

And though I loath'd the evil, yet I lov'd  
You that did counsel it; and rather sought  
To appear a true servant than an honest man.

Ferdinand. I'll go hunt the badger by owl-light:  
Tis a deed of darkness. *(Exit.)*

Bosola. He's much distracted. Off, my painted honour!  
While with vain hopes our faculties we tire,  
We seem to sweat in ice and freeze in fire.  
What would I do, were this to do again?  
I would not change my peace of conscience  
For all the wealth of Europe.----She stirs; here's life:---  
Return, fair soul, from darkness, and lead mine  
Out of this sensible hell:---she's warm, she breathes:---  
Upon thy pale lips I will melt my heart,  
To, store them with fresh colour.---Who's there!  
Some cordial drink!--Alas! I dare not call:  
So pity would destroy pity.---Her eye opes,  
And heaven in it seems to ope, that late was shut,  
To take me up to mercy.

Duchess. Antonio!

Bosola. Yes, madam, he is living;  
The dead bodies you saw were but feign'd statues:  
He's reconcil'd to your brothers; the Pope hath wrought the atonement.

Duchess. Mercy! *(Sbe dies.)*

Bosola. Oh, she's gone again! there the cords of life broke.  
O sacred innocence, that sweetly sleeps  
On turtles' feathers, whilst a guilty conscience  
Is a black register, wherein is writ  
All our good deeds and bad, a perspective  
That shows us hell! That we cannot be suffer'd  
To do good when we have a mind to it!  
This is manly sorrow;  
These tears, I am very certain, never grew  
In my mother's milk: my estate is sunk  
Below the degree of fear: where were  
These penitent fountains while she was living?  
Oh, they were frozen up! Here is a sight  
As direful to my soul as is the sword  
Unto a wretch hath slain his father.  
Come, I'll bear thee hence,  
And execute thy last will; that's deliver  
Thy body to the reverend dispose  
Of some good women: that the cruel tyrant  
Shall not deny me. Then I'll post to Milan,  
Where somewhat I will speedily enact  
Worth my dejection.  
*(He exits.)*

excerpt from *Five Stuart Tragedies*, edited by A.K. McIlwraith (London: Oxford University Press, 1953)

Bosola. Ha!

Ferdinand. Yes, and 'tis  
The largest bounty I can study to do thee.  
By what authority didst thou execute  
This bloody sentence?

Bosola. By yours.

Ferdinand. Mine! was I her judge?  
Did any ceremonial form of law  
Doom her to not-being? did a complete jury  
Deliver her conviction up i' th' court?  
Where shalt thou find this judgment register'd,  
Unless in hell? See, like a bloody fool,  
Th'hast forfeited thy life, and thou shalt die for't.

Bosola. The office of justice is perverted quite  
When one thief hangs another. Who shall dare  
To reveal this?

Ferdinand. Oh, I'll tell thee;  
The wolf shall find her grave, and scrape it up,  
Not to devour the corpse, but to discover  
The horrid murder.

Bosola. You, not I, shall quake for't.

Ferdinand. Leave me.

Bosola. I will first receive my pension.

Ferdinand. You are a villain.

Bosola. When your ingratitude  
Is judge, I am so.

Ferdinand. O horror,  
That not the fear of him which binds the devils  
Can prescribe man's obedience!  
Never look upon me more.

Bosola. Why, fare thee well.  
Your brother and yourself are worthy men:  
You have a pair of hearts, are hollow graves,  
Rotten, and rotting others; and your vengeance,  
Like two chain'd bullets, still goes arm in arm:  
You may be brothers; for treason, like the plague,  
Doth take much in a blood. I stand like one  
That long hath ta'en a sweet and golden dream:  
I am angry with myself, now that I wake.

Ferdinand. Get thee into some unknown part O' th' world,  
That I may never see thee.

Bosola. Let me know  
Therefore I should be thus neglected.  
Sir, serv'd your tyranny, and rather strove  
To satisfy yourself than all the world: .



Duchess. Pull, and pull strongly, for your able strength  
Must pull down heaven upon me--  
Yet stay; heaven-gates are not so highly arch'd  
As princes' palaces; they that enter there  
Must go upon their knees.-Come, violent death, *(Kneels.)*  
Serve for mandragora to make me sleep!--  
Go tell my brothers, when I am laid out,  
They then may feed in quiet. *(they strangle her)*

'Bosola. Where's the waiting-woman?  
Fetch her: some other strangle the children. *(Enter Executioners with Cariola.)*  
Look you, there sleeps your mistress

Cariola. Oh, you are damn'd  
Perpetually for this! My turn is next;  
Is't not so order' d?

Bosola. Yes, and I am glad you are so well prepar'd for't.

Cariola. You are deceiv'd, sir,  
I am not prepar'd for't, I will not die,  
I will first come to my answer; and know how  
I have offended.

Bosola. Come, despatch her--  
You kept her counsel, now you shall keep ours.

Cariola. I will not die, I must not, I am contracted  
To a young gentleman.

Execut. Here's your wedding-ring.

Cariola. Let me but speak with the duke. I'll discover  
Treason to his person.

Bosola. Delays:--throttle her.

Execut. She bites and scratches.

Cariola. If you kill me now,  
I am damned; I have not been at confession  
This two years.

Bosola. When?

Cariola. I am quick with child.

Bosola. Why, then *(they strangle Cariola and bear her off.)*  
Your credit's saved. Bear her into the next room;  
Let this lie still. *(Enter Duke Ferdinand)*

Ferdinand. Is she dead?

Bosola. She is what  
You'd have her. But here begin your pity:  
Alas, how have these offended? *(Shows the Children strangled.)*

*A crucifix let bless your neck ,  
Tis now full tide 'tween night and day;  
End your groan, and come away.*

- Cariola. Hence, villains, tyrants, murderers! alas!  
What will you do with my lady?-- Call for help.
- Duchess. To whom? to our next neighbours? they are madfolks.
- Bosola. Remove that noise.
- Duchess. Farewell, Cariola  
In my last will I have not much to give:  
A many hungry guests have fed upon me,  
Thine will be a poor reversion.
- Cariola. I will die with her.
- Duchess. I pray thee, look thou giv'st my little boy  
Some syrup for his cold, and let the girl  
Say her prayers ere she sleep. *(Cariola is forced off)*  
Now what you please: What death?
- Bosola. Strangling; here are your executioners.
- Duchess. I forgive them:  
The apoplexy, catarrh, or cough o' th' lungs,  
Would do as much as they do.
- Bosola. Doth not death fright you.
- Duchess. Who would be afraid on't,  
Knowing to meet such excellent company  
In th' other world?
- Bosola. Yet, me thinks,  
The manner of your death should much afflict you:  
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?  
I know death hath ten thousand several doors  
For men to take their exits; and 'tis found  
They go on such strange geometrical hinges,  
You may open them both ways: anyway, for heaven-sake,  
So I were out of your whispering. Tell my brothers  
That I perceive death, now I am well awake,  
Best gift is they can give or I can take,  
I would fain put off my last woman's-fault,  
I'd not be tedious to you.
- First Execut. We are ready.
- Duchess. Dispose my breath how please you; but my body  
Betow upon my women, will you?
- Execut. Yes.

Bosola. Yes.

Duchess. Let me be a little merry:-of what stuff wilt thou make it?

Bosola. Nay, resolve me first, of what fashion?

Duchess. Why, do we grow fantastical on our deathbed?  
Do we affect fashion in the grave?

Bosola. Most ambitiously. Princes' images on their tombs  
Do not lie, as they were wont, seeming to pray  
Up to heaven; but with their hands under their cheeks,  
As if they died of the tooth-ache: they are not carved  
With their eyes fix'd upon the stars; but as  
Their minds were wholly bent upon the world,  
The self-same way they seem to turn their faces.

Duchess. Let me know fully therefore the effect  
Of this thy dismal preparation,  
This talk fit for a charnel.

Bosola. Now I shall: *(Enter Executioners, with a coffin, cords, and a bell.)*  
Here is a present from your princely brothers;  
And may it arrive welcome, for it brings  
Last benefit, last sorrow.

Duchess. Let me see it: I have so much obedience in my blood,  
I wish it in their veins, to do them good.

Bosola. This is your last presence-chamber.

Cariola. O my sweet lady!

Duchess. Peace; it affrights not me.

Bosola. I am the common bellman  
That usually is sent to condemn'd persons  
The night before they suffer.

Duchess. Even now thou said'st  
Thou wast a tomb-maker.

Bosola. 'Twas to bring you By degrees to mortification. Listen.  
*Hark, now every thing is still,  
The screech-owl and the whistler shrill  
Call upon our dame, aloud,  
And bid her quickly don her shroud!  
Much you had of land and rent;  
Tour length in clay's now competent:  
A long war disturb'd your mind;  
Here your perfect peace is sign'd.  
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.  
Strew your hair with powders sweet,  
Don clean linn, bathe your feet,  
And (the foul fiend more to check)*

# THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

by John Webster, 1614

*Motivated by greed and family pride, the Cardinal and the Duke Ferdinand of Calabria do not want their widowed sister, the Duchess of Malfi, to marry again--so that the lands and fortune she inherited from her husband will stay in their family. They persuade her to hire Daniel de Bosola, a murderous spy, as head of her stables. The Duchess and Antonio, the major domo of the household, have a secret alliance, and in time a child is born. Bosola informs the absent brothers of the birth but can't provide the name of the father, so they are forced to wait to avenge their family honour until they can discover who is responsible. Several years and two more children later, they discover her secret marriage to Antonio and have Bosola kill the Duchess, her maid, and two of the three children. Unexpectedly, both Bosola and the Duke are conscience stricken after these acts; the Duke goes insane, the Cardinal plots Bosola's murder, and in the final act, Antonio and all three villains receive death wounds. A critic has called this "a bloody but fascinating study of evil, darkness, perversion, corruption, horror and suffering-- a true nightmare reflecting a strange, uncharted side of human relationships in a decaying society."*

## Act IV, Scene 2, lines 117- 377

*(this scene begins when Bosola arrives to murder the Duchess)*

Bosola. I am come to make thy tomb--

Duchess. Ha! my tomb!  
Thou speak'st, as if I lay upon my death-bed,  
Gasping for breath: dost thou perceive me sick?

Bosola. Yes, and the more dangerously, since thy sickness is insensible.

Duchess. Thou art not mad, sure: dost know me?

Bosola. Yes.

Duchess. Who am I?

Bosola. Thou art a box of worm-seed, at best, but a salvatory of green mummy. What's this flesh? a little cruded milk, fantastical puff-paste. Our bodies are weaker than those paper prisons boys use to keep flies; more contemptible, since ours is to preserve earth-worms. 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.

Duchess. Am not I thy duchess?

Bosola. Thou are some great woman, sure, for riot begins to sit on thy forehead (clad in gray hairs) twenty years sooner than on a merry milk-maid's. Thou sleep'st worse than if a mouse should be forc'd to take up her lodging in a cat's ear: a little infant that breeds its teeth, should it lie with thee, would cry out, as if thou wert the more unquiet bedfellow.

Duchess. I am Duchess of Malfi still.

Bosola. That makes thy sleep so broken: Glories, like glow-worms, afar off shine bright,  
But, look'd to near, have neither heat nor light.

Duchess. Thou art very plain.

Bosola. My trade is to flatter the dead, not the living; I am a tomb-maker.

Duchess. And thou com'st to make my tomb?