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**GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES: LENGUA,  
LITERATURA Y CULTURA**

**Are you stark mad?**

**FERDINAND'S MADNESS IN *THE DUCHESS OF MALFI***

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## ABSTRACT

The representation of Ferdinand's madness in *The Duchess of Malfi* is developed through three elements: the relationship between Ferdinand and his twin the Duchess, the metatheatrical devices that Ferdinand designs to torture her and lycanthropy. This TFG analyses these ingredients following the threat of madness that hovers over him until he is diagnosed of lycanthropy at the end of the play. The structure of the study is marked by the development of Ferdinand's state of mind and emphasises the connection between his dual identity and his progressive transformation. The exploration of the distortion of his identity, the use of artifice, images and Ferdinand's language give evidence of the conflict between appearance and reality in *The Duchess of Malfi*. Hence, madness is an instrument of exploration of this issue.

**Keywords:** *The Duchess of Malfi*, Ferdinand, the Duchess, appearance and reality, madness.

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# **1. Introduction.**

## **1.1. General Objectives.**

The nature of madness has been theorised for centuries through different cultures and disciplines such as Medicine, Philosophy or Literature. As humans, we fear madness because it is associated to chaos, foolish behaviour and mental illness. Madness is disorder and significantly the representation of madness in literature is constructed through an organised narrative structure and word order, using the order to make sense of the chaos. This literary interest in madness has often derived from the human need for answers in an attempt to find a solution to the lack of clarity. The literary expression of this concept has varied over the ages, sometimes it introduces chaotic elements and delirious characters, other times it creates narrative chaos. However, the representation of madness as part of the human nature has always been present in one way or another in literary text, both fiction and drama.

Although Greek drama depicted acts of madness, the act itself remained unseen on stage. The theatrical representation of insanity on Elizabethan and Jacobean playhouse stages not only translates from page to stage the concept of madness but it also brings a discourse that is part of society. Webster's plays stand out because he emphasises the exploration on this concept.

In *The Duchess of Malfi* the Cardinal and the Duke Ferdinand seek revenge after their sister marries an inferior, challenging the class system. The words and actions of the character of Ferdinand throughout the play suggest that he has further motivations, especially because he is completely obsessed with his sister. In fact, his obsession and his cruelty trigger the chaos and confusion present in the story. It is precisely the psychological construction of this character the motive of my exploration, and particularly the threat of madness that hovers over him until he is diagnosed of lycanthropy at the end of the play.

The objective of this TFG is to analyse the possible significance of Ferdinand's madness within the story and identify the main key aspects of his madness. This play is catalogued as a tragedy of revenge, but this revenge is just about social punishment. But is there something else? Which function has the grotesque scene of torture designed by Ferdinand? May all this be explained by his madness? What is clear is that his madness,

fueled by his obsessive desire of revenge is necessary in the plot, because his unrestrained nature permeates the story moving the action in a particular direction. For example, it introduces horror elements on stage with a metatheatrical function such as artificial figures or a group of madmen. In the play Webster deliberately insists on the theme of insanity, and the Duke perfectly embodies the role of a demented villain. We can see the culmination of his Machiavellian tactics in the spectacle of the wax corpses and in the exhibition of madmen he planned to plague with madness and horror the death of his sister. He is also involved in all the deaths that occur in the play, in the final act indeed death is the way to resolve madness, chaos and revenge, acting as a purge. Therefore, death and madness go hand in hand in the story.

The Duke suffers a transformation after the first climax when he sees his sister dead. It is significant that it is then when Webster introduces the fact that they are twins and shortly afterwards Ferdinand descends into lycanthropy. Thereby it seems that Webster was careful in the creation of Ferdinand's character. He puts a name to the rage that he displays throughout the play, namely lycanthropy, which is a kind of madness that in this case reveals his true self: the identity he is hiding the rest of the play. This concept of duality is associated to all the characters of the story and to the plot itself. For example, the Duchess has a double position, as Antonio's wife and as the Duchess. Other double parameters are the two climaxes, the relationship between Ferdinand and the Duchess as twins, the double life of the Cardinal, Bosola as a spy and double avenger, the double representation of the death, the use of masks, the duality of the play within the play, the echo, the shadow.

My hypothesis is that Webster's exploration of madness attempts to show the dual identity of human nature, and everything indicates that at the end the contact with madness unveils the true identity of the characters. It is a play between appearance and reality.

## **1.2. Madness in Jacobean Revenge Tragedy.**

The large number of texts written about this issue highlights the importance of madness in Jacobean revenge tragedy and exposes the different perception of it throughout the ages. In *The Duchess of Malfi* Webster explores the core of the human nature through the

loss of sanity. I consider that the main keys of this exploration are focused on three essential ingredients of the play that show the patterns of Ferdinand's madness:

a) The relationship between Ferdinand and his twin the Duchess, object of his revenge.

b) The metatheatrical devices that Ferdinand designs in order to drive his sister mad before her death.

c) Lycanthropy.

The most relevant essays about *The Duchess of Malfi* examine these key concepts that I will use in order to connect these three main lines of study to madness:

#### **a) The relationship between Ferdinand and his twin.**

The theme of incest in Renaissance England is examined by Bruce Boehrer, who explains how the control of female fecundity was a way to preserve social order. In Jacobean drama incest is often connected with social mobility, and, according to him, "the latter automatically generated the former" and it is "a new way of looking at incest, coextensive with its focus on social ambition and the decay of ascribed rank." (93).

The origin of Ferdinand's madness and the motivation for his revenge is hidden, but there are enough signs on the text to claim that he has incestuous feelings for his twin and that his mad behaviour is not just motivated by casual greed. In fact, it is the reason for his inner conflict, he has a problem with his identity as her brother. Apparently, both characters have been constructed with parallel traits, confirming the hypothesis of the concept of duality: both are guided by passion, they are determined and in need of control and employ the act of feigning to achieve their aims. However, as Catherine Belsey points out, "examination of these points of likeness proves in each case to emphasise the moral distance between the Duchess and Ferdinand." (127). My thought is that whereas Ferdinand intensifies his viciousness, the Duchess becomes an emblem of virtue. In this light, his madness may be seen as a sign of incestuous frustration.

An interesting approach to the brother-sister incest is found in Frank Whigham's work. He applies the anthropological concept of incest as a social act in order to read the relationship between the twins, in that light he considers that "social-structural relations come into view among Ferdinand's incestuous inclination, his sister's cross-class marriage, and Antonio's and Bosola's upward social mobility." (263). Moreover, Whigham doubts of Ferdinand's urge to physical consummation because "the point of

Ferdinand's incestuous rage is not the achievement of sexual relations, but the denial of institutional slippage via contaminating relation." (265).

### **b) The theatrical externalisation of Ferdinand's madness.**

The topic of the theatrical externalisation of Ferdinand's madness has been examined extensively. The spectacle of the fourth act that ends with the death of the Duchess is the form in which Ferdinand's madness is manifested. He involves his sister in a world plagued with madness because he really wants that she gets as mad as him. The Duke turns to artifice and his revenge takes the form of a play within a play which includes wax figures, severed hands, madmen from the asylum and a funeral chamber. However, this change of stylistic register is not just a display of sensationalism since she really dies, as David Bergeron has justly observed, "at that point the wax effigies have fulfilled their prophetic role as the dramatic reality overtakes the artistic illusion." (339).

Brian Chalke analyses Webster's preoccupation with death and his interest in monumentality, he thinks that "Ferdinand's cruelest device - presenting Antonio and the Duchess's children to her as wax figures - seems to allude directly to innovations in funeral monuments made in the seventeenth century." (91). The Duke's strategy indeed is to "plague her in art" (IV.i.111), but the Duchess is not tricked and describes her situation as a tedious theater, "For I do play a part in 't 'gainst my will" (IV.i.83). James Calderwood defines her as "the first fully tragic female figure in Renaissance drama." (145). She is confronted to madness when Ferdinand tries to envelop her in his own evil and thus, the exhibition of madmen singing and dancing is a symbolic manifestation of it.

According to Ralph Berry, evil is constantly invoked in the imagery used in *The Duchess of Malfi* which is a good point of departure in order to read Ferdinand's character. I agree with him about the fact that Webster's characters probe themselves for identity, but their conclusions remain unsatisfactory. Although Ferdinand to a certain extent declares his motivations for revenge, his answers are uncertain because as Berry notes "with Webster the gap between statement and acceptance opens wider." (42).

### **c) Lycanthropy.**

Finally, the third ingredient that draws the patterns of Ferdinand's madness is the concept of lycanthropy. Lycanthropy is a synonym of madness. In the seventeenth century it was seen as a form of melancholy and possession. Ferdinand's transformation reveals that he has a psychological problem of identity as a result of his doubling distortion, reinforcing the idea of the duality of the human nature present in the play. Lynn Enterline associates his disease with the symptom of a contagion in the body politic as well. This perspective is also shared by Susan Wiseman who suggests that this disease represents Ferdinand's moral conflict and draws an image of his archaic court.

Ernest Gilman proposes an interesting line of work to follow the thread of Ferdinand's madness and its association with his twin and lycanthropy. He also argues that "the Duke's lycanthropy, imagined as an animal skin worn with the hair on the inside, is thus both an emblem of his duplicity and the symbol of a kind of pathological (papist) mortification of the flesh." (425).

### **1.3. Methodology and Structure.**

The educational program of English Studies includes different subjects that can provide methodology, background and context to frame the research. They are very useful in this project because they will help to contextualise the play and establish a critical reading.

The main sources employed are scholarly digital databases such as Proquest, Jstor and Oxford Academic. The bibliography includes academic journal articles, book's reviews and impressed books. The critical works have been chosen for their focus on the key issues and they may be organised in three sections:

- Background materials that includes general studies of Webster.
- Essay collections.
- Essay and articles that offer a range of relevant works from the mid-twentieth century until now.

The TFG will be focused on Ferdinand's character and it will attempt to frame the references of Ferdinand's madness on the play and analyse them. These references are mainly manifested through figurative language and symbols, the most relevant are found in the following elements:

- The Duchess: It has been previously questioned the nature of Ferdinand's madness and his twin has been pointed out through the text as one of the possible origins



of this madness. A close reading and a deconstructive analysis of the double meaning of Ferdinand's language may unveil his illicit desires, showing his identity problem. In addition, it appears that they share striking similarities and it would be interesting to frame these traits juxtaposing them in different scenes, likely it will be found a gap that emphasises their moral differences. The part about the study of Ferdinand's identity will adopt a Lacanian outlook in an attempt to analyse Ferdinand's construction of identity.

- A large number of images used in the play are associated to madness and helps to construct Ferdinand's psychological state. The figurative language about plants, animals and natural phenomena will be analysed.

- References to drama. The visual spectacle that Ferdinand instigates in the fourth act reveals the form in which his madness takes form: he turns to artifice. The idea is to read from a semiotic perspective the different orders of signification of the wax figures and the severed hand on stage. Apart from the study of the connotational level, the analysis will be focused on the reading of the spectacle of madmen from Barthes's concept of myth.

- Lycanthropy: it is the final stage of Ferdinand's madness and it also supposes a transformation of identity. I will seek to find the symbolism of this disease on stage, particularly exploring Ferdinand's association to duplicity and fragmentation.

The main point of applying this methodology is to support the idea that all the elements that disclose Ferdinand's madness are carefully integrated in the action of the play. Part of the function of these elements is to give unity to the drama, specially taking into account that they emphasise the duplicity of the human nature, which I consider is the main theme of the play, namely the conflict between appearance and reality that is constantly developed throughout the text. My hypothesis is that the play exposes the idea that living this duplicity leads to madness, but at the same time madness unveils the true self of the human nature.

The structure of the project is constructed in accordance with the three lines of study that have been framed at the beginning of the project: brother-sister relationship, Ferdinand's spectacle and lycanthropy.

The section about the relationship between Ferdinand and the Duchess will be divided into four parts: incest, Ferdinand's language, sibling's portrait and the problem of identity. All these elements have been considered remarkable in order to draw the construction of Ferdinand's identity.

The next sections are structured according to the different phases of Ferdinand's madness and consequently there is a lineal account of the progression of his madness. The section about the anatomy of Ferdinand's madness is divided into two parts: the one about the threat of madness will deal with the study of the images used in the play, and the part about the spectacle will deal with the instruments that Ferdinand uses to torture his sister. The last segment about lycanthropy will be focused on the examination of melancholy and the connection between duplicity and fragmentation in the character of Ferdinand.

## **2. Brother-sister relationship in *The Duchess of Malfi*.**

### **2.1. An Overview. The Theme of Incest.**

Historically, the concept of incest has been used strategically during the reigns of Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, and James I in order to preserve their power and reinforce their position within the patrilineal succession. For instance, Boehrer examines the terms employed by James I addressing Elizabeth: "Your most loving and devoted brother and son." (89). In this case incest becomes a political instrument placing James I as Elizabeth's heir.

The theme of incest in Jacobean dramas is related to the maintenance of institutional forms in the society. These dramas offer a new perspective of this issue, a vision of incest that connects this concept with social mobility. This idea is also studied by Whigham who follows the relationship between incest and ascribed status in Jacobean culture. He wonders "why does Webster give 'us a wandering duchess? an incestuous brother?" (167) and analyses "the friction between the dominant social order and the emergent pressures toward social change." (167). Sexual mobility as a form of cross-class within this emergent social change proves to be a threat and incest is a tool for controlling it.

In Webster's play the Duchess transgresses the authority of her brothers and marries an inferior. The lack of control of the Duchess' sexuality is the origin of Ferdinand's rage. That's why he goes mad when he visualises her possible partners since he is excluded and he has no access to her body. This idea is pointed out by Lois Bueler: "The pathological insistence of Ferdinand... upon reserving his sister's sexual activities to his own purposes, and his fevered imaginings when he cannot, are sufficient for

including the play in my corpus of incest dramas.” (138). Nonetheless, Ferdinand’s incestuous rage may be read as a social act rather than a sexual repression. This light followed by Wighman takes into consideration the significant changes in terms of social role within the Jacobean setting. He analyses the social-structural relations in this changing society and he also applies the notion of incest from an anthropological perspective:

Anthropologists propose two general sets of social explanation for the incest taboo: arguments from factors internal to the nuclear family (such as competition among males for females) and from factors external to it. The latter argument, from the larger social situation, fits neatly with Webster’s play. (167)

The external factors inferred from the text are political, religious and economic and are dramatically dependent on the maintenance of supra-familial bonds.

## **2.2. Ferdinand’s Language.**

The main aim of this section is to realise a close reading and a deconstructive analysis of the double meaning of Ferdinand’s language by means of the analysis of a specific text of the play, always taking into account that this part of the project is focused on brother-sister relationship. This methodology is very appropriated in this case because at first sight it seems that Ferdinand’s words offer explicitly his raw thoughts but closely it can be found inconsistencies that bring a different reading. Peter Barry words “the deconstructionist aims to show that the text is at war with itself” (75) fits specially well in this analysis since Ferdinand is at war with himself the whole play. He fights against his feelings for the Duchess, against his corrupted nature and against his identity.

The fragments that are going to be analysed belong to Act 2, scene 5. In this scene the Duke shows a letter to the Cardinal revealing that their sister has given birth to a son, Ferdinand is unable to manage his fantasies about the Duchess’s forbidden sex life and envisions several versions of the imagined lover. This scene is crucial because Ferdinand’s speech marks a turning point at which he losses the control of his mind.

The following deconstructive process is structured in three stages: the verbal, the textual and the linguistic:

### a) The Verbal Stage

One of the most striking binary oppositions present in this passage is the association of the term *weak* to the word *woman* and its opposite *strong* to *man*, especially due to the connotations of these adjectives in the lives of the twins (this aspect will be studied in the section “sibling’s portrait”).

FERDINAND.

Foolish men,

That e’er will trust their honor in a bark

Made of so light weak bulrush as is woman,

Apt every minute to sink it! (II.v.33-34)

The Duke defines *women* as *weak* and untrustworthy human beings. Evidently it is a reaction to the knowledge of his sister’s sexual activities. After this deliberation he imagines his sister in what he calls “the shameful act of sin” and describes the qualities of her lovers:

FERDINAND.

Happily with some strong thigh’d Bargeman;

Or one o’ th’ wood-yard, that can quoit the sledge,

Or tosse the bare, or else some lovely Squire

That carries coles up, to her privy lodgings. (II.v.43-46)

Ferdinand defines these men by their physical strength and associates clearly the adjective *strong* to virility and sexual power. Significantly, Ferdinand establishes a parallelism in the connection between virile masculinity and men of low rank. Hence, he sees them at the same time as a social threat and a visual of his repressed desires. The fact that makes the power of these men socially unacceptable is their low rank and it is at that point where the Duke’s imagination finds unconsciously his social position as the lover of his sister.

The opposition between *low* and *aloud* is also remarkable in this scene. The Cardinal asks Ferdinand to speak lower as a manner to maintain a harmonious psyche, moderation and rationality. He compares the opposite *aloud* with the volume and timbre

of deaf men's speech, using this analogy of sounds to describe disharmony and imperfection.

CARDINAL.

This intemperate noise  
Fitly resembles deaf men's shrill discourse,  
Who talk aloud, thinking all other men  
To have their imperfection. (II.v.52)

The Cardinal beliefs in the control of the passions and the denial of desire, he evidently notes that his brother's speech and attitude go beyond reason. In this light, speaking loudly and increasing Ferdinand's rage, being "a man so deformed, so beastly, as doth intemperate anger" (II.v.59) as his brother notes, it is a way to counteract the threat of this signifier that emerges in this context from the term *low*.

### **b) The Textual Stage**

Although the rhythm of this scene is in crescendo, there is a decisive change of tone and attitude the moment Ferdinand notes that he is going to have a hallucination of the Duchess's with her lover. It is significant not only because his words reveal his mad obsession with the sexual activities of his sister but also because the Cardinal is a witness of his brother's frenzy behaviour. The Cardinal offers a new perspective of Ferdinand's character when he calls him out over his lack of reason "Are you stark mad?" (II.v.72).

FERDINAND.

Methinks I see her laughing  
Excellent hyena! Talk to me somewhat, quickly,  
Or my imagination will carry me  
To see her in the shameful act of sin. (II.v.38-41)

The Duke's urgency of finding a distraction in order to control the vividness of his visions speaks volumes about his level of obsession, he even recognises that his degree of self-control is low. Ferdinand then goes on to imagine the Duchess's lover and overlaps different masculine bodies to a point at which the vision is real to him (this fragment of

the scene 5 have been transcribed at the verbal stage). The use of the conjunction *or* connects the alternate hallucinations that he creates in his mind, increasing the feeling of anxiety that conveys his speech and increasing the rhythm of the scene. It is a display of fantasy that unconsciously unveils a concern beyond a commonly patriarchal interest to maintain the honor of their blood.

### c) The Linguistic Stage

The Cardinal recommends his brother to control his emotions and desires explaining to him the proper use of language because he considers that a speech leads by passion is naturally imperfect.

CARDINAL.

Chide yourself.

You have divers men who never yet expressed

Their strong desire of rest but by unrest,

By vexing of themselves. Come, put yourself

In tune. (II.v.60-64)

Nonetheless, Ferdinand's language is a projection of his psychological state, he doesn't verbalise directly his desires but they can be understood between lines. He answers to his brother through a reflexive comment about *seem* and *be*:

FERDINAND.

So; I will only study to seem

The thing I am not.

The Duke recognises that language can be used as an artifice blending appearance and reality. Thus, language is interrogated as a form of expression because it may misrepresent reality, this aspect is also revealed in Ferdinand's use of double entendres in the next section. Even so, he contradicts himself and goes on with his fantasies planning the sacrifice of the Duchess and her lover, using an explicit language that articulates his unspoken incestuous desire:

FERDINAND.

I would have their bodies

Burnt in a coal pit with the ventage stopped,

That their cursed smoke might not ascend to heaven;

Or dip the sheets they lie in pitch or sulphur;

Wrap them in 't, and then light them like a match; (II.v.67-71)

Ferdinand's vision of the violent death of his sister involves the use of fire. Considering that Ferdinand is identified with fire throughout the play, his words would imply that his intention is to be consumed with her. He indeed asserts before this fragment that "it is some sin in us heaven doth revenge by her." (II.v.65). Therefore, he manifests also his guilt and includes himself in the punishment.

At this stage the binary opposition between *low* and *aloud* analysed in the verbal stage sheds more light on this part of the project. While the Cardinal uses a moderate, controlled language, the one deemed as socially acceptable, the Duke speaks aloud with rage and passion. The way in which he speaks reflects part of his repressed self, namely his incestuous desires that cannot be verbalised because the use of language is ruled by social norms and those words are socially unacceptable, whereby speaking aloud is his manner of dealing with his own emotions. Hence, the dissection of this scene exposes one of the main conflicts of Ferdinand: although he speaks aloud he cannot tell his reality, remaining unspoken the whole play, even in his dying words "Whether we fall by ambition, blood or lust..." the enigma remains unresolved.

Taking into account this revision of Ferdinand's use of language it can be said that his words of destruction, violence and death, as well as his hallucinations are a sign of his spiritual breakdown and state of madness.

### **2.3. Sibling's Portrait.**

ANTONIO.

a prince's court

Is like a common fountain, whence should flow

Pure silver drops in general: but if't chance

Some curs'd example poison 't near the head,

Death and diseases through the whole land spread. (I.i.11-15)

Antonio's opening speech describes the court in terms of good and evil, this technique is also used in his description of Ferdinand and the Duchess. While the Duke is the "most perverse and turbulent nature." (I.ii.76) she "lights the time to come." (I.ii.117). The contrast of an ideal government and the corruption of the court of the play is a pattern also reproduced in the characters of the twins. This antithesis is amplified the rest of the play as Catherine Belsey points out "yuxtaposing the Duchess's world of innocence, reciprocity, and fertility with Ferdinand's sterile darkness, isolation, and death." (121).

This section is focused on the points of likeness and contrast between Ferdinand and the Duchess. Apparently, both characters have been constructed with parallel traits, as twins they are supposed to be complementary, but their similarities reinforce the distance between them polarizing this likeness in terms of causes and consequences. The analysis begins with a revision of the most significant thing that links them together: twinship, followed by the exploration of some aspects that make them similar and different at the same time: madness, dissimulation and double entendres.

#### **a) Twinship.**

In the seventeenth-century the delivery of twins required certain intervention in order to ensure their safe birth. Firstly, it was necessary to identify the stronger twin from the weaker into the womb. The stronger was usually the best positioned and would be born first whereas the second would receive extra assistance. This practice brings a further view about the opposition of *weak* and *strong* aforementioned and their association to the twins Ferdinand and the Duchess.

The Duke recognises that they are twins at the end of the Act IV when he sees her dead, Bosola states: "It seems she was born first" underlines Ferdinand's status as the weaker twin. Thus, this revelation brings a new perspective to his obsession with visions of strong masculine bodies in the Act II. His sister is the stronger one, so her lover will be someone that represents sexual power, in view of this the hallucination is a manifestation of his repressed desire and emphasises his weak nature, he can't have her because he is not strong. His state of madness at the end of the play indeed is a signal of this weakness because although he carries out his revenge and his sister dies, unconsciously he has lost a part of himself, the stronger one and he breaks completely.



## **b) Madness.**

Belsey claims that the fact “that they are twins, of course, invites a director to draw attention in visual terms to the ironic parallels.” (127). The play illustrates Duchess and Ferdinand’s madness but whereas the Duchess’s madness is her marriage with a man of a lower rank and “mad only in the terms of the world she lives in.” (130) Ferdinand’s madness is destructive, as it was exemplified previously in Act II. In Act IV he tries to “bring her to despair” (IV.i.114) and trap her in his madness offering the masque of madmen, however this circumstance only precipitates Ferdinand’s descend to madness.

## **c) Dissimulation and double entendres.**

In terms of action the Duchess and her brother use dissimulation, secrecy, and disguise to achieve their aims. Nevertheless, the causes of this behaviour resolve this parallelism into contrast. Duchess’s dissimulation is imposed by the actions of the Duke and it is adopted as a form of protection. Ferdinand’s dissimulation, by contrast, “is designed to entrap and destroy.” (Belsey 128).

The contrast of *seem* and *be* is also present in the concept of double entendres. The Duchess recognises that she is forced to use it:

DUCHESS.

So we  
Are forc’d to express our violent passions  
In riddles, and in dreams, and leave the path  
Of simple virtue, which was never made  
to seem the thing it is not.

Ferdinand makes use of an ambiguous language to conceal his obscure truth. Duchess’s double entendres, by contrast, are “domestic, secret references understood by Antonio and the audience to her secret marriage.” (129). She conceals her marriage, her children and her husband’s identity because she is forced by circumstances, the Duchess explicitly uses it as an excuse for feigning when she accuses Antonio of tampering with

her funds, considering that is a “noble lie, cause it must shield our honors.” (III.ii.178-181).

Although the play invites to consider that The Duke and his sister share patterns of behaviour, examination of the causes and consequences proves that they are morally distant. At the end, as twins they represent the concept of duality, they are different sides of the same coin but whereas Ferdinand shows the face of the evil and is dragged out in the madness, his sister tends to reinforce her virtue.

## **2.4. The Problem of Identity.**

This section is going to adopt the Lacanian outlook in an attempt to analyse Ferdinand’s construction of identity. A Psychoanalytic theory is very interesting in the case of this character because the play offers different fragments of his personality in which he is seen as a twin, a jealous man, a beast, an author of artifice, a killer, a mad man, an actor... It seems he has a psychological confusing nature probably influenced by his condition of twin. Additionally, there are a great number of references to doubleness and twin structures in the play such as the two climaxes, the twins, the play within the play, the echo, the shadow or Ferdinand’s use of equivocation. Ferdinand’s narrative indeed is surrounded the whole play by doubleness, even from the very beginning of his life he shared a womb with his twin.

Jacques Lacan divides the psyche into three structures that control our lives and our desires:

- a) The real: a state of nature in the neo-natal phase.
- b) The imaginary order: it is primarily narcissistic, in this order comes the phase of the mirror-stage when the young child identifies his own image. He recreates an image that is a fantasy, an “ideal I.”
- c) The symbolic order: it is the acceptance of language, law, and community.

This section of the project is focused on the phase of the mirror stage in order to understand the influence that it exerts in Ferdinand when it irrupts in the symbolic order.

The crucial moment precipitating Ferdinand’s descend to madness is the vision of his dead sister. The Duchess is described by Antonio, her future husband as a mirror for other ladies’ imitation, as a source of light. However, Ferdinand refuses the whole play to look at his twin “I will never see you more” (III.ii.134), “this darkness suits you well”

(IV.i.31), “cover her face; mine eyes dazzle” (IV.ii.242). He sees himself reflected in her form, “the problem for Ferdinand is that this mirror for ladies is also a mirror for him. In her glass, the male subject’s egomorphic work encounters resistance to its most foundational narcissistic assumptions.” (Enterline 110). Ferdinand admits that they were born twins, that they were similar only when she is dead. In this light the mirror-image that he receives when he looks at his dead sister suggests a return to his imaginary phase. After this acknowledgment he is prepared to look at her directly, he has a moment in which her eyes don’t dazzle him, he is not blind anymore “let me see her face again” (IV.ii.249). Considering death as a form of creating life, as a renovation, a return to the origin, a new birth, the moment that Ferdinand is looking at his own reflection in this state he receives what Lacan calls *imagos* which function “is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality.” (Lacan 78). Ferdinand looks at a mirror in which he recognises himself and gets identification as for the first time, intertwining the imaginary order where he assumes the reflection of his specular image with the symbolic order where his identification as a subject is socially determined. In this symbolic world he is unable to keep his own identity separated from his sister’s and she becomes his object of desire.

After this disruption that affects the symbolic order Ferdinand suffers a final rupture. Nevertheless, the play invites to think that his conflict of identity is not solved through the Duchess’s death. The fact that he kills his sister means that he cuts a natural union that they had as twins, but this unnatural action cannot cut his duplicity, it is reinforced instead. The evidence of this reinforcement is that his madness condition takes the form of lycanthropy, the final stage of his transformation.

### **3. Anatomy of Ferdinand’s Madness.**

The structure of the next sections is constructed according to the development of Ferdinand’s stages of madness. These phases of mental pathology are used as a guide to assemble the analysis of the figurative language, the spectacle and the transformation. These phases can be divided into three stages:

- a) An initial phase. It is the first rupture, Ferdinand is consumed by rage and suffers hallucinations. A clear example is the use of figurative language in Act II, scene 5.

b) A climatic phase. The spectacle of the fourth act is marked by the use of artifice and ends with the death of his sister. This fact triggers a significant change in Ferdinand.

c) The final phase. Transformation.

These phases of madness will be used as a guide to structure the next sections: the use of figurative language will be focused on Act II, scene 5 that exposes the first Ferdinand's rupture. The section about the spectacle is focused on the climax of his madness which occurs in the fourth act and the last part will deal with the final transformation in the last act.

### **3.1. The Threat of Madness.**

A large number of figures associated to madness are used in the play and work as references of Ferdinand's insanity. The figurative language about plants, animals and natural phenomena are allusions of the state of his mind and join him in his different stages of madness as a sign of his final transformation. They introduce an ominous mood in the play and are correlated to the action of the play, prefiguring the events to come.

#### **3.1.1. Plants.**

Enterline argues that "the first distorting familiar to provoke Ferdinand's madness is the body of his female twin when it becomes pregnant and thus a sign for sexual activity." (110). This event occurs in the Act II, scene 5 (also commented in the first section of the TFG). Bosola writes a letter to the Duke after he used "apricocks" to expose the Duchess's pregnancy and reading the news Ferdinand uses a significant figure, a mandrake:

FERDINAND.

I have this night digged up a mandrake.

CARDINAL.

Say you?

FERDINAND.

And I am grown mad with 't. (II.v.1-3)

This opening anticipates Ferdinand's lycanthropic activity digging dead bodies up in the last act, as well as it is a signal of the progression of his madness disease. He has overpassed the phase of denial and he recognises openly that he goes mad with the pregnancy of his sister. Thereby the representation of his madness during this scene is drawn by an absolute state of rage. A mandrake is a root used as an aphrodisiac but also poisonous, both aspects associated to Ferdinand. Furthermore, a forked root has an anthropomorphic shape and may have different parts resembling a distorted body. The form of a root is difficult to fix, this uncertainty is also an image of Ferdinand's mind that represents his obsession with his sister's body. According to Enterline this figure parallels the effect that the Duchess's body exerts on the Duke's sense of his own. "His gesture tries to appropriate from her the act of giving birth. In so doing, however, he merely digs up, or gives birth to, a form uncannily like his own." (113).

In the same scene Ferdinand's calls desperately for rhubarb "rhubarb, oh, for rhubarb to purge this choler!" (II.v.12) a plant that was thought curative of the intense rage. He wants to counteract the effect of the mandrake with another plant considered purging and laxative as an attempt of expulsing a disease from his body.

### **3.1.2. Animals.**

Another significant figure that Ferdinand uses when reacting to the news of the sexual activity of his sister is the image of an animal, a hyena.

FERDINAND.

Methinks I see her laughing\_\_

Excellent hyena! Talk to me somewhat, quickly,

Or my imagination will carry me

To see her in the shameful act of sin. (II.v.38-41)

As a part of Ferdinand's hallucinatory state triggered by his rage he thinks he sees a hyena "laughing" and furthermore he hears it. It is an auditory and visual fantasy. This image is associated to perversion since the Duke depicts the hyena of his vision as an incarnation of his twin enjoying the pleasures of the flesh. The hyena is notable for mimicking the human voice as a method to lure his prey to destruction. This condition of

imitation and simulation distorts the distinction between human and animal, implicating two aspects: firstly, a vocal confusion that anticipates the return of the Duchess's voice after her death as an echo that haunts Antonio and secondly, the connotation of duplicity, making two out of one. Considering that his hallucinatory state is a subjective effect of his rage, his perception between the appearance and reality is distorted. Thus, the aspect of duplicity is really disturbing at this level, specially taking into account that the double pattern is repeated at the last act of the play. Ferdinand's final transformation into a wolf may be read as a process in which he repeats the condition of his birth, making two out of one as a form of recreating the image of a twin.

In this view the nature of the imagery about plants and animals in this scene are a further extension of Ferdinand's mind, a unit element and moreover they are reflexive of the action of the play. These images display misleading shapes that parallel the appearance-reality conflict in *The Duchess of Malfi*.

### **3.1.3. Natural Phenomena.**

The figurative language of natural phenomena in this fragment of the second act is an indication of the mood of the scene and an image of the sickness of the main character and furthermore, these images develop the idea of "appearance and reality" above mentioned. On discovering Duchess's maternity Ferdinand suffers an episode of rage in this scene that The Cardinal calls "wild tempest" (II.v.18) arguing that the Duke's language "makes man deformed" (II.v.58). This "tempest" is Ferdinand's driving force the rest of the play. This reference to the weather fits perfectly in this moment of the play because it is at the end of this scene when Ferdinand consumed by madness decides the form in which his sister is going to be punished: "fix her in a general eclipse" (II.v.80). Significantly, the term eclipse invites to think in two parts, it is a reminder of the two bodies that are implicated in his inner conflict.

The image of the eclipse points out Ferdinand's madness, Belsey proposes a line of thought that associates his "tempest" to evil:

His object is a general eclipse which will envelop the world in his own darkness, and the recurrent imagery which aligns Ferdinand with the devil draws

attention to the parallel between this and the satanic desire to transform paradise into hell. (132)

This line of thought is also followed by Berry, according to him “the play’s design of imagery, character, and action has a logical resolution. Evil has been constantly invoked in the imagery; manifest in the actions of the characters; satisfyingly punished, with the maximum of ironic appropriateness.” (106). Following this line of thinking, the imagery revised in this section prefigures the events to come at the end of the play: on the one hand the metamorphosis of Ferdinand as a figure of the evil spreading his disease and infesting all the stage and on the other hand, the return of the Duchess as an echo and as a shadow of his twin. Ironically, the light that is associated to her remains symbolically on stage after her death. In spite of the eclipse conjured by the “tempest” to kill her, the sun continues shining and his twin takes the form of his shadow. He cannot escape his fate.

### **3.2. Ferdinand’s Spectacle.**

The Spectacle of the fourth act that ends with the death of the Duchess is an externalisation of Ferdinand’s madness. He creates a world plagued with madness because he really wants that his sister gets consumed by it. His strategy is to “plague her in art” (IV.i.111), but the Duchess is not tricked and describes her situation as a tedious theater “For I do play a part in ’t ’gainst my will” (IV.i.83). In this act Ferdinand’s madness is uncontrollable. It is a stage of madness in which he becomes completely destructive and he denies and evades responsibility blaming his suffering on other people. In this state the Duke turns to artifice and his revenge takes the form of a play within the play including wax figures, severed hands, madmen from the asylum and a funeral chamber.

Ferdinand’s character imposes his play within the play in order to accomplish his revenge and torture his sister. His method of punishment is progressive, he mixes fake figures that imitate humans and masks with a group of real madmen. Ferdinand structures this artificial setting in a theatrical pattern that culminates with the theatrical display of the Duchess’s corpse. According to Enterline “as the play’s internal playwright, Ferdinand stages a variety of spectacles for his sister that conclude around the spectacle

of his sister.” (93). This climax of the play within the play may be read as a revelation that Ferdinand undergoes looking at his sister and his subsequent breakdown, specially taking into account the psychoanalytic reading realised in the section about Ferdinand’s identity in which this event is considered an irruption of the imaginary in the symbolic. His theater indicates a development in the action of the play, particularly due to the Duchess’s death and it is also prophetic of the next phase of his madness. The Duke’s words “The Wolfe shall find her Grave, and scrape it up” (IV.ii.332) are a prediction of the consequences for his own form.

This section is focused on the exploration of Ferdinand’s use of these forms of artifice as a knot of signification of his state of mind. The idea is to read from a semiotic perspective the different orders of signification of the wax figures and the severed hand on stage, the former as an icon and the latter as a symbol. This perspective is especially useful in the view of the chain of connotations that generates the vision of these signs on stage. On the other hand, the examination of the madmen on stage brings issues about the visual culture of madness and its representation on stage. The analysis will apply Roland Barthes’s semiotic theory of Mythologies as a theoretical filter and it will be paired with the historical context provided by Michel Foucault about madness in the Renaissance.

### **3.2.1. The Severed Hand. A Symbol.**

In the opening of the fourth act “Ferdinand determines to terrify her with a series of mental tortures that begins with his presenting (what the Duchess discover to be) a dead man’s hand.” (Tricomi 347). The Duke uses darkness to veil the nature of the hand and in so doing he intertwines the representational levels of signification. He offers her what she thinks and feels as a hand. The connotation of this hand is a gesture, but the moment the lights turn up emerges other level of signification because the signifier has changed in quality (it is a dead hand of wax).

FERDINAND.

Let her have lights enough. (Exit)

DUCHESS.

What witchcraft doth he practice, that he hath left

A dead man’s hand here? (IV.i.53-55)



The “new” hand stands as a symbol. It does not resemble a simple gesture, signifier and signified have changed and lead to a chain of connotations: as Belsey concludes “his offer of the dead hand to the Duchess is a grotesque and cruel caricature of the wooing scene” (129) in which she proposes to Antonio. On the other hand, Ferdinand’s ambiguous language in this scene “I will leave this ring with you for a love-token; and the hand” (IV.i.47-51) is again, as well as the use of the light, instruments to conceal the truth, supporting the appearance-reality conflict presented the whole play. His words call attention about the uncertainty of the language as a mode of expression and at the same time his personal spectacle draws attention to the theatrical techniques of representation.

The severed hand also symbolises Ferdinand’s obsession with the Duchess’s body “Damn her! That body of hers” (IV.ii.19) and his fascination for the fragmentation of the body. This reading is argued by Albert Tricomi who suggests that “the dissevered hand foreshadows Ferdinand’s behaviour in the fifth act, where he becomes and out-and-out lycanthrope, digging up graves and bearing the leg of a dead man on his shoulder.” (356). Other sections of the play provide evidence of the Duke’s interest in body parts “when I have hewed her to pieces.” (II.v.31) and furthermore, he enumerates other fragments of the human body through the play as heads, hands, eyes. In this respect Enterline has been right to argue that the severed hand “also signifies that her body gives him back a sense of his own in bits and pieces” (113) particularly in the view of his problem of identity and the form of his final figure.

### **3.2.2. The Wax Figures. An Icon.**

After the Duchess sees the severed hand, Bosola discovers the artificial figures of her husband Antonio and her children appearing as if they were dead.

BOSOLA.

He doth present you this sad spectacle,  
That, now you know directly they are dead,  
Hereafter you may wisely cease to grieve  
For that which cannot be recovered. (IV.i.56-60)

Certainly, Ferdinand's desire is fulfilled in the spectacle he creates:

BOSOLA.

Why do you do this?

FERDINAND.

To bring her to despair. (IV.ii.114)

The visual image of this performance on stage invites to the examination of these figures from a semiotic perspective, thinking about the composition of these bodies of wax as a picture. In this outlook the wax figures function as an iconic sign of dead bodies because they maintain a physical resemblance to what is being represented, thus the signifier of the artificial forms seems to be virtually identical with its signified, just like a photograph. This is the first order of signification, the denotative level. The main difference between human corpses and figures fashioned out of wax is the signifier, it changes the material, but it keeps the same signified. However, this change of signifier of the denotative sign generates different connotations in the second order of signification. It is important to consider the fact that these figures have been constructed imitating a model alive but with the pretension to be used as an imitation of someone dead. Hence, in this light the connotation is horror and destruction.

In this state of affairs in which he has the control of stage Ferdinand emerges as an artist. Considering that Renaissance art theory thought that "the highest achievement of art was the perfect imitation of - an improvement upon - nature." (Panzanelli 30) the use of wax fitted perfectly to reproduce images of the living due to the likeness of the texture of wax to human skin. This material creates the illusion that signifier and signified are identical and moreover, technically it gives Ferdinand enough power to construct and deconstruct since he owns the ability to control life and death on stage, like a mad god.

### **3.2.3. The Madmen. A Myth.**

FERDINAND.

And, cause she'll needs be mad, I am resolved

To remove forth the common hospital

All the mad-folk, and place them near her lodging;  
There let them practice together, sing and dance (IV.ii.124-128)

Ferdinand offers the Duchess a masque of madmen claiming that the masque is to be performed for her benefit and as a cure for her melancholy. Although he sets up the masque as an emblem of her state, “ironically, they function dramatically as transformations not of the Duchess but of Ferdinand.” (Belsey 131). Like Ferdinand these madmen scape into madness, just as Ferdinand insists “to feed a fire, as great as my revenge” the first madman would “set all the world on fire.” (IV.ii.74-75). However, the introduction of the madmen functions as a “sport” that once cured the Pope and “forced him to laugh” (IV.ii.42-48). Louis Wright explains the different point of view of the modern reader who understands the presence of the madmen as a mean of intensifying the horrors of the scene from the view of the contemporary audience of the play:

To an Elizabethan, the antics of the madmen furnished comic entertainment. It is certain that the madmen were not regarded as a horror by the contemporary audience; the author himself, at some pains to account for the madmen, makes Ferdinand explain that they are there to keep the Duchess awake. (qtd. Hayawaka 907)

The presence of real madmen in Ferdinand’s theater invites to explore two aspects of this representation of madness: the connotations that generates the image of madmen on stage and the influence of the theater as a channel of signification that controls the meaning of madness. Foucault explains that in Webster’s period the position of madness was changing, while in the Renaissance madness was an experience that was integrated into the rest of the world, “the classical age was to reduce to silence the madness whose voice the Renaissance had just liberated” (30). From this view madness spoke freely through the literary works of that age but at the same time it also started to be observed and controlled. Thereby Foucault defines the “great confinement” as the moment that the attitudes toward madness change in terms of control and madness is confined and influenced by economic ideas. This idea of observation as a form of control is illustrated in Ferdinand’s spectacle, although madness is not silenced, the group of madmen are observed by the audience and curiously they become an instrument of control of the Duchess leads by Ferdinand.

The idea of control developed above is interestingly related to Barthes's theory of Mythologies. According to him myth is constructed in the second level of signification, the connotative level. In this level culture structures provide a connotational framework, namely codes recognised within a society. These codes maintain myths and at the same time myths generate codes, mainly because myths create the illusion that certain meanings are something natural and this belief helps to universalise concepts. In short, myth is a form of conceptualizing some ideas. From this light the representation of madness on Jacobean stage participates in the construction of the meaning of the myth of madness in its period. The vision of madmen on stage activates negative connotations, they are a disempowered group, confined, vulnerable and used as an entertainment. This signification is clearly a sign of the visual culture of madness in Jacobean drama, as a consequence of ideas about madness that were circulating at the time.

On the other hand, Foucault clarifies that the construction of madness depends on the society in which exists, and he explains that cultural and economic forces determine how madness is known and experienced. In the case of Ferdinand's microcosm, he gives voice to the madmen. Despite the fact that culturally madness is related to unreason and a madman's speech is considered something incomprehensible, paradoxically in the spectacle of Ferdinand the nonsense produces sense. Thus, this scene may be reading as a form of counteracting the universal discourse of madness as something incoherent and meaningless.

#### **4. Ferdinand's Lycanthropy.**

Webster was much possessed by death  
And saw the skull beneath the skin;  
And breastless creatures under ground  
Leaned backward with a lipless grin. (T.S. Eliot)

Eliot's words from "Whispers of immortality" poem focus on Webster's ability to uncover completely the anatomy of a character such as Ferdinand. The last section has explored the potential of visual signs on stage: the severed hand, figures of wax, a group of madmen. These visuals reveal the subjectivity that Elliot recalls in his poem. The sight of mangled corpses as a lifeless work of art or the spectacle of madmen are an insight of

Ferdinand's inner conflicts. In addition, Webster uses Ferdinand's play within the play as a shift of perspective to see the truth through a different glass. In this light changing the point of view is also a way to explore the conflict between appearance and reality.

#### **4.1. Melancholy. Social Diagnosis.**

The theatrical display of the Duchess's corpse marks the end of Ferdinand's spectacle and sets up the future of him. However, Ferdinand has been ascribed to the figure of the wolf the whole play, Wiseman also adds that "he sees wolves everywhere, saying of his sister's language" (99) "the howling of a wolf is music to thee" (III.ii.87), "the death of young wolves is never to be pitied." (IV.ii.237). Indeed, the Duchess predicted his transformation before her death "shall make you howl in hell for 't" (V.i.39) and after her death Ferdinand also anticipates his lycanthropy activities thinking about a wolf finding her grave and scrapping it up.

Brett Hirsch explains that his pathological condition is very similar to the symptoms described by Simon Goulart in his *Admirable and Memorable Histories*, Ferdinand's doctor calls it as "a very pestilent disease, my lord, they call lycanthropy." (V.ii.5) and gives a portrayal that resembles Goulart's discussion of lycanthropy:

DOCTOR.

Such melancholy humor, they imagine  
Themselves to be transformed into wolves;  
Steal forth to churchyards in the dead of night,  
And dig dead bodies up: as two nights since  
One met the duke 'bout midnight in a lane  
Behind Saint Mark's Church, with the leg of a man  
Upon his shoulder; and he howled fearfully;  
Said he was a wolf, only the difference  
Was, a wolf's skin was hairy on the outside,  
His on the inside. (V.ii.9-18)

Lycanthropy is seen as a product of melancholy, a manifestation. According to Foucault the idea of melancholy in the sixteenth century was associated to the ideas that

a delirious person formed about himself. This connection is also suggested by Wiseman who explains that a werewolf transformation was related to “a state of mind, as well as soul, and led towards the humoral vision of lycanthropy as melancholy, mania, frenzy.” (98), whereby Ferdinand’s metamorphosis is a sign of his progressive mental decay. Wiseman adds the idea that this decay represents his moral conflict and draws an image of his archaic court:

The play’s language and Ferdinand’s actions suggest that the understanding of Ferdinand’s lycanthropy as melancholy or disease is accompanied by a sense of its social and civic implications. He is tormented by internal hairiness, he murders his sister and her children, and he is also the violent... heart of the civil system. Ferdinand’s lycanthropy frenzy is specifically a mania generated by the court, and overly an index of its moral crisis. (101)

This view recalls the emblematic portrait of the fountain as a metaphor of a prince’s court mentioned before, the fountain radiates life but “if chance some curs’d example poison ’t” “death and diseases through the whole land spread.” (I.i.11-15). This conceit is amplified through the rest of the play and it is prophetic of the end of *The Duchess of Malfi*, the court is poisoned by melancholy and Ferdinand’s lycanthropy becomes the emblem of the court. This sense of polarity between light and death is outlined in the play by means of imagery and action. The consequence of this method is that the play identifies evil itself, Belsey clarifies that this identification is “not in terms of individual motive or intention but as a concept - by locating it within a pattern, defining it with increasing precision by a series of contrasts.” (129). Indeed, Evil appears in the play from the very beginning exposing “the corruption of the times” (I.i.14) that occupies the court. Hirsch offers other perspective that explores corruption as the seed of this evil: “that intemperate anger and Machiavellian ambition can push a man past the limits of civility, and perhaps even past the border of the human.” (43).

Following this thread of the theme of evil Berry includes the aspect of the law in this pattern of contrasts, according to him *The Duchess of Malfi* examines the relationship between evil and the law, especially in the final scenes. He considers that “the play’s design of imagery, character, and action has a logical resolution. Evil has been constantly invoked in the imagery; manifest in the actions of the characters; satisfyingly punished.” (150).

## 4.2. Duplicity and Fragmentation.

Ferdinand's condition imagined as an animal skin worn with the hair on the inside emerges as an emblem of his duplicity. This sense of duplicity is developed throughout Webster's play, particularly using deformed doubles: a root, a beast, a werewolf, a shadow deformed by the sun or hallucinations that distort reality. About this aspect Belsey claims that Ferdinand as "wolf embodies all the qualities we have come to associate with him throughout the play: the symbol evokes a world of isolation, darkness, and destruction." (133).

Ferdinand's transformation verifies the rupture that the character suffers at the end of the fourth act. Considering this fact, his new shape is directly related to the progression of his madness and the loss of his twin. "Lycanthropy finally turns Ferdinand into a double of himself" (Enterline 110). Gilman excavates this connection between lycanthropy and twinship analysing Ferdinand's lycanthropy activities:

The severed limb Ferdinand is reported to carry in his madness and the dead hand he offers his sister are the emblems of his own psychic dismemberment. The loss of his twin to another leads him in effect to create a new one, a lycanthropic conjunction of the human and the animal. (38)

The doctor's description of Ferdinand's metamorphosis includes the traumatic repetition of digging, this symptom was revealed previously in the play as a symbol of his madness. This repetitive obsession has been noted by Enterline who argues that "the lycanthrope's scraping in the ground for limbs merely recapitulates a rhetoric of body parts that has done nothing but grow increasingly literal over the course of the play." (113). Webster's rhetoric of body parts is constructed through the play by means of Ferdinand's fascination in fragmented bodies, his obsession is a sign of his problematic identity and it also has the implication on his own dismemberment. Fragmentation is synonym of incompleteness, of not having some parts and this fragmentation is anticipated not only in the figure of the severed hand but also in Ferdinand's language. He tends to represent language in terms of the body, and he introduces continuously references to parts of the body:

FERDINAND.

And women like that part which, like the lamprey,  
Hath never a bone in 't.

DUCHESS.

Fie, sir!

FERDINAND.

Nay,

I mean the tongue; variety of courtship.

What cannot a neat knave with a smooth tale (I.iii.48)

The use of equivocation suggests a phallic association to the lamprey and to the tongue. According to Theodora Jankowski “These references also serve to point out Ferdinand’s technique of asserting his power over his sister by symbolically dismembering her body.” (229). Duplicity and fragmentation also imply disorder, chaos or madness as a repetitive pattern through *The Duchess of Malfi*.

## **5. Conclusion.**

The main objective of this TFG has been to analyse the significance of Ferdinand’s madness within the story and identify the main key aspects of his madness. In order to frame the patterns of his madness the exploration has been focused on three essential ingredients of the play that have also worked as a skeleton of the structure of this work: the relationship between Ferdinand and his twin the Duchess, the metatheatrical devices that the Duke designs in order to drive her mad before her death and lycanthropy.

On the other hand, the research statement that has guided the purpose of this paper has been the following: Webster’s exploration of madness attempts to show the dual identity of human nature, and everything indicates that at the end the contact with madness unveils the true identity of the characters. It is a play between appearance and reality. This hypothesis has been divided in three sections in order to revise each part. Webster’s exploration of madness attempts to show the dual identity of human nature. This first part of the hypothesis has been approached in the section that explores the problem of identity and the method of examination has been based on the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan. Apart from the various references of doubleness and distortion of the



Duke's identity that emerged from the text, this framework granted one of the main keys to draft Ferdinand's madness, namely the disclosure of the presence of the mirror-stage in the text. The presence of this phase is a symptom of the transformation of the character, he suffers a rupture, a crucial moment that in Lacanian words supposes an irruption of the Imaginary into the Symbolic order. This revelation marks an important change in the progression of Ferdinand's madness, and it is correlated with the loss of his sister, the end of his spectacle and a new phase of his madness in which persists the distortion of his identity.

The next part of the statement is as follows: everything indicates that at the end the contact with madness unveils the true identity of the characters. The first part of the hypothesis is also directly related to these words because an act of madness (he kills his sister after tortured her) has precisely triggered the aforementioned revelation and transformation of the character. The play displays many signs and acts of madness that enlighten the true nature of Ferdinand's identity: the use of artifice, his violent acts, the projection of his madness in the language, his motivation of revenge that remains as an enigma, and his metamorphosis. From the deconstruction of his attributes have emerged a series of oppositions that place him in the dichotomy good-evil. This dichotomy is defined and extended throughout the whole play in order to identify evil itself. The nature of this evil is conceptualised by imagery, by Ferdinand's language, by his acts and by Ferdinand's points of likeness and contrast with his sister.

It is a play between appearance and reality. This is the last part of the research statement and the most significant because it gathers the main aspects of the play. The three ingredients analysed in this project that are significant in the representation of madness (sibling relationship, the use of artifice and lycanthropy) are evidence of the conflict between appearance and reality in *The Duchess of Malfi*. Hence, madness is an instrument of exploration of this issue. Because of this examination emerges a discourse about the importance of the perspective to solve this appearance-reality problem because the point of view is paramount in the construction of meaning. This final conclusion points out that Webster's technique of veiling and unveiling demonstrates the benefits of multiple perspectives.

In order to see the "skull beneath the skin" this TFG concludes with the exposition of the three facets of the play that reflect the conflict between appearance and reality and at the same time emphasise the importance of multiple perspectives:

a) Language is interrogated as a form of expression because it may misrepresent reality, this aspect is revealed for instance in the use of equivocations and double entendres that provoke slippage and displacement. Therefore, the play exposes the possibility of being misleading by the language, especially in the construction of meaning.

b) The theory of the myth analysed in the spectacle of Ferdinand's representation of madness reinforces the importance of multiple perspectives, especially to counteract the control that culture structures exert in the construction of meaning. This angle also points out the idea that a shift of perspective challenges the audience to see the truth through a different glass.

c) The irruption of the symbolic order is a change of perspective that precipitates a chain of events in Ferdinand's madness. Before this revelation Ferdinand controls his own spectacle of madness in the play within the play and at the same time controls the play from his subjective vision. Apparently, he has the power on stage deforming reality at will through the use of artifice and furthermore, this power is managed by madness. In this light, the use of different viewpoints in *The Duchess of Malfi* reinforces the idea of the importance of multiple perspectives in order not to be misleading by the interplay between appearance and reality.

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