***CORRUPTION IN THE WHITE DEVIL AND WIFE OF BATH***

* In both texts, what it means to be noble is reconstructed
* When Brachiano chooses to divorce Isabella, figuratively he is completing his divorcement from the traditional and moral world that Isabella represents
* Whoredom is a key metaphor of the play. It is an extended metaphor, not limited to sexuality, but one that includes all of the obsessed characters who prostitute their human traits to animal instincts. Ultimate they prostitute reality
* Webster’s first act is set indoors, reflecting his interest in people’s inner lives and of appearance vs reality
* nobody can be trusted, regardless of social position or familial relationship – from Pope to maid, sister to brother

**RELIGIOUS POWER IS CORRUPT**

* The Knight’s rape demonstrates that is not only those in positions of religious power that can engage in corrupt behaviour. Both authors explore power in a way that suggests its unerring ability to corrupt.
* To a medieval, Christian audience, the Wife would be seen as a morally-lacking figure as she had broken the rules of the Catholic Church by marring more than once.
* she is shown to have misinterpreted the teachings of the Bible, teachings which would have been familiar with a Christian audience.
* To further highlight the corruption of those in power, the Wife attempts to justify her five marriages through referring to Solomon.
* The corruption of the religious figures of the Pardoner and the Summoner is also indicative of the corruptive influence of power. The overall image of religious authorities is one of corrupt men intent of perpetuating patriarchy.
* Flamieno breaks of the crucifix his mother, Cornelia, wears as a necklace. The crucifix, a tangible symbol of Christianity, once was broken by Flamineo when a suckling babe. Now it is mended. But like the value system it symbolizes, it is not strong enough to stem the rampant flow of evil and sin engulfing the court.
* Monticelso, the cardinal (bishop), becomes Vittoria’s accuser in court; we have a blurring between the legal court and religion
* The Pope, on his deathbed, pardons Lodovico for his charges of murder, showing corrupton as he’s pardoned a murderer
* Monticelso becomes the next pope yet he is urging Francisco to revenge his sister, Isabella’s, death.
* corrupt nature of the two most powerful characters in the play: Monticelso and Francisco. As they represent the ecclesiastical and state powers in Italy
* The murders at the end of the play are dressed as 'capuchins' (monks) and so sin is directly linked to the church
* Cornelia was the Christian figure before and then she hits Zanche, showing the corruption within religion

**MARRIAGE IS CORRUPT**

* The Wife does not marry her first 4 husbands for love but because she is able to have maistrie over them. Brachiano and Vittoria do not marry their original spouses for love but rather for the furtherance of power and the influence of their families. Even marriage is corrupt
* She states women’s best qualities – deceit, weeping and spinning
* Sex not only secures money and land for the Wife of Bath, it also gives her power. The Wife explains that when she wanted something from her husband she would refuse to give him sex. By withholding sex, the Wife ensures that they will give her payment, whenever she wants it – Marriage is corrupted from it’s original Christian purpose of love
* The wife notes Biblical examples for polygamy such as with Abraham and Jacob and Solomon (who had 700 wives) – even in religion marriage is corrupt and goes again thou shall not commit adultery
* Isabella speaks about Brachiano’s affair as a “slight wrong” showing that in that society adultery was commonplace
* Not commiting Adultery was one of the 10 commandments

**POLITICS IS CORRUPT**

* Brachiano's "close pandarisme" is actually known, and Lodovico's past murders are common knowledge. But traditional moral standards have become so debased that open sin and immorality are accepted ways of life. Morally, the court is rotten to the core
* Brachiano is the one in power who set the barometer where everyone is meant to be behaving and yet he is deceitful, his influence will enforce corruption.
* The disparity between appearance and reality is accentuated by both the action and language of the play. In the opening scene, the sympathetic commiseration of Antonelli and Gasparo should console lodovico, but does not. Deceit and flattery are endemic in the court to such a degree that Lodovico assumes their words are only "painted comforts"
* Self-deception is frequent; this motif also begins in the opening scene, when lodovico deludes himself into believing that he is sheep-like. The sheep image is usually applied to meek, innocent, and sacrificial characters, and this certainly is not Lodovico
* In The White Devil, reiterated animal imagery illustrates the predatory nature of the world of the play. The dominant animal images are of wolves and dogs - Almost two-thirds of the animal images (i.e. 21 of 34) pertain to these animals. A detailed evaluation of the wolf and dog imagery points to the complete depravity of the leading court figures who live totally for self. Lodovico attributes “great men” to wolves - his bitterness is directed toward the entire court where political justice is meted out by dual standards; one law for the high, another for the low. Brachiano calls Vittoria a wolf that’s leading him to ruin in act 4; If Vittoria is a wolf leading him to ruin, Brachiano is the hunter stalking her (this inappropriate analogy typifies the play's animalistic characters who are quick to censure animality in others, but fail to recognize their own bestiality.) The many wolves of the play are all typified by Lodovico's initial image; they do not seem to be wolves at all, if their voracious appetites for vengeance, lust, or power are temporarily satiated.
* The use of animal and naturalistic imagery represents debasement from the human and rational to the baser instincts and desires.
* Brachiano and Francisco, the men of highest political rank, and Monticelso, an "eminent" prelate (high in church), expend tremendous energy to achieve and to maintain their positions. Self-assertion dominates their actions
* Giovanni's prediction that guilty men will fall implies courtly punishment for Francisco. However, one may infer from Giovanni's threat of retaliation that powerful factions in the court will continue to bring fear, apprehension, and disorder so long as the prostitution of morality continues.
* There are over a hundred example of animal imagery and this represents a systematic process of human degradation.
* The crime is committed by a knight – highlighting the corruption of those higher up.
* Is corruption linked with poverty?
* Brachiano’s last deed before he died is to pardon a murderer
* Lodovico only feels that their killing of Brachiano was justified when Zanche tells him that Brachiano was involved in the murders – meaning before they were just revenging him on suspicion and weren’t motivated for justice but for revenge
* Flamineo is so power-hungry that he believes Giovianni should be pleased his father is dead as now he can have power
* Giovianni then orders Lodovico to be taken to prison and tortured – he will ‘torture’ to ensure ‘justice’ but by referring to torture it seems more like personal revenge, will he be as corrupt as his father and uncle?
* The audience is now aware that the power now lies with Francisco (as Giovianni is a minor) and Monticelso in religious power (he’s already seen to be corrupt) there is no hope left.

Do the evil characters have positive qualities? Flamineo shows loyalty to his sister when she is called a whore and he quarrels with and eventually kills Marcello as a result of Marcello’s insults towards Zanche. Francisco shows love for his sister, Isabella. Lodovico is driven by his unreciprocated love for Isabella. Brachiano expresses love for Vittoria. Zanche is loyal to Vittoria at the end. The Knight listens to the queen and does what she asks. The Wife gives Jankin freedom as long as she has control.

Context:

* Webster’s other play ‘the Duchess of Malfi’ is a kind of twin of the white devil. Both plays contain pictures of the corrupt courts of princes. The hints of sexual attraction between Flamineo and his sister develop into Ferdinand’s incestuous desire for the Duchess. Flamineo’s obsession with economic deficiency closely parallels that of Bosola.
* Protestant Worship had only finally been secured for England on Elizabeth I’s succession, just 53 years before the white devil was written and with James I coming in, Catholics felt more optimistic of tolerance while Protestants felt threatened.
* The English Reformation, started by Henry VIII in the mid-sixteenth century and formalised under Elizabeth’s reign, had severed all connections with the Catholic Church. Catholicism had become synonymous in Jacobean England with intrigue and corruption, underhand political deals and deceit.
* “a politician imitates the devil” (Flamineo)

David Cecil – “suffering outweighs happiness and all activities are trained with sin” “evil is the controlling force, and good is inevitably quietest”

Chaucer believed “the best clerks do not make the wisest men”

Karen Alkalay-Gut – “Alison is both intelligent and morally corrupt”