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## MONTICELSO

Cardinal Monticelso is Camillo's uncle. He is Brachiano's enemy and determined to punish him and Vittoria for their affair. He is happy to play with Camillo's life when he sends him off to capture pirates in order to get him out of Brachiano's way:

It may be objected I am dishonourable  
To play thus with my kinsman, but I answer,  
For my revenge I'd stake a brother's life  
That being wronged durst not avenge himself. (II.1.390–3)

Since the Bible explicitly prohibits acts of private revenge, Monticelso condemns himself out of his own mouth and reveals himself as a corrupt, scheming cleric. When Camillo dies in suspicious circumstances it is Monticelso who presides over Vittoria's arraignment, accusing her of immorality and, in the absence of evidence of her involvement in Camillo's death, sentences her to detention in the house of convertites. Throughout her trial it is Monticelso who plays the leading role, abusing his clerical position, as Vittoria points out, by acting both as her accuser and her judge. Nevertheless his position allows him to act with impunity. His angry tone throughout the proceedings casts him in an unfavourable light. The Ambassadors comment that he is 'too bitter' (III.2.108) and his denunciation of Vittoria appears almost unhinged at times. He seems obsessed by her and her sexual attractions.

Monticelso is, in fact, the other main candidate for the title role of the 'White Devil' since as Pope he would be clothed all in white despite the fact that his acts by no means match his religious office. Criticism of the clergy, especially the Catholic clergy, was conventional in early modern drama in England after the Reformation, and portraits of corrupt, scheming clerics abound (for example in Shakespeare's *King John*). Monticelso's elevation to Pope, without a proper election, suggests the corruption of the whole institution of the Catholic Church and the fact that his first act on taking up his office, specifically after preaching the 'forgiveness of sins' is to carry out a private act of vengeance by excommunicating Brachiano and Vittoria, reveals its depth. Possession of his 'black book' of Italian malefactors and his urging



## CHECK THE BOOK

Shakespeare's play *Measure for Measure* is centrally concerned with hypocrisy and the abuse of authority. The main characters are a novice nun called Isabella and a duke disguised as a friar called Lodovick.

of Francisco to take revenge reveals a depraved mind. Monticelso, though, is an opaque character in many ways. What is the audience to make of his response when Lodovico confesses his intention to murder Brachiano? Monticelso tells him it is 'damnable' (IV.3.118) and memorably asks 'Dost thou imagine thou canst slide on blood / And not be tainted with a shameful fall?' (IV.3.119–120). Whether or not he is sincere, the effect of Monticelso's advice would have persuaded Lodovico to refrain, had not Francisco sent him money pretending it was from Monticelso. Was Monticelso sincere, then, in his change of heart? Had the holiness of his office finally made him understand the significance of his actions or was he simply paying lip-service to morality? Is he a hypocrite, a 'white devil' or does he embody a religious **paradox**: a corrupt human vessel who can nevertheless deliver God's message, despite his lapsed state?

## LODOVICO

Lodovico is a parallel character to Flamineo in many ways, a ruined nobleman, a **malcontent**, and Francisco's murderous henchman, as Flamineo is Brachiano's. Like Flamineo his own story is peripheral to the plot and yet his actions are central. Lodovico has been called 'an artist in murder' (Alexander Leggatt, *English Drama: Shakespeare to the Restoration, 1590–1660*, Longman, 1988, p. 155) and the play opens and closes with him (apart from Giovanni's final **quatrain**). His character is revealed from the start as his two friends, Gasparo and Antonelli, attempt to reconcile him to his banishment, pointing out that his punishment is well deserved. He has lived riotously and ruined himself and committed 'certain murders here in Rome, / Bloody and full of horror' (I.1.31–2). These Lodovico dismisses as 'flea-bitings' (I.2.32). He seems to have no redeeming qualities, but he shares Flamineo's ability to analyse character, **ironically** passing judgement on Flamineo himself as one of 'These rogues that are most weary of their lives' (III.3.128). His motivation in avenging Isabella's death is complicated by his personal feelings for her. He confesses to Monticelso, 'Sir, I did love Brachiano's Duchess dearly; / Or rather I pursued her with hot lust, / Though she ne'er knew on't' (IV.3.112–14).

When Monticelso tells him revenge is 'damnable' (IV.3.118) Lodovico appears willing to 'give it o'er' (IV.3.129) and only reconsiders when he receives money to continue which he believes



## CHECK THE NET

Lodovico awards himself the artistic credit for the carnage of the final act, claiming that he 'limbed this night-piece' (line 295), that is painted (limned) this tragedy (night-piece), perhaps playing on the sense of 'dismember'. Night-pieces were much admired but usually featured religious themes such as Hugo van der Goes's *The Nativity at Night* (1520–30). Go to [www.nationalgallery.org](http://www.nationalgallery.org) and put 'night pieces' into the search box to see a selection.

Historical Background	Webster's Life and Works	Literary Background
<p>1586 Richard Mulcaster leaves Merchant Taylors School; Trial of Mary Queen of Scots</p> <p>1587 Execution of Mary Queen of Scots</p> <p>1588 Defeat of Spanish Armada</p> <p>1590s High prices leading to economic depression especially in countryside</p> <p>1592 Plague: theatres close for two years</p> <p>1594 Period of bad harvests begins</p>	<p>1579/80 birth of John Webster</p> <p>1587? Webster enters Merchant Taylors School</p> <p>1589 Sara Peniall baptised 20 April</p>	<p>1586 Death of Sir Philip Sidney; Birth of John Ford</p> <p>1587 Rose Theatre opens</p> <p>1590 Sidney's <i>Arcadia</i> published; Boys' Theatres (attached to schools such as St Paul's) were closed; Shakespeare, <i>Comedy of Errors</i>, <i>Henry VI Part 1</i></p> <p>1591 Shakespeare, <i>Henry VI Part 2</i>; Anon, <i>Arden of Faversham</i></p> <p>1592 Marlowe, <i>Dr Faustus</i>; Shakespeare, <i>Henry VI Part 3</i></p> <p>1593 Marlowe dies; Shakespeare, <i>Richard III</i>, <i>Two Gentlemen of Verona</i></p> <p>1594 Shakespeare, <i>Love's Labour's Lost</i>, <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i></p>

Historical Background	Webster's Life and Works	Literary Background
<p>1595 Sir Walter Raleigh's voyage to Guiana; death of Sir Francis Drake and John Hawkins</p> <p>1597 English campaign in Low Countries</p> <p>1598 Poor Law established; John Davies expelled from Middle Temple</p> <p>1599 Earl of Essex fails to defeat rebels in Ireland</p> <p>1600 East India Company chartered</p>	<p>1595? Webster enters New Inn</p> <p>1597 Webster admitted to the Middle Temple</p>	<p>1595 Shakespeare, <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>, <i>Richard II</i>, <i>Romeo and Juliet</i></p> <p>1596 Shakespeare, <i>King John</i>, <i>Merchant of Venice</i></p> <p>1597 Shakespeare, <i>Henry IV Part I</i></p> <p>1598 Stow's <i>Survey of London</i> published</p> <p>1599 Globe theatre built; bishops order burning of satires; James VI of Scotland publishes <i>Basilikon Doron</i>; death of Edmund Spenser; Paul's theatre reopens; Dekker, <i>Shoemakers' Holiday</i>; Shakespeare, <i>Henry V</i>, <i>Julius Caesar</i>, <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i></p> <p>1600 Blackfriars theatre reopened; Fortune Theatre built; Kempe, <i>Nine Days' Wonder</i>; Marston; <i>Antonio and Mellida</i>, <i>Antonio's Revenge</i>; Shakespeare, <i>As You Like It</i>, <i>Merry Wives of Windsor</i>, <i>Twelfth Night</i></p>