

## John Webster's "THE WHITE DEVIL"

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**Abstract-** The white Devil or vittoria corombona is as tumultuous a melodrama as any written during the Elizabethan Age, filled with violent deeds performed by heroic personages, its plot involving love, treachery and revenge, seems incredible; but it is based on actual events which took place in sixteenth-century Italy. The white Devil is based on a tragedy of real life which had made a deep impression in Italy in the sixteenth century. The characters by and large as well as many of the situations and events of the play are historical. The title white Devil means a devil disguised under a fair outside.

**Index Terms-** Personages, Treachery, Incredible, Impression, Melodrama.

### APPEARANCE AND REALITY

The white devil like Webster other play, the duchess of malfi is a play with a rich and complex texture, one which deal with a number of themes at one and same time. One of the major themes of the play is conflict between appearance and reality and this theme is suggested in the very beginning of the play. Vitoria a reconciliation of opposites the very character who is able to hide reality with appearance. In her supreme beauty and glamour are mixed with lust and selfishness. Lodovico open the play with a series of figures that express the relation between deceptive appearance and bitter reality.

In the play the wolves no longer seem to be wolves; the murders hide themselves under disguise to gentle persons. First we have fortune that make a show of favoring ores to deceive. Secondly, the rich and powerful regarded as wolves, however wolfish they may be. Only the penniless and hungry adventurer is looked upon as a beast of prey. The magnificence of rank covers a multitude of sins. All the major characters in this play are different from what they seem to be, Brachiano, Vitoria, and Flamineo all keep up appearances. Flamineo tries to convince Camilla that the best way to keep Vitoria virtuous is to give

her unlimited freedom. This is fact to mean to help Brachiano in seducing Vitoria. Vitoria urges her lover murdered Isabella, his wife and camillo, her husband. Isabella pretends that she is unable to forgive her husband and declares that she is abandoning her husband's bed. Francisco writes letter to Vitoria, professing his love for her and instructs his servant to deliver it when some of Branchiano, men are close by. His love for Vitoria is false, a pretence and an appearance. Lodovico and Gasparo dress themselves as capuchins to kill the count. Brachiano and Vitoria make up their quarrel and then resolve to adopt the suggestion in the letter and run away to Florence. Again the trick succeeds, appearances deceive, and they deceive most dangerously when they flatter.

The suggestion to elope to Florence seemed wonderful. It promised to Vitoria and Brachiano liberty and enjoyment of their love. But the when the Duke hears that they have fled, he exclaims that is exactly, when he has aiming at. 'The fame, found Duke, I first have poison's'; directed thee the way To marria whore; What can be worse when the cardinal has been elected pope, he sees Lodovico talking with a duke and warns him to conjure from his breast that cruel devil. He especially warns him against his plan to kill Branchiano, s. But after that pope has left, the Duke sends a servant to Lodovico with a Thousand crowns. Lodovico can only think that they come from the pope. He soliloquizes on the art of great once in concealing their designs. Here again Webster gives as the figure of false show in action.

The deceitfulness of appearances dominates of the close of play. Villainy is cloaked under a show of holiness, and again even that seem to promise happiness turn to disaster. In IV. III Lodovico takes the sacrament to prosecute the murder of Brachiano and Vitoria in their palace i. e., he uses the false show of holiness for murder. So the disguise is not merely a convention, something to be expected in a play of

blood. It is the meaning of the play that these murderesses the mask of holiness to kill. Again we see the polarity of Webster's method. The brilliant marriage –procession and flamineno's assurances of immediately followed by a dialogue between the three disguised murderers. Flamineo, with unconscious irony sums up the passage with a commonplace about the deceitfulness appearances. The couple has many facets the glow-worm may point at the marriage, at the happiness so soon to be blasted. It may also refer as Mr. Lucas' note shows, to 'persons of paltry eminence'. But it all illustrates Webster's method. The situation is figure in-action, reinforced by figure-in-words. Other instances are baby breaks the crucifix when the mother is giving suck to her child. Cornelia is at first deceived by appearances. She cannot believe that Marcello is dead. Cornelia is also torn between two emotions, love for the murdered son and love for the son that murdered him. Appearances deceive in two ways; they disguise the good as well as the evil. This theme is summed up in the following speech of Flamineo. Part of the problem of appearances and reality arises from the greatness of soul which is revealed or uncovered in the 'devils, of the play. Strip some veils of appearance from them and they are foul, strip those other veils from them and their hearts are seen to harbor an inviolable greatness. Webster does not leave his readers without reverting to another principal figure – the deceitfulness of fortune.

Finally the end of the play curiously echoes the beginning. Giovanni has the last word 'let guilty men remember their black deeds Do leane on crutches, made of slender reeds.' To the best bitter word of the play men's trust is deceived.'" In the white devil Webster was something of a pioneer. Rich as Elizabethan drama is in imagery, nobody before Webster had elaborated a system of figure so intricately linked and so profound.'" Webster also introduces the particular theme of hidden corruption of magnificent rank covering sin that is overt subject of the play.

The play concerns most of time with the close pandarism Both Brachiano and Flamineo are panders. In Rome there is corruption enough. Vitoria's brother, Flamineo, undertakes to corrupt his sister's honor. He asks Brachiano to conceal himself, using an ominous word that foretells the end; 'shroud you

within this closet well my lord. 'He then goes on to seduce Vitoria from her husband camillo and win her over for Brachiano. At the same time camillo is tricked in to believing that Flamineo is persuading Vitoria to come back to him. Camillo is entirely deceived by appearances, the seeming good cloaks horrible evil –all sorts of corruption exist. Money and sex shown as the most important means of corruption. It also shown that the power corrupts most. There are murders and intrigues, poisonings and deceits throughout the play. Revenge is the motif, and revenge prevails. Flamineo says "there is a nothing so holy but money will corrupt and putrefied it. "The cardinal and duke play at fence, trying to deceive each other. The cardinal preaches dissimulation, the false front, the concealed intrigue"; we see the undermining more prevails than doth the canon. "He lends the Duke a black book in which he has collected the names of notorious offenders in the city. The list is so large that it demonstrates the immense rottenness of society. And again Webster rams into as his idea of corruption concealed.

#### THE TITLE OF THE WHITE DEVIL

The title of the play is White devil. The other title is Vittoria corombona. But the former title is much more suitable and appealing and suggestive than the latter one. Nevertheless the play resolves round Vittoria corombona, the heroine of the play. It tells how a great lord of Italy falls in love with the wife of a cardinal's Nephew. Her brother become their pander, from their adultery followed the murders of one of the husband and younger brother of the other; and last of all from three murders death came to the three murderers in their turn. In all these developments, vittoria plays significant role; she with all the clay of her cunning and heartless has such a power of intellect of pride and indomitable will, that we forget the blood on her hands and wrongs of the kingly Isabella; and when in the trial –scene she stands at bay against both worlds, against the power of state and church, of Florence and Rome, we cry 'Not guilty'. This is the justification of the title, Vittoria corombona Lucas explain the meaning of the title [The white devil]"a devil disguised under a fair outside and backs up his definition by many

quotations. For example, Branchiano's cry of disillusionment ;

The N.E.D. gives the following meanings for white ; morally pure, stainless, innocent , free from malignity, beneficent; propitious, auspicious, happy; highly prized , pet , darling, fair seeming, specious ,plausible . In the conflict between these meanings lies the irony of the title .Probably Webster also had in mind two Elizabethan proverbs, the white devil is worse than black and the devil can transform himself into angel of light. The very title of the play, then is a figure of the sort we have been discussing .Vitoria is the white devil; White to outside view, inside the black devil. Lodovico opens the play with a series of figures that express the relation between deceptive appearance and the bitter reality. He is to end to the play by sacrilegiously putting on the disguise of a friar in order to commit a series of murders. Here we have two themes at which Webster labors persistently, both pertaining to the difference between seeming and being. First we have fortune the makes a show of favor in order to device. Secondly the rich and powerful are not regarded as wolves, however wolfish they may be. Only the penniless adventure is looked upon as the beast of prey.

#### CONCLUSION

The magnificence of the rank covers a multitude of sins the unrelenting repetition of this kind of figure binds all the scenes of play in a whole of the highest possible unity. Webster varies the figure to include hidden disease or in deed any kind of rottenness that develops unseen. Webster then introduces the particular theme of hidden corruption of magnificent rank covering sin. That is the overt subject of the play.” Brachiano now lives in Rome, And by close pandarism seeks to prostitute the honor of Vittoria corombona”. Close pandarism is of course, hidden panerism, pandarism that is kept close. And now Webster follows up with figures that promise happiness, only to deceive. Flamineo foretells for Vitoria that delights which the affair with Brachiano will brings to her. ‘Thou shalt lye in a bed stuff with in roses-so perfect shall meet him, it fixit with analyzes of dyamounds to inevitable necessity. These lines contain one of the main ironies of the play. Webster grants Brachiano and Vitoria no happiness. While for a brief moment heaven and earth shall

seem to their voyage, only Flamineno’s last prophecy comes true. Necessity binds them all together in a way Flamieno did not foresee. And what horror and revulsion. Webster conveys in the one word happy, coming from the mouth of the brother and pander and used of the sister he seeking to prostitute. For the rest of the scene Webster pursues the difference between appearance and reality in a long series of figures. He piles up these figures especially to describe the fair outside of camillo that covers only a ‘Lousy slave’.

#### REFERENCE

- [1] R.L.varshney, John Webster, The White Devil, published by: Lakshmi Narain Agarwal.