

Further Reading

Throughout this book you have engaged in detailed reading of the original texts. We have tried to enable you to develop your own independent interpretations, reinforced by close, analytical readings. If you read and discuss a play, using the approaches suggested in this book, you should be able to write essays which are original, analytical and convincing. You may feel that you would like to engage with what other critics have written about your chosen texts: but it is best to do this when you have already formed your own opinions. If you read other critics before you read and think about the play yourself, you will find it harder to develop your own personal ideas and feelings about the play, and it will also make the whole process far less pleasurable.

The suggestions made here for further reading are necessarily curtailed: both by space and by my own selection. All good editions of the plays will have additional suggestions for reading, as will the catalogue of a good library. You will also find that the footnotes and bibliographies of some of the books or articles recommended below, point you to other texts that will interest you.

Reading Webster's Contemporaries

We have mentioned several plays and writers in this book which would give you a good sense of the dramatic context in which Webster wrote. Shakespeare's 'Roman' tragedies, written some years before Webster's plays, are a good comparison: *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Marston's *The Malcontent* (which we discussed briefly in Chapter 9) is an excellent comparison, particularly as Webster was closely associated with revising its script for public performance. Middleton's revenge and Italianate tragedies are very close to Webster's in style, form and theme. Look particularly at *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *The Changeling* and *Women Beware Women*. You

should also look at Webster's other plays, in particular the collaborative *Westward Ho!* and his tragicomedy, written a few years after *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The Devil's Law Case*.

It is helpful and illuminating to look at some non-dramatic contemporary texts which discuss and address many of the issues with which Webster was concerned. Look at Machiavelli's *The Prince*, in any edition; Francis Bacon's *Essays* (any edition); and other political and social debates in the relevant sections of my book *The English Renaissance: An Anthology of Documents and Sources* (Routledge, 1998).

Historical and Social Contexts

This Stage-Play World: English Literature and its Background, 1580–1625 by Julia Briggs (Oxford University Press, 2nd edition, 1997) is excellent on the background to all of the period's drama, and the up-dated version considers issues such as gender and travel, as well as the political and social context. G. P. V. Akrigg's *The Jacobean Pageant* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962) discusses the specific social and political world of the Jacobean court. J. W. Lever's *The Tragedy of State* (1971) is an indispensable account of the political nature and content of tragedy and tragic form in the Jacobean period. David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass's *Staging the Renaissance: Interpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama* (London: Routledge, 1993) contains extracts from some of the key current critical writers on Renaissance drama, as well as individual essays on both plays.

Criticism

The critical works which we discussed in Chapter 11 were: Travis Bogard, *The Tragic Satire of John Webster* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955); Jonathon Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989); and

Dympna Callaghan, *Woman and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy* (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989).

There are a few anthologies of Websterian criticism, although most collections are now quite dated. *John Webster: A Critical Anthology* edited by G. K. and S. K. Hunter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) is the best of the earlier ones. R. V. Holdsworth has edited the casebook *Webster, 'The White Devil' and 'The Duchess of Malfi': A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1975), and Harold Bloom *John Webster's 'The Duchess of Malfi'* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987). If you sample the critical views in these collections, you can then follow up your own interests by reading the extracted books or articles in full.

There are several other full-length studies of Webster's plays which are of interest. M. C. Bradbrook's *John Webster: Citizen and Dramatist* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980) examines the plays within Webster's political and intellectual context. Charles Forker's *The Skull Beneath the Skin: The Achievement of John Webster* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986) summarises previous critical views on Webster. Jacqueline Pearson's *Tragedy and Tragicomedy in the Plays of John Webster* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980) discusses Webster's dramatic form, an argument which is complemented by Christine Luckyj's *A Winter's Snake: Dramatic Form in the Tragedies of John Webster* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1989). A good students' introduction is Rowland Wymer's *Webster and Ford* (Macmillan, 1995).

Recent feminist accounts of Renaissance drama which have addressed Webster's plays include: Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy* (London: Routledge, 1985); Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1983); Kathleen McCluskie, *Renaissance Dramatists* (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989); and Alison Findlay's *A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

There is an excellent short account of recent performances of the two plays by Richard Cave, *Text and Performance: The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi* (Macmillan, 1988).

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