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

CONTEXT:

* With the White Devil, The English Reformation had severed all connections with the Catholic Church
* Webster was no stranger to the extra-marital sex that appears in his works. His first child was born only two months after his marriage to Sara Peniall in 1606

THE WHITE DEVIL

* There’s a contrast between repentance being a Christian ethos yet the play is a REVENGE tragedy – revenge is the opposite of repentance
* Jealousy is common; Alison reports on her husband’s jealousy, Brachiano is jealous of Vittoria
* Marcello speaks 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.
* Flamineo also repeats the word "church" frequently in his speeches. Isolated, these iterations of "church" may seem to be merely descriptive, but in total context they amplify the chain of recurring religious words.
* Once during Vittoria's trial, Monticelso swears in exasperation: "0 for God sake”. The presence of a swearing Cardinal indicates the complete overthrawal of religion as a meaningful force in the court. Religion is meaningless to most of the characters it consists only of pomp, ceremony and pretence.
* Cornelia asks whether poverty makes a person corrupt; she is voicing the traditional Christian view
* Cornelia was the Christian figure before but then she hits Zanche, showing the corruption within religion
* Modern audience’s would be more forgiving of Vittoria because, even though adultery is seen as bad, it is not as bad as Webster’s time as we are generally less religious.
* The “goodly yew” of Vittoria’s dream links to the temptation represented by the “fair tree” in the Garden of Eden. Flamineo’s references to the devil recall the original temptation story and Flamineo’s metaphor of “the subtle foldings of a winter snake” can be linked to the “circular base of rising folds” that Satan as a snake is described as.
* Flamineo, as a baby, broke off part of his crucifix, suggesting an innate evil. The value system it symbolises isn’t strong enough to stem the rampant flow of evil and sin engulfing the court
* Christian virtues – FORGIVENESS (Isabella forgives Brachiano), CHASTITY (men wanted to ensure this so that only their true heirs would inherit their estates), POVERTY (poverty should not lead to immorality), REPENTANCE (Monticelso somewhat repents his actions; when he’s promoted to Pope he tries to stop Lodovico ensuing revenge and reminds him that God’s judgment will lead him to go to hell)

THE WIFE OF BATH:

* The Wife undermines herself when she attempts to quote the Bible saying that “the wife have control over her husbands body, and not her own” without mentioning the subsequent reverse that “the husband have control over his wife’s body, and not his own”, an absence that Chaucer’s courtly audience would have certainly have noticed, and thereby subjecting the wife’s arguments to ridicule.
* 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.
* There are friars around, whose Christianity, the Wife says, has driven the fairies and magic out. She says friars will seduce women.
* 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.
* Friars were supposed to embody the idea that poverty is better than richness as it made it easier to concentrate on life and God, yet the friar is shown to enjoy materialistic pleasures.

“religion; o how it is commeddled with policy” (Flamineo)

CHAUCER - the Bible “is a text wherein we find that woman is the ruin of mankind”

JAMES WINNY – Claims that the Wife “has overthrown the prohibitive morality of the f ff medieval church and planted her own pragmatic doctrine on the ruins”

CONTEXT:

* 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.