

General Conclusions to Part 1

1. Webster's tragic world is explicitly social and political: individuals are seen to be trapped by conventions, corrupt practices, social and political hierarchies, and socialised gender norms, as much as by their own *hubris*, evil or actions. Tragedy is seen to result from the mis-match between individual desire or action, and social, familial or political constraints. Such constraints are themselves characterised as corrupt: but conversely, individual rights and liberties are not necessarily represented as 'good'. Webster does not set up black-and-white moral values in this conflict, but asks us to debate the issues.
2. The world which Webster's main characters inhabit is one characterised by decay, corruption, amorality, bestiality, and chaos, and this is intimately linked through metaphors and action to the political and theological institutions. Order and virtue lie, for the most part, outside the realm of the play, and thereby appear as unattainable ideals.
3. The heroines and heroes are in visible conflict with dominant ideas or power relations, rather than engaged in an internal conflict (as are Shakespearean protagonists). This conflict informs the overall structure of the plays, as well as the internal structure of scenes and dialogues.
4. The plays are structured to engender particular sympathy for, and understanding of, the tragic heroines and their situation. Our understanding is created by scenic juxtapositions, and dramatic structure, as much as by the content of their speeches and characterisation.
5. Webster's plays are typically dialogic and open-ended: he sets up debates on political and social subjects which are taken up by the audience.

6. His sense of the theatrical nature and performability of his plays is evident throughout, and we need to attend to the meanings and manipulations of three-dimensional narrative and iconic symbols as much as to the more conventional verbal text of the plays.