

The Duchess of Malfi Literary Devices

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Figures of Speech:

Symbol

The Fountain: The court is compared to a fountain. Antonio says, Pure water should flow from the court or palace, but if poison is added from above, it spreads throughout the fountain(country). Similarly, justice is established throughout society by a just ruler. This symbol shows how corruption in rulers ruins the whole society.

Darkness and Light: Darkness appears many times in the play. Secret meetings and cruel deeds happen in the dark. Light is linked with truth and hope, while darkness is linked with lies, death, and fear. The Duchess's suffering often happens in darkness, symbolizing evil and secrecy.

The Dead Hand and Wax Figures: Ferdinand gives the Duchess a dead man's hand and shows her fake bodies of Antonio and their children. These objects symbolize death, horror, and trickery. They show the cruelty and madness of her brothers, and the Duchess's loss of all hope.

Birds and Cages: The Duchess and Cariola talk about birds trapped in cages. This symbol means longing for freedom but being trapped by power. The Duchess, like a bird, is caged by her brothers' control. It shows her wish to escape and live freely.

Irony: Irony is used often in the play: Ferdinand says he comes to make peace but really brings death. The Cardinal is a religious leader but behaves in evil ways. Bosola is hired as a spy and murderer, then feels guilty and tries to do good.

Metaphor: Metaphor compares things directly. Here, the court is called "**a fountain,**" where bad leaders poison everyone. Ambition is "a great man's madness," meaning ambition makes people behave wildly. Life is called "a tedious theatre," as the Duchess feels life is just acting out pain