's marriage may have been subversive, the young Duke's blessing of it restores it to the traditional order. Camila's last words are of her assurance of divine retribution for Julio, and when the young Duke takes up the charge and swears upon a cross to avenge his mother's death, he fully restores the traditional patriarchy. *The Duchess*, in contrast, ends with an explosive potential for a new social order borne of merit rather than birth, of the power of the female rather than of the male. While Camila is not depicted as powerless, and she does stand up to her brothers, Webster's Duchess's ferocity and displays of power are almost masculine in their intensity. The Duchess transgresses the normal bounds for female behavior and sexuality, and in the way the play aligns itself with the Duchess and her choices, her defiance becomes the defiance of the audience.

In *the Duchess of Malfi*, the absence of the young duke of Malfi, and Delio's charge at the end of the play, combined with the play's alignment with the Duchess, ensures that the

traditional patriarchy is not restored and is even questioned at the end. While the play is not necessarily an explicit criticism of James, its portrayal of a sovereign Duchess rather than a king allows it to criticize with impunity James's attempt to collapse the distinction between the two bodies through its portrayal of the consequences of such a decision. Kantorowicz sees in *Richard II* a prefiguration of the revolt against Charles I in which the Puritans were able to "fight the king to defend the **K**ing" (18, emphasis in the original), and I would suggest that *The Duchess of Malfi*, too, contains the seeds of what would become the English Civil War. Through its subtle criticism of James's collapse of the two bodies through Ferdinand's incestuous desire and madness, as well as its portrayal of the consequences for the Duchess in her attempts to separate her two bodies, the play not only reveals "the fiction of the oneness of the double body" (Kahn 85), but it also prefigures the violence of the English Civil War, in which the theory of the king's two bodies, the very theory that allowed Elizabeth to rule so successfully despite her femininity, was used to justify the murder of a king and the advent of a new social order. The new social order of Cromwell's England was not ideal, as proven by its very short duration before the restoration of the monarchy. Whether the new social order envisioned by Delio at the end of *the Duchess* would have been better, we cannot know, because it is merely the hopeful promise of a better world to come.

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