

Proposal for Senior Honors Thesis

HONS 497 Senior Honors Thesis Credits 3 (2 minimum required)

Directions: Please return signed proposal to the Honors Office at least one week prior to your scheduled meeting with the Honors Council. This proposal must be accepted by Honors Council the semester before presentation.

Student's Name: Samantha N. Snively

Primary Advisor: Dr. L. Monique Pittman

Secondary Advisor:

Thesis Title: "Subverting a Foucauldian Authority in Webster's _____"

Local phone:

Email:

Expected date of Graduation:

- I. Provide goals and a brief description of your project or research.

Arguably John Webster's most well-known play, _____ was first performed in 1613 or 1614 and published in 1623. Nineteenth-century critics lauded the works of John Webster as most closely approaching the standard of William Shakespeare's plays. Still staged today, _____ is one of the more popular examples of Jacobean revenge tragedy, or Senecan tragedy, and exhibits many of the characteristics typical of the genre: ghosts, revenge, torture and mutilation, and extensive carnage.

_____ is notable among its contemporaries for featuring a strong, independent female in the title role; and even more so because the Duchess resists classification into either one of the two roles typically assigned to women in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, that of the whore or the idealized, chaste woman.

_____ centers on the title character's choice to marry her steward Antonio against the wishes of her brothers, Duke Ferdinand and the Cardinal. When her brothers find out about her forbidden marriage, they begin a program of psychological torture and revenge that ends in her murder. The Duchess's waiting-woman Cariola experiences these mechanisms of torture alongside her mistress and

provides a crucial lower-class interpretive lens in counterpoint to the perspective of the aristocratic Duchess.

The methods that the Duchess's brothers use to torture and murder her align with the Elizabethan and Jacobean tradition of public execution as a spectacle to reinforce state power. The twentieth-century French theoretician Michel Foucault famously calls the use of theatrical and spectacular effects to support patriarchal power structures the "spectacle of the scaffold" in his book

. In the chapter of the same name, he explores this state appropriation of theatrical spectacle in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England and Continental Europe. Sixteenth-century public executions served not only as an example of the dangers of disobedience but also as displays of the absolute power of the monarch or state over the body and life of the victim. As Foucault says, public executions did not restore justice so much as they reactivated power.

Surprisingly, while Foucault has been actively applied to countless early modern texts, little has been done to read Webster's play through the informing lens of this crucial theoretician. Foucault's theories of the changing perception and treatment of madness, found in

allusions, and patterns in the text, as well as the rhythm and meter of the lines to amass a body of data to answer research questions. For example, close textual analysis of the Duchess's lines reveals that many of the metaphors she employs refer to luxury goods created by violent processes—diamonds, which are cut from their natural state; pearls which are prized from their oyster shell; cassia, a kind of cinnamon made by pressing the bark. Her frequent use of these metaphors indicates not only that she acknowledges the violence inherent in representations of power, but also signifies her imbrication with the violent, patriarchal state of her brothers, which limits the forms of her resistance to it.

I will also incorporate Elizabethan and Jacobean antitheatricality pamphlets into my examination of the subversive potential of theater. Using the _____ and _____ databases, I will access writings that Webster would have likely been familiar with, and identify responses to these attitudes addressed in Webster's play.

III. Explain in what sense your project is original, unique, or beyond normal senior expectations. How does it relate to current knowledge in the discipline?

Despite its uniqueness among Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedies for featuring a female tragic hero, _____ still receives comparatively little critical attention. The works of Shakespeare are still the primary focus of Renaissance scholars, and a comparison of the Modern Literature Association database citations of Shakespeare's revenge tragedies and Webster's two tragedies reveals the difference in critical focus. Shakespeare's most famous tragedy, _____, garners 5,098 entries in the MLA database; _____, his most Senecan tragedy, receives 552 entries. By comparison, _____ is featured in only 334 scholarly works.

However, _____ is arguably one of the more famous and studied of the non

as to be without a solid critical basis.

Much critical work on _____ has focused on the Duchess, her moral position, her transgressions and saintliness, and her position as victim. Some more recent scholars have focused on Julia, the other aristocratic figure in the play. However, little critical analysis has been devoted to the character of Cariola. Scholars who do mention her characterize her as a stock servant or choric figure, serving only to guide the audience's responses to the Duchess's actions and provide _____ (short moral sayings or judgments) at the close of scenes. Those critics who focus on her death give it a perfunctory analysis—immediately following the heroic and noble death of the Duchess, Cariola's much more human response is dismissed as "hysterical," foolish, and lacking an admirable nobility (Marcus, 2011). Cariola, a lower-class figure with only 57 lines in the entire 2,851-line play, is ignored both by the characters in the play and the majority of critics.

However, Cariola is significantly present for a number of critical scenes with the Duchess. An examination of the Duchess's resistance to her brothers' Foucauldian state should also include analysis of Cariola—yet this has not yet occurred. My project aims to provide one of the first readings of Cariola that considers her role in the play as vital to a radical questioning of the ontology of power and the roles of women within Webster's play.

The bachelor's degree in English does not require a capstone thesis or article; these larger papers are written within each class. However, even seminar papers written for 400-level classes are usually only 10-15 pages long. My completed paper will be 25-30 pages long, the length of a professional scholarly article, and will serve as a capstone project to my degree. Additionally, this project extends beyond normal senior expectations in its use of the _____ (EEBO) database. Just made available to Andrews students in summer 2012, and still a relatively uncommon database for college undergraduates to be using, the EEBO database allows users to access full-length scans of original texts from the early modern period.

This project is relevant to current concerns within the discipline both in its examination of structures of power within texts, a focus of study of the relatively recent school of New Historicism, and

Cunningham, Karen. "Renaissance Execution and Marlovian Elocution: The Drama of Death." 105.2 (1990): 209-222. JSTOR. 23 October 2011. Web.

Cunningham's article focuses on the extremely violent plays of Christopher Marlowe, and the ways executions are staged in those plays. Marlowe's stage executions, although they mirror Elizabethan and Jacobean methods of public execution, use the inherent deceptions of the stage to expose the theatricality of power. However, in the highly choreographed spectacle of public execution, the subject's body or words would not always cooperate. Although this article deals specifically with Marlovian drama, many of Cunningham's observations are appropriate to Webster's play as well. Her analysis provides another link between power and theatricality, specifically citing and relying on Foucault's theories in

Desmet, Christy. "'Neither Maid, Widow, nor Wife': Rhetoric of the Woman Controversy in i." . Ed. Dymphna Callaghan. New York: St. Martin's Press Inc., 2000. 46-60. Print.

Elizabethan and Jacobean drama is populated both with female characters of varying importance and misogynistic readings of those women. These readings were part of a larger discussion about the place and role of women during the Renaissance, here called the Renaissance Woman Controversy. Much of this controversy centered on the morality and legitimacy of female rule, and Desmet argues that the rhetoric launched against the Duchess's rule in the play mirrors the rhetoric used against real women in the Jacobean era. Desmet's essay examines the Duchess's dual role as political figure as well as wife and mother, and the crisis of identity that arises from these two contradictory selves. Her essay is a notable example of the applications of feminist criticism to modern discourse and concerns.

Ekeblad, Inga-Stina. "The 'Impure Art' of John Webster."

, 9.35 (1958): 253-267.

Henderson, Andrea. "Death on Stage, Death of the Stage: The Antitheatricity of *The Duchess of Malfi*." *Journal of American Studies*, 44.1 (2010): 61-79. Print. Ed. Dympna Callaghan. New York: St. Martin's Press Inc., 2000. 61-79. Print.

Henderson's reading of the play divides its characters into two realms, the aristocratic (Ferdinand and the Cardinal) and the bourgeoisie (the Duchess and Antonio) and bases her characterization on the groups' relationship to theatricality. The aristocratic figures rely on spectacles and show to assert their power, and also enforce their dramatics on other figures in the play. The bourgeoisie figures represent an emerging definition of identity, reacting against power and theatricality rather than participating in it. Henderson also discusses the play as an early indicator of the middle-class ideology beginning to permeate Jacobean culture, here defined by the division between the public and the private spheres. Henderson's essay, which was the inspiration for my own research, is indebted to Foucault's ideas of theatricality as power play.

Heywood, Thomas. *The English Traveller*. London: Printed by Nicholas Okes, 1612. . Web. 3 September 2012.

Heywood's pamphlet is an example of the antitheatricity pamphlets in circulation during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. In his pamphlet Heywood makes the case for the dignity and respectability of actors, as well as the morality of the theater. His overarching argument is for the theater as expositor of vice and corruption and moral example to the many who view it. Heywood also cites the value ancient Greek and Roman society placed on the theater as a point in its favor, and points out that neither Christ nor Paul denounced the theaters, although they were in operation during their lifetimes. Heywood's arguments for theater as a medium to expose, examine, or extol human actions, particularly those of figures in power, illustrate Jacobean dramatists' consciousness of the power of their medium. Additionally, one of the dedicatory poems prefacing the play was written by John Webster, indicating Webster's familiarity with Heywood's arguments and the larger antitheatricity debate.

Hutson, Lorna. "Rethinking the 'Spectacle of the Scaffold': Juridical Epistemologies and English Revenge Tragedy." *Journal of American Studies*, 39.1 (2005): 30-58. JSTOR. 17 October 2011. Web.

Hutson, acknowledging the prevalence of the Foucauldian model in recent English Renaissance tragedy,

Jankowski, Theodora A. "Defining/Confining the Duchess: Negotiating the Female Body in John Webster's ."
 . Ed. Dympna Callaghan. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 2000. 80-103. Print.

The Duchess of Webster's play inhabits two worlds: that of political figure and, after Act I, that of devoted wife. As a female ruler and one who married below her class, the Duchess draws criticism in both spheres of her life, criticisms paralleling those levelled at female rulers and women in general who desired a level of autonomy. The Duchess chooses to keep her political and private life separate, retaining an unusual level of agency that, within

Whigham, Frank. "Sexual and Social Mobility in The Duchess of Malfi." , 100.2 (1985): 167-

Department Chair Approval

- This student's performance in his/her major field is acceptable.
-