It may seem perverse to claim John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* as a companion piece to *Measure for Measure*. Shakespeare’s play begins with a death sentence and ends with four marriages; Webster’s begins with a marriage and ends with ten deaths; in *Measure for Measure*, the characters emerge from prison into daylight (however overcast that daylight may be); in *The Duchess of Malfi*, they wander ever deeper into darkness, madness, and despair. But in both plays, the major characters—and the audience—do battle with a world that will not order itself to their demands; and in both, the action leads to and radiates from a stunning scene in which one central figure faces a nightmarelike summons of death.

Certainly, even if there were no other similarities between the two plays, the nature of the critical reaction to them should tell us something about their kinship. Both plays make critics angry, if not with the plays, then at least with each other. As with *Measure for Measure*, critical opinion on *The Duchess of Malfi* has developed into a furious quarrel over the motivation of the play’s characters, the validity of its action, and the overall philosophy behind it.¹ Some have tried to make the play into a Sartrean gloss on the world as Hell; others have seen it as a Christian allegory of the road to Heaven.² The Duchess herself has been
described as everything ranging from a medieval saint to a modern bitch, while the question of Ferdinand’s incestuous longing has generated as much serious discussion as is usually reserved for the personality of a historical figure. Why all this controversy over what might seem like a typical Jacobean horror play? We may catch a glimpse of the answer if we revisit Claudio in his prison cell for a moment.

Claudio, we remember, was tormented not by an assurance of damnation, like Angelo’s, nor even by an assurance of annihilation, but primarily by an uncertainty about both—a fear of the unknown, that void which the human mind is so ready to fill with horrors of its own making. “To fall into nothingness,” says Philippa Tristram, “is the expression of physical nature; a confidence that God will sustain his creation in being is the achievement of faith.” Given this faith, Tristram says elsewhere, “a man may advance confidently to his reward in a future life; but when death loses its heroism, the continuity between life and afterlife is ruptured by the agnostic spectacle of physical mortality” (10). Claudio, terrorized by his agnostic spectacle, was shocked into heroism by the faith of the people around him; but in the Duchess, there is no one available to administer the shock. Everyone speaks as if he agreed with Claudio.

This is not to suggest that Webster necessarily agreed with Claudio. It is always tempting to explain the increased horror of Jacobean drama by pointing out the increased confusion and disillusionment of Jacobean society; but R. W. Chambers has shown that it would be just as easy to make a case for the confusion and disillusionment of late Elizabethan society and the renewed stability and hope of early Jacobean society. Furthermore, the Duchess is set in sixteenth-century Italy, which traditionally signaled to Webster’s audience both a corrupt court and a corrupt church—if an example at all, then a horrible example. Therefore, I do not think it any safer to assume, on the evidence of Webster’s two great tragedies, that he was a despairing agnostic than to assume, on the evidence of Tamburlaine and The Jew of Malta, that Marlowe was a hopeful atheist. The question that seems to govern Webster’s speculation in The Duchess of Malfi
may be, not “What if the universe were as Claudio imagines?” but rather “What if everyone thought so?”

In such a state of uncertainty, one of the responses is to invent new systems of ordering; to take a seemingly disordered universe and catalogue, categorize, shape it into a meaningful whole. But as a paradoxical corollary to this need, externally enforced order then becomes the enemy because, being already shaped, it cannot be reshaped to the mind’s demands. Thus time, death, decay, and the stars themselves become uncontrollable nightmares. A further corollary that appears in the Duchess is a growing rigidity of human society and a concurrent reversal of convention. That is, as reasons for certain behavior erode, the rules of behavior become more strictly codified until the rules are ends in themselves, not to be deviated from at the risk of chaos. The insecure person, unable to control the mindless patterns of the universe, turns instead to his fellow creatures and reasserts his controlling power by manipulating others—often with the aid of those uncontrollable forces themselves. The more he fears, the more he projects his fears onto others. And gradually, all the modes of comfort generated by the old systems become not comforts but dangers to those who are being controlled by them. If it is any comfort to the manipulators—and it frequently is, as we shall see—they have turned the universe upside down.

Webster himself turns the dramatic universe upside down in his portrayal of such a society. Darkness, for example, is a literary convention often used to indicate a state of ignorance, confusion, or evil; and much of the important action of The Duchess of Malfi is set in physical darkness. But calling for light is no solution; when the torches are brought, they illuminate an uglier reality. In the light, the Duchess sees what she thinks to be the severed hand of her husband and the dead bodies of her husband and children (4.1). Bosola sees the wounded body of Antonio, whom he has mistakenly attacked in the dark (5.4). Ferdinand, when he goes mad, chooses to retreat into world of safe darkness after his eyes have been “dazzled” by reality: “I’ll go hunt the badger, by owl-light: / Tis a deed of darkness” (4.2.334-35). Even the steady light of the stars is not an unmixed blessing; although Antonio in his first love scene prays, “And may our sweet affections,
like the spheres, / Be still in motion" (1.1.482–83), Bosola’s later "Look you, the stars shine still" (4.1.100) is used not to comfort but to rebuke and torment the Duchess.

It is interesting to note that this reversal of the customary associations of light and darkness is often extended to include the audience. The Duchess is not the only one who is deceived by the wax figures of Antonio and the children. Until Ferdinand tells Bosola that “These presentations are but fram’d in wax” (4.1.112), Webster’s audience would have been most likely to accept the illusions as reality, being quite inured to the use of wax stage props to represent decapitated heads, strewn limbs, and other gruesome stage business. Even the modern audience will be jolted out of a feeling of superiority toward the stage manager when it discovers that the clumsy props are really supposed to be clumsy props. There is, then, a kind of horrified fascination in seeing that things really are what they seem, a shocking reversal when one has been led to believe the opposite.

Webster toys with his audience, too, in his use of coincidence. The three major coincidences in the play are at first unsettling in their departure from the larger-than-life realism of the action; William Archer, in fact, in his famous diatribe against Webster, found them not only unsettling but preposterous. But when viewed most closely, the coincidences seem to miscarry from their purpose. Antonio’s dropping of the horoscope that he has cast for his and the Duchess’s first child (2.3) should, in the tradition of stage coincidence, reveal their secret to Bosola. But Bosola misunderstands the implication of the horoscope, and his assumption that Antonio is the Duchess’s “bawd,” rather than her husband, gains the couple two more years of spied-upon happiness. Similarly, Antonio’s and Cariola’s departure from the stage during the hair-brushing scene (3.2) may lead the Duchess into betraying her feelings to Ferdinand, who has stealthily entered while she is talking, but it also removes Antonio from the danger of Ferdinand’s anger, and again prolongs the secret. And finally, Bosola’s accidental stabbing of Antonio (5.4) does nothing to the action that has not already been made inevitable by Antonio’s well-intentioned but ill-judged rush toward death. In fact, the
accidental murder allows Bosola to draw Ferdinand and the Cardinal from their guard for purposes of his own revenge and the bloody denouement. The pointlessness of this last “coincidence,” and a hint that Webster may indeed be toying with his audience, is suggested in the exchange between Malateste and Bosola, in which Webster reminds people that they are watching a play:

Malateste: How came Antonio by his death?
Bosola: In a mist: I know not how—
   Such a mistake as I have often seen
   In a play.

(5.5.93–96)

The Echo scene, too (5.3), adds to the play’s aura of inverted convention. Such echoes, used as oracular or ironic commentary on a protagonist’s musings, had become popular both in poetry and drama, and were often used in combination with offstage utterances of ghosts. The below-stage “Swear!” of Hamlet Senior (1.5) may be part of this tradition, as is the chorus of ghosts—Andrugio, Feliche, and Pandulpho—who echo the last word of Antonio’s tirade on man in Marston’s Antonio’s Revenge. “Murder!” they cry from all sides; and Marston’s Antonio translates the echoed noun into an imperative verb: “Aye, I will murder” (3.1.128). This resonance of ghostlore is amplified in The Duchess of Malfi by Antonio’s insistence that the Echo is “very like my wife’s voice” (5.3.26), and Webster’s Antonio has been echoed in turn by modern commentators, most of whom see (as I do) the Duchess’s spirit hovering over act 5. But Delio, usually a voice of common sense in the play, says later that the haunting is “Your fancy, merely” (5.3.46), and the audience, not having seen the “face folded in sorrow” (5.3.45), again must decide for itself. Whereas Macbeth may muse that “This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good” (1.3.130–31), Webster’s audience must determine whether the echo’s soliciting is even supernatural. Just as the wax dummies were only wax dummies, so this Echo may be only an echo.

But, even here, the audience may not rest. If the Echo is not the Duchess, it is still important because it is a sound. Two scenes
later, the dying Bosola will sum up what proponents of the "gloom" in Webster’s universe take as Webster’s own despair for humankind. Between the “mistake . . . seen in a play” passage and the pronouncement that “Womanish and fearful mankind” lives in a “shadow or deep pit of darkness” (5.5.101-02), Bosola says, “We are only like dead walls, or vaulted graves, / That ruin’d, yields [sic] no echo” (5.5.97-98). As a cry of despair, it is impressive; but as a simple matter of stage business, it is not true. The audience that has puzzled through the meanings of a very vocal Echo in scene 3 knows that ruins do indeed yield echoes, whether supernatural or not, and therefore that Bosola (as usual) is not to be trusted.

Bosola himself, among his many other functions in the play, is one of several travesties on the iconography of death and the arts of dying. Like the Dreary Death figures in the old mysteries and moralities, he is at once a warning of, a summoner to, and a product of the grave; but unlike the Dreary Death, he is frightened of his own role, and in fact seems to have a morbid aversion to life and death alike. His continual harping on the grotesque aspects of bodily decay goes beyond the standard rantings expected of the stage malcontent, and there is, in addition, always a question of whether his melancholy is part of his real nature or merely a pose for his own ends. Antonio thinks it genuine (1.1), but Ferdinand recognizes its ambiguity: “Be yourself,” he says to Bosola; “Keep your old garb of melancholy” (1.1.277-78). And Bosola keeps his garb of melancholy as a kind of hair shirt under all his subsequent disguises, tormenting himself with it as much as he torments those around him.

One of the more significant of Bosola’s early appearances as Dreary Death is his confrontation with Castruchio and the Old Lady in act 2, scene 1. At first he is a combination of the malcontent and the Warning of the Legend, chastising social climbers and mocking the attempts of the old to appear young, the ugly to appear beautiful. But when he has finished his social commentary in prose, he rounds on the audience like the Death of the mysteries, and with an exordium of “observe my meditation now,” delivers his searing moral in blank verse:
Bosola: Though we are eaten up of lice and worms,
And though continually we bear about us
A rotten and dead body, we delight
To hide it in rich tissue: all our fear—
Nay, all our terror—is lest our physician
Should put us in the ground, to be made sweet.

(2.1.55-60)

This passage is one of the critics’ favorites; it is cited, not without a shiver of delighted horror, to prove either Webster’s nausea at the world or Bosola’s role as prophet of the world to come—in either case, with Bosola placed firmly in the de contemptu mundi preaching tradition. And down to the middle of line 58, it is true that Bosola echoes the words of Pope Innocent and all his imitators, including the Duke’s sermon to Claudio in Measure for Measure. Bartholomew Chappell had pointed the moral in his dapper little quatrains, each with a sting in its tail:

Our bodies are a cursed ground,
our skin is like to withered hay:
Our humours weake and watrish found,
which filthie wormes shall suck away.\(^\text{12}\)

And George Strode was to say it more graphically: “We are now in our best estate, but as a dunghill couered with snowe, which when Death shall dissolve, there shall nothing be scene of all our pompe and glory, but dust, rottennesse, and corruption.”\(^\text{13}\) Or in Robert Southwell’s catalogue of horrors:

Beholde the place, in which thou must abide,
Is loathsome, dark, vnsweet, and very straight,
With rotten bones, beset on euery side,
And crawling wormes, to feed on thee do waite:
O hard exchange, O vile and hatefull place,
Where earth and filth, thy carcase must imbrace.\(^\text{14}\)

Bosola’s pronouncement, then, is well within the convention of seeing the living body as a walking grave, proceeding naturally out of a corrupt mass and progressing ineluctably back to corruption. As he says the words, Bosola is in fact holding the
apricots that he has ripened in horse-dung, apricots that he will
give to the Duchess and that will induce labor and the birth of
her son. From corruption will issue corruption: a new human
life, a “dunghill couered with snowe.” But the point of divergence
from convention in Bosola’s speech is as important as the points
of similarity. The body, in his imagery, does not return to dust;
it is “put” there by a physician, as a kind of remedy for life. For
Bosola, the worms and corruption of the traditional iconography
of death exist only above the ground, and the grave itself is sweeter
than the body placed in it.

Nor is this the traditional Christian allegory of salvation: Christ the physician giving “sweetness” after death to a soul that
has been imprisoned in the “filth” of the body. Rather, the placing
of the body in the ground is a cause of “all our fear— / Nay, all
our terror”—a form of burial alive, where the irony of the word
sweet, against the backdrop of the known corruption of the grave,
casts into doubt the wisdom of any physician who should pro­
pose such a remedy.

It is a ghastly portrait of life and death alike, with apparently
no acceptable escape from either. And one can hardly help see­
ing it as Bosola’s own view, despite his pose as satiric malcon­
tent. Significantly, he uses the pronoun “I” only when he speaks
of his unrecognized and unrecompensed secular activities; when
he delivers his vivid diatribes on the corruption of the body, he
turns instead to the accusing “you” or poetic “we”—an effective
device by which the speaker can universalize his failings while
giving listeners to understand that he really refers to everyone
but himself. The malcontent posture appears to be not only a
fashionable pose for Bosola, not only a cloak for his espionage
activities, but also a means of coping with his own fears by pro­
jecting them onto others.15

Nowhere more than in Bosola’s famous act 4 confrontation
with the Duchess does his power of rationalizing and manipulating
manifest itself, and it significantly does so, there, in inversions
of the Summons of Death. Entering disguised as an old man,
directly after the dance of madmen—perhaps as a coda to the
Dance of Death—he announces, “I am come to make thy tomb”
and launches himself into what many have seen as a de contemptu mundi sermon:

Bosola: Thou art a box of worm-seed, at best, but a salvatory of green mummy:—what's this flesh? a little cruddled milk, fantastical puff-paste; our bodies are weaker than those paper prisons boys use to keep flies in; more contemptible, since ours is to preserve earthworms. Didst thou ever see a lark in a cage? such is the soul in the body: this world is like her little turf of grass, and the heaven o'er our heads, like her looking-glass, only gives us a miserable knowledge of the small compass of our prison.

(4.2.124-33)

Taken out of context, this is standard fare: the body as food for worms, the prison of the soul. Just such an approach was used to Claudio, with the implication that he must now come to terms with death. But we cannot take the passage out of context. Claudio was a convicted felon, legally arrested and sentenced under law, however rigorous that law might have been, and was further called upon to lay down his life for his sister's honor. To die bravely, for him, was to die submissively. The Duchess, on the other hand, is about to be murdered, and it is her murderer who is preaching submission to her.

Critics who see Bosola's role in this scene as the Duchess's spiritual comforter appear to have overlooked this small detail: that Bosola has come to murder her and her maid and children. True, Bosola has earlier told Ferdinand that "when you send me [to the Duchess] next, / The business shall be comfort" (4.1.136-37). But when have we ever been able to take Bosola at face value? The fact remains that before this pronouncement, he has just spent the last twenty lines goading Ferdinand into a homicidal frenzy, and is now, despite his apparent protests, ready to commit the homicide that Ferdinand demands. And just as he has used religious-sounding words to make Ferdinand squirm in 4.1 ("Send her a penitential garment to put on / Next to her delicate skin" [119-20]), so he does the same to make the Duchess squirm in 4.2. How the Duchess reacts we shall see later.
When the executioners enter to the Duchess and Bosola, he tacitly admits his deception by changing roles. He is no longer the Warning of the Legend, but "the common bellman / That usually is sent to condemn'd persons / The night before they suffer" (4.2.172–74). And the dirge that he sings to her, justly celebrated for its beauty, is again a compendium of traditions turned upside down. It is lovely, it is soothing, it is very nearly hypnotic—but it is full of contradictions and dangerous to the Duchess' sanity. Indeed, when Bosola comes to the de contemptu mundi section of his dirge, at first hauntingly reminiscent of the Duke's sermon, he gives himself away:

Bosola: Of what is 't fools make such vain keeping?
   Sin their conception, their birth weeping;
   Their life a general mist of error,
   Their death a hideous storm of terror.

(4.2.186–89)

Death a hideous storm of terror? He has just sung that "Here your perfect peace is sign'd" (185). For someone who has come to give comfort, either he is going out of his way to inspire terror or he has let his personal fears surface accidentally again—or both. And now he issues the formal Summons:

Bosola: Strew your hair with powders sweet,
   Don clean linen, bathe your feet,
   And (the foul fiend more to check)
   A crucifix let bless your neck.
   'Tis now full tide, 'tween night and day:
   End your groan, and come away.

(4.2.190–95)

This is certainly not Christian comfort, with its emphasis on physical rather than spiritual preparation for Death the Bridegroom. In fact, given Bosola's previous rantings about the filth of the body, this summons to cleanliness may appear to be a variation on his cloying image of the "sweet" grave. Even the crucifix that he recommends is a false note; although, as Bettie Anne Doebler points out, the crucifix was a standard accompaniment
to deathbed ministration in the medieval Artes, Webster’s audience would have been more likely to see it as a papist superstition, and therefore perhaps more a temptation by than a hindrance to “the foul fiend.”

What Bosola is offering is not comfort but a travesty on comfort. Indeed, we may recognize in it echoes of another false comforter, Spenser’s Despayre:

What if some little Payne the passage have,
That makes fraile flesh to feare the bitter wave?
Is not short Payne well borne, that bringes long ease,
And layes the soule to sleepe in quiet grave?
Sleepe after toyle, port after stormie seas,
Ease after warre, death after life does greatly please.

(FQ, I.ix.40)

As in any temptation to despair, the soul must make a subtle distinction between a willingness to die and a wish to die. The first is accession to necessity (or, for Christians, to God’s will); the second is suicide, for Christians, the sin of Judas. And Bosola’s appeal to the Duchess tempts her to an even more perverse variation on the second: complicity in her own murder. It is Webster’s, not Bosola’s irony that rings the pun on Bosola’s “’Twas to bring you / By degrees to moritification” (4.2.176-77); Bosola means the Duchess to understand “mortification” as “humility,” and, alas, many critics have accepted his definition at face value again. But the Duchess knows that what he really means is “humiliation,” an entirely different thing; and, as we shall see, she fights back, not to save her life, but to die bravely.

It is, perhaps, Antonio rather than the Duchess who has internalized Bosola’s message. If Antonio believes in a God at all, he seldom mentions it. His one extended reference to Heaven describes it as a “curious artist” that “takes in sunder / A clock or watch when it is out of frame, / To bring ’t in better order” (3.5.63-65). In the next century, this watchmaker image became the deists’ favorite image for the impersonal nature of God, and Antonio does not appear to have more than a deistic conception of religion. How, then, does he face the threats of death and
the pains of life? By an attempt at stoic endurance, yes; by a reliance, Bosola-like, on physical action, of course; but also, like many newly irreligious people, by a transference of his search for reassurance from religion to superstition. He casts horoscopes, looks for portents, and sees ghosts in echoes—but, ironically, his new form of supernatural guidance aggravates rather than assuages his fear.

Delio, as always, comments matter-of-factly on Antonio's superstition, although it is one of Webster's characteristic ironies that this commonsense refutation of prophecy is almost a prophecy itself:

Delio: 'Tis but the shadow of your fear, no more:
How superstitiously we mind our evils!
The throwing down salt, or crossing of a hare,
Bleeding at nose, the stumbling of a horse,
Or singing of a cricket, are of pow'r
To daunt whole man in us.

(2.2.74–79)

Later in the play, Ferdinand will literally attempt to wrestle with the "shadow" of his fear (5.2), and only one scene after Delio's speech, Antonio will let a nosebleed "daunt" him so much that he will display guilt before Bosola and drop the not-really-fatal horoscope.

This is not to suggest that Antonio is a coward; on the contrary, he has an almost foolish disregard for his personal safety. He must be dissuaded by the Duchess from spending the night with her when Ferdinand is near (3.2), and must be directed to flee when discovery or capture is imminent (3.2; 3.5). Once the Duchess is no longer there to advise him, he determinedly sets forth on what he must know is an impossible—if not suicidal—mission: to attempt a reconciliation with her brothers. Indeed, each time he speaks to Delio of his plan, he speculates equally on his success and his failure, and almost seems to relish the failure more:

Antonio: . . . if it fail,
Yet it shall rid me of this infamous calling;
For better fall once, than be ever falling.  
(5.1.72-74)

Come: I'll be out of this ague;  
For to live thus is not indeed to live:  
It is a mockery, and abuse of life—  
I will not henceforth save myself by halves;  
Lose all, or nothing.  
(5.3.47-51)

Antonio, hunting blindly for assurance in his watchmaker universe, cannot cope with the uncertainties of life. Despite his stoic declaration that "Contempt of pain, that we may call our own" (5.3.58), he can face only physical pain, and in a world that inflicts mental pain as well he can see no remedy but death. His gratitude when Bosola brings death to him is the very reaction that Bosola has tried to elicit from the Duchess:

Antonio: Pleasure of life, what is 't? only the good hours  
Of an ague; only a preparative to rest,  
To endure vexation.  
(5.4.67-69)

It is entirely possible that the sense of waste generated by Antonio's almost self-inflicted death is what has led some critics to take at face value Bosola's cry when he sees what he has done: "We are merely the stars' tennis-balls, struck and banded / Which way please them" (5.4.54-55). But Bosola himself has earlier denied that the stars have any connection with human activities:

Ferdinand: Why some  
Hold opinion all things are written [in the stars].  
Bosola: Yes, if we could find spectacles to read them.  
(3.1.60-62)

Duchess: I could curse the stars . . .  
And those three smiling seasons of the year  
Into a Russian winter, nay the world  
To its first chaos.  
Bosola: Look you, the stars shine still.  
(4.1.97-100)
Furthermore, we must not forget that the coincidence of Antonio’s death is no more coincidental than Webster’s other tricks on the audience, and in fact follows logically from Bosola’s and Antonio’s purposes in coming to Milan: Bosola to kill, and Antonio to be reconciled or die.

What Bosola is doing, in his diatribe against the stars, is simply what he has done throughout the play: excusing his actions by claiming that he is just following orders. He has repeatedly done it with Ferdinand, accusing his employer of sole guilt for the instructions that he himself has carried out; telling himself that an act is wrong, and then performing it with sadistic embellishments of his own; and even excusing his personal revenge for Ferdinand’s ingratitude by claiming that the Duchess’s dying look has demanded it. But, as always, Bosola gives himself away when he finally takes his revenge; temporarily forgetting the Duchess in the heat of the moment, he cries out as he kills Ferdinand, “Sink, thou main cause / Of my undoing!” (5.5.63-64; emphasis added). Only at the moment of his own death does Bosola come to grips with his humanity, and even then he must first deliver *sententiae* before acknowledging that they are inappropriate to his case:

*Bosola*: In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness,  
Doth womanish and fearful mankind live!  
Let worthy minds ne’er stagger in distrust  
To suffer death, or shame for what is just—  
Mine is another voyage.

(5.5.101-05)

It is perhaps fortunate for Bosola’s sanity that he dies before he has a chance to contemplate what that “voyage” is and where it leads. Until now, he has been able to goad others into fearing it, as a release from his own fears. He does not have the equanimity to face the “deep pit of darkness” without forcing others ahead of him to block the view. And, ironically, for all Bosola’s description of mankind as “womanish and fearful,” of the three people who refuse to block the view—the Duchess, the Cardinal, and Julia—two are women.
Julia is the “bad” woman who is meant to form a contrast with the “good” Duchess. She woos for lust rather than for love, and unlike the Duchess, who is faithful to her secret vows, she is capable of flirting almost simultaneously with her current lover (the Cardinal) and two prospective lovers (Delio and Bosola) virtually under the gaze of her husband. Does she feel guilt, or the need to transfer guilt? There is no evidence that the question has ever crossed her mind. Amoral Julia, the pawn in everyone else’s games, is simply a straightforward cheat who has developed a method of making things comfortable by shrugging off what she cannot explain. Even when she has been poisoned by the Cardinal, and must face the same mysterious “voyage” that terrifies Bosola, she dies with a shrug, and in her sardonicism earns the rare distinction of having effectively silenced Bosola:

Bosola: O foolish woman,
Couldst not thou have poison’d him?
Julia: ’Tis weakness,
Took much to think what should have been done—I go,
I know not whither.

(5.2.286-89)

This is an acceptance of uncertainty that Bosola cannot share or understand. Despite his villainy, he is still caught in the transition between belief and unbelief: the middle ground where Claudio’s “Ay, but to die and go we know not where” is still a horrified “What if?” instead of a resigned “So what?”

But Bosola’s obsessive verbalizing of his fears is simply idle conversation beside Ferdinand’s. Alone of all the major characters in the play, Ferdinand finally does have a nervous breakdown under the pressure of reality. Unlike Bosola, he cannot distance his fears or pass responsibility on to others, because one of his fears is the loss of power—a fear that makes him assert ownership over everything, including his own thoughts and deeds. To lose control, for him, is to fall into nothingness; but unlike the Duchess and the Cardinal, he cannot maintain the control, cannot face his thoughts, and lets others goad him into the very extravagances that frighten him.
Ferdinand’s hallmark in the play is a constant retreat from the things that he cannot face, a retreat that he tries to mask by ordering people to take the things away. He refuses to meet the Duchess’s husband (3.2); he will not look at the Duchess until she is dead, and then, faced with a worse reality, orders Bosola to “Cover her face” (4.2.264); and he finally sends Bosola himself away (4.2). But above all, he will not face his own motivation. As he retreats systematically from one thing after another, he in effect withdraws from reality, but the visions that he conjures up for himself are more frightful than the reality out of which he distorts them.

Ferdinand’s most obsessive ravings, of course, center on his sister. As the Cardinal notes throughout 2.5, he is already a little crazy on the subject. And since F. L. Lucas’s proposal of the incest theme (noted earlier), it has generally been accepted that Ferdinand’s almost insane words and actions grow out of an incestuous passion for the Duchess that he cannot indulge, cannot dissipate, and cannot face. Certainly, ungovernable rage growing out of irrational jealousy is not an uncommon device. Ferdinand’s “My sister! O my sister! there’s the cause on’t” (5.5.71) is both a reminiscence of Othello’s “It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul” (5.3.1) and a precursor of Giovanni’s “My sister, O my sister!” in Ford’s more explicitly incestuous ’Tis Pity She’s a Whore (5.6.21) But perhaps there is more to Ferdinand’s simultaneous obsession and revulsion than a simple matter of incest.

Amid the sexually promiscuous activity of the play’s society, Ferdinand does not appear to have a sexual liaison, or ever to have had one. He is decidedly uncomfortable with other people’s ribald joking (1.1), and his own dirty joke to his sister is not ribald but smutty, and is meant to humiliate her:

Ferdinand: And women like that part which, like the lamprey, 

Hath ne’er a bone in it.

Duchess: Fie, sir!

Ferdinand: Nay, 

I mean the tongue: variety of courtship.

(1.1.336–38)
Perhaps it is not merely his repressed incestuous passion that frightens Ferdinand so much but sexuality in general. For him, it is one of the great unknowns, an uncontrollable force dangerously close to madness and death. He sees sex everywhere, everything he sees seems ugly, and, like Bosola, he cannot stop talking about his fear. While the Cardinal is busy lecturing the Duchess on family honor, Ferdinand keeps talking about “those joys, / Those lustful pleasures” (1.1.325–26). Even the madmen whom he chooses for her torture are ones who will be sure to talk smut to her.

It is ironic—or perhaps predictable—that Bosola, who shares Ferdinand’s fear of the body, should be the one who eventually drives him over the brink of madness. There is a hint of things to come even in their first encounter:

Ferdinand: I would not have her marry again.
Bosola: No, sir?
Ferdinand: Do not you ask the reason: but be satisfied, I say I would not.

(1.1.256–58)

Ferdinand’s protestations about not wanting the Duchess to remarry are not entirely true, since he does later pick a second husband for her in Malateste. To be sure, Malateste is a gentleman, whereas Antonio is only the Duchess’s steward. But the courtiers’ description of Malateste in 3.3.10–34 indicates that he is the type of man whom the Duchess would despise, and who would cause her either to avoid sex with him or to go through with it and hate it. What is unpleasant for Ferdinand must be made unpleasant for everyone.

At any rate, there would seem to be no reason for Ferdinand to become so defensively testy with Bosola on the subject, since Bosola has not specifically asked for the reason behind Ferdinand’s categorical statement. After the Duchess is killed, Ferdinand does volunteer a reason, partially, one feels, to stop Bosola from harping on the subject of her death. But Ferdinand has not learned to rationalize credibly. His reason, that he had hoped to gain his sister’s fortune (4.2.283–85), is given too late
and too unconvincingly; it deceives neither Bosola nor himself. And as Bosola continues to press the issue, Ferdinand, unable to face his real reasons but forced to face his fear of them, is driven into a final retreat from reality: a madness in which he can “throttle” his own shadow and act out his nightmares.

Ironically, although Ferdinand’s madness may cause his deepest fears to surface, it also puts him more firmly in control of them. His lycanthropy, a descent into animality, is part of the dissolution that has obsessed him throughout the play, but now that the dissolution has begun, he seems to be able to face it with more equanimity—almost, like Antonio facing his death, with relief:

Ferdinand: Look, what’s that follows me?
Malateste: Nothing, my lord.
Ferdinand: Yes:—
Malateste: ’Tis your shadow.
Ferdinand: Stay it, let it not haunt me.
Malateste: Impossible: if you move, and the sun shine:—
Ferdinand: I will throttle it.

[Throws himself down on his shadow.]
Malateste: O, my lord: you are angry with nothing.
Ferdinand: You are a fool: how is’t possible I should catch my shadow unless I fall upon’t?

(5.2.31–41)

The word nothing, innocent enough in Malateste’s mouth, is significant in Ferdinand’s mind. He has been running from Nothing all his life, and only in his madness can he turn at bay and face it. Indeed, his digging up of graves and carrying about of dead men’s limbs (5.2.12–15) might almost be a gloss on the dead man’s hand that he brought to the Duchess in 4.1. The difference now is that he is presenting the memento mori to himself, although, to be sure, it is still a perversion of the symbol: a limb rather than a skull.

Ferdinand has often acted as a variant of the traditional memento mori. As early as 1.1, he begins to show the Duchess her own death: “This was my father’s poniard: do you see? / I’d be loth to see ’t look rusty, ’cause ’twas his” (331–32). In the
hair-brushing scene, he hides like the skeletonic figure in Renaissance “vanity” portraits, watching a woman regard her gray ing hair in a looking-glass. When she turns and sees him, he hands her the weapon that he has warned her with earlier, and bids her “Die then, quickly!” (3.2.71). And yet, in all his warnings and all his presentations of death, he is neither the warning of the Legend nor the beckoning figure of the Summons, but rather a more sinister creature that we have met before: the knife-bearing Despair. Although Bosola has told the Duchess that the figure of her “dead” husband and children are meant to bring her to resignation, the orthodox purpose of a memento mori (4.1.57–60), Ferdinand is quite clear about the real purpose of the display: “To bring her to despair” (4.1.116).

When Bosola’s function is seen thus, in the light of his master’s, it becomes plain why the Duchess must resist his ministrations. To accede to his terms will mean, for her, acceptance not of God’s minister but of Despair’s. Even in the old allegories—the Mysteries, the Moralities, and The Faerie Queene—Despair’s voice had sounded perilously like God’s; but in those allegories, the tempted souls knew that there was a God to whom they could turn instead. When the soul has lost its standard of comparison, when there is no other voice to listen for, how, then, can it conquer despair?

The answer is that of the Duchess. In fact, her death scene is such a powerful one, and has drawn so much admiration even from reluctant critics, that it is easy to overlook the roots that her dying demeanor has in her past behavior.

Some critics have cited the Duchess’s last scene as an example of not only a good but a specifically Christian death. Much as one would like to accept this, if only for the sake of dramatic contrast with the irreligion of the other characters, the idea is called into question by the evidence in the play. It is true that she kneels to be strangled, and speaks of “heaven gates” (4.2.232), and that she tells Bosola that she is not frightened of death because: “Who would be afraid on’t?/Knowing to meet such excellent company/In th’ other world” (4.2.210–12). But on the
other hand, her earlier conversation with Cariola indicates a less positive attitude on the subject:

_Duchess:_ Dost thou think we shall know one another,
In th’ other world?
_Cariola:_ Yes, out of question.
_Duchess:_ O that it were possible we might
But hold some two days’ conference with the dead,
From them I should learn somewhat, I am sure
I never shall know here.

(4.2.18-22)

This type of questioning is not an indication of strong belief, but rather a search for conviction. The scene is similar to the one between Desdemona and Emilia before Desdemona’s death: the beleaguered heroine asks her confidante a question, hoping not for a reasoned answer but rather for an opportunity to talk herself into a desired frame of mind. The confidante, it must be remembered, is of a lower class than the heroine and is not expected to discuss the subject as an equal; she is merely a sounding-board for the heroine. This is not an uncommon way of dealing with one’s fears, but it does indicate that a fear exists.

In the Duchess’s case, the question about an afterlife occurs at a significant time. Cariola has just offered two unwanted and unasked for bits of advice and has been rebuked as a fool. Now Cariola herself has raised an uncomfortable question:

_Duchess:_ When I muse thus, I sleep.
_Cariola:_ Like a madman, with your eyes open?

(4.2.16-17)

The Duchess’s question follows directly upon this and effectively changes the subject until she is ready to deal with it, several lines later. In the actual death scene, as we shall see, she uses the same method of answering a question with another question in order to remain in command of the situation.

But perhaps this is just a dark night of the soul from which the Duchess will recover at her death; she has, after all, made reference to Heaven earlier in the play. At first glance, her parting
from Antonio seems to posit a personal God, or at least a purpose in the universe:

Duchess: And yet, O Heaven, thy heavy hand is in't.
I have seen my little boy oft scourge his top
And compar'd myself to't: naught made me e'er
Go right but heaven's scourge-stick.

(3.5.78-81)

Unfortunately, this comparison is uncomfortably close to Bosola's talk about the "stars' tennis-balls," in which the human will is "struck and banded" for amusement by an uncaring power. In fact, the image of Heaven as a little boy is not very awe-inspiring, and is similar to Bosola's description of the body as "those paper prisons boys use to keep flies in."

The moral that the religious allegorists draw from the Duchess's actual death can hardly be supported by the text. Consider, for example, this description of her supposed repentance: "Despising the world, living a good life, meditating on death as a way of self-knowledge, coming to an existential acceptance of the necessity for mercy through facing one's sin, and finally overcoming despair through throwing oneself on the mercy of God." Although the Duchess may have "lived a good life," the other parts of the description bear little resemblance to the actions that make her most triumphant. In fact, there is no need to force the Duchess into the pattern of a traditional Christian saint in order to admire her. Her whole strength—we may say her whole self-knowledge—lies in rejecting the traditional (and spurious) spiritual blandishments of Bosola and Ferdinand, and indeed in asserting her tie to this world rather than the next: "I am Duchess of Malfi still" (4.2.142). She certainly does not "face [her] sin," either the general sinfulness of the Christian tradition or the "sin" attributed to her by her brothers—which the audience hardly considers a sin in the first place. And her only cry for "mercy" significantly comes during her temporary return to life, after Bosola has told her the lie about Antonio's reconciliation with her brothers (4.2.350-53); it is difficult, in this context, to tell whether the
“Mercy!” is addressed to God or to Bosola, or whether it is simply the French _merci_.

And yet, there is something genuinely uplifting in the Duchess’s death, something that makes one feel, as Robert Ornstein says, that “her self-possession in the face of death is a spiritual victory rather than a glorious defeat.” The source of this feeling need not be Christianized in order to be spiritual; it appears to lie not only in what she says about “heaven’s scourge-stick,” but also in her words about the madmen outside her window:

_Duchess:_ Nothing but noise and folly
Can keep me in my right wits, whereas reason
And silence make me stark mad.

(4.2.5-7)

It is a physical fact that when one is lost in a mist or in darkness, silence is a danger and noise the greatest aid in recovering one’s sense of direction. Similarly, in human affairs, opposition is an enemy of complacency and a major spur to perseverance. The “noise and folly” surrounding the Duchess are a form of mental sonar that shows her what is to be avoided and how to avoid it; without the vision of madness held up before her, she might easily drift by degrees into a madness of her own, not recognizing it until it was too late. But the Duchess, for all her talk of going “into a wilderness” (1.1.359), thrives on danger, because danger is a direction post and a call to action.

It is not that the Duchess has Antonio’s foolish recklessness; she is aware of the value of a strategic retreat, and must often force Antonio to fall back and regroup when he would rather fly into the cannon’s mouth. Rather, she responds to threats with a bravado that robs her persecutors of their pleasure and so gives her a heady feeling of victory that carries her through any situation—even her own death.

The Duchess will not be dominated. Unlike Ferdinand, she will not be goaded by others into raving and self-exposure, but turns the goads on her tormentors and leads them to expose themselves. Her simple reply to her brothers’ diatribe on her possible
remarriage, "I think this speech between you both was studied, / It came so roundly off" (1.1.329–30), effectively strips the veneer from Ferdinand more than any impassioned speech would have done and leads to his first threat on her life, and his first dirty joke. Similarly, her one-line replies to him during the hairbrushing scene, interspersed with perfectly logical questions, drive him into a frenzy and lead to his repeated "I will never see thee more" (3.2.136; 141), one of his standard retreats from what he cannot face.

It is true that the Duchess occasionally slips in a very human way, particularly when she permits herself to seek comfort outside herself. She allows Bosola, for example, to play upon her emotions in the pregnancy scene (2.1), when her physical condition lowers her resistance both to his words and to his dubious apricots; and she comes close to breaking down after she has seen the wax figures of her husband and children. But she recovers quickly. When Bosola says, "Now, by my life, I pity you" (4.1.87), she calls him a fool, the epithet that she usually reserves for her maid. And in her last scene, her famous "I am Duchess of Malfi still" is a major turning point for her; it has been virtually forced out of her by Bosola’s insults, but it seems to show her that she has been forced into a defensive position—and from then on, she turns to the attack.

One of the most effective ways that any oppressed people has of fighting back against a tyrant is to develop a sardonic sense of humor based on rigid common sense, an acceptance of the worst, and the ploy of answering a question with another question—one that the opponent cannot really answer. Lupset’s good pagan, Canius, had mastered this strategy; and the Duchess has developed it to a science.

The Duchess’s apparent obedience to the Summons is itself strongly reminiscent of Canius’. According to Lupset, when Canius was sentenced to death by Caligula:

Therat Canius turned him with lowe courtesy and sayd: My most gentill prince I hartely thanke you.
This answer came from a noble stomach, whereby he shewed the mad rags of the cruel tyrant to be so ferre intolerable, that under hym death was to be reckoned for a benefit and a good tourne. ... And great merueil men had to behold this Philosopher howe mery he was after this tyrantes thretenynge. 27

It is noteworthy that the Duchess, too, when she begins to resist Bosola, says, "Let me be a little merry" (4.2.151), and that her two sententiae on the welcome nature of death may carry stings in their tails:

Duchess: I have so much obedience in my blood,
I wish it in their [her brothers'] veins to do them good.
(4.2.169-70)
... tell my brothers
That I perceive death, now I am well awake,
Best gift is they can give, or I can take.
(4.2.224-25)

The second of these is part of her long speech mocking Bosola's attempt to frighten her. And the first? The word obedience is ambiguous; it may be taken as obedience either to her brothers or to the summons of death. But it can also mean, "I wish they were about to die, too."

But the question is the Duchess's most powerful weapon. I think that Ralph Berry is only partially correct when he notes the frequency of unanswered questions in the play: "At different times, all the characters are racked with doubt as to the meaning of life, and the rightness of their course through it. Constantly they ask each other questions, and receive from one another inconclusive answers" (132-33). The point is that when everyone around us is as ignorant as we are, to be the one to formulate a question is to place oneself in control of the situation. We are the ones who are demanding information; our opponent is the one who must admit ignorance and defeat. Furthermore, since a question in itself is a demand, and an answer an accession to that demand, the person who can ask the last question is the
person who is giving the orders. And when our opponent is trying to turn the argument in one direction, our question can divert the argument into other channels or expose the absurdity of the opponent’s position. 

The Duchess, as we have seen, knows the rhetoric of questioning very well. She uses it on Ferdinand in the hair-brushing scene, uses it on Cariola when a question of madness arises. And in her death scene, she uses it to stunning effect on both Cariola and Bosola. There is something astonishingly modern—something that might almost be called “street-smart”—about her words after Cariola’s hysterical “Call for help!” We might hear such a remark in a tenement apartment or a well-insulated suburban home: “To whom? to our next neighbours? they are mad-folks” (4.2.197-98). What is particularly interesting here is that the Duchess has anticipated Bosola, who should be the one to point out the hopelessness of her situation, and has thereby wrested control from him.

Bosola realizes what is happening and tries to restore his position of power by having Cariola, the Duchess’s “straight man,” taken away: “Remove that noise” (4.2.199). Interestingly, though, he is unconsciously echoing the words that the Duchess used about her emotional sonar: “Nothing but noise and folly / Can keep me in my right wits.” And when he removes the “noise and folly” of Cariola, he himself steps into the vacuum and becomes the next straight man that the Duchess will use to keep herself sane. The ensuing give-and-take is almost in the nature of a comic “turn,” and is worth reproducing at length:

\[\text{Bosola: Here are your executioners.}\]
\[\text{Duchess: I forgive them:}\]
\[\text{The apoplexy, catarrh, or cough o' th' lungs}\]
\[\text{Would do as much as they do.}\]
\[\text{Bosola: Doth not death fright you?}\]
\[\text{Duchess: Who would be afraid on't?}\]
\[\text{Knowing to meet such excellent company}\]
\[\text{In th' other world.}\]
\[\text{Bosola: Yet, methinks,}\]
\[\text{The manner of your death should much afflict you,}\]
\[\text{This cord should terrify you?}\]
Duchess: Not a whit:
What would it pleasure me to have my throat cut
With diamonds? or to be smothered
With cassia? or to be shot to death with pearls?

(4.2.206-18)

By turning Bosola's words against him, the Duchess has not only prevented him from tormenting her further, has not only talked herself into accepting death, but has put her enemy of the moment on the defensive and made him look small and ineffectual. He is, in fact, so unsettled by her self-command that he lets the remainder of his power slip from him, allowing his victim to give the order for her own death: "Pull, and pull strongly, for your able strength / Must pull down heaven upon me" (4.2.230-31). And even after she is dead, the joy of the kill seems to go out of him; all he can do is brusquely dispatch Cariola and the children—with surprisingly few words, for Bosola—until Ferdinand comes in and provides a more malleable victim onto whom he can project his fears.

There is a certain delight in being able to confound an oppressor in this way. It is not simply a matter of survival, or stoical acceptance, or even belated self-discovery. There is something more to it, a "spiritual victory," celebrated in the humorous remarks attributed to all the religious and political martyrs of history, as well as to the heroes of such diverse genres as the romance, the hard-boiled detective story, and the war film. To reach the breaking point and discover that one's spirit is not broken is a thrilling experience, not only because one survives, but also because one has given "a foule checke mate to the tyrantes crueltie"; because somewhere in such an experience is the hint that wrong will not always conquer, that (as Chesterton says), "Even on earth, it may go ill / At last with the evil earls." If we could end on such a note, The Duchess of Malfi would stand as a highly optimistic document. But Webster did not end here; the Duchess's death is only the first in a series of ten, and (except for Julia) only one person dies on a note of self-
possession like the Duchess's. Unfortunately, that person is one of her murderers.

The Cardinal is a strange figure. He does not appear to be afraid of anything; even his political maneuverings and murders seem to be done in a fit of boredom. Although he is a potentate of the church, he never mentions God or Heaven, and his two references to Hell and the Devil are defeatist and abstracted. After he has poisoned Julia, his words are curiously Faustian: “I would pray now: but the devil takes away my heart / For having any confidence in prayer” (5.4.27–28). And later, his musing on his own end is so offhand that it seems more like an academic problem than a personal concern:

Cardinal: I am puzzled in a question about hell:
He says, in hell there's one material fire,
And yet it shall not burn all men alike.
Lay him by:—how tedious is a guilty conscience!
When I look into the fish-ponds, in my garden,
Methinks I see a thing, arm'd with a rake
That seems to strike at me.

(5.5.1–7)

R.W. Dent has cited a number of sources, classic and contemporary, for that chilling “thing arm’d with a rake”; these figures are portents of death, revenge, or damnation, and most often brandish a sword, although there are a few who carry rakes. No doubt Webster was familiar with these passages, but he was also likely to be familiar with the iconography of death and Hell, and to have combined the verbal and pictorial images into one. In medieval and Renaissance depictions of the Judgment, the Devil drags souls into Hell with a rake; and the Cardinal’s “thing,” following so closely upon mention of Hell, might suggest such an image to Webster’s audience. But the Devil is not the only figure who carries a rake. Dürer's Fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse swings a rake rather than a scythe, and in many pictures of the skeletalic Summons, the pursing Death often carries a rake, shovel, or pick-axe.
The "thing" in the Cardinal's fish-pond, rather than being a specific figure drawn from any of Webster's sources, is more likely a deliberate compendium of all the literary and pictorial bogeys representing things beyond the world: ghosts, portents, devils, and death—all of which form the great "Ay, but to die and go we know not where" of the transitional skeptic imagination, the "agnostic spectacle" of which Tristram speaks (10). It is the very vagueness of the Cardinal's reference that makes the figure so horrifying: "Methinks I see a thing . . . / That seems. . . ." This is the nightmare, the thing at the periphery of the vision, the suspicion that even death is unreal because the universe itself is unreal, the hint that the Nothing that beckons us at the last is no different from the Nothing that already is. And the Cardinal often seems to be a representative of that Nothing.

Una Ellis-Fermor has rightly noted that the Cardinal "keeps his counsel to the end";33 he is a kind of cosmic black hole in the universe of the play, who takes in everything and gives back nothing. If he has any fears at all, he is remarkably skilled, like Bosola, in projecting them onto others, and then, like the Duchess, in deriving a positive joy from watching his victims' discomfort. In 2.4, he deftly maneuvers the otherwise indomitable Julia this way; and similarly, he can easily stir up Ferdinand with some well-timed reticence:

**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.

**Cardinal:** With whom?

(2.5.38-42)

With that simple "With whom?" the Cardinal sets Ferdinand off on one of his most obsessive ravings; and when Ferdinand finally runs out of breath and invective, the Cardinal's "Are you stark mad?" (2.5.66) sets him off again. Like the Duchess, he has found the question to be the best weapon in a struggle for power.
Although the Cardinal appears, like the Duchess, to lose his composure at the end, he, too, quickly recovers. And it is Bosola, "the born loser," who, in trying to bring the Cardinal to despair, instead restores his sense of identity:

*Bosola:*  
I do glory  
That thou, which stoodst like a huge pyramid  
Begun upon a large and ample base,  
Shalt end in a little point, a kind of nothing.

(5.5.76-79)

What Bosola means as an insult the Cardinal takes as a compliment; he insists on being a "kind of nothing." For him, Claudio's fear is simply a fact, and in a hideous inversion of the neoplatonic ideal, to align himself with the meaning of the universe is to become one with the great Nothing—and to draw all others after him. Indeed, if Bosola thinks that the Cardinal will allow him to die as Something, to assert individual power over things and reap glory from the carnage on the stage, he is sadly mistaken. When Bosola has finished boasting about his revenge, the Cardinal calmly deflates him and dies with his self-possession intact:

*Cardinal:* Look to my brother:  
He gave us these large wounds as we were struggling  
Here i' th' rushes:—and now, I pray, let me  
Be laid by, and never thought of.

(5.5.87-90)

"Let me be laid by." These are the same words that he used about his book on Hell: "lay him by." He has put forth as his ideal that which Bosola will (erroneously) say comes to all men, and which Delio will (piously) say comes to evil men: oblivion. In effect, the Cardinal, like the Duchess, has given the order for his own death and robbed others of their power over him. We may even say that his vices are the dark side of her virtues; that although the two characters seem to set forth for the opposite poles of Everything and Nothing, the same road serves for both.

We are left, then, with nothing certain in our own universe. If the admirable Duchess and the despicable Cardinal are so much
alike, if darkness is safe and light deceiving, if everything is in fact so open to contradictory interpretations, what is the purpose of Webster's play—or, Webster might seem to ask, of life? The answer may be that the question is immaterial.

And in this way, *The Duchess of Malfi* differs from *Measure for Measure*—by leaving its characters with more questions than answers, much in the manner of the universe itself. Just as seventeenth-century essayists explore the nature of truth by enumerating types of error, so Webster has explored the nature of life by examining its dissolution. The world around the Duchess is disordered and chaotic; but she survives and even triumphs, not by trying to make sense out of the disordered pieces, but by building from within and not attempting to find cosmic solutions beyond her power. What Delio calls “integrity of life,” and moderns might call “quality of life,” is the victory. And sometimes it can be best shown in the moment of crisis, the time of “noise and folly,” the hour of death.