

CARIOLA IN CONTEXT: AN EXPLORATION OF THE FEMALE SERVANT IN *THE
DUCHESS OF MALFI*

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper brings critical attention to the figure of Cariola from Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. She has been neglected in scholarship, but her involvement in the play offers commentary on the cultural politics of Webster's time. The play questions the social hierarchy of early modern England as the Duchess marries below her class, but Cariola extends this conversation of what service should entail as she serves the Duchess out of reciprocated affection. Her affiliation with the Duchess can also be interpreted as an example of female alliance that challenges patriarchal and tyrannical male authorities. Beyond this relationship with her mistress, Cariola contrasts the hypocritical Cardinal and functions as a positive Catholic figure, engaging with the anti-Catholic religious politics of Webster's time to invite religious tolerance. She is important not only for how she illuminates other characters in the play, but also for how she challenges prevailing early modern notions of service and religion.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Cariola, the Duchess's female servant in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, has received very little critical attention. What critical consideration there is tends to place her as simply a contrast for the Duchess. Scholars such as Leah Marcus argue that when "Cariola expresses an opinion strongly at odds with the Duchess's, we tend to side with the Duchess" ("The Duchess's Marriage in Contemporary Contexts" 107), and Christina Luckyj suggests that Cariola becomes "the Duchess's foil in death" ("Great Women of Pleasure'..." 280) as she "bites and scratches" (4.2.25)¹ the executioners in fear. Her actions often seem to serve to emphasize by contrast the Duchess's laudable ones, but there is more to her character. Cariola manages to gain agency through her service to the Duchess, and, unlike female servants in other literature of the period (such as Zanche in Webster's *The White Devil*), does not do so to advance her own personal sexual imperatives. As Mark Thornton Burnett states, "as servants and women, maidservants were twice disadvantaged in contemporary ideologies" (129) because of their class and gender, but Cariola manages to criticize her superiors and establishes her own voice. Cariola gains agency through her relationship with the Duchess, and through her potential subversion of the class system. My thesis considers how she accomplishes this by examining the play's social contexts and literary sources. In this new contextual examination of Cariola, chapter one considers Cariola's relationship with the Duchess in the context of the patterns of service for both male and female servants in early modern England. Cariola does not fit neatly into the usual servant roles depicted in drama, since she is unwaveringly loyal to the Duchess but still criticizes her. Chapter two considers Cariola in terms of cross-class female alliance. Cariola is present for

¹ Webster, John. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Edited by Leah Marcus, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009.

all of the most intimate moments of the Duchess's life, and the power she gains in her relationship with the Duchess, as well as the trust that the Duchess is willing to put in Cariola, demonstrates the power of female alliance as well as suggests a friendship that renders their class difference less significant. Chapter three considers Cariola within the confessional context of early modern England. Cariola's implied Catholic views, which have sometimes been emphasized in modern performances, invite the audience to think more critically about the play's religious politics, especially in how they might have been perceived by Webster's largely Protestant audience. Webster's positive positioning of Cariola's Catholicism challenges a singular Protestant religious stance, and intimates a wistfulness for the old Catholic faith, the tradition of which was largely forced underground in England in Webster's time. Cariola's character has generally been examined simply in order to consider how "the Duchess is constructed in terms of Cariola" (Callaghan, "Tragedy" 67), but this paper brings necessary attention to Cariola herself. Cariola is important not only for her illumination of other characters in the play, but also for her challenge to prevailing early modern notions of service and religion.

CHAPTER 2: CARIOLA AND THE SERVICE OF FRIENDSHIP

Elizabeth Rivlin explains that early modern England witnessed a "wholesale transformation [...] from a neo-feudal economy in which service entailed permanent, non-monetary obligations for both servant and master to an economy which increasingly revolved around capitalist wage labor" (21-22). This new capitalistic structure invited servants to think more self-interestedly about the rewards associated with their service, augmenting the cultural fear that servants might betray their masters if promised better compensation elsewhere. The possibility that servants would set other goals, such as financial gain or marriage, above service was a concern for the ruling class. Michelle Dowd explains that in early modern England, "women were expected to work as servants not in order to gain occupational training per se (as was the case for men) but in order to learn the domestic skills that they would need as wives and to delay their marriages until they were economically and socially prepared for them" (23). Because their service functioned as a transitional life stage with the ultimate goal being marriage, there was a cultural fear of maidservants putting personal marital imperatives above their duties and loyalties to their superiors.

The Duchess of Malfi engages with these anxieties of the period. The play demonstrates the dangers of having servants with divided loyalties through characters such as Bosola, but unlike Bosola, Cariola does not display any of the characteristics of the anxiety-inducing self-interested maidservant, as she does not desire money or marriage. In a play that forces the audience to consider class relations as the Duchess marries below her station when she weds Antonio, her household steward, Webster's use of Cariola must be considered. As a loyal maidservant to the Duchess, Cariola embodies the neo-feudal servant type, but Webster gives Cariola, like Antonio, an independent and valuable voice, demonstrating a model of social

mobility in which even a traditional loyal servant is accorded the freedom to offer critiques to superiors.

Before considering Cariola's place in Webster's servant-master hierarchy, we must understand how *The Duchess of Malfi* as a whole both represents and addresses servants and their masters, and must consider the effects the play might have had on Webster's audience. The first quarto states that the play was "[p]resented privately, at the BlackFriers; and publiquely at the Globe, By the Kings Majesties Servants" (Webster, *The tragedy of the Dutchesse of Malfy* 1). This line suggests that "[f]rom this first inscription onwards, the theatrical life of *The Duchess of Malfi* has hinged on the relationships between high and low" (Barker 42) with an audience that "probably represented a range of social positions" (Barker 43). From the first page, the printed text of the play is aware that those watching would come from a range of social positions and thus would likely have different views on service.

In *The Duchess of Malfi*, the treatment and place of servants is such a central issue that its audience is forced to take a stand on class divisions. The main conflict of the play is driven by the fact that Antonio is in the Duchess's service. The Duchess's brother, Ferdinand, discovering that the Duchess is having a romantic relationship, without knowing with whom, assumes that there is a class disparity within the relationship. He imagines that the Duchess must be with "some strong thigh'd bargeman; / Or one o'th'wood-yard, that can quoit the sledge, / Or toss the bar, or else some lovely squire / That carries coals up to her privy lodgings" (2.5.42-45). Frank Whigham argues that the disgust expressed in Ferdinand's line "specifies cross-class rivalry, and the debasement by occupation marks the intensity of the aversion. For him invaders are mere laborers, well-equipped with poles and bars, false, and potent; by coupling with the duchess they couple with him and contaminate him, taking his place" (170). Indeed, when Ferdinand discovers

that it is Antonio who is married to the Duchess, Ferdinand focusses on Antonio's class, sneering that Antonio is "[a] slave, that only smell'd of ink and counters, / And ne'er in's life look'd like a gentleman, / But in the audit-time" (3.3.70-72). Like all of the play's characters, Ferdinand is psychologically complex, but the lengths he goes to prevent the mixing of the classes (torturing and then ordering the death of his sister and her children) are insupportable, and most likely unpalatable to the audience. The audience is led to condemn Ferdinand, allowing them to dismiss his rigid class hierarchical views.

Perhaps to achieve this effect, Webster deviates from his source material in positioning the opposition to the Duchess's marriage, represented through the Duchess's brothers, as the play's primary antagonists. In the source material, the marriage is figured as a cautionary tale. Painter writes: "True it is, that mariages be done in Heaven, and performed in earth, but that saying may not be applied to fooles, which governe themselves by carnall desires, whose scope is but pleasure" (368). In *The Palace of Pleasure*, the reader is led to judge the couple (and more specifically, the lustful Duchess) for their immorality. Sophie Lemercier-Goddard observes that "Webster transforms Painter's cautionary tale of lust and immorality into the political and social tragedy of men and women whose progress is contained by the corrupt and tyrannical impulses of a decaying aristocracy" (204-205). Webster's deviation from the source material complicates the simple moral lesson that aristocracy should not become romantically involved with those in lower class standing. The audience is forced to challenge class divisions, with the titular heroine trying to convince "the audience that closed economic and social societies are both dangerous and inequitable" (Aughterson 105).

Webster increases the class distance between the Duchess and her servants, drawing the audience's attention to just how transgressive the Duchess really is of class boundaries. He

deliberately lowers Antonio's status from its representation in the source. Although in *The Palace of Pleasure* Antonio is the Duchess's inferior, he is still an aristocrat. Webster stresses the class difference between the two characters, accentuating "the Duchess's contempt for rank as a trustworthy indicator of worth" (Marcus, "Introduction" 34). Similarly, the maidservant in the source is referred to as "gentle" (Painter 369), indicating that she is from the upper class; in the play, however, Cariola is identified only as a maidservant, with no mention of her background. A small difference between the classes of the characters could be justified as ultimately inconsequential, but instead the Duchess's violations of class boundaries are emphasized by Webster's exaggeration of her class difference with Antonio, and his neglect to specify Cariola's background. The attention drawn to the class difference forces the audience to confront the Duchess's disregard of the class structure as a model.

There are points within the play at which Webster shows how equality between classes can function positively, allowing the audience to agree with the Duchess's disregard of the class structure. Act 3, scene 2 is significant, for example, since it features the Duchess preparing for bed and removing the physical symbols of her class. Both Antonio and Cariola are present for this process, creating a sense of equality between the three (in the private sphere, at least), despite their class differences. Onstage, the scene can be played to depict a strong sense of camaraderie. For example, Antonio is comfortable enough with both women to jokingly ask the Duchess "why hard-favoured ladies/ For the most part keep worse-favoured waiting women" (3.2.42-45). Often on stage, such as in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse production directed by Dominic Dromgoole in 2014, this line is laughed off by the Duchess and Cariola as the Duchess responds by saying that just as an ill painter would not want their shop next to a good one, so do unattractive ladies not want to be surrounded by comparatively beautiful women. By showing

these positive moments of class equality, Webster actively and charmingly deviates from his source. The Duchess is happy with Antonio and Cariola. Demonstrating how the classes can interact in a positive way on equal ground makes the social hierarchy seem emphatically flexible.

Perhaps due to this camaraderie, Cariola remains constant in her loyalty to the Duchess, and the audience can feel secure trusting in their relationship. Cariola's character demonstrates a model of service in which the servant upholds the social hierarchy out of reciprocated love. She serves as a foil to the mercenary servant, Bosola. Bosola judges Ferdinand for ordering the death of the Duchess, but if Ferdinand had paid Bosola for the death of the Duchess, the play might have had a very different ending. Bosola requests "the reward due to [his] service" (4.2.283) for killing the Duchess, but Ferdinand refuses, toppling the mercenary structure of service. Bosola does state that he "loved" (4.2.319) Ferdinand, but Ferdinand's rejection of him and refusal to pay after Bosola kills the Duchess is enough to drive him over the edge. In the play's final scene, Bosola summarizes the macabre events that transpired through the play, and claims that he "was an actor in the main of all,/ Much 'gainst [his] own good nature, yet i'th' end/ Neglected" (5.5.83-85). Bosola believes that he betrayed his own good nature by serving Ferdinand and laments the fact that he was neglected. He had an unhealthy relationship with Ferdinand. Unlike the Duchess and Cariola's relationship, Bosola's loyalty to his master is not returned.

Furthermore, unlike Bosola, Cariola does not feign allegiance to the Duchess. The audience can clearly see the dangers of a servant having multiple masters, especially when one requires the servant to abuse another master's trust. Bosola betrays the Duchess when he carries out Ferdinand's orders to kill her. She thinks that he is her loyal servant, but he puts Ferdinand's desires and the rewards provided above her wellbeing. His justification is that he "rather sought/To appear a true servant [to Ferdinand] than an honest man" (4.2.321-22). Bosola may

serve Ferdinand well, but he ignores his duty to the Duchess, illustrating the anxiety in early modern England over a servant's choice in loyalty, and potential feigned allegiance. A servant has the power to decide which master they wish to follow, and money (or in the case of Bosola, money and the promotion to provisorship of the horse) can often tempt betrayal. Cariola, however, is never tempted to betray the Duchess, seeking neither wealth nor promotion.

While the audience can critique Bosola as an example of a corruptible servant, Whigham observes that "Cariola relates to the duchess as Kent to Lear (though without the devotional power supposedly conferred by noble rank). She occupies the old mode of identity in service with its hierarchical origins, yet she also embodies the collusive strength that female identity can acquire in an oppressively role-restricted society" (172). Cariola is a strong character who could easily betray the Duchess by making her marriage to Antonio public if she chose to do so. She puts the Duchess's desires first, however. There is never any discussion through the play of social advancement for Cariola, and she does not look for any sort of promotion. She is a safe counsellor for the Duchess, serving her exclusively.

Cariola does not have any conflict of duty to a husband or lover, either, which is an anxiety represented in other plays of the period. For example, in *Othello* Emilia betrays her mistress, Desdemona, by stealing the handkerchief that Othello had presented to Desdemona because Iago, Emilia's husband, requests it. There is also the anxiety that female servants will be motivated to betray their masters by the desire to marry, or simply by sexual desire. Maidservants could use their positions in service as a way to "take advantage of opportunities to learn a trade, to save small amounts of money and to build up useful possessions" (Burnett 119) in preparation for marriage. This system positioned the drive to catch a husband as the ultimate goal of service. This tension is exemplified in other plays of the period, such as *The White Devil*.

In it, Zanche (a maidservant to Vittoria) starts as a relatively passive figure. She facilitates the affair between Vittoria and Brachiano, but is a ghostly figure in the background for the first half of the play. As soon as she gains a voice, she embodies the popular trope surrounding female servants in drama who were "imagined in terms of an all-consuming sexuality" taking "the form of a desire for marriage" (Burnett 129) as she pursues various male characters, including the disguised Francisco. She betrays Vittoria's confidence in telling others about her mistress's affair, and actively plans to steal from Vittoria to finance her own escape with Francisco (who she thinks is romantically interested in her).

Unlike Zanche, Cariola does not pursue any sort of romantic relationship that would threaten the quality of her service to the Duchess. Cariola seems to embody the image of the neo-feudal servant, serving her mistress exclusively without the danger of being corrupted by money. As Whigham observes, she "is an exceptionally focused specimen of the type: she is not given any of the divided loyalties that would accompany the usual suitor of her own (though Delio is structurally available)" (172). Even though a character such as Delio could easily have become a love interest for Cariola, Webster does not pursue this match. Cariola's romantic independence grants her the ability to be exclusively loyal to the Duchess. Webster allows Cariola to exist outside of the typical love-obsessed female servant mold.

Moreover, Cariola maintains sexual independence through her lack of romantic interest. In many other dramas, maidservants are allowed to gain a voice through the pursuit of their sexual imperatives, and they can potentially profit financially through marriage as it is an authorized means of gaining economic security; however, their agency is curtailed as they become subject to their husbands, as exemplified through Emilia. As Dowd explains, "Idealized stories about female servants whose work ends neatly in marriage, for instance, offer a reassuring

fantasy of social order to those who might be concerned about women's ambiguous position within a volatile service economy" (2). Marriage returns any subversive woman to a subordinate position under male authority once again. By rejecting marriage, Cariola avoids being subject to a male authority, and her ability to reject marriage demonstrates her agency.

Cariola does not express any intention to marry. When asked by Antonio when she will marry, she responds quite decisively with the answer: "Never, my lord" (3.2.22). This is an overlooked and very important line. How Antonio phrases the question sheds more light on her response. Antonio asks "when," not "if," she will marry, demonstrating the unquestioned assumption that she will marry. Cariola actively rejects these social expectations. It is true that she does not explain her reasoning for such a definitive rejection, and a dramatic director could choose to have this line delivered as joking banter; however, even if the line is not completely in earnest, by claiming that she will never marry, Cariola at least recognizes how the patriarchal system functions and gives voice to a position that would be considered unconventional in her time. She also does not indicate any desire to marry at any other point in the play.

Cariola's chastity also figures into her rejection of patriarchal control. Chastity, as Constance Jordan argues, "was important chiefly insofar as it could lead to a woman's escape from patriarchal proprietorship [...] feminists generally portrayed [women choosing chastity] as possessing a kind of liberty" (37). One of the most powerful women in the decades before Webster wrote *The Duchess of Malfi* also refused marriage. Queen Elizabeth I chose to "live out of the state of marriage" ("Response to a Parliamentary Delegation on Her Marriage, 1559"). This rejection allowed her "to connote, not the negation of a woman's bodily difference, of her own sexual desires, but rather the survival of a quality of feminine autonomy and self-

sufficiency” (Berry 18). Cariola’s resistance gives her power in the patriarchal field as she joins the ranks of women like Elizabeth I who reject marriage.

Indeed, Cariola's motivations are difficult to place, since she seeks no financial reward or marriage, but offers enduring service to her mistress. When asked by Antonio when she will marry, she does not provide any alternative future desire. She is quite content, it seems, not to change her status at all. Unlike Bosola, Cariola is not motivated by any kind of personal gain. She is happy to simply exist in the Duchess's service, demonstrating her deep loyalty.

Cariola does not view herself as simply the Duchess's servant, however. Although her actions have most often been explained ² as a return to the hierarchical origins of service, Cariola is not wholly submissive. She is willing to question the Duchess's judgement, demonstrating that her service is not only to be subordinate to the Duchess, but to challenge her as well. Cariola and the Duchess are more similar than current scholarship has recognized; the Duchess challenges the social hierarchy imposed by characters such as Ferdinand by marrying Antonio, but similarly, Cariola challenges the social hierarchy by challenging the Duchess. She witnesses the Duchess's marriage to Antonio, but her first line after this reflects upon her mistress's judgement. She states: "Whether the spirit of greatness or of woman/ Reign most in her, I know not; but it shows/ A fearful madness. I owe her much of pity" (1.2.410-12). The first quarto of the play, printed with Webster’s direct involvement in 1623, a decade after the first performance, positions the formal exit of the Duchess and Antonio after Cariola’s comment. Marcus states that if the couple remains onstage, it "allows for an altered dynamic in performance. The two newlyweds may, for example, laugh off Cariola's dire language in a way that makes her look faintly ridiculous, or they may give her an incredulous stare. Or they may be so wrapped up in

² See, for example, Frank Whigham’s “Sexual and Social Mobility in *The Duchess of Malfi*,” page 172.

each other that they fail to hear her" ("The Duchess's Marriage in Contemporary Contexts" 107). If, however, Antonio and the Duchess are treated as having heard the line, the comment demonstrates Cariola's staunch ability both to critique openly and to express pity for the Duchess.

Cariola's ability to evaluate the Duchess even while serving her is still demonstrated even if Antonio and the Duchess do not hear Cariola's critique of their marriage. This quotation also allows the audience to relate to a figure in the play (other than the Duchess's murderous brothers) if they are not completely on board with the marriage. Cariola can speak to the audience in a conspiratorial tone, establishing a relationship with them and demonstrating that she has an independent mind while still being loyal to her mistress.

In this context, it is interesting to note the parallels between Bosola and Cariola in how they critique their masters. Bosola openly criticizes Ferdinand at points, such as when he tells Ferdinand that he is his "own chronicle too much" (3.1.88), and Ferdinand does seemingly express gratitude for Bosola's honesty when he says: "'That friend a great man's ruin strongly checks/ Who rails into his belief all his defects'" (3.1.92-93). The quotation marks suggest that Ferdinand is borrowing these words, however. The praise does not originate from him, perhaps curbing its authenticity. Even if gratitude is expressed by Ferdinand here, however, Ferdinand's desires shift as his mood changes. Ferdinand demands false flattery when he expresses that "you that are courtiers/ should be my touchwood, take fire when I give fire-/ That is, laugh when I laugh, were the subject never so witty" (1.2.42-45). Contrasting this, he chides Bosola for the Duchess's death and says: "What an excellent/ Honest man mightiest thou have been / If thou hadst borne her to some sanctuary" (4.2.262-64), indicating that he wishes that Bosola had disobeyed him (a reversal from his previous demand for servile submission). Bosola does not

have Ferdinand's reciprocated loyalty, as Cariola has the Duchess's. The play directly shows the outcomes of servants following questionable orders, but also the importance of trust between a master and a servant. Bosola is clearly uncomfortable in killing the Duchess, as demonstrated by his desire to hide his identity from her, but he kills her nonetheless. Cariola loyally follows the Duchess's orders but comes to her own conclusions, never openly voicing regret for following the Duchess.

Cariola dies alongside the Duchess for, as Bosola points out, having "kept [the Duchess's] counsel" (4.2.238). She is punished for having been a devoted servant in helping the Duchess keep her marriage secret. Bosola and the other executioners, it would seem, even mock her for keeping the Duchess's counsel, suggesting that by dying, Cariola "shall keep ours" (4.2.238). In the *Palace of Pleasure*, the Duchess asks (albeit unsuccessfully) for her maidservant to be spared "in consideration of hir good service done to the unfortunate Duchess of Malfi" (Painter 382). In the source material, the Duchess seemingly exempts Cariola from any liability since she was simply serving her mistress, but the executioners still say that the maidservant must die since she "hast bene so faithfull a minister, and messenger of [the Duchess's] follies" (Painter 382). In both the *Palace of Pleasure* and the play, the executioners emphasize that it is *because* of this service that the maidservant is punished.

The stakes of being a servant were high in early modern England. Servants could be culpable for their master's crimes. For example, just after *The Duchess of Malfi's* first performance, Anne Turner, a waiting woman to Lady Frances Howard, was executed along with other servants for helping Lady Frances Howard poison Thomas Overbury, an advisor to Robert Carr. Overbury was critical of a match between Howard and Carr. Howard received a death sentence as well, but was pardoned by King James. Her status and relationship to the King (she

was in love with Robert Carr, one of the King's favorites) provided her with safety. The pardon was not extended to the servants, who were punished for carrying out their mistress's desires.³ By contrast, the fact that both the Duchess and Cariola are killed almost puts them on the same level. They are both equals in the "crime." The Duchess does not get special dispensation for her rank, nor does Cariola get a reprieve for simply serving her mistress well. Both women resisted patriarchal control throughout the play (the Duchess in rebelling against her brothers and marrying Antonio, and Cariola in denouncing the brothers' "tyranny" (4.2.3) and in refusing marriage), and both are punished together.

Cariola does not accept this punishment easily, however. She lies to Bosola before her death and tells him that she is "contracted/To a young gentleman" (4.2. 239-240) and that she is "quick with child" (4.2. 244). These excuses represent "the exacerbated conditions of femininity, namely betrothal and pregnancy" (Callaghan, "Theatre, Art, the Woman..." 138). It is interesting that, in her dying moments, she lies and tries to conform to societal expectations. Cariola thinks that by conforming, she may be spared; indeed, pregnant women were routinely spared execution.⁴ These excuses demonstrate that she understands the societal expectations for a maidservant. She appears to hope that there may be safety in feigning this conformity, since putting herself under patriarchal control eliminates her as any sort of a threat. It is too late, however.

As observed by Burnett, in many early modern plays, "the maidservant is revealed as the unwitting butt of reductive patriarchal attitudes" (120), but Cariola, like the Duchess, resists

³ For a more in-depth look at the scandal of Lady Frances Howard, see David Lindley's *The Trials of Frances Howard: Fact and Fiction at the Court of King James*

⁴ For more details and specific examples of how pregnancy affected executions, see Sara M. Butler's "Pleading the Belly: A Sparing Plea? Pregnant Convicts and the Courts in Medieval England."

patriarchal structures and therefore has to die. She is a threat and cannot be neatly married off and reintroduced to a patriarchal model. In life, she resists male domination, and serves her mistress. She does not conform to the maidservant image presented in other plays, such as *The White Devil*. She embodies a new model of servant, loyally serving the Duchess yet able to voice her own opinions. Cariola's model of service seems to indicate a pattern based upon reciprocated love, thus breaking rigid social structures based on inequality. As will be further explored in the next chapter, moreover, like Antonio's marriage to the Duchess, Cariola's relationship with the Duchess offers power. In death, Cariola is removed as a threat to Ferdinand, who discourages personal connections with servants, but the need to remove her highlights the cultural anxiety surrounding the power of maidservants in a shifting economy.

CHAPTER 3: "TO THY KNOWN SECRECY" : FEMALE ALLIANCE IN *THE DUCHESS OF MALFI*

Dominant definitions of friendship in early modern England did not position women as being capable of this type of relationship. As Laurie Shannon describes, "In both Cicero and Montaigne, the avowed nature of woman serves as proof that women, just like such 'bad' or unconstant men, cannot fulfill friendship's demanding offices" (58). Being fickle, women were considered (unlike the majority of men) as incapable of true friendship. The definition of friendship and "the rhetoricized virtues of ideal friendship (self command, constancy, 'liberty of heart,' truthful and communicative speech) essentially repeat the criteria of manliness" (Shannon 56), yet alliances between women crop up, not just in drama, but in historical accounts, challenging this misogynistic definition. Within scholarly reactions to these examples, however, as explored by Luckyj, "there has been a marked reluctance to read the 'private,' affective discourse of friendship and alliance among women as imbued with public or political meaning" ("Introduction" 4). Perhaps in part because of this reluctance to consider female friendship, the Duchess and Cariola's relationship has yet to be considered in this light; however, it clearly deserves such consideration.

Cariola gains the agency required by early modern definitions of friendship. First, she does so by rejecting any form of marriage. Cicero dictates that self-sufficiency is required for friendship, and, "by this interpretation, female chastity takes on a volitional character; the chaste virgin expressed an active 'female pride'" (Shannon 69). The "opportunities for counsel" (Luckyj, "Introduction" 2) that figure in early modern definitions of friendship are also present in the relationship between the Duchess and Cariola. The interactions between them demonstrate a strong female alliance with both domestic and political significance. Previous scholarship has

focused on the differences between the two characters, but there are also significant similarities between them that enable an alliance against the dominant patriarchal and hierarchical social order.

Speaking of maidservants and mistresses in general, Burnett states that “[a] servant whose devotion was equal to that of a close relative may also have been privy to her mistress’s confidences” (127). Cariola certainly is privy to the Duchess’s confidences, being present for all of the big moments in the Duchess’s life and demonstrating a strong allegiance to her. As Wendy Wall describes, “The heightened emotional intensity of marital intimacy includes Cariola as an active participant: the wooing scene, the bedroom joking scene, the couple’s forced separation, and the Duchess’s death” (162). Cariola is the only woman with whom the audience sees the Duchess interact, and the Duchess is rarely present on stage without Cariola, making them almost an inseparable unit. This consistent presence demonstrates Cariola’s intimacy and friendship with a superior. Each one’s character development is entirely dependent on that of the other.

This intimate relationship challenges the class system much as the relationship between Antonio and the Duchess does. A lot of research has gone into exploring how marriages between an aristocrat and her male subject are subversive,⁵ but less attention has been paid to same-sex relationships that are equally intimate and potentially just as subversive. The Duchess and

⁵ For example, see Barbara Correll’s “Malvolio at Malfi: Managing Desire in Shakespeare and Webster” in which Shakespeare’s Malvolio is imagined with a transgeneric afterlife as Antonio. Correll’s essay argues that “Webster used Malvolio’s erotically inflected relation to a female aristocrat to sharpen issues of historical transition, service, class formation, and conflict” (Correll 65). See also Frank Whigham’s “Sexual and Social Mobility in *The Duchess of Malfi*” in which Antonio’s marriage to the Duchess is considered in terms of its subversion of the class system.

Cariola's alliance is maintained not through the promise of reward, but rather simply through their strong female relationship, comparable to the strong heterosexual relationship between Antonio and the Duchess.

Cariola functions in the same manner as Antonio, becoming the Duchess's equal based on their relationship status. Knowing that she will be killed, the Duchess turns to Cariola and says: "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" (4.2.196-98). As Wall observes, the Duchess's final lines to Cariola are more significant than simply a mother asking her servant to look after her children. Wall tracks the use of medicine throughout the play, and casts it as an intimate symbol. She makes a compelling argument that, by asking Cariola to provide medicine to her son, the Duchess "casts Cariola as the overseer of her 'reversion,' a position formerly occupied by Antonio; the play thus slots Cariola into the very site occupied by a lover, and it defines that position by using the vocabulary formerly used to produce intimacy" (Wall 164). Cariola also sleeps in the Duchess's bed in the absence of Antonio. This was common practice for maidservants and their mistresses,⁶ but it demonstrates that Cariola is involved in every intimacy of the Duchess's life, and even knows that the Duchess is "the sprawlingest bedfellow" (3.2.13). All of these intimacies cast her in a relationship with the Duchess as strong as that between the Duchess and Antonio.

Indeed, the relationship between these two women may even be more accessible to the audience than the relationship between the Duchess and Antonio. There are instances when the Duchess is alone with Cariola on stage, but there are no scenes with just the Duchess and Antonio. Although there are certainly suggestions of private times between the Duchess and Antonio (such as when they exit together at the end of Act 3, scene 2), the audience is not invited

⁶ For a more in-depth discussion privacy within the household, and more specifically in relation to the bedroom, see Lena Cowen Orlin's *Locating Privacy in Tudor London*, page 172.

to join them. By way of contrast, in seeing the two women alone together on multiple occasions, the audience has access to their private relations and hence is invited to form part of their intimate relationship. This demonstration of friendship (especially when compared to the lack of audience inclusion in the married couple's relationship) highlights the Duchess's and Cariola's comfort and reliance on each other to the audience.

Indeed, the relationship between the Duchess and Cariola is strong enough to supposedly extend beyond life. When the Duchess contemplates her impending death, she asks Cariola: "Dost thou think we shall know one another/ In th'other world?" (4.2.17-18). Cariola's response is unhesitating: "Yes, out of question" (4.2.18). Their relationship extends past mortal obligations to spiritual connections. Cariola even states that she "will die with [the Duchess]" (4.2.195). Although a theatrical director could decide what emphasis to put on this line, reading it either as a sudden realization or as an expression of a dramatic desire to stay with the Duchess, in either case Cariola expresses a recognition of their fates being tied. In the source text, the Duchess's maiden is described as being "of good minde and stomake, and loved hir mistresse very derely" (Painter 369). This description anticipates Cariola's portrayal in the play; like her antecedent, Cariola is trustworthy because she cares deeply for the Duchess.

The Duchess at times, too, seems to be equally devoted. She asks Cariola if she thinks they will meet in the afterlife, and then when asked by Bosola if she fears death, responds by saying: "Who would be afraid on't, / Knowing to meet such excellent company /In th'other world" (4.2.202-4). The audience can assume that she is referring to her family, whom she thinks she saw dead because of Ferdinand's wax figures of them, but this line may also remind the audience of the question she posed to Cariola regarding the afterlife. Because she asked it of Cariola directly, this question links the maidservant to the Duchess's comment on the "excellent

company” that she expects to see in heaven. The Duchess gains strength from Cariola’s reassurances, as demonstrated in the Duchess’s answer to Bosola.

This intimacy should not distract from the tension in the Duchess and Cariola’s relationship, which has garnered considerable critical attention. For example, Cariola is criticized by the Duchess for her resistance to Bosola’s suggestion of feigning a pilgrimage in order to rejoin Antonio. The Duchess calls Cariola a "superstitious fool" (3.2.321) after Cariola expresses that she does not like “[t]his jesting with religion, this feigned pilgrimage” (3.2.320). This line has been picked up by scholars such as Marcus as evidence to suggest that the audience will not necessarily relate sympathetically to Cariola. Marcus argues that Cariola’s “reasoning is nonetheless suspect: to feign a pilgrimage in the interests of saving a family is not necessarily ‘jesting with religion’” (“The Duchess's Marriage in Contemporary Contexts” 107). Despite this, Cariola’s advice (although ignored) is ultimately good. By feigning the pilgrimage to Ancona, the Duchess falls into her brothers’ trap.

In the source, it is the character Cariola is based upon who suggests the pilgrimage. In Painter’s work, the Duchess’s maidservant states that her advice is ““to let your household understand, that you have made a vow to visite the holy Temple of our Lady of Loretto”” (Painter 371). It is important to consider why Webster would actively alter this, for he could easily have had Cariola suggest the pilgrimage. The alteration is perhaps intended to maintain the audience’s perception of the Duchess’s independence. In early modern England, “the potential for a maidservant to influence the mistress was a recurring subject” (Burnett 128). Instead, as the one to suggest the feigned pilgrimage in the play, Bosola becomes more of a villain in the audience’s eyes as he knowingly suggests that the Duchess go towards danger. Cariola is absolved of any blame for leading the Duchess towards danger, even unintentionally. This

exoneration of Cariola allows her association with the Duchess to remain as an example of a female relationship in which the friend and servant offers good counsel. Importantly, it is ignoring Cariola's counsel that leads the Duchess into danger. When Bosola suggests the pilgrimage, the Duchess ignores Cariola's advice and favors Bosola's. Bosola replaces Cariola in a position of trust with the Duchess. Considering the outcome, the audience may understand the potential danger of rejecting female alliances.

By challenging the Duchess's brothers' control, moreover, the two women's relationship is imbued with political significance. The brothers attempt to control the Duchess, but with Cariola's help, the Duchess marries Antonio. The Duchess and Cariola's resistance to the brothers may even be metaphorical for subjects resisting monarchical control. Julie Crawford notes that in early modern England, women were often analogized with political subjects. In writings such as William Whately's *Bride-bush*, for example, the instructions for a husband and wife mask political commentary on the responsibilities of the monarch and the subject. Crawford notes that people who took the woman's side "were associated with the rights of the subject and, crucially, with limitations on the monarch's power" (38). Both the Duchess and Cariola can be read as representations of the violated rights of subjects in an authoritarian state, and sympathizing with them perhaps positions the audience against absolute monarchical control in England. As Marcus notes, many plays of Webster's period featured attempted female subjugation, which would compare "with political subjects who were abased and implicitly feminized as a result of tyranny [...] male sexual and political dominance resonates with the corruption and absolutist ideology of the court of James I" ("Introduction" 13). The situation is made more complicated by the Duchess's class status, yet the Duchess's class does not shield her from her brothers' nefarious plans. She and Cariola are both punished for undermining the class

system and going against Ferdinand and the Cardinal's orders that the Duchess remain celibate. The alliance between the women allows for the subversive marriage to take place, but then the Duchess's brothers try to reinstate the social order, both patriarchal and class, by eliminating them. It is interesting to note that all of the female characters (the Duchess, Cariola and Julia) are killed by men, a fact that highlights the dangers of domineering rule.

The Duchess and Cariola are able to resist the patriarchal system because they support each other, even if there is sometimes tension in their relationship. Cariola does not react to the Duchess's outburst that she is a superstitious fool, nor does she respond negatively to other moments of abuse throughout the play. Although she is willing to critique the Duchess's actions (as previously discussed), she does not rise to any insult directed her way. After the Duchess is captured, Cariola tries to comfort her and reassure the Duchess that she will not be killed. The Duchess's response is to call her "a fool" (4.2.12). Cariola seemingly shakes it off, continuing to comfort the Duchess, telling her to "Pray, dry your eyes" (4.2.14). Despite any tension or name-calling on the part of the Duchess, Cariola continues to serve her faithfully.

The Duchess is not the only character with whom Cariola is put into conflict. The early modern household, like the Duchess's, "was embedded in larger networks of relationship and accountable to them; it was vulnerable to scrutiny and intervention from within and without; its walls were riddled with fissures through which co-habitants and neighbours peeped and listened- and then often reported what they'd learned" (Dolan 120). The dangers of such household structures are clearly exhibited through Bosola trading the Duchess's secrets, but we also see that Antonio is unreasonably suspicious of Cariola. In the source, he points out the danger to his and the Duchess's life if "the maiden of [the Duchess's] chamber be not secrete, if she be corrupted" (Painter 366), although he never expresses this concern directly to the maidservant. Similarly,

Antonio's mistrust of Cariola is apparent in the play. When Antonio and Cariola return to the Duchess's bedchamber after Ferdinand's exit, Antonio directly accuses Cariola of betrayal. He goes so far as to aim a pistol at Cariola to blame her for the fact that they "are / Betrayed" (3.2.140-141). Antonio has anxiety over the fact that Cariola is privy to all of her mistress's secrets. Cariola does not internalize this mistrust, however, or lash out. She serves as a contrast to Bosola, at whom the suspicions should be aimed. When Bosola is accused of betraying the Duchess by Antonio in Act 2, scene 3, he reacts with aggression, calling Antonio a "false steward" (2.3.35). Contrasting this, when Cariola is accused by Antonio, she calmly asserts her own innocence by telling Antonio that "when / That you have cleft my heart, you shall read there / Mine innocence" (3.2.142-145). In Marcus's edition of *The Duchess of Malfi*, she points out that "Cleft" can literally mean the bullet ripping Cariola's heart, but it can also metaphorically represent her heart breaking because of Antonio's mistrust of her. This dual meaning demonstrates how seriously she takes her role of confidante. To Cariola, betraying her mistress would be as terrible as death. Cariola, unlike Bosola, has no need to lash out, knowing that she would never betray the Duchess.

Considering that Cariola is so loyal to the Duchess despite the tensions between them, some consideration must go to what Webster hoped to accomplish through her character. How should the audience relate to her? In the source material, Painter condemns the Duchess's marriage. He states that "[a] goodly thing it is to love, but where reason loseth his place, love is without his effect, and the sequel rage and madnesse" (368). This line echoes Cariola's concern over the Duchess's marriage, when she says that "the spirit of madness" may exist in the Duchess. Cariola perhaps mirrors the source text's concern over the marriage in the play and provides the audience with an access point to these concerns. Marcus argues that Cariola's

“assessment is culturally normative, and that early viewers of the play would have agreed with her” (“The Duchess's Marriage in Contemporary Contexts” 106), but it is equally possible that that her reaction can be considered as “overly conservative, or unnecessarily fearful, like some of her reactions later in the play” (Marcus, “The Duchess's Marriage in Contemporary Contexts” 108). Although it is important to consider the audience’s relationship to Cariola, considering this line is directed to them, I am more interested in why Webster would give this role to Cariola in the first place. There is already disapproval of the marriage from the Duchess’s brothers, and the play is set up in a way that the audience is invited to sympathize with the Duchess. For example, the inclusion of the Duchess’s children onstage in Act 3, scene 5, is strategic. Having children onstage is difficult—they are an almost uncontrollable element. Their presence deliberately focusses the audience’s attention on the Duchess as a mother and a loving wife, inviting the audience to feel sympathy for her and showing the innocent infantile victims whose deaths will come to further villainize her brothers. The audience will either see their own sentiments in Cariola’s reflection and perhaps find validation in it (since it is not just the antagonistic brothers who question the marriage), or they will judge Cariola for her questioning of the marriage. Choosing a character to critique the Duchess who is nonetheless supportive of her validates audience members who may be cautious about the radical path the Duchess has taken but do not want to be aligned with the play’s antagonists (complex as the Duchess’s brothers are). Cariola legitimizes the audience’s hesitancy in supporting the Duchess’s marriage and may even serve as a model for the audience to follow. She may critique the marriage, as many audience members might, but in the end she is ultimately supportive and endorses it through her actions.

Cariola’s relationship with the Duchess is not just one of a mistress and her subordinate. The way Webster presents their relationship indicates a strong affection, and even friendship. It

is their combined efforts that keep the marriage a secret for so long, an action that threatens the patriarchal aristocratic social order. It is their alliance that allows this subversion to take place, and it is ultimately the Duchess's dismissal of Cariola's advice that leads to their capture. Men kill both of them, recognizing the threat their alliance brings. Cariola is thus more similar to, and more important to, the Duchess than previous scholarship has recognized. She is a safe figure for the audience to relate to if they are reluctant to offer full support for the Duchess's marriage, while also encouraging sympathy for the Duchess through her own support. She has an absolute moral compass (a topic discussed more in the next chapter as her religious tendencies are explored), and is irrevocably loyal to the Duchess.

CHAPTER 4: ACCEPTING CARIOLA AND ACCEPTING CATHOLICISM

In 1533, King Henry VIII broke from Rome and introduced his new Church of England, a choice that led to decades of religious turbulence. After the Reformation, England “was a religiously pluralistic society that found it difficult to accept religious pluralism” (Harris 41). Due to evangelical preaching and propaganda, “the majority of English people became vehemently anti-Catholic and hostile to all manifestations of popery” (Harris 39) following events such as the 1572 massacre of Protestants in Paris on St. Bartholomew’s Day, and given the tensions between England and Catholic Spain. The Spanish Armada even famously tried (and failed) to invade England in 1588. In 1582, Queen Elizabeth and the “privy council took the drastic step of issuing a proclamation declaring that all seminarists and Jesuits were *ipso facto* traitors and making it a capital felony for lay people to harbour or relieve them” (Harris 39). There were also tensions within the Church of England itself as different sects debated what the religion should consist of and contain. Protestant separatists could be caught under the same non-conformational laws as Catholics. This “anti-separatist legislation had the effect not only of stigmatizing radical puritans in the public eye as dangerous political subversives, but also of associating them with papists” (Harris 41). When Webster wrote *The Duchess of Malfi*, both Catholics and Puritans were alienated from the episcopal Church of England. This religious tension is evident in Webster’s tragedies. Although it is difficult to predict how Webster’s audience would have reacted to the religious depictions in the play, “to place the play within its first historical milieu, however provisionally and speculatively, is to become attuned to resonances that can help us understand why it was so important to its contemporaries” (Marcus, “Introduction” 15). Considering the play in terms of Webster’s audience has allowed scholars to reflect on how the play arguably exposes the religious atmosphere of early modern England, in

which Catholicism could be an object of both mourning and revulsion. For example, Leah Marcus observes that “Webster offers the Duchess as an exemplar of heroic constancy in a twisted world that incarnates Protestant England’s worst fears about Catholicism” (“Introduction” 16). Giving more latitude for Catholic tolerance, Todd Borlik argues that “[r]ather than simply wave a banner for the Anglican compromise, Webster’s tragedies voice both Protestant distrust of Catholic ritual and poignant defenses of the old faith’s ceremonialism” (148). Academic inquiry into Webster’s religious politics is not novel,⁷ but little has been said about Cariola’s contribution to this conversation beyond her significant and oft-quoted statement following Bosola’s suggestion of feigning a pilgrimage when she expresses that she does “not like / This jesting with religion” (3.2.319-20). There is more to be said about Cariola’s religious involvement beyond this line. Amid all of the criticism of Catholicism embodied in the Cardinal, Cariola serves as a respectable Catholic figure, allowing for a positive representation of Catholicism in the play. The positive representation of both Cariola’s Catholicism and the Duchess’s reluctance to recognize the power of ecclesiastical courts as she marries in private goes against the religious standards of early modern England, which rejected Catholicism and promoted Protestant church control. This parallel allows for a deeper comparison between the Duchess and Cariola and demonstrates a model of productive religious tolerance.

The source on which Webster based his play positions Cariola as the one who recommends that the Duchess pretend “to visite the holy Temple of our Lady of Loretto” (Painter 371) to conceal her escape. This is not to say that the source’s maidservant does not consider

⁷ For example, see Leah Marcus’s “The Duchess’s Marriage in Contemporary Contexts” for a discussion of the Duchess’s marriage as associated with English Puritanism, and see Elizabeth Williamson “The Domestication of Religious Objects in *The White Devil*” for consideration of how Webster presents Catholic symbols such as the Crucifix in a positive light in *The White Devil*.

God's will; in fact, she seems to position God as being on the Duchess's side. In forming the plan, she states that after the Duchess escapes, "God will perform the rest, and through his holy mercy will guide & direct all [the Duchess's] affairs" (Painter 371). The woman in the source material, like Cariola in the play, seems confident in her religious convictions. That being said, Webster makes Cariola more willing to challenge her class superiors based on her religious dedication. As previously stated, Cariola is vocal about her dislike of feigning a pilgrimage.

Borlik points out that this line parallels the Cardinal's response to her pilgrimage. The Cardinal states: "Doth she make religion her riding hood / To keep her from the sun and tempest?" (3.3.58-59). The Cardinal clearly does not approve of the Duchess's use of religion as a way to cover up her escape. At the same time, the audience recognizes the Cardinal as a corrupt religious figure tainted by the hypocrisy of his adulterous relationship with Julia. The Cardinal's hypocrisy and its implied negative representation of Catholicism was not overlooked in the early modern period. For example, "[w]hile serving as Chaplain to the Venetian embassy in London, Orazio Busino attended a production of Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* and was mortified by the portrayal of the conniving, lascivious Cardinal" (Borlik 136). Busino writes that the portrayal of the Cardinal "was acted in condemnation of the grandeur of the Church, which they despise and which in this kingdom they hate to the death" (Busino 34).

Whereas the Cardinal, who is portrayed as a hypocrite, is mocked for his fraudulent Catholic devotions, Cariola expresses her religious views in a sincere way. Although she can be rejected by the audience in much the same way as the Duchess rejects her statement on feigning a pilgrimage by calling her a "superstitious fool," the audience can also recognize the religious sincerity she expresses. Hence, Cariola balances the scale of the clearly anti-papist Cardinal

figure. While recognizing the corruption of the Catholic Church through the Cardinal, Webster leaves room for positive Catholic associations, creating a more inclusive religious approach.

There are other instances of England's nostalgia for its prior Catholicism present in the play. For example, Borlik explores the significance of the play's Marian moments. Visiting monuments was seen as problematic to begin with by the Protestant English, given the Reformation's destruction of shrines and icons viewed as false idolatry, but the play actively displays the Duchess and her companions visiting the Marian shrine of Loreto. Although the visit is made under false pretenses, as the Duchess wishes to escape to Ancona, it is still religiously charged.

The visit can be examined through modern interpretations of Marian devotions. Contemporary scholarship has become increasingly interested in medieval and early modern Marian devotion. Many scholars have identified this sort of devotion with female empowerment. As Marotti expresses, "Women's religious, personal, and political empowerment could be facilitated, rather than impeded, by the 'old religion and the functioning in it of the figure of Mary and the practices of Marian devotion'" (xx). By going to the shrine, the Duchess demonstrates her agency as she attempts "to flee from the patriarchal thumb of her brothers" (Borlik 139). In this way, even if her desire to go to the shrine is not out of piety, she uses the shrine to reject patriarchal control.

But where does this leave Cariola? In Act 3, scene 4, pilgrims discuss the holiness of the shrine to Our Lady of Loreto and comment on the actions of the main characters. The audience is not privy to any dialogue among the Duchess's company at this point, as the Cardinal's presence prevents the Duchess and her family from entering to pay their vow of pilgrimage. The pilgrims' reaction to this banishment, stating that "the Cardinal / Bears himself too cruel" (3.2.25-26),

“invites the audience to view Marian worship through more sympathetic eyes” (Borlik 141). I agree with Borlik that the audience is invited to sympathize with the Duchess here despite any possible disingenuity on her part regarding the visit, but I would like to draw attention to Cariola’s absence from this scene. The audience may sympathize with the Duchess at this point, but Cariola is not part of this sympathetic moment. The scene opens with the pilgrims. The stage directions indicate that the Cardinal is there in the habit of a soldier, and “[t]hen *ANTONIO*, the *DUCHESS* and their *CHILDREN*” (3.4.8) present themselves at the shrine, only to be turned away. Cariola is not present, though she reappears in the scene immediately following the banishment. Her absence is never addressed; the audience is never told why she is not there. Any justification would be speculative, but considering her voiced opinion that one should not use religion as a pretense, it is possible that she did not accompany her mistress out of a sense of her own moral obligations, placing her own religious allegiances over service to her mistress. Her absence (especially considering her presence for the majority of the Duchess’s life) must be noted. She expresses her religious views openly, even to her superiors, and does not compromise them.

Cariola’s choice to voice her opinion of the false pilgrimage is not the only example of her expressing religious views. When she and the Duchess are held prisoner together, the Duchess asks Cariola to describe what she looks like. Cariola responds, telling her that she resembles “some reverend monument / Whose ruins are even pitied” (4.2.32-33). References to ruins like this, while foreshadowing the Duchess’s ghostly voice among the ruins in Act 5, scene 3, would also “aggravate a nagging remorse for the destruction of the Catholic monasteries” (Borlik 143) during the Reformation. Again, Cariola references positive aspects of Catholicism, invoking nostalgia for what had been lost in the English Reformation.

Some consideration, too, must go to the religious significance of Cariola's chosen abstinence from any sexual activity (including marriage). While the play's setting is unquestionably Catholic, Webster's English audience may have interpreted the play and its action based on their own religious knowledge and experiences. The dominant Protestant view in England was that women had to marry, "and those who did not were denied the respect of their communities" (Warnicke 178). This notion can help the audience to better sympathize with Antonio's assumption in Act 3, scene 2 that Cariola would marry. Marcus argues that Antonio "is associated with Puritan, or at least strongly Protestant values" ("The Duchess's Marriage in Contemporary Contexts" 115), so the largely Protestant audience would likely share his assumptions. Cariola's Catholic views allow her to gain power in her celibacy, however, especially given that the Counter Reformation had "renewed the Catholic dedication to celibate life for women" (Warnicke 179). Catholic women could even gain social and political power, notes Warnicke, since "in convents and especially in teaching congregations, women were taught to work with one another for religious and sometimes for social endeavors" (179). When Cariola conspires with the Duchess to advance her marriage, she uses her celibacy and chastity to support the Duchess's goals. She does not feel inclined to speak to the Cardinal but takes her religion and beliefs about what is socially acceptable into her own hands. She does not go to the male religious figure in the play, relying instead on her chosen female alliance.

Her abstinence from sexual activity is also significant, since "[i]n neither the Catholic nor the Protestant reform movements were women recognized as equal to men in their ability to deal with their sexuality" (Warnicke 179). Despite the fear of women being sexually lascivious, Cariola resists any form of sexuality, demonstrating that she can be in control of herself. Through this lens, she may have even more power than the Duchess who is, as Luckyj points out,

"above all, as she herself makes clear, an intensely sexual woman" ("Great Women of Pleasure" 276).

Indeed, Webster's audience might have perceived the two women's religious positions as similar in their implied opposition to the dominant religious views of England. The Duchess exercises control in how she commences her relationship with Antonio. Much could be said about the religious world of the play but, as Marcus argues, Webster's audience would be "far more likely to judge [the Duchess's marriage] in light of English ecclesiastical law of their own period" ("The Duchess's Marriage in Contemporary Contexts" 108-109) than in light of Italian customs. The Duchess rejects ritual and ecclesiastical control over her marriage when she chooses to marry in private, *per verba de presenti*. As Marcus states, "Because England's ecclesiastical courts were based in the canon and civil law of the Roman Catholic Church, they were, to many in England, yet another contamination of the purity of the English Church" ("The Duchess's Marriage in Contemporary Contexts" 114). An English audience would be able to see how the Duchess rejects the controlling Catholic religious order of the play, but also compare it to the same elements of control exercised by England's Protestant ecclesiastical courts. Cariola, being a good Catholic, and the Duchess, in rejecting church control, both behave in ways that can be interpreted as resistant to England's dominant Protestant order. The audience is invited to sympathize with the Duchess's rejection of a public marriage. As Marcus argues, the tragedy "is not that she makes the attempt through her clandestine marriage, but that she is not allowed to succeed" ("The Duchess's Marriage in Contemporary Contexts" 114). The audience is likewise invited to view Cariola as a positive representative of Catholicism. This makes both of the women embodiments of marginalized religious groups. They invite religious tolerance from the

audience, challenging the rigid religious non-tolerant structures in place both in the fictional world of the play and in early modern England.

Despite Cariola's Catholic loyalty, it is the Duchess who gets the death with traditional religious undertones. As Borlik suggests, "Despite her Protestant fortitude and self-reliance, [the Duchess] reverts to a more Catholic-tinged humility in her final moments, asking the executioners for assistance, as if they have taken on the role of priests easing her passage to the afterlife" (148). Similarly, by kneeling to accommodate the executioners, "she is repeating the ritual posture that she had taken before at the shrine of Our Lady" (Brown 15) (although I would point out that the stage directions do not indicate that she gets the chance to kneel at the shrine). Contrasting this, Cariola's death is violent and without the religious symbolism of the Duchess's. It has been interpreted as simply emphasizing "the nobility of her mistress's death by dying as a woman, and a lower-class one at that, would be expected to die" (Callaghan, "The Construction of Women Through Absence..." 83). She is stripped of the masculine stoicism that the Duchess displays.

Still, I would argue that there are some religious considerations in Cariola's death. In the source, the maidservant calls upon God, telling him to "be witness of the same, and crying out upon his divine Majestie, she besought him to bend his judgement against them which causeless (being no Magistrates,) hadde killed such innocent creatures" (Painter 382). In the play, she tells the perpetrators that they will be "damned perpetually" (4.2.231-232), speaking with conviction for a divine punishment on her murderers. She is willing to speak with conviction about the punishments that God will deliver, calling the perpetrators "villains, tyrants, murderers" (4.2.191-192). She may not have the same symbols attached to her death as the Duchess, but she speaks as God's messenger of judgement.

Cariola may not be the model Catholic throughout the play, however. While making her excuses to try to stave off death, Cariola states that “I am damned. I have not been at confession / This two years” (4.2.241-42). This line is important to consider, especially in light of her vocal condemnation of the use of religion as an excuse for the Duchess’s feigned pilgrimage. Is Cariola being hypocritical here? Based on the other excuses that she generates (that she is contracted to a gentleman, that she is quick with child, etc.), it seems that she is saying whatever comes into her head in an attempt to postpone her execution. The audience has not previously been made aware of anything that would indicate that any of these excuses are true. In her final moments, Webster makes her do exactly what she judged the Duchess for: use her religion as a tool to try to escape. This hypocrisy shows Cariola in a very human way. She is not transcendent like the Duchess in her death, but scrappy and resourceful. Cariola’s death has been dismissed as a simplistic conventional choice as “lower-class figures are shown to opt for the most convenient, pragmatic solutions to difficult circumstance” (Callaghan, “Theatre, Art, the Woman..” 138). Perhaps the expected pragmatism accounts for why her death scene has been so easily overlooked, but the effect of watching it should be considered. It is very upsetting to watch somebody struggle that much, and it is telling that the source’s maidservant does not put up the same fight. Webster made an active choice to give Cariola this death. Scholars such as Marcus have suggested that Cariola’s “death may be very human, but it scarcely inspires confidence in her judgement” (“The Duchess's Marriage in Contemporary Contexts” 107), but rather than dismissing Cariola’s death for its humanness, scholars should consider it as an example of a realistic response to the threat of death, resonating with the audience’s shock over the murder scene. While the Duchess’s death is transcendent, Cariola’s is easy to relate to, and emphasizes her will to live that is ruthlessly

ignored by Bosola. The Duchess has a brave ending, but Cariola fights against those trying to neutralize her until the bitter end.

The fact that she does indicate a desire for confession is still significant, despite her potential hypocrisy in using religion as an excuse. As William Kerrigan explains, “In the *Book of Common Prayer*, the formally outlined procedure for confession in the 1549 edition was entirely excised three years later, in the 1552 edition, with little (and rather ambiguous) explanation for the change. [...] In theory, the Anglican Church abandoned good works and confession as remnants of the corrupt Catholic past” (249). Cariola’s act of calling out for confession, even if it emphasizes her neglect of the sacrament, tags her as a figure of the old Church. Though many Catholic icons such as stained glass, monuments, etc., were destroyed during the Reformation, as Arthur Mariotti points out, “habits of mind and patterns of private devotion were harder to eradicate” (xiii).

The potentially Catholic religious identity that Webster has constructed for Cariola was emphasized in the 2014 Sam Wanamaker Playhouse production directed by Dominic Dromgoole, and the 2010 Greenwich production directed by Elizabeth Freestone, both of which featured a prominent cross as part of Cariola's costume. In these productions, she was literally marked as a religious figure, just as the text marks her based on her actions. Although the play is set in Italy, the largely-Protestant audience would not miss such commentary on their own ecclesiastical politics. The Duchess herself does not conform to Anglican religious practices (as demonstrated with her marriage), and so both Cariola and the Duchess can be read as religious outsiders, strengthening their relationship. Both can speak to the marginalized members of the early modern English audience, and through their support for one another, demonstrate religious tolerance. The Duchess and Cariola may have disagreements over religion (as demonstrated

through Cariola's comments on the Duchess's marriage and on the pilgrimage), but ideological difference does not negate their support for each other. They both find power through their religious practices and one another.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have explored Cariola in the context of Webster's play and of his time. She is not simply important for how she illuminates other characters. Investigating Cariola offers new avenues for considering the themes of the play. Looking more closely at Cariola allows for the play to be read as a more controversial piece as she undermines the dominant patriarchal, class and religious practices of early modern England.

The Duchess of Malfi was already controversial in Webster's time because of the mixing of classes through the marriage of the Duchess and Antonio, but Cariola's relationship with the Duchess is just as important as Antonio's. Webster's deviation from the source in his refashioning of its maidservant and his departure from the assumption that female servants are primarily driven by their sexuality positions Cariola as a unique specimen who is unswervingly loyal to the Duchess. She *chooses* to be loyal, which demonstrates her independence even while serving. Her service to the Duchess is based on reciprocated affection and serves not just as an example of cross-class female alliance, but also as a political tool as they work together to challenge the social order. She is not afraid to challenge the Duchess, but still serves with reciprocated love. Especially when compared to Bosola, who is betrayed by Ferdinand and betrays the Duchess in turn, Cariola highlights the idea that affection and loyalty between the classes is desirable.

Cariola gains power not only through defying the hierarchical order, but also through her Catholic devotion. Although the play's setting is unquestionably Catholic, the characters can be considered in terms of what the predominantly Protestant audience would have understood. Cariola is a respectable Catholic figure who allows for a positive view of Catholicism. Whereas England had outlawed Catholicism, Webster shows that not all Catholics are bad.

Despite being Catholic, Cariola offers a point of connection for audience members who do not fully support the Duchess's marriage but do not want to be associated with the Duchess's brothers. The fact that Cariola critiques the marriage but still supports the Duchess, and ultimately supports the marriage, allows her to be read as a model for audience members to emulate. Even if there is reluctance at first, Cariola is fully supportive of the Duchess's marriage. She is an inoffensive figure who voices concerns that the audience may have, but ultimately does no wrong. She is not a forgettable background figure, but rather offers a point of access for the audience.

Despite the points this paper has made, my research has barely scratched the surface of what could be said about Cariola. For example, within the play itself, much could be explored and discussed in relation to Cariola's erasure after her death. Bosola does not repent for killing her. Is this because of the manner in which she died, with Bosola forgetting about her due to the death's lack of transcendence? Or does he not want to remember her, seeing her as the Duchess's loyal and devoted servant, so different from himself? A different approach could be a more etymological and historical one. For example, where did Webster get the name "Cariola?" Considering the significance of names such as Ferdinand,⁸ could there be another layer behind her name? These are only two of many considerations that could, and should, be further examined.

Cariola should be considered further than even my own research has allowed. At the end of the play, Bosola laments that he had been "i'th' end/Neglected" (5.5.85). This line could also be applied to Cariola's absence in scholarship: she is a significant character worthy of attention.

⁸ See Leah Marcus's "Introduction," page 25-26 to *The Duchess of Malfi*. Marcus notes that Webster changes the name from the source material from "Carlo" to "Ferdinand," possibly in an attempt to relate his character with Ferdinand d'Aragona of Spain.

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