



Duchess of Malfi: Deconstructing the play

The Duchess of Malfi

Duchess

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.

Commentator

This is the first published text of *The Duchess of Malfi*, printed in 1623, around ten years after the play was first performed. Like other early modern plays, *The Duchess* has few stage directions. This film looks at the way Webster's language and the physical text itself yield insights into what he was aiming for in the performance of his play and how directors since have interpreted his words in bringing the play to the stage. Even the title page reveals something about how the play was originally performed.

Kate Aughterson

'The Tragedy of the Dutchesse of Malfy', it says, 'As it was presented privately, at the Black-Friers; and publicly at the Globe, By the Kings Majesties Servants. The perfect and exact Cobby, with diverse things. Printed, that the length of the Play would not beare in the Presentment'. So what this tells us is that the book, that was published in 1623, has extra bits in it. It's not the script that was performed as it happens, probably at least a third longer. So any individual director, any individual company can decide which bits they're going to cut. And they did. The text that we have is merely an outline in a way.