



THE WHITE DEVIL

J. WEBSTER

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John Webster

TO THE READER



In publishing this tragedy, I do but challenge myself that liberty, which other men have taken before me; not that I affect praise by it, for, *nos hæc novimus esse nihil*, only since it was acted in so dull a time of winter, presented in so open and black a theatre, that it wanted (that which is the only grace and setting-out of a tragedy) a full and understanding auditory; and that since that time I have noted, most of the people that come to that playhouse resemble those ignorant asses (who, visiting stationers' shops, their use is not to inquire for good books, but new books), I present it to the general view with this confidence:

*Nec rhoncos metues maligniorum,
Nec scombris tunicas dabis molestas.*

If it be objected this is no true dramatic poem, I shall easily confess it, *non potes in nugas dicere plura meas, ipse ego quam dixi*; willingly, and not ignorantly, in this kind have I faulted: For should a man present to such an auditory, the most sententious tragedy that ever was written, observing all the critical laws as height of style, and gravity of person, enrich it with the sententious Chorus, and, as it were Life and Death, in the passionate and weighty Nuntius: yet after all this divine rapture, *O dura messorum ilia*, the breath that comes from the incapable multitude is able to poison it; and, ere it be acted, let the author resolve to fix to every

scene this of Horace:

—Hæc hodie porcis comedenda relinques.

To those who report I was a long time in finishing this tragedy, I confess I do not write with a goose-quill winged with two feathers; and if they will need make it my fault, I must answer them with that of Euripides to Alcestides, a tragic writer: Alcestides objecting that Euripides had only, in three days composed three verses, whereas himself had written three hundred: Thou tallest truth (quoth he), but here 's the difference, thine shall only be read for three days, whereas mine shall continue for three ages.

Detraction is the sworn friend to ignorance: for mine own part, I have ever truly cherished my good opinion of other men's worthy labours, especially of that full and heightened style of Mr. Chapman, the laboured and understanding works of Mr. Johnson, the no less worthy composures of the both worthily excellent Mr. Beaumont and Mr. Fletcher; and lastly (without wrong last to be named), the right happy and copious industry of Mr. Shakespeare, Mr. Dekker, and Mr. Heywood, wishing what I write may be read by their light: protesting that, in the strength of mine own judgment, I know them so worthy, that though I rest silent in my own work, yet to most of theirs I dare (without flattery) fix that of Martial:

—non norunt hæc monumenta mori.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ



MONTICELSO, a Cardinal; afterwards Pope PAUL the Fourth.

FRANCISCO DE MEDICIS, Duke of Florence; in the 5th Act disguised for a

Moor, under the name of MULINASSAR.

BRACHIANO, otherwise PAULO GIORDANO URSINI, Duke of Brachiano, Husband

to ISABELLA, and in love with VITTORIA.

GIOVANNI—his Son by ISABELLA.

LODOVICO, an Italian Count, but decayed.

ANTONELLI, | his Friends, and Dependants of the Duke of Florence.

GASPARO, |

CAMILLO, Husband to VITTORIA.

HORTENSIO, one of BRACHIANO's Officers.

MARCELLO, an Attendant of the Duke of Florence, and Brother to VITTORIA.

FLAMINEO, his Brother; Secretary to BRACHIANO.

JACQUES, a Moor, Servant to GIOVANNI.

ISABELLA, Sister to FRANCISCO DE MEDICI, and Wife to BRACHIANO.

VITTORIA COROMBONA, a Venetian Lady; first married to CAMILLO, afterwards to BRACHIANO.

CORNELIA, Mother to VITTORIA, FLAMINEO, and MARCELLO.

ZANCHE, a Moor, Servant to VITTORIA.

*Ambassadors, Courtiers, Lawyers, Officers, Physicians,
Conjurer,
Armourer, Attendants.*

THE SCENE—ITALY

ACT I



SCENE I

Enter Count Lodovico, Antonelli, and Gasparo
Lodo. Banish'd!

Ant. It griev'd me much to hear the sentence.

Lodo. Ha, ha, O Democritus, thy gods
That govern the whole world! courtly reward
And punishment. Fortune 's a right whore:
If she give aught, she deals it in small parcels,
That she may take away all at one swoop.
This 'tis to have great enemies! God 'quite them.
Your wolf no longer seems to be a wolf
Than when she 's hungry.

Gas. You term those enemies,
Are men of princely rank.

Lodo. Oh, I pray for them:
The violent thunder is adored by those
Are pasht in pieces by it.

Ant. Come, my lord,
You are justly doom'd; look but a little back
Into your former life: you have in three years
Ruin'd the noblest earldom.

Gas. Your followers

Have swallowed you, like mummia, and being sick
With such unnatural and horrid physic,
Vomit you up i' th' kennel.

Ant. All the damnable degrees

Of drinking have you stagger'd through. One citizen,
Is lord of two fair manors, call'd you master,
Only for caviare.

Gas. Those noblemen

Which were invited to your prodigal feasts,
(Wherein the phoenix scarce could 'scape your throats)
Laugh at your misery, as fore-deeming you
An idle meteor, which drawn forth, the earth
Would be soon lost i' the air.

Ant. Jest upon you,

And say you were begotten in an earthquake,
You have ruin'd such fair lordships.

Lodo. Very good.

This well goes with two buckets: I must tend
The pouring out of either.

Gas. Worse than these.

You have acted certain murders here in Rome,
Bloody and full of horror.

Lodo. 'Las, they were flea-bitings:
Why took they not my head then?

Gas. O, my lord!
The law doth sometimes mediate, thinks it good
Not ever to steep violent sins in blood:
This gentle penance may both end your crimes,
And in the example better these bad times.

Lodo. So; but I wonder then some great men 'scape
This banishment: there 's Paulo Giordano Ursini,
The Duke of Brachiano, now lives in Rome,
And by close panderism seeks to prostitute
The honour of Vittoria Corombona:
Vittoria, she that might have got my pardon
For one kiss to the duke.

Ant. Have a full man within you:
We see that trees bear no such pleasant fruit
There where they grew first, as where they are new set.
Perfumes, the more they are chaf'd, the more they render
Their pleasing scents, and so affliction
Expresseth virtue fully, whether true,
Or else adulterate.

Lodo. Leave your painted comforts;
I 'll make Italian cut-works in their guts
If ever I return.

Gas. Oh, sir.

Lodo. I am patient.

I have seen some ready to be executed,
Give pleasant looks, and money, and grown familiar
With the knave hangman; so do I; I thank them,
And would account them nobly merciful,
Would they dispatch me quickly.

Ant. Fare you well;

We shall find time, I doubt not, to repeal
Your banishment.

Lodo. I am ever bound to you.

This is the world's alms; pray make use of it.
Great men sell sheep, thus to be cut in pieces,
When first they have shorn them bare, and sold their
fleeces.

[Exeunt

SCENE II

Enter Brachiano, Camillo, Flamineo, Vittoria

Brach. Your best of rest.

Vit. Unto my lord the duke,

The best of welcome. More lights: attend the duke.

[Exeunt Camillo and Vittoria.

Brach. Flamineo.

Flam. My lord.

Brach. Quite lost, Flamineo.

Flam. Pursue your noble wishes, I am prompt

As lightning to your service. O my lord!

The fair Vittoria, my happy sister,

Shall give you present audience—Gentlemen, [Whisper.

Let the caroch go on—and 'tis his pleasure
You put out all your torches and depart.

Brach. Are we so happy?

Flam. Can it be otherwise?

Observ'd you not to-night, my honour'd lord,
Which way soe'er you went, she threw her eyes?
I have dealt already with her chambermaid,
Zanche the Moor, and she is wondrous proud
To be the agent for so high a spirit.

Brach. We are happy above thought, because 'bove merit.

Flam. 'Bove merit! we may now talk freely: 'bove merit!

what is 't you doubt? her coyness! that 's but the
superficies of lust most women have; yet why should ladies
blush to hear that named, which they do not fear to handle?
Oh, they are politic; they know our desire is increased by
the difficulty of enjoying; whereas satiety is a blunt, weary,
and drowsy passion. If the buttery-hatch at court stood
continually open, there would be nothing so passionate
crowding, nor hot suit after the beverage.

Brach. Oh, but her jealous husband——

Flam. Hang him; a gilder that hath his brains perished with
quicksilver

is not more cold in the liver. The great barriers moulted
not more

feathers, than he hath shed hairs, by the confession of his
doctor. An

Irish gamester that will play himself naked, and then
wage all

downward, at hazard, is not more venturous. So unable to
please a

woman, that, like a Dutch doublet, all his back is shrunk
into his

breaches.

Shroud you within this closet, good my lord;
Some trick now must be thought on to divide
My brother-in-law from his fair bed-fellow.

Brach. Oh, should she fail to come——

Flam. I must not have your lordship thus unwisely amorous.
I myself have not loved a lady, and pursued her with a great
deal of under-age protestation, whom some three or four
gallants that have enjoyed would with all their hearts have
been glad to have been rid of. 'Tis just like a summer bird-
cage in a garden: the birds that are without despair to get
in, and the birds that are within despair and are in a
consumption for fear they shall never get out. Away, away,
my lord. [Exit Brachiano as Camillo enters.]

See here he comes. This fellow by his apparel
Some men would judge a politician;
But call his wit in question, you shall find it
Merely an ass in 's foot-cloth. How now, brother?
What, travelling to bed with your kind wife?

Cam. I assure you, brother, no. My voyage lies
More northerly, in a far colder clime.
I do not well remember, I protest,
When I last lay with her.

Flam. Strange you should lose your count.

Cam. We never lay together, but ere morning
There grew a flaw between us.

Flam. 'T had been your part
To have made up that flaw.