

# The White Devil in Beauty as Mask: John Webster

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## Abstract:

The incongruous name of John Webster's play "The White Devil" has often led to attempts to identify one of the characters with the titular devil. This paper argues that. This paper argues that the hardship of pinpointing lie not only in the obvious paradox of the consortium of "White" with "Devil", but also in the changing role of colour in the early modern period. This change was marked by the evolution of painting procedures as well as by the attacks on cosmetics and the "False colouring" of rhetoric accustomed during this grandiloquent colour, the stage therefore came to be a specifically contentious institution at which similar disagreement were often levelled. Through an inspection of the three major female character in "The White Devil" Isabella, Zanche and victoriya, This paper illustrates the way in which these assault are defused and become the substances of the author's sarcasm .As females, these characters have a unique bond with colour because their (claimed)use of beauty products and thus the accuracy of their skin colour eventually determine their position within society. The complete paper analysis and shape the characters through colour division and exposes the artificiality behind beauty as a mask.

**Keywords:** *sexual politics, colour imagery, feminist criticism, moral ambiguity*

## Introduction

In John Webster's Jacobean tragedy The White Devil the theme of "beauty as a mask" is central to the play's inquiry of Demeanour versus reality and moral venality. The tittle independence, drama from a synchronous proverb that "The White Devil is uprise than the black", suggests than an seemingly fair and presence often conceals a wicked or treacherous nature. The ostensible paradox the tittle itself acts as the fundamental symbol for the deceitful nature of beauty. A "White Devil" recommend something that emerge pure, virtuous or beautiful on the surface (White) but is radically evil beneath (Devil) critics widely agree that this tittle essentially refers to the protagonist, victoriya corobona. Victoriya interpretation is detailed as having stunning physical beauty, which is used to mask her Amities and ruthless nature. He beauty is a tool she brandishes to influence the powerful men around her, incorporating duke Branchiano, luring them into an illicit affair that requires the murder of their specific spouses. A corrupt world in the play's settings sincerity and true virtue are rare most characters, specifically those in power, engage in sanctimonious Ness and dissembling beauty, wealth, and heigh status function as masks that

allow characters to perform heinous acts without instantaneous. Social denunciation Flamineo, Victoriya's brother and a central pander, explicitly comments on the "Two Faced" nature of a society fashioned to protect male attention while evaluation women by perfunctory virtues. Cosmetics and artifice something uses the modern anxieties enclosing cosmetics (seen as artificial and a sign of deceitful women) to heighten this theme. The idea that women "Paint" their faces to create a false semblance of beauty is a figure of speech for the general moral artificial permeating the play's world. John Webster's The White Devil (First performed in 1612) engrosses complex position in English renascence drama while today it is regarded as one of the most thought full and melodramatically sophisticate tragedies of the Jacobean period, its initial reception was notable hostile. (webster himself complained that the play was "Most Unconsciously Censured" TWD:44 At its first performance). This critical failure was not merely due to plot complication but also to the play's challenging moral vision, its unsteady awarding of virtue and vice, and its unseating therapy of beauty as a deceptive mask. Achievement history is therefore crucial to understanding The White Devil. The

play's meaning is not Permanent Soley in its text but is repeatedly reshaped by staging, costuming, makeup, acting styles, and viewers anticipation. Across millennia, directors and entertainer have recontextualized the signification of "Whiteness," beauty, and theatrical disguise, allowing the play to evolve with cultural disposition toward gender, morality, and performance "O Poor Charity! Thou Art Seldom Found In Scarlet" (TWD:43) This study vestiges the performance history of The White Devil across different eras from the Jacobean stage to revitalization neglect, Victorian moral tenderness, twentieth century revival, and fashionable reinterpretations. It examines how shifting histrionic practices and audience responses have reworked the play's central concerns, especially the theme of beauty as a mask The White Devil was first accomplished by the Queen's men at the Red Bull theatre, a venue associated with popular audiences rather than elite courtly audience. This choice of venue substantially affected reception. The Red Bull catered to audiences who favoured spectacle, clear moral binaries, and action-driven Drama. (Webster's dense language, ironic moral ambiguity, and intellectually complex characters were ill-Suited to such expectation. In the Jacobean circumstance, "Beauty as a Mask" functioned both literally and allegorically. White face paint, generally used by aristocratic women, was connected with social status but also with deception and moral perversion. Contemporary bulletin and sermons attacked cosmetics as tool of hypocrisy and sin. "There Are Some Flattering Sins That Carry Us to Hell ."( TWD:45) On stage, Victoriya's beauty would have been visually conspicuous yet clearly artificial, stressing her role as a figure who disrupts moral assurance. Early audiences may have perceived this dramatic beauty not as commendable but as intimidating a seductive surface concealing moral chaos. Rehabilitation audiences embraced overt sexuality and ostentatious performance but commanded clarity in moral arrangement the unclear portrayal of female beauty in the White Devil neither wholly virtuous nor entirely dishonest conflicted with rehabilitation. Beauty was no longer essentially a mask but a habitation to be enjoyed. webster's

determination that beauty deceives and destabilizes moral assessment made the play awkward and execrated. Female beauty, particularly when linked to sexual independence, was seen as menacing Victoriya's expressiveness and courtroom defiance challenged the period's ideals of female modesty. As a result, the play was often judged immoral rather than dramatically innovative. "There's No Peace Found In Wackiness."(TWD:161) Victorians culture highlighted moral respectability, domestic virtue, and female chastity. Webster's violent world, filled with adultery, immorality, and cynical power politics, clashed keenly with these values. "Women Are Like Curst Dogs; Civility Keeps Them From Biting."(TWD:91) The achievement history of the white devil charts a notable journey from early rejection to modern respect. initially misunderstood due to its challenging moral ambiguity and eccentric portrayed of beauty, the play has gradually found audiences capable of appreciating its complexity. Spanning, shifting theatrical practices and cultural attitudes towards beauty, gender, and morality have converted its reception. What was once perceived as moral confusion is now acknowledged as deliberate critique. Beauty, far from being a stable ideal, operates as a mask assembled, strategic, and deeply political. The evolving stagings of the white devil demonstrate the enduring power of Webster's drama to adapt, provoke, and unsettle. Execution history thus becomes essential not only to understanding the play's past but to finding its relevance in a world still fascinated by semblance beauty, and the menacing allure of beauty.

## REFERENCE

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