



The Duchess of Amalfi

after "John Webster" by Christian Lanciai (2008, revised 2019)

Dramatis personae:

Duchess of Amalfi
Duke Fernando, her brother
The Cardinal, her second brother
Antonio di Bologna, her accountant
Cariola, her chamber maid
Daniele di Bussola, groom in the service of the duchess and her brothers
Delio, Antonio's friend
Count Malatesta of Ancona
Giulia Castrucchio, the Cardinal's mistress
guards

The madmen:

doctor

lawyer

priest

astrologer

philosopher

four hangmen

physician

an echo

Antonio's servant

The action is in Italy during the Renaissance

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Act I scene 1

Cardinal Our sister must not remarry.

Fernando I couldn't agree more.

Cardinal But she lives dangerously, indulges in wasteful banquets and encourages wooers, as if she was looking for someone.

Fernando We must put her under some kind of guard, so that we keep her strictly controlled. If she married again and had a child, it would be something of the worst that could happen to us. She is the eldest and therefore the duchess of Amalfi, and only if she dies without issue could we inherit her.

Cardinal I am with you all the way.

Fernando Can I trust that?

Cardinal Without conditions or reservations. She has everything, and we have nothing.

Fernando We were lucky to see the husband pass away without issue.

Cardinal We succeeded in sending him on before it went too far.

Fernando We must avoid that risk in the future.

Cardinal By utmost necessity.

Fernando (gives his hand) So you are along?

Cardinal Whatever you do, I will not interfere. I give you free hands with all means, and I have cardinal authority, which you might need.

Fernando Thank you, my brother. (*embraces him*) Then we shall surely manage to keep her strictly confined to our family interests.

Cardinal She is not even interested in entering a new marriage, so I am sure it will be easy.

Scene 2.

Antonio Madame, you called on me.

Duchess Like always in my most sensitive affairs. You are the only person I can trust.

Antonio In business?

Duchess As my accountant. You have made yourself indispensable.

Antonio It has always been my pleasure and privilege to serve you.

Duchess That is why I today have an especially sensitive task for you. I intend to write my will.

Antonio Madame, you have no heirs and no relatives but your two powerful brothers.

Duchess That's exactly the problem.

Antonio Why?

Duchess They already have everything but want more. I would rather that all the responsibility I have in life would be more fairly shared by my death.

Antonio Are there reasons then to speculate in your death?

Duchess My friend, there are reasons to assume, that my former husband was murdered in order to exclude any possibility for him to give me children.

Antonio My God! Do you have evidence?

Duchess His death at so young an age was not natural. Only my brothers had motives. I am just adding two and two. You also should, who are a mathematician. I am only thinking logically, watching my brothers' characters, observing that all they live for is power and money, their mortal worry that their sister's heritage would bypass them, my husband's sudden and mysterious death, most probably by poison, before he could give me any children, which he was on the course of making, and the telling glances of dark intentions which my brother Fernando and my peacock cardinal of a minor brother are giving me. Yes, my friend, I have reason to fear for my life but will not die until I have a son whom I could give my life.

Antonio Do you then intend to remarry?

Duchess My friend, what do you think of marriage?

Antonio It's either a blessing or a curse but often both, a double-edged sword of capriciousness with your life at risk, the most dangerous of ventures, where not only your life but even your soul could be lost.

Duchess You are right. I agree with you entirely. We are of the same mind. Well then, what do you think of love?

Antonio The most precious and beautiful thing there is, if it works. If it doesn't work, it will more often than not lead to the greatest tragedies.

Duchess Do you think love would be worth waging, even if it would lead to the greatest tragedy?

Antonio If love works it can only triumph over all tragedies.

Duchess Then you are the man I thought.

Antonio My duchess, with respect and pardon, but what is your point?

Duchess I asked you here to help me with my definite will, and I wish to give over everything to the son I wish to have with you.

Antonio (blushing) My duchess...

Duchess Your eyes start shining. That's a good sign. See here, take my ring, and it will calm the fever of your eyes.

Antonio I am only touched. But your brothers would never accept it.

Duchess And do they have to know? What do we need more than God's blessing as our only witness? And if we like good Catholics invoke his name and good will to seal our marriage, how could even God say no?

Antonio My duchess, I am overwhelmed.

Duchess It will pass. Let it sink in, and accept it. You have my ring. Let me now put it on the right finger. Thus we are married, and as a sign thereof you will always carry it.

Antonio Madame, I always loved you, but I could never guess and never had a thought of that it could result in intimacy.

Duchess It's just natural. We have known each other long and had time long enough to cultivate an impeccable friendship. Let's stick to that and continue building on it for our foundation. The marriage thing is just a natural consequence.

Antonio Madame, I thank you with all my heart.

Duchess No, I thank you. But be careful about discretion. While the brothers have no idea that I have entered a new engagement and more sacred marriage than the one that was murdered, which was political while ours now is natural and consistent of only love under threat, we will be safe with nothing to threaten or perturb us.

Antonio But what if there will be a child?

Duchess My friend, then we are at home having reached our aim, and the future is secured.

(enter Cariola)

Antonia (upset) Ha!

Duchess Be not afraid. It is Cariola, my personal maid. She knows everything and backs me on everything. She will be our extra wedding witness. Let's kneel and pray.

(takes Antonio to a small private altar)

I hereby accept you, Antonio, for my wedded husband to love you until death us do part. So shall we be as one for good and for worse, in progress and adversity, as God is our witness.

Antonio I accept and reciprocate. None but you, my duchess.

Duchess Forget my title. You didn't marry my title. The title and the established social standing of power is only in the way for true love. That's the sole reason why we elevated leaders and statues must propose ourselves, for no one else would dare to threaten us with love.

Antonio I am yours, my lady, and take the oath of your promise as sacredly serious.

Duchess Then we can unite to remain united forever. Come, my friend. Cariola, put out those two lights on my altar. They now enter darkness to shine the more

brightly in there, with the greater strength, sincerity and permanence. (*leads the way out with Antonio*)

Cariola As long as she was a widow her brothers would not threaten her, but I know her and understand her, if even her step from security to adventure now only could be regarded as the utmost dangerous folly. The warmer only will my feeling of compassion grow with her.

Scene 3.

Cardinal Are you sure?

Fernando You can never be sure. She sure is ill and swollen, she feels regularly ill and throws up but has a raving appetite.

Cardinal But she couldn't be pregnant, could she?

Fernando Impossible. That's for sure. She has no close friends, lives in exemplary plainness as she always did, is careful about the strictness of her holy privacy, handles her business perfectly with the help of her faithful accountant and leaves no room for any extravagance.

Cardinal Still she has secrets that we don't know. One of them is her illness.

Fernando Can we have it investigated?

Cardinal We will send a spy on her. I know one infallible test. He will bring her fresh apricots. If she eats them all it is serious, and then we can no longer exclude the possibility that she has become pregnant.

Fernando With whom?

Cardinal With anyone. We'll deal with that later, if it becomes necessary.

Fernando What kind of spy are you thinking of?

Cardinal His name is Bussola, the reliable agent who can take on any task and any mask and who always gets away completely neutral, for he only thinks of himself.

Fernando Then we have to bide our time in wait for his report on our sister's appetite for apricots.

Act II scene 1.

Duchess Doesn't it bother you, Antonio, that I am getting so fat?

Antonio How could it bother me, when I know so well the cause of it, and when all my concern is just your comfort? And even if your waist is swelling, your face is the same, if not even the more sparkling.

Bussola You actually look like Leonardo's familiar portrait of Monna Lisa Gherardini, the consummate and absolute harmony.

Duchess My friend, I hope indeed your flattery does not conceal secret ambitions. You should know that it nowadays has no effect on us princes any more.

Antonio Bussola is known for his neutrality. He wishes nothing for his own.

Bussola On the other hand I wish to share the little I can. Allow me, duchess, to present to you the very first fruits of this year's apricot harvest, a few selected samples. I selected the most delicate ones just to please you.

Duchess You are too kind. Dare I, Antonio, taste such exquisite temptations?

Antonio I vouch for him.

Duchess (accepts the apricots) Thank you, my friend. *(tastes one)* They are irresistible. You really selected them with care. *(tastes several)*

Antonio Take care, duchess, not to eat them all at once.

Duchess How could I resist them? *(eats)* They just arouse my appetite, and I can't quench it. You must prepare a palankin for me, Bussola, such as the Florentine duchess used to be carried around in.

Bussola That was while she was pregnant.

Duchess Yes, I suppose that's how it was.

Cariola You shouldn't eat more plums now, Madame.

Duchess They are not plums, silly Cariola, but apricots. They are not as dangerous.

Cariola Don't be too sure. Fruits are always fruits.

Bussola (aside) She can't stop. If this is not evidence yet, it's still an obvious indication.

Duchess Bussola, I thank for this gift. Did you know perhaps that our own gardener failed this year with our apricots?

Bussola No, duchess. No one told me about that.

Antonio How are you, duchess?

Duchess (feeling her stomach) Perhaps I had one too many.

Cariola That's what I warned you about. The only dangerous thing to eat is too much, especially in summer.

Duchess I couldn't stop my appetite. Show me to my rooms. All I need is rest, I think.

Bussola Let me help you. It was my fault.

Duchess Not at all. They were just too good.

(Cariola and Bussola helps the duchess out.)

Antonio O, my good Delio, we are lost! If it now comes out that she is pregnant and maybe has a sudden childbirth, it cannot be concealed!

Delio Don't worry, Antonio. If it would happen we have made arrangements in secret for a midwife. But I think it will pass. She felt ill before, and it's natural during pregnancy.

Antonio I don't know how to handle this development. I have never been in this situation before, you know.

Delio Just don't make any fuss about it, and for the sake of our duchess, mind the discretion!

Antonio Yes, that's the most important. Nothing must harm or threaten her.

Cariola (returns) I am afraid it is serious. We had better ensure security.

Antonio Is she in pain?

Cariola Outrageously.

Antonio In other words, emergency. Guards! (*enter guards*) Let no one enter and no one out from the duchess' residence. The situation is critical, and she is in great pains.

Guard I understand.

Antonio Spread the word, Delio, that our duchess has been attacked and has been visited and robbed by bandits. That will always have effect.

Delio I will tell it to some reliable gossips and efficient clacks. (*leaves*)

Bussola (returns) What is happening?

Antonio Were you not with the duchess?

Bussola She had so acute pains that I was promptly dismissed by her duenna.

Antonio That's luck for you. She appears to have been visited by infamous bandits. No one is let out from the citadel for that reason, and no one may visit her.

Bussola I sincerely hope no bandit poisoned my apricots.

Antonio Could anyone have done it?

Bussola Nowadays it happens that even cardinals poison their bibles which they give their most dangerous confessants to kiss, so that they die instantly.

Antonio What kind of tall tales is that?

Bussola I wish they were only tall tales.

Antonio Go. You have our permission to leave the citadel. I can vouch for that you had nothing to do with this crisis.

Bussola Thank you. (*leaves. Aside:*) I would fain have stayed to learn some more. (*out*)

Cariola (returns)

Antonio Well?

Cariola I waited until that Bussola was gone. I think he was there mainly to snoop.

Antonio He is gone now and harmless. How is it with our lady?

Cariola I was sent by her with the message that you have become a father. She is out of danger as is your firstborn son.

Antonio You make me blessed.

Cariola Don't thank me. It was all thanks to you.

Antonio Then I thank the duchess.

Cariola Do so. She is expecting you.

Antonio Does anyone know?

Cariola No one.

Antonio Then it shall be kept as the greatest state secret of Calabria, all for the life and honour, welfare, happiness and progress of our duchess.

Cariola We are alone with her secret.

Antonio And the midwife?

Cariola She will stay quiet. (*They go out.*)

Scene 2. The Cardinal's palace in Rome.

Cardinal My dear brother, you went so far just to see me. What is the matter? How is our sister?

Fernando Bussola has been in touch with a devastating report.

Cardinal Well?

Fernando He has found the astrologer who cast a horoscope for a child born earlier this year, a boy, in the ducal palace by the duchess herself.

Cardinal (shocked) Then we are in a bad state.

Fernando Do you understand what it means? It's a declaration of war against us! It's a mortal blow against our future and our position, which she delivers with the utmost shamelessness and impertinence!

Cardinal And no one knows who the father is?

Fernando No.

Cardinal Then she is a whore, and what's more, an unacceptable cancer on our family that must be removed by operation.

Fernando First we must learn who the father is, so that we can eliminate him as well. Who knows if she hasn't already written a will leaving everything to him? And would he not in that case muster all means to guard his son and apply all measures for his defence and security?

Cardinal You are right. Until we know who the father is we can do nothing. Is Bussola alerted?

Fernando Paid both by us and in salaried service of our sister.

Cardinal Is he reliable as a double spy?

Fernando He is concerned about both incomes.

Cardinal Then he is our man, and he will surely find out the father sooner or later. Is there still no suspect?

Fernando The man closest to her is her accountant Antonio, who served the family implicitly all these years since our father died, an impeccable man of honour who is above all suspicion. He could never importune on the duchess.

Cardinal So it might very well still be just an ordinary servant or groom without rank. The lower his rank, the better for us, the easier it will be to have her compromised, and we should start working on that at once. Soon the whole church will be informed that the duchess of Amalfi is a whore who is sucking a bastard.

Fernando Will that help us reach the father?

Cardinal Sooner or later, you can be certain he will be found out.

Act III scene 1.

Antonio Welcome back to Calabria my best friend! Did you arrive together with duke Fernando?

Delio I followed him faithfully as I always did, as faithful to him as to your duchess and yourself.

Antonio What is your diagnosis on the duke's and the Cardinal's intrigues? What do they know, and what do they not know?

Delio They know nothing but guess too much. The Cardinal, for it could be no one else, has spread the rumour by the church that the duchess is a whore who has born several children in sin.

Antonio I know. That rumour has also gained foothold among the people of Calabria. Everyone is whispering about it, but no one knows anything certain. As always, uncertainty is the surest ground of unfounded rumours.

Delio Is it true? Has she born several children?

Antonio Three so far, but we have managed to keep it secret with some success. Wet-nurses take care of the children until they are old enough to be entrusted to godparents. No one suffers from such discretion, and no one suspects or notices anything.

Delio And the oldest boy?

Antonio We can't do without *him*. We make sure to have care of him regularly, so that he may learn who he is.

Delio Here is the duke with the duchess and that fellow Bussola, who no one knows if he serves more the duchess or the duke.

Antonio Like you he is in the service of both, and there is nothing wrong with that as long as he behaves. I would not trust that slim opportunist though, as I always trusted you.

Delio A trust which I will never betray.

Antonio For which I am not the only one grateful.

Fernando (to the duchess) I am tired and on my way to bed. My sister, I have procured a husband for you. It's the only way to stop all malicious rumours.

Duchess And who is your choice?

Fernando Count Malatesta, the lord of Ancona.

Duchess That tyrant! He is nothing but empty gestures, arrogance and boastful nonsense. Everyone sees him through. If I am to remarry it must be for the honour and not dishonour of the family.

Fernando That's exactly why I wish to see you married again, for that's the only way. None of us believe those rumours that have no ground. It will be easy to dismiss them if you'll only celebrate another wedding.

Duchess I will consider Malatesta, if there is no one else.

Fernando You can still save yourself and our family honour, and I still trust your good judgement.

Duchess You can safely continue with that until I remarry. – There I see two of my most trusted advisors. Let me consult you, Antonio and Delio. (*exit with those*)

Fernando She is as guilty as a pregnant abbess and a heated sow but is a perfect master of self control in concealing it. She is rotten to the core while her self control is supremely sovereign. My spy, why haven't you found out yet who is impregnating her?

Bussola She has three bastards. That's all we know.

Fernando How many will there be, if she is allowed to go on? How many drones shall anonymously swarm around a queen who generously generates beehives of irritating insects? This must have an end. It can't go on like this. What about that key I asked you to provide?

Bussola (*showing a key*) It's this one. The original has unnoticeably been restored to the pocket of Cariola, and this is a perfect duplicate.

Fernando Then we may at last get somewhere.

Bussola But go carefully. If she suspects that anyone else than the required ones could see or hear what goes on between her sheets, she could always wring herself out of it.

Fernando Do you take me for a fool? She shall not suspect anything, not even after I have left her bedroom with the harvest of knowledge of her private life completed, which I need for going on to a safer course of action.

Scene 2. The duchess' bedchamber

Duchess So you advise me against marrying that villain Malatesta?

Antonio Could you even consider it seriously? Is he not the worst of all the fools and tyrants of Italy?

Duchess I am afraid my brother suggested him only to force me to reject his offer to use as reason and excuse for escalating their measures against me, as if their foul play at cowardly spreading false rumours was not enough.

Cariola It's the cardinal who is behind it. He wars against you by covert means cowardly behind the curtains, while the duke just longs for a reason to start an open conflict with you.

Duchess How can two brothers be so mean against a sister?

Cariola It's simple. They have no heart.

Duchess Lucky me then for having two hearts, if not three, to replace the stones which they replaced their hearts with.

Antonio What three hearts are you suggesting?

Duchess My own, yours and Cariola's. Yours is in my good care, and I will never let it go, and I always had Cariola's as the sister I should have had instead of two avaricious brothers.

Cariola I always loved you, Madame, but only Antonio has the right to claim your love.

Duchess Has he? He cannot spend the night here with me tonight.

Antonio And why?

Duchess I don't sleep well. If you sleep by my side, you will not sleep.

Cariola I often slept here by her side and can confirm that she is not easy to sleep with.

Antonio And you, Cariola, why did you never marry?

Cariola Men only make trouble and even more if you marry them. You should keep the opposite sex at a distance, since it is not to be trusted: there are always sickly intentions and destructive frictions. You can only make friends and be able to trust them within your own sex.

Duchess You don't know what it is to love. You can only love a friend of the opposite sex, for that's the only way to feel and reach perfection. Sticking to one sex only is one-sided and dull in its limitation, and you can only be completed and fulfilled by the other sex.

Antonio Yes, I agree.

Duchess That does not mean that marriage is a blessing. I think the ideal would be just a friendly agreement on a spiritual level, where you can have one another as lovers and trust each other but entirely without bonds, oaths and obligations, for love must never become a burden.

Antonio Yes, I agree.

Duchess You always just agree. Could you never produce some protests, invectives and refreshing opposition?

Antonio But my love, you are always right.

Duchess I dare have my doubts about that, and we shall not know until the future has crowned our life's experiment with success or defeat. I spare you tonight, Antonio. Don't stay here with me.

Antonio My love, only you have the right to rule over your bed.

Duchess You allow me to decide. That's why our love is so harmonic, fortunate and ideal. Don't fail me, Antonio, whatever happens.

Antonio Never. Come, Cariola. Let's give your mistress a chance to sleep, for she won't get it either in your company or mine.

Cariola We leave, my lady. Sleep well.

Duchess I will try.

(Antonio leaves with Cariola.)

No, it will be another sleepless night, like every night without my lover, but I can't have him here when the duke my brother walks around haunting in unblestness under constant scheming of how he and the Cardinal should best get rid of me. If then Antonio would be discovered in my bed, life would have no chance of survival, least of all Antonio and his children. For my part it doesn't matter what my brothers' conspiracies may lead to – if I can live nobly I can die even nobler.

Fernando (ascending from darkness with a dagger, which he offers her) Die then, at once!

Duchess My brother!

Fernando What's noble about whoring with a servant? You have stained your family so that it can never again be pure except by your death! You cover your crimes with what you call nobility only to avoid confronting them! You have lied to yourself, so that you no longer can distinguish between good and evil!

Duchess If you accuse me, you must hear my defence.

Fernando For your indefensible bastards? For your whoredom and promiscuity? For your dishonouring your family and your self-humiliation?

Duchess Brother, I am married.

Fernando That's the last thing you are. If you are married, why hasn't it become known and proclaimed and published in church? You are neither married in church nor by law, so you are no more than what people call you: a fallen woman, whore, strumpet, simple slut, prostitute, harlot, courtesan without honour and a cheap tart! I never want to see you any more.

Duchess At least talk with my husband.

Fernando I don't want to see him, know him, never hear his name and never learn it! For me he is as dead as you!

Duchess He is an honourable man related at some distance with princes, perhaps even far nobler and of more ancient blood than we. At least he behaves better as a man of honour.

Fernando That word in your mouth is the supreme blasphemy! Do you know what honour is? It is to keep absolutely spotfree. We know all about you, and the people know it even better. You have clandestinely given birth to three bastards with your pimp of a parasite, and you claim to still have any honour left? If you ever had any honour, it has fallen the deeper to its contrary. To us you are as if you never had existed, removed, rejected and thrown away like a stinking deadly cancer on our family that never should have been given any life at all! (*leaves, banging the door behind*)

Duchess Alas, we are betrayed!

Antonio (returning with Cariola) Has he left?

Duchess You heard?

Antonio Every word.

Duchess Now he knows who you are. You must get away.

Antonio Who has betrayed us? (*aims his pistol at Cariola*) Is it you?

Cariola That's the last thing I would do, and my lady knows it.

Duchess Put down your gun. She is more innocent than we.

Antonio (sees Fernando's dagger) What is that dagger doing here?

Duchess He gave it to me for my own use.

Antonio He urged you to commit suicide?

Duchess Not directly but indirectly.

Antonio Then you are also in great danger. (*Someone is banging at some door outside.*)

More threats and dangers? Who is it now?

Duchess There is one mine after another exploding under my feet.

Cariola It's Bussola.

Antonio I'll run off.

Duchess Hide in here. (*covers him behind a curtain*) I know what we shall do. (*signs to Cariola to let Bussola in*)

– What do you want here with me at this late hour?

Bussola Only report, that your brother the duke suddenly has left for Rome with great speed.

Duchess In the middle of the night?

Bussola All he said for an explanation was, that you were done for.

Duchess I know. Antonio, our accountant, has made a mess of our economy so that we are almost ruined.

Bussola So the duke rode off to get help from the cardinal?

Duchess Obviously.

Bussola (aside) You can't fool me. – Where is then Antonio? Has he escaped?

Duchess We must find him. Get the guards.

Bussola Certainly, duchess. (*leaves. Antonio immediately steps forth again.*)

Duchess You must go to Ancona. I have a secret house there that you could use for the time being. I will join you later and send you jewels and everything I could get hold of. Wait for me there. Unfortunately I must criminalise you in order to protect you, and for our protection I shall bury ourselves in white lies. – Hear, they come. (*Bussola returns with guards.*)

Antonio Hear me then at least, your highness!

Duchess I have heard enough! We must confiscate everything you own, and your service will never more be needed.

Antonio It is fair. All I own including my life belongs to you.

Duchess The only thing I can give you is the sack.

Antonio And the only thing I still can do to please you is to leave from here at once. (*leaves*)

Duchess What do you think about him? What does the people think of that man, Bussola?

Bussola A man of honour until now, a wise but difficult minister, who until now kept the purse-strings tight, known for his hostility to women, since he never even reacted to a flirt, and one who understood well to fill his own coffins.

Duchess This was my husband, with whom I have had three children, Bussola.

Bussola (pretends surprise) Is it true?

Duchess I never lie. Therefore I must now ask you to help me deliver my money and jewels to our place in Ancona. I will follow you later as soon as I can.

Bussola In that case I would suggest that you go for a pilgrimage to the sanctuary of Loreto just a few miles from Ancona. In that way you could leave with your dignity intact without giving an impression of escape or running away.

Duchess Your advice is good, and I will follow it. We will start preparing at once. Cariola, let's not wait. Time is all too precious. (*leaves with Cariola*)

Bussola (alone) It's sometimes painful to have to act as an informer. I don't wish the duchess any harm, but still I must now report her plans to those brothers who

angrily are working for her destruction, for which I will be richly rewarded. Thus the whole world goes around just by the bribes and intrigues of villains. (*leaves*)

Scene 3. Rome.

Cardinal Antonio, the accountant?

Fernando An ordinary upstart and scoundrel, as we thought, has only made his career by his submissiveness, talent for fawning flattery and lack of a mind of his own, a lackey, whom she found a suitable means for her perversion, an instrument that never would complain, criticize or have any objection, the perfect breeding bull, as placid as castrated, the ideal sexual puppet.

Cardinal Three children, you say?

Fernando No less.

Cardinal They will be difficult to dispose of.

Fernando Is there any choice? Shall we allow them to multiply? Will she be allowed to fornicate with any willing man from Reggio di Calabria to Domodossola?

Cardinal We must put a stop to her but with careful calculation and caution.

Fernando The worst thing is that she has got away.

Cardinal She is no longer at home?

Fernando She sent away her adulterer as soon as I had spoken my mind to her, and only a few days later she was gone herself on a pilgrimage, according to official sources.

Cardinal And she took her children with her?

Fernando All three of them.

Cardinal So they escaped us, and she is free.

Fernando And she took everything with her – jewels, money, clothes, documents, nothing was left behind.

Cardinal If thus she has abandoned all, you have every right to confiscate whatever is left, that is the entire duchy.

Fernando Yes, she has no right to ever get it back.

A servant Bussola is here.

Fernando Well, at last! He is our only hope. Welcome, Bussola!

Cardinal Do you know where the duchess has gone?

Bussola To Loreto, a sanctuary outside Ancona, a well renowned pilgrimage resort especially for repentant atoners seeking protection.

Fernando As if she was capable of the least repentance!

Cardinal That makes it easy for us. We'll persuade Malatesta to exile her as an outlaw. That way she will lose all property and be forced out on the roads as a beggar gipsy without any means for her support.

Fernando Is it that simple?

Cardinal It's only a first step in the right direction. In the end we'll get her framed, so that she will never again be rid of us.

Fernando I only wish to be rid of her.

Cardinal We'll reach there in good time, when we have achieved some results.

Scene 4. Loreto.

The duchess with Antonio, the children and Cariola, as humble pilgrims.

Duchess Here we can find safety for the time being from all mundane injustice. This is a sacred location. No spoilers and warriors and misers will come here to trample on and ruin the lives of innocents.

Antonio Still I fear some hidden menace. I would never have trusted your Bussola. Those loads of fortunes that you entrusted him with did never reach here, you know.

Duchess They appear to have been confiscated by order of the cardinal.

Antonio You asked me to go to Ancona. Why did Bussola then want you to Loreto?

Duchess It's human and natural to trust a friend consistently as long as he doesn't betray you. He suggested Loreto maybe because of its holy status and safe distance. He hasn't failed me yet.

Antonio No, not openly and directly, but behold the procession that now is approaching.

Duchess The cardinal!

Antonio It doesn't look any better. What does he want here?

Cardinal (*pompous in all his glory*) For the sake of duty I hereby lay down my cross, cardinal's hat, clothing, ring and chain to instead solemnly dress in what the war bids to heavily burden myself with, helmet and weapon, sword and armour, blood and death instead of the life insurance of eternity in my holy office, in the name of his holiness the pope, against the emperor for the king of France. (*lays down the cardinal regalia and puts on a helmet symbolically.*)

Antonio He intends to follow the pope to war! Is he here by chance, or was Bussola aware of his arrival here?

Cardinal I see among the pilgrims here even my own sister the duchess of Amalfi. Then I can take the opportunity to deliver the edict of count Malatesta of Ancona concerning the case of my sister the escaped duchess. She may not remain in Ancona with her bastards and her pimp but must immediately leave Malatesta's territory. She is therefore banished with all her family, and all her property has been confiscated. That's all. Let the procession continue in due order and solemnity. (*The procession goes on.*)

Antonio Banished! Bereft of everything! Exiled wherever you go! How far will the poison of your brothers' heartlessness extend their destruction?

Duchess There is an end to everything. But this is probably just a beginning, and I fear that my minor brother has worse messages to bring. Beloved Antonio, you must escape.

Antonio And you?

Duchess I'll manage. I can handle them. But take my oldest son, our princely heir with you. The two smaller ones are too young, they can't even talk yet, but your first son is old enough to travel with you.

Antonio When shall we meet again?

Duchess If not in this life, in the next one. And at least in eternity.

Antonio (embraces her emphatically) My love, I refuse to depart from you.

Duchess It's only physically. Our souls are one and will remain so forever. Keep me in your thoughts, as I will always keep you in mine and more than anyone else.

Antonio My beloved! *(embraces her again)*

Duchess We don't have much time. I can feel the cold breath of the phantoms of persecution down my neck. Hurry!

Antonio If we may not meet again, take care of the sweet children and protect them against the tigers.

Duchess Let me look at you one last time. Those words felt like coming from a dying father.

Antonio One last kiss.

Duchess So cold was never the hermit's kiss on any dead man's skull.

Antonio Beloved, farewell. *(embraces her one last time, takes the oldest boy, and leaves.)*

Duchess Now all the laurels of joy and glory that I carried in my days are withered into a crown of thorns, the pangs of pains of which shall never leave me in peace any more.

Cariola Listen! There is an armed force coming against us.

Duchess They are expected and welcome. If the end must come, I pray it will come quickly.

(Enter Bussola with soldiers.)

I presume I am the one you are looking for.

Bussola Duchess, you must no more associate with your husband.

Duchess You missed him. He has already left me. You can no longer separate us.

Bussola I have a letter for you from your brother the duke.

Duchess What does he want?

Bussola Peace, reconciliation and atonement.

Duchess It doesn't sound like him.

Bussola Then read for yourself! *(delivers the letter)*

Duchess (reads) "Send me Antonio, we desperately need his head for the business of our state." He will have his head, not for what it contains or thinks. He can't fool me. "Don't let it bother him that he owes us much. I would rather own his heart than his money." I would think so indeed. He wishes nothing more than to cut out his heart.

Bussola I can assure you, that he only wishes to put things in order, get you back home and the stability of your country restored with you reconciled with your people and your brothers as the heart of Calabria, celebrated for her beauty, wisdom, goodness and family loyalty.

Duchess Have you then not come to arrest me?

Bussola No, only to escort you back to Calabria to your court and your lovely home at Amalfi.

Duchess And if I refuse?

Bussola You can't refuse. Your brothers' sole concern is your security and welfare.

Duchess That's what Caron says to those he ferries across to the realm from where no one returns, just to make the journey easier.

Bussola They have the greatest compassion with you.

Duchess Like to a fatted turkey which is not fat enough yet to be slaughtered.

Bussola Are those your children?

Duchess Yes.

Bussola I can only see two of them.

Duchess That's right.

Bussola How old are they? Can they talk?

Duchess No, but their first words in your captivity will most likely be oaths and well grounded curses against supremacy.

Bussola Are you teaching them such stuff, or is it from your base husband that you convey such baseness?

Duchess Don't call him base. He was an honest and just man of straightforward simplicity who earned himself everything he got by his own effort and got nothing for free. Such merits I value much higher than what I and my brothers inherited by titles and fortune.

Bussola Well, I will try to respect him.

Duchess That's all I ask for my own part. I am at your service and will follow you whether to prison or to death, I don't care which, as long as my children may live.

Bussola Follow us, my duchess. (*escorts her out. She and Cariola never let go of the children.*)

Act IV scene 1. The duchess' apartment.

Fernando How does my sister endure her imprisonment?

Bussola Nobly, as she always was and still is. She is sad like as if she since long had got used to her prison and appears rather to welcome an end to her suffering than have anything against it. Her dignity in suffering gives majesty to her tragedy and adversity, and her beauty is more apparent in her tears than it used to be in her smiles. She is so quiet and lets not a sound of what she suffers out but bears it with harmony and often smiles to herself in clear serenity.

Fernando She seems to have fortified her arrogance and haughtiness by her newly acquired melancholy.

Bussola No, it's not arrogance and haughtiness. It is her pride and inborn integrity that has been strengthened by her suffering, which she masks under supreme self control.

Fernando She is just playacting as always. May she be damned. When I just think of all the evil she has done to us and get furiously upset, I just wish to batter her to death and have done with it. Just convey my message to her. I cannot even stay here in her apartment without getting infected by her morbid vibrations. It's unendurable just to know that she is still alive. I am finished here. I am off. (*leaves*)

Bussola He is losing his foothold and denies his guilt to himself and blames it on her, blind to all the beams in his own eye. But she is coming.

Duchess (*enter*) Bussola, what is your business here?

Bussola Just to wish you all the best.

Duchess No doubt you are bringing some bad news again. And why then do you always cover your poisonous attacks in disguises of gold and honey?

Bussola It's hardly poison I bring this time. Your brother Fernando wants to visit you, but since he has sworn never to see you again he will come in night time and only speak to you in the dark.

Duchess His stolidity is consistent. He will not break his word when he has given it to devilry.

Bussola He only means well.

Duchess Like always.

Bussola He wants to kiss your hand and be reconciled but asks you not to light any torch or light.

Duchess It is dark already. We could put out all lights. Just let him come.

Bussola He is ready.

(*The duchess and Cariola put out all lights. When it is dark enough, Fernando enters.*)

Fernando Where are you, sister?

Duchess I am here.

Fernando Your darkness becomes you.

Duchess I want to ask your forgiveness.

Fernando I will gladly grant it. Where are your babies?

Duchess What do you want with them?

Fernando I just wonder where those brats are.

Duchess They are not babies or brats but my children.

Fernando Of course they are your children although they are just bastards, and although the law distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate children, they still have the right to be called human beings.

Duchess Have you only come to insult my children to their mother's face? That's an outrage to their mother and worth many punishments in hell.

Fernando If only you always would have lived like this in the dark, since all the evil you gave us came from staying too much in the glare of the strong light of your power and glory. But I have only come to make peace with you. Here is my hand. If you want forgiveness, you may kiss it.

Duchess I would do it gladly to atone for all and do what I can to restore peace and harmony.

Fernando Mark the ring on its finger, which you once made a present of love. I ask you to keep the ring and save its message and meaning, the hand as well as the ring, and we will soon also be able to offer the heart that belongs to them. When you desire your friend, just send them to the one that owned them, and you will see how much he can help you.

Duchess Your hand is very cold. I fear you are not well after your journey. It is unnaturally cold – and it is loose! O horror!

Fernando (to Bussola) Give her enough light. *(leaves)*

Duchess What an infernal cruelty to thus in cold calculation play me such a practical joke! What does he mean?

(A curtain is withdrawn, revealing Antonio's and the children's bodies as dead, Antonio without one hand.)

Bussola He means, that you are now quite alone without husband and children, and that you from now on hardly needs to grieve any more for what you anyway never will have in life any more.

Duchess This is too much. Are they then all murdered, all four of them?

Bussola They are at least dead to you.

Duchess Then I have only one wish left in life, to die myself.

Bussola You must live.

Duchess That's worse than to die. The cruellest torture that the souls are exposed to in hell is that they have to go on living without ever being able to die. Of course, I could starve myself to death.

Bussola Then you would only be fed by force. Consider, my duchess, suicide is the worst exit of all, for it implies all doors and all possibilities to be shut, and there are always possibilities even in the most hopeless of lives, and always new doors only made to be opened. My lady, I implore you to survive, and I shall be of your assistance.

Duchess To me life is only a mortal curse, so that now even death appears as a more joyful alternative.

Bussola My lady, be brave. You have passed through many ordeals and only grown more noble and beautiful in the light of your adversity. Don't interrupt the development of life by vain self-destruction, but allow it to continue growing and striving in your care as long as it still is natural and able to breathe. Anything else would be an unnatural sacrilege.

Duchess Even if the whole world goes to perdition I will not, unless it drags me along with it. Let them kill me if they like. That's the only thing left for them to do. I will survive them anyway. *(leaves)*

Bussola No assignment given to me was ever more difficult. I sincerely hope the duke will not go any further. They have already gone too far. Here he is.

Fernando My action had all the effect I could wish. She is shocked and devastated. Vincenzo Laureola performed his task in a masterly way, and the wax figures were as convincing as if they had been real corpses.

Bussola Why are you doing this?

Fernando To drive her to despair.

Bussola Is it really worth it? Be sensible, your grace, and don't allow this cruelty to run away with you and get the better of you and your senses.

Fernando I am not the one who is losing my senses. My intention is to make *her* do it. This is only the primary step. I will succeed, just you wait! Next I will fetch a company of madmen from the hospital, who shall freely improvise from their repertoire from the drains of the madhouse just to entertain her, so that she will find some kind of communion here in her captivity. It will only do her good.

Bussola I don't wish to be part of this.

Fernando I order you to. You must.

Bussola From now on I will do all I can to comfort her.

Fernando You may if you can. I give you free hands. You'll never be able to quench the passion fire of my revenge for all her crimes behind our backs, her secret self-indulgences just to stain our family and lead it to destruction, her abominable intrigues and damned orgies of criminal possession just to seduce and ruin and bring her family to perdition. Well, I release you from your commission as her prison guard. I will send you to Milan instead, where Antonio now has found some kind of a refuge. You don't have to feel obliged any more to keep the duchess alive. You are dismissed from her. Go! Wait for further orders! (*Bussola leaves.*)

I can no longer trust that worm. It's time for me to take the case of the duchess in my own hands.

Scene 2. The same.

(The duchess and Cariola somewhat recovered, sitting by their embroideries, are disturbed by hardly human noises.)

Duchess What kind of nightmare wailings is that, Cariola? Are we hearing nightmares in broad daylight though we are awake?

Cariola It's the bedlamites coming together, summoned by your brother the duke just to harass us with even worse tortures. Such a tyranny I don't think was ever practised before against two harmless and defenceless women.

Duchess We must be grateful. At least I am. Only noise and madness could save my senses, since this silence and the horrible thoughts of confinement it inspires would only definitely drive me mad by depression, despair and regret.

Cariola I suspect your brother's actual intention to be just that, to drive you out of your mind. If he then instead favours it by his lunatics he has grossly miscalculated, and you might end up a winner.

Duchess That will be on him. He can afford it, but I have nothing to lose and therefore can't lose anything. If I then instead happen to win, it will not matter, and I don't care. Continue encouraging me, Cariola. Read to me some dark morbid and hopeless tragedy.

Cariola That would increase your melancholy.

Duchess Not at all. To listen to a worse tragedy than that of real life could only alleviate our reality. Worst of all is to be forced to confinement in oneself.

Cariola I am sure we will still get out somehow.

Duchess No cagebird in the world would believe that who even in his highest optimism could do anything else than fall quiet.

Cariola Listen! Someone is coming.

Duchess It's only one of those servants who only turn up to deliver bad news.

Servant (turning up) I am only here to inform you, that the duke your brother intends some evening's entertainment for you.

Duchess Alas, we love his intrigues, for they constantly excel themselves in their great mirth and excellent sense of humour.

Cariola I think we already heard the prelude to the new play.

Duchess What actors are playing in the new show?

Servant A mad lawyer, a secularised priest who only preaches atheism, an astrologer who knows exactly when doomsday should have occurred and believes in shifting time and disorder in the dimensions, and several others. All are qualified as certified.

Duchess They can't be madder than the world, and the world is hopelessly disqualified and uncertified.

(The bedlamites start appearing.)

Servant I leave you alone with your visitors. *(sneaks out)*

Doctor Noble ladies, I have had many patients, and they all died, since I poisoned them to death. They were dying anyway and tormented to death by life and had nothing else to do, so I just helped them on and shortened their misery. Was it wrong? I boasted my philosophy and was only proud of my incisions, but my jealous short-sighted colleagues could not accept the reason and success of my sensible procedure, so they got me certified into the hospital, where I don't have to work any more. Now I was sent to comfort you. And I can promise you, that no maniac I ever comforted did ever get well.

Lawyer Don't listen to him. He is all gaga as the imbecile certified idiot he is. He brags about the patients he has murdered, more than a hundred, but what is that to all the murderers I got pardoned and released and all the innocents I got sentenced? I was employed in my day by all the highest nobles and potentates of Naples just to let them get away without punishment. I have had more villains released than any mad emperor ever got innocents to the scaffold, quartered, castrated and hanged. Popes absolve any murderers, but I have absolved popes.

Duchess Why are you then not in the service of my brothers the duke and the Cardinal?

Lawyer Because I was too clever. Only to sabotage them I made the settlement that they would inherit nothing from their father while instead you, their extravagant self-indulgent sister, would inherit everything.

Duchess And that's why you were hospitalized?

Lawyer Yes. Isn't it unfair?

Priest Don't brag about your injustice. Everything is unfair, for God has ordained it that way, that everything in the world must be wrong, to punish all people, who are hopelessly self-destructive, mad, jealous, incompetent, distracted, disorderly, promiscuous and morally bankrupt...

Duchess Is man then no longer the image of God?

Priest It's impossible that God could be so perverse and fallible, so idiotic and corrupt, so sexually stuck and fixed in his unlimited lewdness and promiscuity that man would be some image of him. Therefore I must hold it proved beyond any reasonable doubt that God could not exist and never has existed.

Duchess Who wrote the Bible then?

Priest Cheats and charlatans, impostors, madmen and idiots like myself.

Duchess And you are supposed to be a priest?

Priest And more saintly and holy as such than every priest in the whole world, for I am the only one who is right.

Astrologer Don't be so damned haughty, you miserable failure of a nonsensical preacher. The only one in the world who is God is I.

Duchess How do you know?

Astrologer Because I am the one who commands the stars to decide the destinies of men. Only I understand to interpret the stars and their relationships and aspects correctly, and therefore I am the only one who could be the only true God.

Philosopher What about me then, who in a previous life was Jesus Christ?

Astrologer Go and hang yourself. You have nothing to say.

Philosopher I did hang myself once, and that was enough.

Astrologer You are unchanged, if you claim that the resurrection was of any matter.

Philosopher As if I ever was dead! I am constantly reincarnated and get constantly executed again by the ungrateful and ignorant humanity! This time I was buried alive and incarcerated in a hospital, but I am used to get buried alive. I was already then as Jesus Christ, but I triumphed as always by reincarnation and resurrection.

Astrologer You are just babbling.

Priest Tell me now exactly how it is. Mary couldn't certainly have any children unless she was impregnated by her Joseph, who must have known what he did, as he had made children before?

Philosopher Are you suggesting that my mother was a whore?

Priest Yes, if your father wasn't Joseph.

Astrologer Who was it then?

Priest If it was Joseph she was no innocent virgin. Or else she was a whore.

Astrologer She was a whore anyway if it was Joseph, since they were not married.

Priest Joseph was an old widower, and Mary was a teenager. I call that lewd.

Philosopher You don't know what you are talking about.

Astrologer That's precisely what we do. It's you who are demented, deluded and perverse.

Philosopher I am just stating facts.

Astrologer That's what we are trying to say. Joseph was a lewd and dirty old man who took the teenager Mary without her being aware of what was happening until it was far too late. All the gospels tried to do was to smooth it over, beautify it and explain it away dressed up in attractive myths.

Priest It was far more serious and worse in the case of Mary Magdalene, whom Jesus screwed, if you are to read and believe Thomas the apostle.

Duchess Poor creatures, you are just prattling on. Do you have nothing else to do even in your hospital than just to debase everything by slander and gossip, spreading false rumours and humiliating speculations? Is there not even in your asylum the faintest hope of anything better, some light and something different from the self-destructiveness of humanity?

Priest That's what I mean. There just isn't.

Duchess Then I welcome you to a far more hopeless hell than yours in the hospital, namely my own as prisoner in this castle.

Doctor But you are a duchess and sovereign as such and respected all across the country and Italy and elevated beyond all suspicion of any fallibility.

Duchess I thank you. My brothers claim the opposite.

Lawyer Then they are mad, but I always said they were, since that's what they always have been.

Philosopher That's why they stick so strictly to their own absolute authority by their titles and positions.

Priest They are also saintly, as they confess their sins as regularly as they commit them, go to church and communion, confess and repent for a refreshment to then go back out to war to start new fresh and even crueller intrigues.

Philosopher That's how the world goes around. That's why we happy few who know all about it are locked up for life and buried alive.

Duchess I ask you, gentlemen, to convey to the duke my sincere thanks for such an enlightening entertainment. You are all better brothers to me than the real ones, and I can regard you as no less than my dearest colleagues.

Lawyer (bows) What an honour, sister.

Doctor We are all deeply honoured.

Priest We almost feel promoted and elevated to your court.

Duchess That's precisely what you are. You are my court since I have no other.

Astrologer (to the others) We could hardly make a better performance.

Philosopher Let's be grateful for the appreciation we received and retire in dignity.

Duchess You have done well. Thank you, gentlemen. Your universal wisdom spites the world, surpasses and places it in a correct perspective as that prison of restricted futility it is.

Astrologer It's our pleasure that you understand us.

Philosopher We have a sister.

Priest And some sister! Nobler than the entire world!

Doctor Only villains stick to the mundane world and adhere to its follies in addicted dependence. I regret that I no longer may freely cure it of deadly patients.

Lawyer It will die anyway in time, for no one can defend it. The only one who could was I, who is sitting here locked up and branded as chronically mentally ill.

Priest Just call on us next time you need us. We are gladly at your service as preachers.

Duchess I never had a more sober preacher at court, but I fear my brother won't let you out again when he is enlightened about the success you made with me.

Philosopher We shall maintain your court with you or without you to your honour.

Duchess Thank you. Now I will be able to sleep well for the first time in ages. (*The bedlamites retire respectfully.*)

Cariola I fear there is one last guest.

Duchess Who is it?

Bussola (disguised and masked) I am your gravedigger.

Duchess How do you know? You have no corpse as yet to bury.

Bussola I just come to prepare you, for your hangmen are on their way.

Duchess You can't prepare me, for I am more than well prepared long since. I am so prepared, that I am looking forward to death as a better life than the life I was forced to lead here.

Bussola I just wanted to inform you and try to alleviate the transition.

Duchess Are you equally courteous to your bodies? Do you handle them with care?

Bussola With the greatest respect, so that they will not be disturbed in their rest. No one wants corpses raised again as haunting nightmares and evil furies of conscience.

Duchess I am afraid I can't answer for what I will do after my death.

Bussola That is your business. I suggest a temporary postponement. When you are safely on the other side and see how things are there and what possibilities might turn up, you can start acting and are free to act at large.

Duchess I am looking forward to that day. Something tells me, that even if my brother murders me, my love will triumph over him. By premeditatedly and methodically preparing my death, the Cardinal will only dig his own grave. Gravediggers like you are more healthy, for you dig your graves to give others peace therein, but my brothers dig their own graves to fall therein themselves never to have peace again.

Bussola I think there is something to it. Are you ready?

Duchess Always ready for whatever.

Cariola My lady, everything is but a charade, an infernal masque just to scare you out of your wits.

Duchess They failed in everything and especially in scaring me out of my mind. So they have nothing else to do but to murder me.

(Four masked hangmen bring in a coffin with a bell and a rope.)

Cariola They do go about it with a sense of proper ceremony.

Duchess Everything is carefully thought out by my brother, who most certainly is standing hidden behind the curtain, gloating on the spectacle. He can't get more

morbid than he was from the beginning, but still he always succeeded in excelling his own morbidity. – What is my sentence, gravedigger? How will they murder me?

Bussola By strangling by rope.

Duchess That's milder at least than to die stifling in cough, excretions, catarrh and consumption, for it will be so much quicker.

Cariola They mustn't do it! It's only a cruel hoax!

Duchess Cariola, go to my children and take care of them. I can manage these wild uninvited night guests alone. Obey me.

Bussola Do as your mistress says. It's best for you and the children.

Duchess Obey me.

Cariola If they as much as touch a hair on your head, I will avenge you far crueller than any man could for the rest of my life and beyond the limits of death!
(*leaves*)

Duchess You heard. She will not be easy to handle whether before or after death.

Bussola You are lucky both, your highness, to have such a quick exit from this existence. You were born with titles, influence and power, and that was your curse, since you opposed its impact. There is no political establishment exerting its power, except on the condition of an equally established corruption of evil, foul play, treason, murder and what not, that does not live exclusively on sacrificing other peoples' lives. You detached yourself from that establishment to instead join hands with all its victims, innocence and fairness, love, humanity, sincerity and honour. You are blessed in the courage of having made that choice and die a martyr to your honour, for which you should be happy and relieved.

Hangman Do you mind, Madame? (*puts the rope round her neck*)

Duchess As long as you don't fumble, it doesn't hurt, and you do it quickly, I really have nothing against it.

(*Bussola makes a sign, and the hangmen strangles her quickly.*)

Bussola (removes his mask) So it is done. I hope the duke is satisfied now, but I doubt he will ever be satisfied.

Fernando (in) Is she really dead?

Bussola Your grace, check for yourself. She could hardly be more dead.

Fernando (to the hangmen) Quick! The children! All must be killed! The maid also! (*exit hangmen*) Then bring them in here, so that I can see that they are all dead!

Bussola Will you also desecrate their bodies?

Fernando I just want to make sure that all is accomplished.

Bussola Christ said when he died, that it was accomplished, but that's when it all began.

Fernando Quiet!

Bussola I can't keep quiet. Here comes your life's work, the harvest of all your life's effort, three more bodies, a virgin and two small children.

(*The hangmen place the bodies beside the duchess.*)

Fernando It was necessary. It was a murder of honour.

Bussola (to a hangman) What did the maid say when she died?

Hangman She didn't want to die. She was not prepared. She fought with teeth and nails so there will be scars for some years. She argued that she hadn't been to confession for three years and that she was pregnant.

Fernando Lies. She tried to get away.

Bussola And what had the children done, your grace? What did their threat against you consist of, when they couldn't even talk?

Fernando Shut up! They were children of the she-wolf and wolves like she.

Bussola No, they were human beings and not wolves, and innocent as such at that. Look at the delicate corpses of these little children. Only yesterday they prattled and cheered warmly and cordially at anything. What joy could it bring you to put an end to childish joy and innocence by slaughter and cruelty? Can you watch them without nauseating disgust and anguish and not have any feeling of remorse at all?

Fernando At least shut the eyes of the poor things. They died all too young.

Bussola No, your sister died before her time all too aged, because of the sufferings from your persecution of her.

Fernando Let me once more see her face. Alas, couldn't you have stopped this, who still was present at the deed? What a man of honour you would have been if you had smuggled her out to some sanctuary! If you had only interfered between her innocence and my revenge of blinded wrath! I asked you to commit the murder of my best friend my sister, and you did it!

Bussola Don't accuse me. I advised you against it from the start, but you never wanted to listen in your blind brotherly jealousy. I did all I could to mediate between you, and only reluctantly carried through whatever orders you gave me in your persecution tactics against her, in efforts to turn them to her advantage, strengthen her, comfort her and give her hope. I had nothing to do with your hired assassins. They were all your own. Still I have fulfilled everything you asked me to do, and do I not finally deserve some kind of a salary?

Fernando Of course you deserve a reward.

Bussola I still had nothing so far for my long and faithful service.

Fernando You will certainly have what you have earned with a vengeance. As a reward for everything you did I forgive you the murders of my sister, her maid and two children.

Bussola But I didn't do it!

Fernando Everything you did led up to it. And therefore I must now ask you: With what right and authority have you done what you have done?

Bussola With yours.

Fernando I never gave you any authority to reach this result. No court has decided it, there has been no sentence, and the church can only rightly condemn it. You are lost, Bussola, you have placed your own head under the axe and can be taken to a criminal court with only a death sentence for a possible outcome.

Bussola You are perverting all justice. And if the story comes out, how will you get away with it yourself?

Fernando I had nothing to do with it, and you know it: She was murdered by unknown masked assassins during the night, and a careful investigation will only find that a number of murders have been committed and that you alone were present. No matter what tales you will try to fabricate, nothing will help.

Bussola Why, after all I have done for you, do you so ungratefully treat me so badly? I always implored you not to have to torment her any more, you always tempted me to take another step, each time it was promised to be the last one, but there never was a last one until now, when everything is too late and nothing can be redressed.

Fernando You are lost. Get away and hide somewhere in the world, where neither we nor justice can reach you any more.

Bussola Do you banish me now?

Fernando If you don't wish to be prosecuted and destroyed.

Bussola You have seduced me with beguiling hopes of riches to participation in the most heinous crimes ever committed here in Amalfi, and what's worse, they were preceded by an endlessly long and cruel torture which, because it was mental, was far more inhuman than any bodily torture could be.

Fernando Enough! You just keep babbling, and I will hear no more, for you only bore me. Get the hell out of here at last and never let me see you again! (*Bussola leaves without further comments.*)

He will probably go to Milan to confer with Antonio, who still has a whore's brat to plague us with. I will have to have him shadowed and contact my brother the Cardinal to at last have this painful business out of this world with our sister's last child.

Act V scene 1. Milan.

Antonio Is there nothing I can do to placate the brothers?

Delio I have tried everything. I pleaded with the marquess of Pescara myself, who by his bills has acquired some of the property that belonged to you until you were banished and all your lands were confiscated, but I was denied without explanation, while the Cardinal's mistress, Giulia Castrucchio, only had to deliver a letter from the Cardinal to instantly have all that property as a gift.

Antonio The Cardinal is now here in Milan.

Delio And I just heard that his brother is here to visit him. He appears not to be quite well.

Antonio What ails him?

Delio Sleeplessness and depressions, obsessions and hallucinations, illusory voices and a number of other psychic problems, which affect his intestines and stomach problems negatively.

Antonio It sounds like perfect hypochondria.

Delio It's a fact that he is not quite himself.

Antonio I will visit the Cardinal. Perhaps I can convince him that I am not as dangerous as they think. If he hears me alive perhaps he might realise that every hostile action against me was unnecessary and stupid.

Delio Take no risks. The Cardinal is like velvet on the outside but has nothing but poisonous thorns under the skin.

Antonio I know. I know him. That's why I am not afraid.

Scene 2. The Cardinal's apartment in Milan.

Cardinal I am grateful for your visit, Bussola, but you must wait. My brother is also here, and there are some problems about him.

Bussola Is he ill?

Cardinal You will see yourself. I expect him any moment.

Bussola I would rather not see him.

Cardinal Perhaps it's better. Does your errand to me touch your dealings with him?

Bussola No.

Cardinal Then I ask you to wait outside in the meantime. (*shows Bussola to a waiting-room.*)

(*Enter Fernando with a doctor and Malatesta.*)

Fernando Why may I not be alone? Why must everyone now persecute me?

Malatesta But why do you love your loneliness? You didn't use to, and only your own thoughts could be dangerous to you if you are alone with them.

Fernando Who is persecuting me?

Doctor You are not persecuted at all, your grace.

Fernando I constantly feel my shadow following me in my heels.

Malatesta But that is only your shadow!

Fernando You who are so knowledgeable, doctor, cure me from it, so that I can have peace.

Doctor Your shadow is no illness. We all have our own shadows to drag along, it's quite natural, and they weigh nothing, but you don't seem to understand their natural nature.

Fernando I can understand anything and much more than you, mister bright boy of a quack. I dismissed you long ago.

Doctor The Cardinal your brother found it safest that I kept you under observation, in case anything should happen.

Fernando And what could happen, except that my persecutors could get at me?

Doctor Who are your persecutors?

Fernando That is what I don't know! They just keep persecuting me! I can't see them, but I feel them and know that they are always straight behind me lurking on me.

Malatesta (to the Cardinal) He is queer and will remain so since he refuses to accept and realize that that is what he is.

Cardinal It will pass. It might be just a temporary depression.

Fernando What I have done I have done, but I admit nothing. What are you doing here? I didn't come to meet you, damned flatterers and slaves and lackeys, but my brother the Cardinal.

Cardinal It's me. Tell me, don't you recognize me?

Fernando Are you the Cardinal?

Cardinal Yes.

Fernando What Cardinal?

Cardinal Your brother.

Fernando You are lying. He didn't look that way.

Cardinal We all gradually change our looks while we age. You haven't seen me for half a year.

Fernando You only play the Cardinal to get me trapped.

Cardinal In what sort of a trap?

Fernando How could I know? You are just going to persecute me like everyone else.

Cardinal Take good care of him, doctor. Give him much rest and the calmest harmonious environment, and then he will get better and get rid of his depression.

Malatesta In Amalfi he had the calmest environment in the world of perfect harmony and beauty in his castle and garden, but he just could not bear it there any more.

Doctor (to the duke) Come, my friend. You shall see it will be all right with time. (*exit with the duke*)

Malatesta Have you any idea how such a brilliantly gifted prince could get stuck in so dark blind alleys of self-restriction and frightening morbidity?

Cardinal I suppose it is age setting in too fast too early, or he has been visited by some phantom or revelation from the other side, perhaps by some unfathomable nightmare. How could I know? It could be just anything, but it will pass.

Malatesta Let's hope so. (*leaves*)

Cardinal And then there was that Bussola. He must not know that I know everything about the death of his duchess. (*lets him in from the waiting-room*) What can I do for you, Bussola?

Bussola I heard through the door and understood my duke's predicament.

Cardinal I expect it to be soon well known and public. Still I ask you to contain what you know.

Bussola I never had any problem with discretion.

Cardinal How is the duchess? Her grief has been hard on her, but I can assure you that we do everything we can to take care of her and give her comfort. Of course it was a shock to her to be deceived by her most faithful servant, the treasurer Antonio, for so much of her money – he appears to have embezzled all her money, her entire fortune and inheritance. But why do you look so upset? I know. You served the duke so faithfully for so long. Of course you are concerned about his present condition of mental instability, deteriorating into debility. Nothing could shock as much as a change of personality, but he could become normal again.

Bussola (aside) What does he mean? Doesn't he know anything? Or is he acting? Why, in that case?

Giulia (enters) My lord, will you have dinner? (*discovers Bussola, aside:*) Does he know that I am the Cardinal's mistress? I would rather have him than the old dry Cardinal.

Cardinal Later. Now I am busy. Please go. (*She departs.*)

His nemesis, Antonio di Bologna, the secretary who commenced the ruin of our duchess and seduced her so that her destruction became inevitable, is now here in Milan. That's why your visit is very opportune. Find him and kill him, for as long as he is alive she cannot remarry, and we have a splendid match prepared for her. Execute the mission, and you can be sure of a higher favour and promotion.

Bussola How can I find him?

Cardinal He has a good friend called Delio. You know him. Just find them. Ask people and go to mass in the cathedral and the churches, and they will certainly turn up or be well known there.

Bussola There is no one I would more gladly meet with than Antonio.

Cardinal Good! Find that villain, and you will find your fortune and happiness. Now I must go to my housekeeper for my dinner. (*leaves*)

Bussola He is just like his brother – all they both can think of is murder. How could he be ignorant of the duchess' death? It must be pure dissimulation for evil purposes. Let me also dissimulate then and pretend to play the game, which only is about how they prepare their own destruction and desperately try to drag down as many as possible with them. And the poor gentleman Antonio! I will find you to warn you and get you to safety, perhaps to become your best instrument for all that retaliation needed to have us reconciled with life. Even the weakest of all arms is strong enough to handle justice when its sword demands a striking action. All power, force and energy is basically and exclusively moral, and those two brothers pathetically competing in bolting away in the madness of criminality are utterly morally bankrupt.

Scene 3. Outside.

Delio Up there you see the Cardinal's window. This fortification was built on the ruins of an old church, and on the other side of the river there is a wall, a remnant of what once was a monastery, which has resulted in, that here you have the best echo I have ever heard, a hollow, solemn and spooky echo, which so distinctly and vividly repeats whatever you speak if it only is a whisper, that every letter is more than clear enough and amplified, like in the Ear of Dionysios.

Antonio I always loved old living ruins, where history never dies but goes on living a life of mystery in other dimensions, which so beneficially remind us of how futile, vain and absurd we are in our pitiable triviality. Without doubt there are many graves here with stories too many and too tragic to be told – all the best of humanity lies buried alive.

Echo Humanity lies buried alive.

Delio You hear. Now you have been detected by your double your echo.

Antonio As if it wailed when it was awakened and gave an extra even more ghostly meaning to its grave accent, as if here even death itself was speaking.

Echo Here even death itself is speaking.

Delio You can hear for yourself. It is phenomenal, and you could easily manipulate it into anything, to joyful singing, to senseless laughter and horrid hysteria, to frightening effects or to a song of death languishing in endless tears.

Echo A song of death languishing in endless tears.

Antonio It's almost as if she lent her own voice to bottomless depths of sorrow.

Echo My voice to bottomless depths of sorrow.

Delio It's too spooky. Let's leave this place. I fear some calamity. Don't go to the Cardinal.

Echo Go to the Cardinal.

Antonio She urges me to the opposite. Mark well how the echo doesn't repeat exactly what we express but adds some spice to the contents of a somewhat varied meaning, as if it actually was she herself who advised me like my oracle.

Echo Your oracle.

Delio That's what frightens me. It doesn't usually work like that. Consider the matter carefully, give yourself time, Antonio, and don't do anything rash. Time is the highest wisdom and better than all wisdom in efficiency when it comes to the cure of sorrows. Wait, I beg you, Antonio, and put safety first.

Echo Put safety first.

Antonio Necessity forces me to go on. What is my love doing now? She probably sleeps with her beloved darlings in a happy mother's sleep of smiling serenity with them both closest to her heart. Shall I ever see her again? Yes, we shall meet again soon.

Echo Yes, we shall meet again soon.

Antonio I feel it so distinctly, that my return to her leads me to the Cardinal. This destiny I cannot escape.

Echo This destiny you cannot escape.

Antonio You hear.

Delio That echo is something dead, a physical matter without any life, a simple phenomenon of acoustics. You must not take it so dead serious.

Echo Take it dead serious.

Antonio Should I then not hear what I am hearing? It's her own voice but whispering and veiled but the more obvious and clear! It is as if she was showing me the way! I must follow it!

Echo You must follow it.

Antonio I have nothing to lose, Delio. They have already taken everything away from me. All I have left is my life. I can no longer live here as a half disabled human being. I will wage everything and win everything or lose it all. That's the only thing left for me to do.

Echo The only thing left for you to do.

Delio I shall support you in everything. Your oldest son should be by your side. Perhaps the encounter with his own nephew could tune the Cardinal to some trace of humanity and wholesome charity.

Echo Charity.

Antonio You hear. We are on the right course. Be it as you say. She calls on her oldest son, and I will present him to the Cardinal. Thus nothing can go wrong, and our diplomacy will prevail over all evil of power in this world. Come!

Echo Come! Come! Come!

(Exit Antonio with his arm around Delio.)

Scene 4. Back at the Cardinal's.

(Bussola is on his way out as Giulia enters.)

Giulia (enters with a pistol) My lord, I wish to speak with you.

Bussola What is the meaning?

Giulia You know that I am the Cardinal's mistress.

Bussola I also know that you are Castrucchio's wife. Where is your husband?

Giulia He has gone to Naples where he is busy about taking over Antonio de Bologna's residential palace. *(raises her pistol against him)*

Bussola I have not poked into your business. Why then do you aim a gun at me?

Giulia Simply to force you to confess.

Bussola What? What have I done?

Giulia You have bewitched me to fall in love with you. I was raped by the Cardinal and have been forced to be his slave under threats of violence and murder, but no woman wants him, the old dried out and plastered mummy. He only inspires disgust.

Bussola Perhaps I can help you, if you can help me.

Giulia How could I help you?

Bussola You could find out how the Cardinal is involved in the death of the duchess and her children.

Giulia I already know all about it. He has confessed it to me. He commanded his brother to take the lives of the innocents by sanction of the church and absolution in advance since it was a murder of honour.

Bussola I knew it! So it's the Cardinal who is responsible for the brother and his mental illness.

Giulia But I swore never to tell anyone.

Bussola But I knew it already.

Giulia Still I have now told you about it. If now the Cardinal discovers that I told you he will take my life.

Bussola Escape then before it is too late.

Giulia Where could I go? To my corrupt husband, their slave lackey as all the others, he who least of all loved me, since our marriage was just a political

arrangement by our parents? I hardly ever saw him. He only thinks of his indulgences and his money. And that Cardinal then. For his eminence, love is just force and violence, and he always enjoyed it.

Bussola I will help you.

Giulia And if I escape, he will immediately know that I have talked, and then I will have all the bloodhounds of the Vatican running after me.

Bussola What do you want me to do?

Giulia Love me – for real.

Bussola Here and now?

Giulia Why not?

Bussola Here in the Cardinal's own house?

Giulia He will not notice anything. He is tired after his dinner, and I put some powder into it.

Bussola If only you had put the poison that he deserves!

Giulia Maybe I did. I have often thought about it.

Bussola Come away from here with me. This is no place for you.

Giulia Then take me to some place where the Cardinal never more can find me.

(They intend to leave and draw the curtain, where the Cardinal meets them.)

Cardinal I knew that you wouldn't even have time to wink before you had talked. But, my heart, I forgive you. Just kiss the Bible here, and all your sins will be forgiven.

Giulia I ask your forgiveness, your eminence, but even you should know, that not even bishops and cardinals and not even archbishops can trust a woman.

Cardinal Yes, I know that. Now kiss the Bible, dear child, and all is forgiven.

Giulia (kisses the book) No penalty and no punishment?

Cardinal It will come later. You already had it. It was the kiss of death you gave my holiest bible but in reverse, for it was poisoned. You are dead within a few minutes. Let it comfort you that you found death by a kiss and that you don't have to talk any more.

Giulia I don't know what I did, and even less I know what's happening to me and where I am going. I disappear into the mists. The only wrong I did, which I know, is that I was taken and loved to death by the Cardinal. *(drops down)*

Cardinal And for you, signor Bussola, who now knows everything, it will be wisest to continue obeying my orders. You were present when this woman died and was her accomplice. You can't get away. First of all we must get rid of the body somewhere.

Bussola I had nothing to do with her death.

Cardinal But you were her lover, and she almost died in your arms. Try to explain that to a court. There! Don't stand there like a dummy. You served the duke before and know our routines. One more corpse is nothing to fuss about and will hardly even be missed by that husband who never did but betray her. That's why I pitied her and took care of her, and all the thanks I had for that was treason. Is it then so strange that she is dead?

Fernando (in the background) Leave me then at last in peace, you shadows of twisted corpses that only carve in me to torment me!

Cardinal My brother is unblessed again and walks around in his sleep crying for woe and madness in his sick mind. We can't do anything serious in the meantime. We'll have to wait until we have put him to bed and got him quiet by drugs. One patient at a time. We have to dispose of the body later. First we must take care of my brother. Stay here and keep watch. (*leaves. Aside:*) He dies, as soon as he has settled with Antonio.

Bussola (alone) So I seem more and more like some corpse transport in the service of these brothers. Well, it should come to an end by and by when the corpses have filled their quota and are cold, stiff and buried enough. It's just to take one at a time, bury them and let the rest wait.

Fernando (closer) The most quiet way to die is by strangling, for it gives the strangled or hanged man no possibility to answer by any sound.

Bussola My mad duke, who so often talked about murder by charity, and who has claimed that it is an act of charity to murder people who suffer, is now lost in his madness with not even his own soul left in his control and wholly unaware of his own outrageous suffering. It's pathetic and grotesque. He can't see me here in the dark. Wouldn't it then be a charitable deed to at last give him the justice of death, which he so long has deserved?

Fernando Silent shadows, cover for me my false brother's guardian, who only wishes me evil, wants to shut me up and fulfil the darkness in my soul to make it total. If only someone would close the eyes of those poor stiff kids!

Bussola It will be difficult to strike straight in the dark, but if I only get his figure in sight within reach it will be just a matter of striking home. It's the only right thing to do.

Antonio (stealing in, to himself) I found the right place. This is the Cardinal's apartment, and he seems to be at home, for someone is wandering impetuously about talking to himself, like in his sleep. Could it be the Cardinal himself? Can I then wake him up without risk?

Fernando I regret nothing, for I did nothing that I am aware of, for I have forgotten all I did, so I have nothing to confess. All I fear is to be confined under strict hospital care, for then there will be no way out of the darkness any more.

(*Antonio carefully approaches the duke and comes close into view of Bussola, who mistakes him for the duke.*)

Bussola Ha! Get lost in darkness at once, you sick and miserable villain! (*strikes and pierces Antonio*)

Antonio No! I beg you, hear my prayer first! Alas, too late!

Bussola (realises his mistake at once) Who are you, my poor man?

Antonio Who are you yourself, who murders me in blindness, poor devil?

Fernando People are murdering each other around here. Is it my guards who have missed me? Just spare me from viewing any more corpses, for everything I see in the light makes me mad.

Antonio Am I not at the Cardinal's? Is he the one who has gone mad?

Bussola (cries) Bring in some light, for heaven's sake!

Fernando No, anything but not that! (*escapes*)

Antonio's servant (enters with light) I guided my master here, but he asked me to wait outside, so that he could see the Cardinal. What has happened?

Bussola (discovers the bleeding Antonio) Antonio! No! Of all possible grotesque mistakes! (*falls down embracing him*) The last man in the world I wished any harm!

Antonio Bussola! What are you doing here? Is it you who have murdered me?

Bussola I thought I struck the duke, but he got away!

Antonio Was it the duke who has gone mad? I took him for the Cardinal who lives here, whom I was hoping to reach some reconciliation with.

Bussola A reconciliation with the Cardinal is as impossible as it is for the duke to ever get well. The more gravely afflicted with illness is the Cardinal though, who hasn't even got a conscience.

Antonio And who is then the dead woman whom I see as something of another sister here in death's company?

Bussola The Cardinal's mistress as yet another of his victims.

Antonio Isn't it lady Castrucchio?

Bussola Yes, it is indeed.

Antonio Tell me more before I die. You seem to know everything, but my time is short. How are my beloved at home, my children and their mother?

Bussola Break, my heart! This is too unbearable!

Antonio Well, what is it? Just whisper a word that they are alive and well, and you can still save my life.

Bussola They have been murdered.

Antonio (surprised) All three?

Bussola All three.

Antonio Then I have nothing more to do in life. Just as well then, and perhaps a blessing by fortune, that you took my life. It was just an accident and nothing to forgive, regret or worry about. And then it was really my beloved who called on me by her echo now in the night. Everything is explained, and I can die at peace in spite of all. What is all our life's great effort of ambitions and strains but a chase for soap bubbles blown in the air only to burst and disappear? What are all the pleasures, enjoyments, moments of happiness and so called fulfilments in our life more than just short pauses in the constancy of eternal sufferings? – Just two wishes, and I may die.

Bussola Tell me quickly. They are granted.

Antonio Greetings to my friend Delio, and let my son take over after me. (*dies*)

Bussola Burst, my heart, for this tragedy, which I was fooled into by my own vanity and folly, has long since derailed into an immeasurable disaster constantly growing worse, while those who started the misery, two jealous egoists, lost control from the start. But I must live if not for anything else, to fulfil Antonio's last wish. Boy, you loved your master?

Servant Yes. I followed him here for his reconciliation with the Cardinal.

Bussola Yes, I know all that already. Nothing came of it. Carry him up to Giulia's room. I will carry Giulia herself, and so they will keep company on their last journey, dispatched by the Cardinal and his sick brother, but these two are the last victims they will get away with, for Caron's boat is already filled to the point of sinking by the cargo of their vice. Even Caron himself says enough to any further tragedies, and now it is time at last for the brothers to pay for the tickets of all those they sent away.

Cardinal (enters) My brother evades me. I can't hear him complain any more, but they said he had walked in here. Bussola? And Antonio? Did you at last succeed in murdering him?

Bussola Your eminence, you are just on time. No, your eminence, I am not the one who has taken Antonio's life. It's the duke and you, who constantly insists on adding murder to murder to the mad intrigues of your desperate greed. It's over now.

Cardinal For your part, yes.

Bussola No, for your part. As a man you are finished, denounced by your emperor and dishonoured and perhaps ruined by all that you wasted your life, career and money on that has backfired. Your brother himself preached murder by charity, and you are so spiritually and morally bankrupt that you deserve nothing better.

Cardinal You are finished here and are not needed any more. Your services are no longer required. All you did for us deserves no extra salary, since the deeds of your own hands, like all these murders, are salary enough as a reward.

Bussola You don't seem to understand. You will get no further. The devastations, persecutions and crimes of your course end at this point.

Fernando (enters) My brother, are you in trouble?

Cardinal Yes, Fernando. I am threatened. Kill him.

Fernando Whom shall I kill? Who is the persecuted, and who is the persecutor?

Cardinal Antonio is dead, and Bussola has killed him and is angry with me for that and intends to kill me if no one kills him.

Fernando No, my brother, you are the persecutor, and I am tired of being persecuted by you, your guards and doctor who only harass me.

Cardinal You are ill. I wish you well.

Fernando If you wish me and all people so well, how come then that you all your life only caused them harm?

Cardinal You are mad.

Fernando No, my brother, for the first time in my life I am now sane, and this is the soundest thing I ever did. (*pierces the Cardinal*)

Bussola I am beginning to think, your grace, that there is hope for you.

Fernando One murder of honour too much. Nothing is worse than a fratricide, but this was necessary. Kill me now, Bussola, and reconcile me with life.

Bussola Kill you, my employer?

Fernando Or else I must be the one who kills you.

Bussola You give me no alternative.

Fernando And that's the intention. I have forfeited all my rights of any life and can only atone for it by death, which automatically liberates the soul from all guilt of crimes it committed by the body. Give me death, Bussola, and give me free, for this life was no life but only a burial of myself alive.

Bussola I warn you. It will hurt.

Fernando All that hurts will pass, but all that's good will remain.

Bussola One last murder then, and one last murder of honour, to end all murders of honour. (*pierces him*)

Servant (returns) My lord, Delio is here with Antonio's son.

Bussola That was about time. Still all is not too late, even if it is too late to save a few innocent lives.

Delio (enters with the son with his hand on his shoulder) I heard about the disaster and know everything. Let's now forget it, for all these bodies and these brothers' criminal intrigues is no more than frost and snow melting to nothing as soon as the sun shows up, which always reappears to shine even after the darkest night of storms. The names of these two brothers will be forgotten, since they leave nothing behind, while Antonio's son will inherit everything after his mother. Thus our life continues as if nothing had happened, and our duties, Bussola, to in some extent neutralise and outweigh all the evil that has happened, is to with the same fidelity with which we loved Antonio now serve his son, the new duke of Aragon and Amalfi.

Bussola We can hardly do more than just the best of it.

Delio That's what I mean. (*also takes Bussola round his shoulder, and they leave all three, Delio in between with his hands secured around the others' shoulders.*)

The End

Leh 30.8.2008,
revised 30.1.2019.

Comment

The play varies only slightly from "John Webster's" "The Duchess of Malfi" with only a few abbreviations, revisions and developments of certain scenes and characters to primarily concentrate on the subject, which actually is the modern concept of 'murder of honour' to analyse this and try to understand how it can occur by delving into the strange motivation of a kind of greedy jealousy that can degenerate so seriously and totally to find extremely irrational expressions in a total lack of detachment.

The origin of the play is actual conflicts between 1508 and 1513 within the Aragona family. The duchess' name, which never is mentioned in the play, was Giovanna d'Aragona, daughter of Arrigo d'Aragona, marquess of Gerace in Calabria, who was illegitimate son of king Ferdinand I of Naples. Her first husband was Alfonso Piccolomini, duke of Amalfi. Her brothers were Cardinal Luigi d'Aragona and marquess Carlo d'Aragona of Gerace. Her second husband, married secretly, was Antonio Beccadelli di Bologna, murdered 1513. When the duchess was brought back to Amalfi by her brothers with her children, they were never heard of again, and the story of their murders is only an unverified legend. Of course, the uncertainty of what really happened inspired the legend, which was told in different versions during the 16th century, for example by Cinthio and William Painter in "The Palace of Pleasure" 1567, where also the stories of Romeo and Juliet and Othello are found. Thus "John Webster" has used exactly the same sources as "Shakespeare" but, also like "Shakespeare", fashioned them in his own architecture.