

The Duchess of Malfi **Director's Statement**

The basics of the plot is the family Karma :

'The Duke of Malfi' the patriarch and father of the Cardinal, Ferdinand and the Duchess built an incredible empire. He was a man apparently without emotions and little care or respect for humanity or feelings. He built up his wealth by retaining a grasp of iron over his children and business and through a harsh use of authority and power. He was a respected international captain of industry and though his business activities were vast and not always legally transparent - he was not a Mafia boss. His oldest son 'the Cardinal', showed himself from a young age to be ruthless. 'The Cardinal' was obsessed with pleasing and emulating his father's success and would often turn to criminality and cruelty to achieve his aims. His father was repeatedly left with the unpleasant and embarrassing problem of having to 'clean up' his eldest son's mistakes.

Alternatively with his daughter, 'the Duchess of Malfi', who bears a striking resemblance to her mother, the father has enjoyed a fissional relationship. Did the father abuse her? We don't know for sure but there are some strong suspicions cast.

On the other hand, it is apparent that the father despised his youngest son, Ferdinand, who he holds responsible for the death of his beloved wife; and who died whilst giving birth to Ferdinand. This rejection and guilt has caused Ferdinand to develop into a very psychologically and emotionally troubled man. The only solace he ever felt was in the presence of his sister, with whom he is obsessed.

In his diminishing years, the father is forced to tackle the issue of which of his three children should inherit the family empire. He doesn't want to hand power over to either of his sons because he knows that the eldest is criminally ruthless; or to the youngest, Ferdinand, who is psychologically too damaged. He believes that his daughter could carry on the family legacy; however, he is determined to ensure that she will continue to be controlled, as she has been throughout her life by him, and monitored after his death by his 'Council'. Therefore, the father establishes a surveillance system which will be overseen by a faceless 'Council' and hands the control over the family business to 'the Duchess'. In due course, if his two other sons prove to the 'Council' that their evolution is satisfactory, they will be entitled to a share of the power.

The 'Council' hires Antonio, a young talented journalist, to provide them with constant audiovisual reports about the life of the three 'Malfi' children. This constant intrusion infuriates the 'Malfi' brothers and fuels their determination to swiftly conclude their objectives: for the Cardinal, the securing of absolute control over the family's estate; and for Ferdinand - the attainment of unrivalled possession of his twin sister.

Bosola, who was previously 'the Cardinal's' henchman and as a result of his criminal activities ended up in jail for a crime which 'the Cardinal' and not he committed, is now in service to Ferdinand and instrumental to the realising of his boss' sick and murderous fantasies.

Some brief comments about the characters :

- The Duchess: is both pure and perverse. Was she abused by her father? Is she in love with her brother, Ferdinand? Does she believe that she deserves to suffer and so seeks this subconsciously?
- Antonio: like the Duchess has a duality at the heart of his character and is both hero and cruel 'voyeur'.
- The Cardinal: has a religiosity about his manner and yet is the personification of evil.
- Ferdinand: is 'the poor fool' who wasn't loved by his parents and has become a monster.
- Bosola: has been mistreated all of his life; firstly, by his mother and subsequently by the men that he has served. He serves evil because life has never offered him any evidence that goodness actually exists. Bosola is his own worst enemy but he does evolve and eventually finds the courage to 'do the right thing' and destroy evil and so 'kills them all'.

The structure:

• Opening:

- A sequence of shots: will reveal a night chase ending with a monstrous killing.
- A man is being chased in a gloomy post-industrial environment;
- we discover who's chasing him: it's Bosola;
- But it appears that Bosola is only 'the beater' of the hunt.
- There is a warehouse with an open door in which the man seeks refuge.
- He succeeds in locking the door and in keeping out what has been chasing him.
- Inside the warehouse, from behind him, we hear somebody clearing his throat...

• Morning light:

- We follow a rusty chain emerging from an old wall and stretching out into the middle of the room. Suddenly a hand appears. The chain weaves itself round an imprisoned arm...
- A plain shot of the entire warehouse: reveals a horrific vision of two long chains which cross the middle to form an « X ». They run along the arms and legs of the naked victim and meet in his open stomach. The man's guts are hanging out and appear to have been partly eaten away.

• The party, end of the day, the establisher:

- A huge castle lost on top of a hill and in the middle of a forest.
- An opulent party is taking place and during it all the main characters and the relationships existing between them will be established. There is a series of sequence shots from both outside and within the castle, from room to room, and inside to the gardens.
- As the guests leave, the thickening fog is all consuming but the night is crowned by a remarkable full moon. The various ways out of the castle are lit by fire. From above, the castle will look like a huge spider in the centre of a vast web of fire.

- **Birth & death:**

- the death of the boy, the birth of the girl;
- a delirious Duchess has a 'flash-back' which reveals her own family karma and her relationships with her father and brother Ferdinand

- **The Cardinal and Julia:**

- Another castle, a little smaller and of a construction which fuses ancient architecture with modernity and reflects the Cardinal's personality. It is the Cardinal's home and a modern construct of steel and glass which is embedded within the stone walls of a medieval castle;
- Julia, who is having a rather 'extreme sexual affair' with the Cardinal, tells him that she suspects the Duchess of having an affair.

- **The Cardinal uses Ferdinand's obsession with his sister and animalistic rage to turn his siblings on each other:**

- Another castle/mansion in the middle of the woods, which is reflective of Ferdinand's animal and organic life style. He lives surrounded by dogs and wolves. Ferdinand is the chief of this pack of animals; he is a hunter like them and everywhere there are heads and bodies of stuffed animals.
- Ferdinand becomes deranged at the thought of his sister having sexual relations with another man.
- Ferdinand gives Bosola orders, in the presence of the Cardinal, to spy on the Duchess and to report directly to him.

- **Bosola finds evidence that the Duchess has bore a child and reports to Ferdinand**

- On hearing this news, the extent of Ferdinand's disturbed mind and mental sickness becomes fully evident :
- In a terrible scene between Ferdinand and his wolves, which will be undercut with flashbacks to reveal his relationship with his father and sister and making difficult for the audience to identify what is past and present, Ferdinand will kill one of his wolves.
- Charged with clarity brought about by this titan clash and formidable killing, Ferdinand decides to go after his sister who he feels has betrayed him.

- **Ferdinand arrives at the Duchess' Castle and Antonio is sent into hiding, with the child, by the Duchess.**

- **The chase up to the cliffs:**

- This will be a battle of man against a harsh and inhospitable environment. Firstly, it will involve Antonio escaping with his child, followed by the Duchess ; and subsequently,
- Show Antonio fleeing with the child, down the cliffs, towards an awaiting sailing ship; whilst the Duchess climbs the cliffs once more to face Bosola and stop the henchmen from reaching Antonio and her child.

- **The martyrdom of the Duchess:**

- She is captured and imprisoned in a cock-pit-like warehouse; where she receives three visitors who each determine her fate.
- the Cardinal - whose intention is to get rid of his sister as she represents the only serious obstacle to his taking over of complete power;
- Bosola - who is both her tormentor and eventual avenger; and from
- Ferdinand - who is her brother and 'wronged' suitor.
- Bosola kills the Duchess and then during a confrontation with Ferdinand repents his deeds and the way in which he has lived his life.

- **Bosola changes sides but everything goes wrong:**

- He confronts the Cardinal but this yields no results;
- Julia, who is also Bosola's lover, is killed by the Cardinal;
- The Cardinal visits Ferdinand, who he has had 'sectioned' in a somewhat medieval looking asylum ;
- Bosola decides to kill the Cardinal and from hiding, awaits his return ;
- Antonio returns to confront the Cardinal and Bosola kills him by mistake;
- The Cardinal emerges and Bosola stabs him;
- Ferdinand escaped the asylum and sets fire to the Cardinal's Castle and finally kills the Cardinal;
- Bosola escapes dragging the mortally wounded Antonio way from the, which consumes Ferdinand and the Cardinal's home.
- Antonio dies without having succeeded in securing Bosola's promise that we will not kill his child.
- Bosola walks away into the unknown, accompanied and tortured by the ghosts and deeds of the past.

- **Epilogue and Final Credit Sequence:**

- From hiding Bosola, watches the Duchess' and Antonio's little girl playing with Ferdinand's wolf. Bosola's devoid of emotion manner is puzzling and will cause the audience to wonder whether he is looking for an opportunity to kill the child; or whether his repentance is honestly felt and he will walk away, with only his troubled thoughts and guilt for company, and leave history to repeat itself all over again...