

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/cognition.v5i1.55403>**THE SPIRITUAL ANGUISH IN JOHN WEBSTER'S *THE DUCHESS OF MALFI***Dr. Dipesh Neupane¹**Abstract:**

This paper attempts to explore the fusion between the mundane world and the world of spirituality and religiosity in the play- The Duchess of Malfi. It shows how two worlds are inseparable and how their integrity is inevitable in human life. Whatever mundane and material life people live, they ultimately seek the blessings from the supreme divine to attain the peace and bliss. Since death is the ultimate destination life, ultimately people idealize it as the gate to enter into the world of eternity. This study attempts to answer the questions: why and how do people of the mundane world surrender to the supreme divinity ultimately? and what circumstances lead people to utter the name of heavenly abode? This paper conceptualizes the theoretical frameworks of spiritualism to invigorate the study in the play. The contrast and the fusion between Materialism and Spiritualism are remarkable aspects of this study. The life of the duchess of Malfi and her tragic end with her spiritual anguish echo the value of the amalgamation between the spiritual life and the material visions. It is difficult for human beings to escape from spiritual outpourings at the time of sufferings, hardships and even the tragic end i.e. death. Therefore, human life becomes complete, meaningful and worth living only through the combination of both notions. Life lived in isolation from spiritual notions does not become saucy and juicy.. The supremacy of the spiritual over the physical, of the soul over the body is asserted in this study to make people conscious of his spiritual superiority in life.

Key words: divine, eternity, intangible, materialism, mundane, religiosity, spirituality, transcendental

The Spiritual

The spiritual is an aesthetic beauty of literature. It is a broad phenomena formed by transcendental image of linguistic symbols. It connotes to upper level of consciousness which cannot be observed tangibly and connects to virtual picture of existence. Historically speaking, spirituality dates back to biblical references and attempts to define spirituality in different ways. Spirituality has occupied a distinctive space in many literary texts all over the world. Theological references from different religious scriptures like the Bible, the Koran, the Veda etc. have impressively been presented in many literary genres of different ages. Spirituality and literary studies have parallel association based on knowledge, faith, reason and existence. The depiction of spirituality in literature has often been on a striking note. It is all about the strong connection that one develops with one's inner self or spirit. Kamal Sharma writes:

The Journey within begins when people start contemplating about the real purpose of their existence. The contemplation of longing to know the real purpose of life starts in the process of sitting with mindfulness- meditation which transcends the survival purpose of life. It leads to spirituality, the ability to talk to oneself or the heart- the inner calling, leads humans towards the perception of Divine within oneself, treasure within oneself and happiness within oneself. (10)

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Writers like Shakespeare in his *Hamlet* Milton in his *Paradise Lost*, Hopkins in his *God's Grandeur*, T.S Eliot in his *The Waste Land*, W.B. Yeats in his *Purgatory* etc. connote spiritual references strikingly. Writers like Leo Tolstoy, Rabindranath Tagore, Rudyard Kipling etc. employ spirituality and religious teachings and preaching in their stories and novels to uplift spiritual values as morals. R. K. Narayan's *The guide* and Robin Sharma's *The Monk Who sold His Ferraro* are the stories spiritual traces where protagonists find pleasure an happiness rooted in spiritual quest along with their own destiny. Pantheism becomes a crucial part in many romantic poets like Wordsworth, Keats, Shelly etc. Among romantic poets, Wordsworth regard nature as the manifestation of God's power and spirituality. S.T. Coleridge in most of his poems employ supernatural, mystical or spiritual references in his poems. It shows that spiritual or religious references have become the inherent sources in many literary works of the authors. Apart from religious and spiritual Gurus, some writers like W.B. Yeats, Shakespeare, Rudyard Kipling talk about body and soul inseparable part of human existence.

Though we may be well-educated and mature persons, it may not be true that we have a correct understanding of what man is in relation to what we hear of as a soul. With all our age and experience and learning, we cannot escape the childish notion into which we have been born that the soul is something that is residing in this body. This notion really lays an impression upon many writers of English literature. Swami Krishnananda writes:

Now, does such a thing called the soul exist, or does it not exist? If we feel that there is a soul independent of the body and yet existing within the body, illuminating, vitalizing, energizing this body which we sometimes mistake for what we really are—if this is our understanding of a so-called existence called a 'soul' and a mystery called 'man', then we would not be able to answer this great query that is raised by the very theme of the discussion. What is happening to man today, and what he is today, is perhaps a necessary background on which we have to base our further considerations in the direction of a solution to this great question: Is man searching for a soul, or is he searching for anything at all? ("Modern Man...")

In Today's modern world, men have become accustomed to believe the great ideology that a machine is an indispensable appurtenance of human life. Nothing can be done without the assistance of a machine. This shows the subsidiary character of man in comparison with the gigantic operative mechanisms that he has considered necessary not only for his satisfaction, but even for his existence. He manufactures arms, not perhaps obviously for an immediate satisfaction, but for a security in regard to his own existence. Even his existence is controlled by a machine. He cannot be sure that he will be here for a few minutes unless a machine operates around him; and a machine need not necessarily be a typewriter, a printing machine, a motorcar or an airplane. Modern men have lost their faith in god and spirit due to utter materialism in this mundane world. They are immersed in commercial activities forgetting the spiritual and religious notions. G.M. Hopkins views:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil:
It gathers to greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do min then now not reck his rod ?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod. (1-8)

Hopkins laments over the loss of spiritual faith in the modern world due to grim materialism in which modern men are blindly and recklessly entangled. The soil connotes the earth which has been made naked due to massive deforestation. The poet refers to the encroachment of nature in which God exists. Nature which reveals the magnificence and glory of God is the part and part of living beings on this earth. Hopkins expresses the spiritual anguish in the modern world due to human entanglements in material world. The poem reflects the spiritual decay in the mundane world.

Voices of Spiritual superiority

The Duchess of Malfi is a young widow whose two brothers, a cardinal and Ferdinand, the duke of Calabria, are desperately anxious because she might marry again against the norms and values of their society. Ferdinand even warns her not to marry anybody bringing the disgrace to the family:

Ferdinand: You are my sister: This was my father's poniard, do you see? I'd be loth to see it look rusty, cause't was his, I would have you give over these chargeable revels: A visor and a mask are whispering rooms. That were never built for goodness; farewell; What cannot a neat knave with a smooth tale. Make a woman believe? Farewell lusty widow.(116)

But the duchess revolts against the warning rendered to her and decides to marry. She does not care what others say against her. She revolts against the patriarchal domination speaking in favor of her female rights: "Duch: Why might not I marry? I have not gone about in this to create any new world or custom (166)." She falls in love with her steward, Antonio, and marries him secretly. Later, she secretly bears a son. When the happy father writes out the child's horoscope according to the rules of astrology and then loses the paper. Bosola finds the document and learns about the child. He dispatches a letter immediately to Rome to inform the brothers. The duke swears that only her blood can quench his anger, and he threatens that once he knows the identity of the duchess's lover, he will ruin her completely. The years pass and the duchess bears Antonio two more children, a second son and a daughter. Antonio tells his friend Delio that he is worried because Duke Ferdinand is too quiet about the matter and because the people of Malfi, not aware of their duchess's marriage, are calling her a common strumpet.

Duke Ferdinand comes to the court to propose Count Malatesta as a second husband for the duchess. She refuses. Bosola is not able to discover the father of the duchess's children. Impatient with his informer, the duke decides on a bolder course of action. He determines to gain entrance to the duchess's private chamber and there to wring a confession from her. That night, using a key Bosola gives him, the duke goes to her bedroom. Under his threats, she confesses to her second marriage, but she refuses to reveal Antonio's name. After the duke leaves, she calls Antonio and her loyal servant Cariola to her chamber. They plan Antonio's escape from Malfi before his identity can become known to the duchess's brothers.

As soon as Bosola leaves, she recalls Antonio and tells him of the feigned crime of which she accused him to shield both their honors, and then bids him flee to the town of Ancona, where they will meet later. Antonio realizes that their departure is the wish of God from the heaven: "Antonio: You counsel safely/Best of my life, farewell, since, we must part;/ Heaven hath a hand in it; but no otherwise/ Than as some curious artist takes in sunder...(188)". The moment of her departure with Antonio becomes very painful for her. She curses her fate surrendering to God again:

Duch: Must I, like to a slave born Russian,
Account it praie to suffer tyranny?
And yet, O heaven, thy heavy hand is in it!
I have seen my little boy oft scourage his top,
And compared myself to it naught made me ever
Go right but heaven is scourage stick.(190)

When the duped Bosola upholds Antonio in an argument with the duchess, she feels she can trust him with the secret of her marriage and asks him to take jewels and money to her husband at Ancona. Bosola, in return, advises her to make her own departure from the court more seemly by going to Ancona by way of the shrine of Loretto, so that the flight might look like a religious pilgrimage.

Bosola immediately travels to Rome, where he betrays the plans of Antonio and the duchess to Duke Ferdinand and the cardinal. They thereupon promptly have the lovers banished from Ancona. Bosola meets the duchess and Antonio near Loretto with a letter from Duke Ferdinand that orders Antonio to report to him, since he now knows Antonio to be his sister's husband. Antonio refuses and flees with his older son toward Milan. Bosola takes the duchess back to her palace at Malfi as Duke Ferdinand's prisoner. At Malfi, the duke again visits her in her chamber. He presents her with a dead man's hand, implying that it is from Antonio's corpse. She is horrified to see it. She is also shown the wax figures of Antonio and her children appearing as if they were dead. Then, Bosola asks the Duchess to prepare for death. The executioners appear with coffin, Cords and a bell. Bosola tells the Duchess that she will die by strangling. She welcomes death and offers herself to be strangled:

Duchess: Not 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 exit and it is found
 They go on such strange geometrical hinges
 You may open them both easy and way, for heaven sake
 So I were out of your whispering. Tell my brothers
 That I perceive death now I am well awake,.... (214)

She utters her heartfelt agony accepting her death. She is ready to be killed any way they like. Like Socrates, a great Greek philosopher, who faced death daringly and fearlessly, she gets ready to confront her terrible fate. She idealizes death having ten thousand several doors. She states that these doors have hinges of strange shapes making better position ahead. She envisions the life of eternity with as many options as possible after her death. Such spiritual notion really is worth noticing in the play. She pleads the executioner to kill her faster for God's sake uttering her spiritual anguish ultimately before facing the tragic fate:

Pull and pull strongly, for your able strength
 Must pull down heaven upon me
 Yet, stay, Heaven gates are not so highly arched
 As princes palaces; they that enter there
 Must go upon their kness- come, violent death
 Serve for mandragora to make sleep !
 Go tell my brothers, when I am laid out ,
 They then may feed in quiet. (214)

She bursts out her satirical words saying that gates of Heaven are not so high as the gates of the palaces of princes. She welcomes her violent death invoking God and heavenly bliss and peace. She even tells the executioner to report her brothers about her death so that they will take their food in peace. Throughout her life she lives a life of material gains and sensual pleasures ignoring the spiritual life. But ultimately, at the mouth of death, she surrenders to heavenly abode invoking supreme divine. She is overcome by her spiritual awakening at the final stage of her life. Her spiritual anguish refers to the victory of spiritual outpourings over material and sensual life. Though her

brothers- Ferdinand and Cardinal are the representatives of religious organization- Roman Catholic Church, they live immoral lives. They are spiritually dead as they do not realize their corrupt mind and unethical behaviors.

Conclusion

The material or mundane life is incomplete itself. Modern people are entangled in material gains and profits blindly. They have apathetic attitude towards religiosity and spirituality. They have lost their faith in God and spiritual life in the name of modernism and materialism. Due to the scientific advancements and inventions, human beings have become the slaves of machines and tools overlooking the spiritual and religious notions. Scientific advancements have made human lives easier and more comfortable than before but they have not been able to weed out human sufferings and trauma. Men have not achieved ultimate peace and bliss through material gains. Ultimately they seek the help of intangible, abstract superiority which we call God or the divine soul. Human life becomes complete, beautiful and contentious only through the combination of both material and spiritual visions. Though people wallow in the pool of mundane world throughout their life, they are compelled to utter the supreme divinity or even surrender to it before facing any mishaps or causalities as in the tragic play- *The Duchess of Malfi*. The conduct of the Duchess at the moment of death is convincing depiction of the glory, dignity, beauty and greatness of the spiritual.

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