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A STUDY OF JOHN WEBSTER

by

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For my Mother and
to the memory of my Father

PREFACE

In this century many scholars have studied the work of John Webster, providing the materials needed for critical interpretations of his plays. In 1904 Charles Crawford published the first of his studies of Webster's borrowing, and in 1905 Elmer Edgar Stoll showed the relation of the plays to the development of Elizabethan dramatic genres in *John Webster: The Periods of His Work as Determined by His Relations to the Drama of His Day.*

Modern Webster scholarship received its greatest impetus with the appearance in 1928 of F. L. Lucas's edition of *The Complete Works of John Webster.* Lucas attempts to solve every problem connected with the study of Webster, dating the plays, discussing their sources, trying to determine his share in collaborations, and so on. He interprets the plays mainly in the context of classical and Shakespearian tragedy, and does not stress their dependence on the Christian and medieval tradition. This reading of the plays has had great influence on nearly every writer who has since approached Webster.

In recent years there have been a number of further advances in our knowledge of Webster. In 1951 Clifford Leech's *John Webster: A Critical Study* offered a new outlook on the plays as works of dramatic art. Gabriele Baldini contributed a study of *John Webster e il linguaggio della tragedia* in 1953, with a valuable appendix on the history of the dramatist's reputation. Travis Bogard's study of *The Tragic Satire of John Webster* appeared in 1955. More recently there have been Robert W. Dent's study of *John Webster's Borrowing* (1960), Gunnar Boklund's two books on the relation of the tragedies to their sources: *The*

Sources of the White Devil (1957), and *The Duchess of Malfi: Sources, Themes, Characters* (1962), John Russell Brown's editions of *The White Devil* (1960) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (1964), and Don D. Moore's *John Webster and His Critics, 1617-1964* (1966).

My book does not undertake to supersede what has already been written about Webster. Instead I have tried to build upon what has already been achieved, directing my efforts especially toward two questions: What did Webster actually write? What is the artistic value and the significance of his work? Several scholars have tried to determine the authorship of the plays Webster is known or thought to have written in collaboration with others, and I have tried to advance scholarship in this area. My main concern, however, has been to arrive at an understanding of Webster's art and meaning. By following the lead of his titles, imagery, plots, and characters, I have tried to define the theme and structure of his plays and to relate them to the ideas and patterns of his cultural tradition. In doing this, I have discussed his relation to medieval literature and Christian thought more than other critics have done, attempting to fill in the gap left by Lucas and so provide what I hope will be a broader basis for criticism than we have hitherto had. I do not mean to suggest, however, that Webster wrote to expound Christian doctrine or morality. The vision that informs the plays is more tragic than moral, and nearly as much Stoic as Christian. Webster consistently affirms the Christian-Stoic ideal of "integrity of life." Whether one wishes his end to be crowned by the pagan "fame" or the Christian heaven, one must not swerve from the paths of truth. As a tragic writer, however, Webster is concerned most of all with the inner experience of his characters when they do stray from the paths of integrity. His sympathetic and imaginative treatment of their tragedies is much more deeply human than would be possible for a writer whose interest is primarily moralistic.

In quoting early authors I have exactly reproduced the texts cited, except that I have used modern *s*, *u* and *v*, and *i* and *j*, and have expanded the tilde.

I owe a great debt to those who have studied Webster and his times before me, and especially to the scholars with whom I have been privileged to study, particularly Professors Allan G. Chester, Matthias A. Shaaber, Matthew W. Black, Arthur H. Scouten, and Maurice Johnson of the University of Pennsylvania. I also want to thank Mrs. Delphine O. Richardson of the University of Pennsylvania Library and Dr. William E. Miller of the Furness Memorial Library of the University of Pennsylvania. I am indebted to the University of Pennsylvania for a research fellowship that enabled me to complete a great part of the work. And, finally, I want to express my gratitude to my wife Frances and our children, Jean, Stephen, Susan, and Christopher, for their loving and usually constructive interest in my great stacks of paper.

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I

LIFE AND WORKS

Almost everything that we know about John Webster we have learned from his writings. So far no one has discovered a single document connecting the author of the plays and poems with a John Webster about whose private life we know anything. We guess he must have been born between 1570 and 1580, since he was writing plays in 1602. In the dedicatory letter to *Monuments of Honour* (London, 1624), he tells us that he was born free of the Merchant Taylors' Company, which presumably means that his father was a Merchant Taylor, but really tells us only that the dramatist lived in London. Beyond this we know virtually nothing except that he seems to have died before 1634, for in that year Thomas Heywood wrote of him in the past tense in his *Hierarchy of the Blessed Angels.* All else is darkness and conjecture.[1]

[1] For a review of some conjectures see F. L. Lucas, *The Complete Works of John Webster* (London, 1928), I, 49-56. Also see F. C. Morgan, "A Deed of Gift (1624) and John Webster", *NQ*, 192 (1947), 496. From a contemporary gibe at Webster as "The *Play-wright, Cart-wright:* whether? either!" and a line in the comic elegy on Thomas Randolph's finger, "Webster's brother would not lend a coach", there is also the real possibility that Webster's brother, if not the playwright himself, was a cartwright. No record has yet been published, however, to show whether such a brother really existed or whether the first allusion was perhaps intended only to compare Webster's playmaking with the crudeness of cart-making, and was the inspiration of the second allusion. See F. L. Lucas, *Works*, I, 55; John J. Parry, "A Seventeenth Century Gallery of Poets", *JEGP*, XIX (1920), 270-277, who reprints the elegy on Randolph's finger; and R. G. Howarth, "John Webster", *TLS*, Nov. 2, 1933, p. 751, who draws the two allusions together and makes the inference that Webster's brother might have been a member of the Coach and Harness Makers' Company.

Among the conjectures, the only one that is at all plausible or attractive is that the dramatist might be the John Webster who was admitted to the study of law at the Middle Temple on the first of August, 1598.[2] This identification is plausible with respect to date and attractive as it explains Webster's knowledge of the law and his liking for courtroom scenes.

But if Webster's life is obscure, we have a fairly clear picture of his literary career, and from this picture I think we can make some valuable inferences about how we should approach his works. The first record of his work as a writer is in the diary of Philip Henslowe, the theatrical manager at London's Rose Theater. Two entries in May of 1602 list Webster with Thomas Dekker, Anthony Munday, Thomas Middleton, and Michael Drayton as the authors of *Caesar's Fall,* a lost play.[3] In October of the same year Henslowe made three entries in his diary for payments to Henry Chettle, Dekker, Heywood, Wentworth Smith, and Webster for two parts of *Lady Jane,* which is probably an early, perhaps longer version of the play that was printed in 1607 as *Sir Thomas Wyatt,* by Dekker and Webster. In early November of 1602 there is an entry for payment to Heywood and Webster "in earneste of" *Christmas Comes but Once a Year,* another lost play.

1607 saw the publication not only of *Sir Thomas Wyatt,* but also of two other collaborations of Webster with Dekker – the comedies of London life, *Westward Ho* and *Northward Ho,* which were written in 1604 and 1605, respectively. At this time Webster was working with other writers, too. In 1604 he wrote the amusing but negligible induction for John Marston's *Malcontent,* and he was well enough known to be asked to contribute commendatory verses for the publication of Munday's translation of *Palmerin of England* (the third part, 1602), S. Harrison's *Arches of Triumph* (1604), and Heywood's *Apology for Actors*

[2] Lucas, *Works,* I, 50.

[3] Except where noted to the contrary, the facts about dates and authorship given here are from Lucas, *Works*; Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage,* 5 vols. (Oxford, 1941-1956); *Henslowe's Diary,* ed. R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert (Cambridge, 1961); and E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage,* 4 vols. (Oxford, 1923).

(1612). And in 1612 he joined with Heywood and Cyril Tourneur in composing a volume of elegies on the death of Prince Henry. Webster's contribution, *A Monumental Column*, was also published separately in 1613.

Through the year 1608, all of Webster's dramatic writing was done in collaboration with others. For the ten or so years that follow, however, we have record only of his working alone, and it is from this period of his career that the works come which have placed his name near Shakespeare's among England's tragic dramatists. His entire reputation rests on two of the four plays he wrote during these years, *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*. *The White Devil* was published in 1612. From allusions to contemporary events and from Webster's habit of borrowing phrases from contemporary books we can be sure that it was written after 1609.[4] *The Duchess of Malfi* was not published until 1623, but we know that it was written before 16 December 1614, because William Ostler, one of the actors in the play, died on that day. Since the play has many phrases and lines that are similar to passages in the 1612 *Monumental Column,* and since it borrows freely from sources not printed before 1612, we can be certain that it was written in 1612 or 1613.[5]

[4] Compare Lucas, *Works*, I, 67-69; Robert W. Dent, *John Webster's Borrowing* (Berkeley, 1960), p. 57; and John Russell Brown, "On the Dating of Webster's *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*", *PQ*, XXXI (1952), 353-362.

[5] It has been suggested, however, that Webster added the lines at the start of the play in 1617 as an allusion to the upheavals of the French court in that year. F. L. Lucas believes that the play must have been revived in 1617, and that Webster added these speeches to make it timely: *Works*, II, 4. John Russell Brown has argued that there is nothing specifically historical about the passage, and that therefore there is no reason to suppose that the lines were written after the rest of the play, especially since these lines help define the theme of the action to follow, so that something like them must have been in the original version: "On the Dating"; Dent agrees with Brown, p. 58. In his 1959 re-issue of *The Duchess of Malfi*, Lucas revised his introduction to reply to Brown. He contends that since the play deals with actual history, the audience of 1614 would have asked, "*this* speech must be topical. But how? For to-day the French King is a mere boy . . . ": *The Duchess of Malfi* (New York, 1959), p. 15n. But I think that the audience would naturally assume that the lines were topical in relation to the actual history of the Duchess of Amalfi if they were not related to conditions of 1614.

In 1615 the sixth edition of "Overbury's" *Characters* appeared. Included was a section of thirty-two new characters having a separate title page. F. L. Lucas reprints these in his edition of Webster's works along with a list of passages that have parallels in the dramatist's known writings or that borrow from his favorite sources.[6] Robert Dent has found more parallels, and I think we can safely assert that Webster had some part in the composition of these brief prose sketches.[7]

The dedication of *The Devil's Law Case,* Webster's third and last unaided play that survives, lists his earlier works, *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi,* and adds to them the title of a third play, *Guise,* which has most unfortunately not come down to us. From the fact that *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* are listed in what we believe to be the order of their composition, we infer that *Guise,* listed third, was also written third. *The Devil's Law Case,* which was published in 1623 and probably written between 1617 and 1621, was presumably written fourth, but we cannot be sure.[8]

In *The Devil's Law Case* Webster is on the decline, and in his later collaborations there are only rare flashes of the fire that burns so intensely in his two great plays. He may have had a hand in *Anything for a Quiet Life,* written about 1621 and published in 1661 with Thomas Middleton's name on the title page,[9] but here the Websterian fire burns not at all. Indeed, the

[6] *Works,* IV, 6-59.

[7] P. 59.

[8] Bentley has argued from dates given in the play's trial scene that Webster imagined the action of *The Devil's Law Case* to be taking place in 1610, and infers from this that the play must have been first performed in that year: V, 1250-1251. But as Brown has contended in reply, the date of 1610 in itself is never mentioned, nor is any topical point made in connection with that year: "The Date of John Webster's 'The Devil's Law Case'", *NQ,* 203 (1958), 100-101. Moreover, as Lucas and Dent have shown, the play borrows phrases and lines from works first published or performed in 1612, 1614, 1616, and even 1617: Lucas, *Works,* II, 213-216; Dent, pp. 58-59.

[9] Lucas establishes the date of composition of *Anything for a Quiet Life* by citing allusions to events of 1621 and a little earlier; *Works,* IV, 65. Lucas's date is used by R. C. Bald in "The Chronology of Middleton's Plays", *MLR,* XXXII (1937), 42; and Bentley, IV, 860.

evidence of his participation is so slight, as I show in Appendix I, that the play cannot be considered seriously in a study of his works. In September 1624 *A Late Murder of the Son Upon the Mother* was licensed with Webster and John Ford listed as the authors, but this play has been lost. From 1623-4 Webster's only surviving works are a short poem commending Henry Cockeram's *Dictionary* to the reader (1623), a few emblematical verses on a memorial plate showing the progeny of James I (1624-5),[10] and a Lord Mayor's Pageant entitled *Monuments of Honour* (1624). He may have contributed a little to *The Fair Maid of the Inn,* written about 1625[11] and licensed as John Fletcher's on 22 January 1625/6, but the signs of his participation are even slighter here than in the case of *Anything for a Quiet Life* (see Appendix I).

In the later period of collaboration there are two plays that have some importance for the study of Webster. He wrote *A Cure for a Cuckold* with Heywood and William Rowley, probably in 1625.[12] The play was published in 1661 with the names of Webster and Rowley on the title page. *Appius and Virginia* was published in 1654 with Webster's name alone on the title page, but today we believe it was a collaboration with Heywood. There has been a great deal of controversy over the date of composition of this play. All the evidence indicates that it must have been written either very early or very late in Webster's career, either before 1609 or after 1625, but no solid proof has been advanced for either alternative.[13] I am myself neutral on the question, and

[10] Bernard M. Wagner, "New Verses by John Webster", *MLN,* XLVI (1931), 403-405.

[11] Lucas fixes the date of *The Fair Maid of the Inn* by its topical allusions: *Works,* IV, 147.

[12] Lucas again uses topical allusions to fix the date: *Works,* III, 3-4. Rowley died in Feb. 1625/6.

[13] Rupert Brooke and Henry D. Gray assign it to about 1608-1609 and 1603-1604, respectively: *John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama* (New York, 1916), pp. 165-210; and "*Appius and Virginia:* By Webster and Heywood", *SP,* XXIV (1927), 275-289. Lucas, on the other hand, believes it was written between 1625 and 1630, or possibly later: *Works,* III, 121-130. Metrical analysis of Webster's part of the play indicates that it must have been written either early or late in his career. Through his three unaided plays, Webster's blank verse becomes progressively freer

have decided to discuss the play after the other plays because I believe they shed more light on it than it could possibly shed on them.

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with the passage of the years. Then, in *A Cure for a Cuckold*, there is a return to somewhat greater regularity. The Webster of *Appius and Virginia* is the most regular of all, and it is a moot point whether one should place it just before *The White Devil*, to which it is statistically the closest, or after *A Cure*. Other evidence is similarly indecisive. Gray's theory is that Heywood and Webster wrote the play in 1603-1604, and that it was revised in 1609 to follow *Coriolanus* in one or two scenes. Favoring this theory of collaboration and date are the echoes of *Julius Caesar*, the fact that Heywood and Webster are listed by Henslowe as working together in 1602, the closeness of the play's subject and its clown to Heywood's *Rape of Lucrece* (printed in 1608), and, above all, the general conformity of the play's subject and treatment to the style and manner of the earlier period of the drama. Countering this, Lucas points out that Heywood collaborated on *A Cure for a Cuckold* in 1625, and that there are clowns like Corbulo in plays of 1626-1630. Lucas claims that the starvation of the Roman troops, not found in the play's sources, could be an allusion to the starvation of English forces in 1624-1625. And he accounts for the general similarity of the play to earlier plays on Roman themes by suggesting that *Appius and Virginia* is a nostalgic "return to the older themes of the greater Elizabethan drama with stories and characters not ashamed to be heroic". Now the argument from nostalgia might work for Heywood, but it is not relevant to Webster. When had he written of heroic figures? Whatever may be the value of the rest of Lucas's argument, this line of thinking weakens rather than strengthens his case for a late date, reminding us again of the play's closeness to the works of the early seventeenth century.

There is one other small piece of evidence favoring an early date. In the plays written before *The Devil's Law Case*, Webster consistently favors the old-fashioned forms, *hath* and *doth*, over the more modern *has* and *does*. Starting with *The Devil's Law Case* and continuing through *A Cure for a Cuckold*, he favors *has* and *does*. In the longer scenes of *Appius and Virginia* that Gray and Lucas assign to Webster (I.i, III.ii, IV.i, and V.i), there are 10 *hath* and 8 *doth*, no *has* or *does*. (Heywood tended to use *hath* and *doth* throughout his career – see the Appendix.) On the face of it this is strong evidence for an early date, but it must not be allowed to carry much weight. It is simply too easy to explain away, not so much on the theory that a scribe, reviser, or printer has altered the forms, but on the theory that Webster may have felt that decorum demanded that a classical tragedy should have the greater formality of *hath* and *doth*. This very distinction may be seen in the works of Ben Jonson.

I think it is impossible to decide between early and late on the basis of the evidence we now have, and I follow Bentley in leaving the matter as an open question: V, 1247.

Few dramatists who have written so little enjoy so great a reputation as Webster. He has only three complete plays, yet he was writing for the stage over a period of more than twenty years. I think that the explanation for this rather strange situation is that the qualities of *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* that make them so distinctive and so great are qualities that prevent quantity of output. These plays are very *closely* written, having an amazing density and complexity of structure and style. Every element of language and action is brought into relation with every other element in coherent patterns, but at the same time the individual elements of the patterns remain somehow discrete. Thus the plot is generally coherent, but the intense moments are what really stand out; and, while the dialogue generally holds together, its language is compressed and abrupt, almost disjointedly epigrammatic, and highly figurative.[14] The effect is that of a dense pattern of brilliant points of fire, like a mosaic surface studded with gorgeously resplendent gems.

Webster's style is the natural product of his method of composition. To Elizabethans, a part of mimesis in art was the borrowing of images, phrases, epigrams, and even whole passages from the works of other writers. These the borrower would adapt to make them fit the tone of his own work. Webster, particularly, seems always to have written with his commonplace book open at his elbow. He made such free use of borrowed materials that in a few passages he contributes nothing more than the cement for a mosaic of other men's words,[15] though more usually he

[14] There are efforts to define the peculiar qualities of Webster's style in Elmer Edgar Stoll, *John Webster: The Periods of His Work as Determined by His Relations to the Drama of His Day* (Boston, 1905), p. 124; Lucas, *Works*, I, 28-30; W. A. Edwards, "John Webster", in *Determinations*, ed. F. R. Leavis (London, 1934), pp. 165-166; Moody E. Prior, *The Language of Tragedy* (New York, 1947), pp. 123-135; Frank W. Wadsworth, *The White Devil. An Historical and Critical Study*, a 1951 Princeton University dissertation, pp. 349-371; Gabriele Baldini, *John Webster e il linguaggio della tragedia* (Rome, 1953); Anna B. Dunkle, *A Concordance to Three Plays of John Webster*, a 1954 University of Wisconsin dissertation; Dent, pp. 13-14; and John Russell Brown, ed., *The White Devil* (London, 1960), and *The Duchess of Malfi* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964).

[15] Dent, pp. 13-14.

writes only an occasional phrase that sounds reminiscent of others' work.

In adapting borrowed passages Webster most often improves on the phrasing that he finds. Generally he is attracted by arresting conceits, pithy sententiae, and striking epigrams. These are marked by their economy of expression to start with, and Websters's tendency is to make them still more economical. The result is a breathtakingly concise effect that in itself accounts for much of the brilliant intensity of his style. Sometimes there is a labored quality about the intensity of Webster's work. Usually such a quality is a detriment to style, but for the most part Webster's style is enhanced by it, for the very laboriousness adds a degree more of intensity in his case.

It must be admitted that the habit of borrowing frequently injures Webster's plays as plays. He finds it difficult to resist the beauties he has quarried, and on a few occasions works them into passages where their relevance is not entirely clear or where they impede the action of the play. But we must judge the technique by measuring its overall success or failure, and when we do this I think there can be no doubt that we should be grateful to Webster's commonplace book and should accept the occasional faulty passages as the necessary defects of a most excellent virtue.

Another defect of the peculiar virtue of Webster's method is that such laborious shaping of individual expressions is very time-consuming. Webster acknowledges and refuses to apologize for his slow writing habits in the preface "To the Reader" of *The White Devil*: [16]

To those who report I was a long time in finishing this Tragedy, I confesse I do not write with a goose-quill, winged with two feathers, and if they will needes make it my fault, I must answere them with that of Eurypides *to* Alcestides, *a Tragicke Writer:* Alcestides *objecting that* Eurypides *had onely in three daies composed three verses, whereas himselfe had written three hundreth: Thou telst truth, (quoth he) but heres the difference, thine shall onely bee read for three daies, whereas mine shall continue three ages.*

[16] I follow the text of Lucas's edition of the *Works* in all quotations from Webster.

Webster's extreme care and slowness in composition imply two important consequences. First and most obviously they explain why he wrote so few complete works in his long career, why so much of his output is in collaborations with others. Second, and even more significantly, they suggest something of the way in which we should approach his plays. His care in composition indicates that he intended his plays to be read as well as staged, an intention that is also implied by the high literary pretensions of the prefaces to his works, as in the passage just quoted. In fact, Webster explicitly and angrily suggests the value of a careful reading of *The White Devil* when he says in the preface that the play failed on the stage because it lacked "*a full and understanding Auditory*" which he hopes it will find among readers. And the title page of *The Duchess of Malfi* tells us that the text printed is not the same as the one that was acted, but rather the work as it came straight from the writer's desk, being "The perfect and exact Coppy, with diverse *things Printed, that the length of the Play would* not beare in the Presentment".

It is a byword of an older style of criticism that what was written for the stage should not be closely analyzed in the study. But plays, like other works of literature, are created in some sort of study, and this is especially true of Webster's plays, on which we must imagine him working with several books open at his side. These include not only his commonplace book, but also two or three accounts of the events in Italian history from which he derives his stories.[17] The reader who will have the patience to study Webster's plays very carefully will be richly rewarded, as I shall try to show in the discussion that follows. In all that I write my intention will be to illuminate his plays as works of dramatic art, and in order to do this I shall not hesitate to con-

[17] For Webster's sources for *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* see especially Lucas, *Works*, I, 70-90, II, 6-17; and Gunnar Boklund, *The Sources of The White Devil* (Uppsala, 1957), and *The Duchess of Malfi: Sources, Themes, Characters* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962). See also John Russell Brown, "The Papal Election in John Webster's 'The White Devil' (1612)", *NQ*, 202 (1957), 490-494, and Brown's editions of *The White Devil*, pp. 194-197, and *The Duchess of Malfi*, pp. xxvii-xli, 175-208.

cern myself with the details of his composition, with nuances of thought and with individual images, considering both their immediate relevance in the passages in which they occur and also their larger relevance as elements in the complex, ordered whole that is a Webster play.

II

EARLY COLLABORATION

The plays Webster wrote with Thomas Dekker and others between 1602 and 1605 cannot command great interest in their own right, for, like most Elizabethan collaborations, they are work of inferior conception and achievement.[1] The authors of *Sir Thomas Wyatt, Westward Ho,* and *Northward Ho* made some effort to create dramas that would not have too many seams showing, but for the most part the unity of these plays is mechanical. All three plays are of interest to students of Webster in at least one respect, however, for we can see in them some of the themes and the ways of dealing with reality that, transformed by the imagination of a great artist working alone, reappear so gloriously in *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi.*

The version of *Sir Thomas Wyatt* that found its way into print was unfortunately an effort on someone's part to reconstruct the text from memory, and as a result the dialogue and the characterization are poor.[2] Two stories are woven together to make up the plot of the play. One is the tragedy of Lady Jane Grey and her husband Guildford Dudley, whom the Protestant nobles try to put on the throne in place of the Roman Catholic Queen

[1] These plays are discussed at some length from other points of view in Stoll, pp. 45-82; Frederick E. Pierce, *The Collaboration of Webster and Dekker* (= *Yale Studies in English,* Vol. 37) (New York, 1909); Mary Leland Hunt, *Thomas Dekker: A Study* (New York, 1911), pp. 75-78, 101-108; and Baldini, pp. 13-26, 29-52.

[2] See *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker,* ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, 1953-1961), I, 399; and W. L. Halstead's "Note on the Text of *The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyatt*", *MLN,* LIV (1939), 585-589. The state of the text makes it impossible to distinguish Webster's share in the play.

Mary. The other is the related story of Sir Thomas, who defeats the supporters of Lady Jane only to rebel against Mary when she declares her love for Prince Philip of Spain. There is a great conflict of tone between the quiet pathos of the scenes in which Jane and Guildford are brought to death and the loud exuberance of the scenes of warfare. This conflict gives *Wyatt* whatever power it possesses by developing the thematic conflict between the desire of Jane and Guildford to lead a private life and the mad insistence of their world that they should become political puppets. The madness of their world is stressed throughout the play in the headless noise of the battle scenes and the clowning that attends them, in the folly of Wyatt, and in the insistence of the political world at the end that Jane and Guildford must die, while most of the lords whose puppets they were go free!

If anything in *Wyatt* appealed deeply to Webster's imagination, it must have been the character and fate of Jane. Her prosecution by a malicious churchman foreshadows *The White Devil,* and her Christian-Stoic strength in the face of death foreshadows the heroism of the Duchess of Malfi. Despite the degraded state of the text, a few of the lines in which Jane and Guildford lament their sad destiny show the intense and highly figurative style that is the mark of Webster's later work. These two young martyrs say the same sort of thing in much the same sort of way as Webster's later figures:

> Lo we ascend into our chaires of State,
> Like funerall Coffins, in some funerall pompe
> Descending to their graves. . . .
> (I.ii. 64-66)
>
> Great men like great Flies, through lawes Cobwebs breake,
> But the thin'st frame, the prison of the weake.
> (V.i. 99-100)
>
> The world like to a sickell, bends it selfe,
> Men runne their course of lives as in a maze,
> Our office is to die, yours but to gaze.
> (V.ii. 63-65)[3]

[3] The text I have used for plays in which Dekker had a hand or which are his unassisted work is that established by Bowers, *ed. cit.*

Most students of Webster have believed that he wrote very little of either *Westward Ho* or *Norhward Ho*. Frederick E. Pierce and F. L. Lucas assigned only parts of three or four scenes in each play to Webster.[4] From metrical and linguistic analyses, comparisons of parallel passages, and the occurrence of incidents or characters they believed to be typical of one author or another, they could do little more than say that a scene appears to be "mostly" by Dekker, or "partly" by Webster. They could make no clear statement of how the two writers divided their job of composition. As a new approach to the problem, I have studied the use of colloquial contractions and other distinctive features of the language of the two plays. The results show that Webster wrote more of these plays than we have thought, and they give us a clearer picture of the method of his collaboration with Dekker than we have had before.

In both of the *Ho* plays there is alternation between groups of scenes in which *has* and *does* are used consistently and *I'm, 'em,* and *ha'* occur frequently, and groups of scenes in which *hath* and *doth* are used consistently and *I am, them,* and *have* are rarely contracted (see Appendix II, Table II). There is very little mixing of the two sets of forms. With one exception, at V.i. 263-359 in *Northward Ho,* the points of separation are sharply defined and obviously coincide with scene or act terminations. At each of the scene divisions where a change of forms occurs, there is an average of only nine lines (in Bowers' edition) on one side of the scene division to the first *I'm, 'em, ha', has,* or *does,* and an average of only seventeen lines on the other side to the first *hath* or *doth*. The few *ha', has, does, 'em,* or *I'm* that do occur in the *hath, doth* portions of the plays are scattered, not clustered or consistently near any of the borderlines. The same is true of the few occurrences of *hath* and *doth* in the *has, does* portions.

These changes in forms could happen for any one of four

[4] Pierce, pp. 129-132; Lucas, *Works*, IV, 241-244. See also Stoll, pp. 64-79; and Brooke, pp. 90, 222-233. The argument that follows is adapted from my essay, "The Collaboration of Dekker and Webster in *Northward Ho* and *Westward Ho*", *PBSA*, LVI (1962), 482-486.

reasons: there could be a change of the level of style from scene to scene, or of compositors setting type for the book, or of scribe copying the play for the printer, or of author. The first possibility is the most easily eliminated: the same characters involved in the same sorts of situations will use *has* and *does* in one part of a play, *hath* and *doth* in another. The possibility that the change from one set of forms to the other signals a change in compositors seems equally slight. First of all, the two plays were printed by different printers, *Westward Ho* by William Jaggard and *Northward Ho* by George Eld. How explain two pairs of compositors working in different shops having the same contrasting characteristics? Besides, though Bowers notes no changes of compositors in *Northward Ho,* he notes several possible changes in *Westward Ho,* especially that a new compositor begins work at signature H_I, at the end of V.i, as marked by a change in the spelling of *'em* to *'hem* and the use of a narrower measure.[5] But while the spelling of the contraction of *them* changes, *them* is still contracted, and we continue to find *I'm* and *ha'* and *has* and *does*. There is no really significant change in the contractions used. Nor are there changes from one set of forms to the other at other places where Bowers suggests there may have been a change of compositors.

Since there seems to be little doubt that *Westward Ho* was printed from authors' foul papers and not from a scribal copy,[6] the only remaining possibility is that the changes in forms are caused by changes in authors, a conclusion supported by the occurrence of the changes at the beginning of acts and scenes – of natural units of composition.

To determine which writer is responsible for which groups of scenes, we must determine which of them used *hath* and *doth* in works written near the date of the *Ho* plays and which used *has, does, I'm, 'em,* and *ha'*. In the careers of both men we can trace a development from the use of the conservative and uncontracted forms to a more modern and colloquial style. In *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and *Old Fortunatas,* both printed in 1600,

[5] See Bowers, *Dekker,* II, 315.
[6] *Ibid.,* II, 314-315.

Dekker uses *hath* and *doth* almost exclusively, and never uses the colloquial *I'm, 'em,* or *ha'*. But by the time of *Satiromastix,* printed in 1602, *has* and *does* have become dominant, and *ha'* occurs 37 times. Also, *does, I'm,* and *ha'* are used in the Dekker autograph page of *Sir Thomas More,* which was written at the end of the sixteenth century. In *The Second Part of the Honest Whore,* printed in 1630 but written between 1604 and 1608, *has* and *does* are dominant, *ha'* is quite common, *I'm* is used 16 times and *'em* 9 times. This trend continues in *If This be Not a Good Play, The Devil is in It,* printed in 1612, which has 24 *ha'*, 33 *has,* 7 *hath,* 25 *does,* 1 *doth,* 44 *'em,* and 12 *I'm.*[7] *Westward Ho* (1604) and *Northward Ho* (1605) thus fall in a period when Dekker was consistently using *has* and *does* more than *hath* and *doth,* and was using the colloquial *I'm, 'em,* and *ha'*.

Webster moved from the conservative *hath* and *doth* to *has* and *does* at a later date. In *The White Devil* (1609-12) and in *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612-13) he uses *hath* and *doth* almost exclusively and rarely contracts *I am, them,* or *have.* In *The White Devil* there are no *ha', has, 'em,* or *I'm,* and only one *does. The Duchess of Malfi* has no *I'm,* or *ha',* only 3 *'em.* Later on, in *The Devil's Law Case,* (1617-21), *has* and *does* are dominant, but there is only one *ha',* no *I'm* or *'em.*[8]

From this evidence we may conclude that the *has, does* portions of the *Ho* plays belong to Dekker and the *hath, doth* portions to Webster. This division of the plays gains force because it is basically consistent with the assignments made by earlier investigators. All the scenes they assigned to Webster are

[7] What evidence there is indicates that most and possibly all of these Dekker plays were printed from author's papers or fair copies of them preserving most of their author's characteristics. See Bowers' introductions to the plays, *ed. cit.*

[8] John Russell Brown has analyzed the texts of Webster's plays and shown that *The White Devil* was printed from the author's papers, that *The Duchess of Malfi* was probably printed from a scribe's copy of the author's papers or from prompt copy, and that it is slightly more probable that *The Devil's Law Case* was printed from author's papers than from prompt copy: "The Printing of John Webster's Plays (I)", *SB,* VI (1954), 117-140. I have used the text of Lucas's very accurate edition of Webster for my count of these forms.

in the *hath, doth* portions, while all the scenes they were positive belonged to Dekker because of the use of dialect are in the *has, does* portions.

The pattern of composition turns out to be the same for both plays: Webster wrote the first and third of a total of four parts of *Westward Ho* and the first, third, and fifth parts of a total of six for *Northward Ho.* The portions written by Dekker are always longer than the portions by Webster that precede them. This pattern implies something of the way Dekker and Webster worked. After the whole of the play had been planned, they seem to have assigned the first unit of action to Webster and what followed to Dekker. Webster, the slower of the two writers, was thus given a definite goal to write towards. Dekker, on the other hand, had the freedom to write ahead as far as he could while Webster was toiling over his share. When Webster finished his assignment, they met again, compared what they had done, and divided the next section of the play in the same way. Alternatively, they may have divided the whole play up at the start, making sure to give Dekker the longer sections to work on.

Despite his slower pace, Webster wrote about forty per cent of each play: all of Acts I and III and the first scene of Act IV of *Westward Ho,* and in *Northward Ho* all of the first scene of Act I, the second scene of Act II, all of Act III, and Act V to somewhere between lines 263 and 359.

This still leaves the question whether Webster had a significant share or interest in the creation of character, plot, and theme. Most critics have thought not, and Lucas did not even include the plays in his edition of Webster's works.[9] In any event there is not much room in these plays for anything that is distinctively Webster's, since they conform very closely to a conventional dramatic type of the day. They are typical and thoroughly undistinguished citizen comedies, a genre in which the subject matter is the natural conflict between young gallants or appren-

[9] More recently, however, Baldini, pp. 29-52, has argued that these plays are important for the study of Webster's development, finding even in Dekker's scenes the spirit, if not the words of Webster. But most of the characters and sentiments Baldini cites as evidence of Webster's spirit seem to me to be quite conventional.