# Towers and Tapers: Materialist Legacies in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*

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## Introduction

In his 1613 poem, *A Monumental Columne*, dedicated to the recently deceased Henry, Prince of Wales, Jacobean dramatist John Webster meditates on the transitory nature of earthly greatness:

> O Greatnesse! what shall we compare thee to?
> To Giants, beasts, or Towers fram'd out of Snow,
> Or like wax-guilded Tapers, more for show
> Then durance? Thy foundation doth betray
> Thy frailty, being builded on such clay.
> This shewes the al-controuling power of Fate,
> That all our Scepters and our Chaires of State
> Are but glasse-mettall, that we are full of spots,
> And that like new-writ Copies, t'avoid blots,
> Dust must bee throwne upon us … (lines 109-18)

Webster invokes a number of materials in these lines to depict eminence's fleetingness, including snow, wax, clay, glass, and paper, the majority of which are in various states of metamorphosis or decay. The only exception is perhaps the "new-writ Copies," which, though negatively associated with potential ink blots linked to human frailty or "spots," appear to remain physically intact. This endurance of the written word is consistent with the larger message of Webster's poem—that "verse" and the "Poets pen" are the ways that "great men" will live on, for "when all the cost / of guilded Monuments shall fall to dust; / 'They [poets] grave in metle that sustaines no rust" (ll. 320-25).

Critics have long noted the linguistic and thematic connections between *A Monumental Columne* and Webster's contemporaneous play, *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612-13), which is similarly preoccupied with questions of legacy and memorialization.[1] Of particular interest to

[1] In "Monuments and ruins as symbols in *The Duchess of Malfi*," Michael Neill cites the two works as "companion pieces" that "meditat[e] on the mutable frailty of worldly pride" and "celebrat[e] … Fame, which poetry renders immortal" (76). Neill notes that Antonio's famous assertion that the Duchess "stains the time past, lights the time to come" is directly repeated in *A Monumental Columne* (Ibid.). I find it intriguing that we also find aged and painted

me are the similarities between the "Greatnesse" passage from *A Monumental Columne* and the final lines of *The Duchess of Malfi*. At the end of the play, Antonio's friend Delio moralizes:

> … Let us make noble use
> Of this great ruin, and join all our force
> To establish this young hopeful gentleman
> In's mother's right. These wretched eminent things
> Leave no more fame behind 'em than should one
> Fall in a frost and leave his print in snow—
> As soon as the sun shines, it ever melts
> Both form and matter … (5.5.108-15)

Just as Webster uses snow pillars to figure the ephemerality of "Greatnesse" in *A Monumental Columne*, in this final speech, Delio draws upon the image of a print melting in the snow to describe the evanescence of "eminent things." While the phrase "these wretched eminent things" is somewhat ambiguous, it most clearly refers to the two politically powerful brothers who have just died: Ferdinand and the Cardinal. According to Delio, the brothers are not afforded a meaningful memorial legacy; they "Leave no more fame behind 'em" than does the transitory print of a body in the snow. It might seem tempting to lump the Duchess in with this group of "eminent things," as she is another noble personage who dies in the play, but, as I will demonstrate, the Duchess's legacy is quite different than that of her brothers and cannot be expressed through the metaphor of a snowy print that melts away in the sun.

Despite the clear thematic and metaphoric similarities linking these passages from *A Monumental Columne* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, there are also several key differences between them. First, while snow appears in both instances, it does not appear in the same form. In the poem, Webster compiles the snow into a tower that rises up from the ground, while in the play, he imagines a print impressed down into the frost-covered earth. The difference is one of built

female figures in both play and poem (2.1.21-25, ll. 173-75), as well as the dust of diamonds (5.5.71, l. 293), and echoes (5.3, l. 300).

monumentality on the one hand and an inadvertent trace on the other. While both snowy forms ultimately melt, one *pro*trudes while the other *in*trudes (I will examine the implications of this contrast a bit later). Secondly, there is the conspicuous absence of wax in Delio's speech. Webster pairs "Towers fram'd out of Snow" and "wax-guilded Tapers" in *A Monumental Columne*, but in *The Duchess of Malfi*, the wax drops out, and we are left with just snow. The pairing of wax and snow is, as I will demonstrate, a long-standing and widespread literary and philosophical trope. Given the prevalence of this trope, and Webster's conventional turn to it in *A Monumental Columne*, why would he forego this classic coupling in the final lines of *The Duchess of Malfi*?

In answer to this question, I am going to suggest that the absence of wax in Delio's speech is no accident, but rather a conscious choice that gives insight into a distinction that Webster makes in the play between two forms of memorialization and legacy. On the one hand, there is the version that Delio articulates in the play's final lines, which amounts to a melting away of "Both form and matter" (5.5.115). While at the end of the play this disappearance is expressed as a print in the snow that vanishes, at other moments, it is presented as the scattering or dispersal of matter. This bleak non-legacy emerges as most closely tied to Ferdinand and the Cardinal. On the other hand, the Duchess embodies another memorial legacy—a legacy closely tied to the material of wax, which can be infinitely shaped and reshaped, but which retains an integrity and sense of identity.[2] Webster presents this waxen—and notably feminine—version of memorialization as more positive and long-lasting, linked to the enduring power of poetry.

[2] In asserting that the Duchess's memorial legacy is one of wholeness and an intact identity, I am departing from critics like Brian Chalk who read the Duchess's condition by the end of the play as one of evacuation and fragmentation. In "Webster's 'Worthyest Monument': The Problem of Posterity in *The Duchess of Malfi*," Chalk argues that throughout *The Duchess of Malfi,* other characters see the Duchess "as a monumental emblem that provides the elusive stability that they seek. Ultimately, however, in the play's final act, this drive toward futurity collapses the present with the future and evacuates both of meaning" (381).

I am not the first to read the Duchess's memorial condition as one closely connected to the material of wax. In "John Webster, Tussaud Laureate: The Waxworks in *The Duchess of Malfi*," Margaret Owens argues that "[t]he effigeal condition that subsumes the Duchess is ultimately not a figure of closure, the alabaster statue, but one of dispersal and disarticulation, the mutilated waxwork" (871). I agree with Owens's claim that the material of wax expresses the Duchess's "effigeal condition" much more successfully than the alabaster statue to which the Duchess likens herself in the play's first act (1.1.441-43), but I read the Duchess's condition at the end of the play as more positive than that of a dispersed and "mutilated waxwork." I understand wax as both a material and a metaphor that expresses the Duchess's perdurance beyond her death. Central to my reading of this perdurance is the echo scene in Act 5, which raises questions about what it means to reshape not only bodily matter, but also, in a meta-poetic sense, literary matter. Considering the gendered implications of authorship in *The Duchess of Malfi*, Margaret Owens asks, "Compared to the reproductive female body, are Webster's theatrical creations little more than inert wax figures? Is the male enterprise of playmaking doomed merely to travesty the 'true substantial bodies' produced by the womb…?" (870). While I find these questions deeply provocative, I am again inclined to read wax in this play more positively. Rather than focusing on the mauled and "inert wax figures" of Act 4, I trace wax's latent presence as both material and metaphor throughout the play, emphasizing its malleability and capacity for change, and arguing that it ultimately offers a vision of poetry that is as dynamic and enduring as the Duchess's own legacy.

In mapping out the two forms of memorialization that Webster presents in *The Duchess of Malfi*, I will be engaging with a number of literary and philosophical traditions. Webster's style of authorship demands this kind of engagement due to his propensity for borrowing and

imitation. In the introduction to the Norton edition of *The Duchess of Malfi*, Michael Neill calls Webster "the most derivative of poets," emphasizing that his "magpie method of composition" stood out even in a culture that prioritized "a writer's command of the art of imitation" (xxiii-iv). This "magpie method of composition" is on full display in *The Duchess of Malfi*, where Webster borrows widely from literary, religious, historical, and philosophical sources, selectively choosing elements from diverse texts and traditions and weaving them together into unexpected and provocative combinations. Part of my project in this paper will be to trace the influence of the various traditions in Webster's play, demonstrating when, how, and to what effect Webster weaves together these different voices. As a result of my focus on memorialization and material forms, Webster's engagement with classical materialist philosophy will be of particular relevance to me. I foreground the Roman poet and materialist philosopher Lucretius as a key interlocuter for Webster, placing *The Duchess of Malfi* into conversation with Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* (ca. 50 BCE) in order to highlight some of Webster's affinities with and departures from the classical materialist tradition.

## Tracing Wax and Snow in Literature and Philosophy

To start unraveling the different voices and traditions that Webster invokes in *The Duchess of Malfi,* it is useful to begin by charting the history of the wax/snow trope. This examination will help me establish the wider historical discourse surrounding wax and snow and their connection to questions of memorialization and material (im)permanence. It will also serve as an entry point into the classical materialist tradition and an introduction to several of the key interlocuters with whom Webster engages.

There is a long literary and philosophical tradition of pairing wax and snow/ice/frost. We have already seen this coupling in Webster's *A Monumental Columne,* and in her book *Wax Impressions, Figures and Forms in Early Modern Literature: Wax Works,* Lynn Maxwell notes that "the image of a footprint in the snow is so like to the impression of wax that the two images frequently appear together in early modern literature" (152). Maxwell cites as examples passages from John Donne's *Sappho to Philaenis* and Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (151-52, 184). The pairing of wax and snow was not unique to early modern literature, however, and can in fact be traced back to classical antiquity. A prominent example occurs in Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* where the narrator describes that Narcissus can no longer bear staring at his reflection and begins to melt away metaphorically, just "as the yellow wax melts before a gentle heat, as hoar frost melts before the warm morning sun" (3.486-90). Like Webster, Ovid uses the melting of wax and snow (here, frost) to chronicle material decay, and in Ovid's case, these evolving material forms also provide a salient figure for metamorphosis. Ovid himself borrows the wax/snow trope from philosophy.

From the ancient Greeks onward, wax and snow featured prominently in philosophical discourse about matter. In "On Youth, Old Age…" for example, Aristotle invokes wax and ice to demonstrate that the nature of the material from which an animal is composed corresponds to the nature of that animal's external environment: "if nature were to constitute a thing of wax or of ice, she would not preserve it by putting it in a hot place, for the opposing quality would quickly destroy it, seeing that heat dissolves that which cold congeals" (758). In this context, Aristotle employs wax and ice as examples that illustrate the more complex point he is trying to make, drawing upon the materials' shared capacity for rapid state change to clarify his larger argument about why certain animals are labeled "warm" and others are labeled "cold" (758).

According to Aristotle, the constitution of an animal is, like wax or ice, "best maintained by an environment akin to it" (758).

Centuries later, Lucretius similarly turned to wax and snow to depict state change in his poem *De Rerum Natura*—a text that Latinized the teachings of the ancient Greek atomists, notably including Epicurus, for a Roman audience. Ancient atomists believed that invisible and indivisible particles of matter, or atoms, composed the fabric of the universe. Amidst a discussion of the causes behind many natural phenomena that humans often attribute to the gods, Lucretius writes, "In the first place, the sun bakes the earth and makes it dry, but he melts ice and with his rays compels to thaw snow piled up high on the high mountains. Again, when placed in his heat wax liquifies" (6.962-65). This description of the material fluidity of wax and snow/ice fits with Lucretius's vision of a world in flux in which matter is constantly being bombarded, reshaped, and rearranged by other matter. It is the centrality of matter in Lucretius's worldview that firmly situates him within the philosophical tradition of materialism—a tradition that Raymond Williams notes is "at least as old as" the ancient atomists, and one that he defines as "a very long, difficult and varying set of arguments which propose **matter** as the primary substance of all living and non-living things, including human beings" (146). This tradition stands in opposition to the philosophical school of idealism, as espoused by thinkers like Plato, in which immaterial "ideas are held to underlie or to form all reality" (Williams 106). In *The Duchess of Malfi*, Webster shares Lucretius's materialist interest in matter and the ways in which it is constantly rearranged, specifically bringing these questions to bear on the memorial legacies of different characters in his play.

In the mid- to late-seventeenth century, a moment of classical (and classical materialist) revival, the English philosopher, poet, playwright, and scientist Margaret Cavendish added her

voice to the philosophical dialogue about wax and snow, using the two materials in her *Philosophical Letters* to think about bodies and figuration. Cavendish's discussion, which Lynn Maxwell highlights is situated "in an epistolary treatise filled with her responses to an imagined female correspondent about some of the most preeminent male philosophers of her day," has important implications for the gendered dimensions of the trope (104). Wax and snow have long been characterized as passive matter and gendered as feminine due to their ability to receive imprints. In letter XXXII, Cavendish reverses this typical characterization, however, rather suggesting that "snow … patterns out the figure of the body" just as wax "takes the print or pattern from the seal" (73). As Maxwell articulates, Cavendish assigns a surprising amount of agency to wax and snow, thereby "offer[ing] up new possibilities for wax, women, and all positions traditionally construed as passive" (104). The syntax of these lines conveys this agency; the nouns wax and snow are both attached to active verbs ("patterns" and "takes"). While Cavendish was writing a generation after Webster, the gendered elements of the wax/snow trope that she addresses also play an important role in *The Duchess of Malfi*, where Webster grapples with the feminization of wax, snow, and matter more generally as he thinks about the possibilities for different material forms of memorialization.

Taken together, this brief survey of literary and philosophical examples highlights that invoking wax and snow is not a neutral project; to trace the history of the trope is to trace the history of classical reception and the transmission of classical materialist philosophy. To pair wax and snow is to raise questions about gender, material existence, and memorial legacy—the traces and impressions that we intentionally or inadvertently leave behind. These are all questions that occupy Webster in *The Duchess of Malfi*, and in his play, Webster is in conversation with several of the authors I have just mentioned. *The Duchess of Malfi* constitutes

a challenge, for example, to Aristotle's gendered ideas about matter, and Ovid's stories of metamorphosis clearly haunt the play. Since other scholars have examined Webster's polemical attitude toward Aristotle, however, and have tracked Ovidian resonances in *The Duchess of Malfi*, my analysis will not constitute a comprehensive examination of the play's Aristotelian or Ovidian influences, though I will contend with Aristotle's gendered matter and invoke the *Metamorphoses* at several key moments relevant to my argument (namely the mirror scene, the Duchess's reanimation, and the echo scene).[3] Lucretian materialist influence in *The Duchess of Malfi*, on the other hand, has not yet been the subject of critical discussion, and my analysis seeks in part to fill that gap in the current scholarship of the play.

## Webster and the Lucretian Tradition

In outlining two different forms of memorialization, Webster is clearly drawing from and engaging with the classical materialist tradition. The question, however, of how well he knew this tradition, or which version(s) of it he knew, is a bit trickier to unravel. The revival of interest in classical materialism at the turn of the seventeenth century has been well-established, but, as Reid Barbour notes, in this period "English authors were often careless in their references to or uses of" this tradition, frequently "lack[ing] a systematic understanding of the relations between Democritus [another ancient Greek atomist], Epicurus, and Lucretius" (*English Epicures and Stoics* 23). While Webster clearly had a grasp on the basic tenets of classical materialism, it is difficult to determine precisely how well he knew and distinguished between these thinkers. Despite these difficulties, however, we do know that Webster had, at the very

[3] See Agnès Lafont's "'I am truly more fond and foolish than ever Narcissus was': Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* and Ovidian Resonances" for an examination of Ovidian influence on the play's structure and characterization. And see Richard L. Greaves's *The Puritan Revolution and Educational Thought: Background for Reform* for a discussion of Webster's "vigorous attack on Aristotle" (104).

least, secondhand access to classical materialist thought through his more contemporary readings. Richard Greaves notes, for instance, that Webster read Pierre Gassendi, a French philosopher contemporary to Webster who sought to integrate Epicurean philosophy with the Christian worldview (Greaves 104). And Paul Frazer and Norma Kroll draw attention to Webster's deep engagement with the works of sixteenth-century French philosopher Michel de Montaigne, whose writings discuss the philosophies of Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius (Frazer 159, Kroll 4). Michel de Montaigne is a key figure for understanding Webster's exposure to classical materialist, and specifically Lucretian, philosophy.

While the majority of Democritus's and Epicurus's works have been lost or are known only secondhand through summaries by other writers, Lucretius's materialist worldview survives firsthand in *De Rerum Natura*. Jessie Hock notes that Montaigne's copy of *De Rerum Natura* "is one of the most, if not *the* most, vigorously annotated extant sixteenth-century copies" of the poem, and that "his *Essais* attest to a profound engagement with Lucretian ideas" (41). Thus, simply by virtue of reading Montaigne, Webster would have been exposed to a significant portion of Lucretius's philosophy—Montaigne's *Essais* in fact "contains approximately one-sixteenth of *DRN* in quotation" (Hock 129). And this is of course assuming that Webster did not read *De Rerum Natura* itself, which is a very real possibility. Kroll believes that while Webster would have certainly encountered Lucretius in Montaigne's *Essais*, these essays "do not treat atomism fully or accurately enough for us to consider them Webster's only source … Webster's careful use of Epicurean-Democritean physics suggests that he derived the philosophy of his play either from an accurate account of Lucretius or from the *De Rerum Natura* itself" (4). The play that Kroll refers to here is Webster's *The White Devil* (1612), which includes a prominent reference to Democritus in its opening lines: "Ha, ha, O Democritus, thy

gods / That govern the whole world!" (1.1.3-4). While *The Duchess of Malfi* does not boast such an obvious reference to a materialist thinker, Webster's engagement with classical materialist philosophy in this play is just as pervasive, if more nuanced.

*De Rerum Natura* is a valuable text to place into conversation with *The Duchess of Malfi* for a number of reasons. Webster was clearly interested in the classical materialist tradition, and given that *De Rerum Natura* is the most complete surviving articulation of this tradition, Lucretius's text (either as quoted by Montaigne or in its entirety) would have been a touchstone for Webster. Furthermore, Lucretius's text offers Webster something that the fragmented and mediated extant prose excerpts of materialists like Democritus and Epicurus do not: a model of philosophy as poetry, or even, as Jessie Hock suggests, poetry as philosophy (11). For Webster, a playwright thinking about how to use verse to engage with different philosophical traditions, Lucretius's model would have been invaluable. This said, given the potentially secondhand nature of Webster's knowledge of Lucretius, I also want to stress that I am not presenting *The Duchess of Malfi* as Webster's direct response to *De Rerum Natura*. Lucretian influence in the early modern period is notoriously difficult to prove: Lucretius's philosophy was deemed heretical and was often studied in secret if it was studied at all. In recent years, however, scholars including Gerard Passanante, Ada Palmer, and Jessie Hock have provided excellent new models for tracing Lucretian thought, examining the subtle but pervasive ways that Lucretius's influence permeated the early modern period and its poetry. I follow their example in making my case for Webster's engagement with Lucretian materialism. In what follows, I argue that *The Duchess of Malfi* grapples with many of the same questions that occupy Lucretius, and I identify a number of suggestive resemblances between the two texts that help illuminate Webster's memorial project in *The Duchess of Malfi*. Both Lucretius and Webster

explore material perdurance in atoms, matter's ability to be scattered or rearranged, the (im)permanence of identity, and, in a meta-poetic sense, the meaning of authorship and the effects of poetry.

Despite Webster's affinities with the Lucretian worldview, he also subverts one of the key tenets of Lucretian materialism. While Lucretius argues that the spirit does not endure beyond the body, Webster presents the Duchess's spirit as doing just that. Even though Webster's play is not firmly or exclusively situated within the Lucretian materialist tradition, it is nonetheless worth foregrounding Lucretius as an important thinker for Webster who helps the playwright grapple with knotty questions about matter, identity, and memorialization. Consistent with his "magpie method of composition" (Neill "Introduction" xxiv), Webster borrows from Lucretius with no sense of obligation to remain true to the classical materialist tradition. This practice of appreciating past thinkers but pushing beyond them in fact unites Webster with Lucretius, who in *De Rerum Natura* uses the metaphor of footprints (in Latin, *vestigia*) to figure his own relationship to past authors. At the beginning of Book 3, for instance, Lucretius claims to "plant [his] own footsteps firm" "on the marks [*vestigia*]" left behind by Epicurus (3.1-6). In contrast, at the beginning of Book 4, Lucretius marks his departure from previous thinkers by declaring that he is now traversing "[a] pathless country," "where no other foot has ever trod" (4.1-2). While Lucretius remains situated within the classical materialist tradition even as he sets out into "pathless country," here he nonetheless draws attention to his own innovation. I will return to these *vestigia* later on, but suffice it to say for now that engaging with previous authors necessitates a delicate balance of following and of striking out on one's own.

In order to be able to recognize precisely how Webster invokes and subverts the Lucretian materialist tradition in *The Duchess of Malfi*, it is useful to briefly examine several

key moments in *De Rerum Natura* that will be touchstones for my argument. Lucretius presents his readers with a world in which all forms of memorialization are fleeting and constantly being worn away or reconfigured by an endless barrage of atoms. Lucretius's favorite metaphor for this rearrangement is that of atoms as letters that can be shuffled around into infinite numbers of configurations, much like the letters that make up Lucretius's own text ("Moreover, all through these very lines of mine you see many elements common to many words, although you must confess that lines and words differ one from another both in meaning and in the sound of their soundings. So much can elements do" [1.823-29]).[4] Lucretius is also fond of images of mighty material forms falling into states of decay or ruin, which he uses as evidence to prove that all things are subject to the ravages of time and the bombardment of atoms. In Book 5, he asks, "do you not see that even stones are conquered by time, that tall turrets fall and rocks crumble, that the gods' temples and their images wear out and crack, nor can their holy divinity carry forward the boundaries of fate, or strive against nature's laws?" (5.306-10). For Lucretius, then, the concept of different forms of legacy or memorialization would be irrelevant, for all configurations of matter ultimately return to the same atomic state.[5]

Lucretius would take issue with Webster's image of the sun melting away "Both form and matter" because Lucretius asserts that while forms certainly morph, matter always remains

[4] In the Latin: "quin etiam passim nostris in versibus ipsis / multa elementa vides multis communia verbis, / cum tamen inter se versus ac verba necessest / confiteare et re et sonitu distare sonanti. / tantum elementa queunt permutato ordine solo; / at rerum quae sunt primordia, plura adhibere / possunt unde queant variae res quaeque creari." (1.823-39)

[5] The ending of Lucretius's own poem reflects his views of memorialization. As opposed to the grand (if also ironic) memorializing gesture that concludes Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, for instance, where the narrator declares, "through all the ages shall I live in fame" (15.878-79), *De Rerum Natura* ends on a note of decay. Lucretius describes a terrible plague that ravages the world, and the poem's concluding lines are quite bleak: "for they would lay their own kindred amidst loud lamentation upon piles of wood not their own, and would set light to the fire, often brawling with much shedding of blood rather than abandon the bodies" (6.1283-86). This final image is one of inevitable decay, of the transformation of human bodies to dust. Compared to Ovid's ending, Lucretius's is distinctly anti-memorial.

intact. The verbs that Lucretius employs in his passage on wax and snow highlight this fact: "[sol] glaciem dissolvit" and "cera liquefit in eius … vapore" (6.963-65; the sun melts ice and wax liquefies in his heat). According to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, *dissolvere* can mean "to break up into component parts, disintegrate," "to disarrange," or "[t]o reduce to a liquid form, melt, dissolve" (definitions 1a, 1c, and 2a), and *liquefacere* similarly means to melt or to dissolve (def. 1a). Both verbs denote state changes and matter changing form. Whereas Lucretius sees little difference between melting and dispersing to the extent that they both reconfigure matter, Webster separates the two. For Webster, some matter can be reconfigured into new forms while other matter is scattered or dispersed until it is nothing. This reshaping of the classical materialist tradition enables Webster to present the Duchess's legacy as distinct from—and superior to—that of her brothers.

## Ferdinand and the Cardinal: Scattered Matter

Webster sets the stage for the material distinction between the legacies of the Duchess and her brothers early in the play. Antonio, describing the trio of siblings to Delio, asserts, "You never fixed your eye on three fair medals, / Cast in one figure, of so different temper" (1.1.181-82). Antonio's metaphor, according to Margaret Owens, refers "to the casting of portrait medals, a humanistic tradition that developed in Renaissance Italy in imitation of ancient Greek and Roman coins" (866).[6] Antonio importantly discriminates between the form and matter of these portrait medals—between their identical "figure[s]" and their unique "temper[s]." The word "temper," while referring to both one's "[m]ental balance or composure" and "[t]he particular

[6] Owens also makes the intriguing observation that "the element of wax is retained in an occulted manner in the medal analogy, since the sculpting of wax was required for the preparation of the molds used for casting the metal, hence the emergence of the cognate artistic tradition of the wax medallion portrait" (866).

degree of hardness and elasticity or resiliency imparted to steel by tempering," can also more generally indicate the "[p]roportionate arrangement of parts" (*Oxford English Dictionary* def. 3, 5, and 2). To translate this last definition into the classical materialist lexicon, temper might thus be understood to describe the arrangement or configuration of atoms that comprise a certain material form. According to this definition, when Antonio speaks of the medals' "different temper[s]," he describes the specific material arrangements that lie beneath the surface of their shared figures. Antonio's wordplay suggests that despite the three siblings' shared form or superficial appearance, there is a fundamental difference in their tempers, both in the sense of mental composure and material composition. Antonio and Delio make a similar play on the word temper just a few lines earlier, when Delio asks Antonio, "what's that Cardinal? / I mean his temper," to which Antonio responds, "Some such flashes superficially hang on him for form. But observe his inward character: he is a melancholy churchman" (1.1.146-52). Antonio's reply operates on two registers. On a superficial level, Antonio answers Delio's question about the Cardinal's temperament by responding that he is melancholy. But Antonio's comment about the Cardinal's "inward character" being different than his outward "form" also plays on temper's more materialist meaning. Antonio possesses a keen awareness of the way that outer forms or figures can belie one's internal material composition.

Throughout the play, Webster portrays Ferdinand as composed of matter that has a tendency to scatter and disperse. In the play's first act, when Antonio asks the Duchess whether she fears her brothers' discovery of their union, the Duchess dismisses his concerns with the assurance that "time will easily / Scatter the tempest" (1.1.458-59). Intriguingly, the only other time the word "tempest" appears in the play is in the Cardinal's question to Ferdinand, "Why do you make yourself / So wild a tempest?" (2.5.16-17). Read alongside this later passage, the

Duchess's remark to Antonio seems to prefigure Ferdinand's own tempestuous, scattered state. Ferdinand's lycanthropy also contributes to the sense of mental and physical fragmentation associated with him. His eyes "dazzle" and his sight fractures when he lays eyes upon the dead Duchess in Act 4 (4.2.249), and in Act 5, the Doctor testifies to seeing Ferdinand in the churchyard at midnight "with the leg of a man / Upon his shoulder" (5.2.14-15), thereby tying yet another disturbing image of bodily scattering to the duke.

The depiction of Ferdinand as scattered matter bears distinct political connotations due to the early modern association of classical atomism, and particularly Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, with political formations. Reid Barbour highlights the trend of bringing materialist thought to bear on the fraught political conditions of seventeenth-century England, noting that "[a]uthors flourishing in the 1640s and 1650s habitually imitated Lucretius's comparisons between atomism and chaotic civil war" (*English Epicures and Stoics* 266). According to Barbour, while atomism was mobilized by both sides of the political spectrum during the English civil wars, it gained particularly democratic (or rather "democratical," as in "a physics that represents the equality of the parts as against the subordination of the parts to the whole") connotations due to the connections drawn between atoms and people ("Between Atoms and the Spirit" 338-42).[7] "Democratical" in this context was not necessarily a good thing; Margaret Cavendish, for instance, linked "atomic democracy" to "chaos" (Ibid. 342). While Webster was writing *The Duchess of Malfi* a few decades before the English civil wars, it is already possible to identify undercurrents of a politicized atomism in his play, and particularly in his depiction of

[7] Robert Roecklein foregrounds the important role played by Renaissance Italian political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli in the European tradition of politicizing ancient atomism, arguing that "Machiavelli was the philosopher who first revived the atomist teaching for a new political purpose" (2). According to Roecklein, "Lucretius was one of Machiavelli's favorite writers," and Machiavelli "adapt[ed]" Lucretian atomism into a theory of "political actors" as atoms (18). Roecklein asserts that classical atomism formed the foundation for Machiavelli's materialist conceptualization of the state, with "the characteristics of the atom [transferred] to the flesh and blood human beings of his political science" (19).

the aristocratic Ferdinand. Webster himself was skeptical of aristocrats (Neill "Introduction xxi)—a skepticism perhaps best epitomized by the image of the "prince's court" that opens the *Duchess of Malfi*. Antonio, upon his return from France, muses that "a prince's court / Is like a common fountain whence should flow / Pure silver drops in general; but if't chance / Some cursed example poison't near the head, / Death and diseases through the whole land spread" (1.1.11-15). Ferdinand is one such poisoned head, and the image of his bodily matter scattering or fracturing into a mass of atoms serves as a powerful figure for the chaos, and potentially even civil war, brought about by corrupted leadership.

Like Ferdinand, the Cardinal too, is easily scattered, as is his legacy. In the final scene of the play, Bosola presents a striking vision of the Cardinal's material dispersal, rejoicing "That thou [the Cardinal], which stood'st like a huge pyramid / Begun upon a large and ample base, / Shalt end in a little point, a kind of nothing" (5.5.75-77). Bosola's speech highlights the way that even pyramids (conventional symbols of memorialization) are, like the Cardinal himself, subject to dispersal. Both the words "point" and "nothing" were used to describe atoms in the early modern period, making Bosola's comment a distinctly materialist one. Atoms were understood to be the smallest possible points, or indivisible particles, of matter (*OED* "atom" def. II.3), and they were frequently described as "nothings" because they could not be seen, only conceptualized.[8] The image of a massive pyramid gradually worn away by the elements until it is "nothing" in fact recalls Lucretius's descriptions of the constant waning of material forms over time, from rings that thin with years of wear on our fingers, to rocks hollowed out by dripping water, to cobblestones "rubbed away by men's feet," to the hands of bronze statues

[8] Jessie Hock discusses the role of "nothings" in John Donne's writing in her chapter, "'Like gold to aery thinness beat': John Donne's Materialisms." She draws particular attention to Donne's sermons, demonstrating the way that they "use the … language of atomic nothings to compare men to God" (114).

"thinned away by the frequent touch of greeting from those who pass by" (1.311-18).[9] Bosola similarly describes that the matter from which the Cardinal is comprised wears away until he is an incoherent collection of atoms or nothings; all sense of the Cardinal as an individual is lost. This image of dispersal could easily be applied to Ferdinand as well, and in fact recalls the duke's dying words only a few lines before: "*Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust, / Like diamonds, we are cut with our own dust*" (5.5.70-71). Both the Cardinal as a pyramid and Ferdinand as a diamond are ultimately reduced to mere dust—a salient metaphor for the dispersal of their material legacies.

While these material legacies may be dispersed, it is important to recognize that they are not gone entirely. Ferdinand and the Cardinal endure, albeit only as the smallest possible particles of matter. Yet by using the phrase "a kind of nothing" to describe the Cardinal, Webster also questions how meaningful this endurance is. The fundamental paradox of atoms is their simultaneous existence as something and nothing; we know that atoms make up the foundation of our world, and yet they "cannot be comprehended by the senses" (Hock 14). They are, in effect, "a kind of nothing." Whereas classical atomist philosophers accepted the reality of material dispersal, however, and recognized that, as Lucretius articulates, nothing can be reduced to nothing (1.215-16), Webster seems to question the difference between "a kind of nothing" and nothing at all.

What would it mean to consider Bosola's comparison of the Cardinal to a pyramid alongside Delio's subsequent comparison of the Cardinal's and Ferdinand's fame to prints in the snow? The difference between pyramids (or pillars) and prints is, as I noted at the beginning of

[9] This is the first of several instances I will be footnoting where the Lucretian lines that I quote are also quoted by Montaigne in his *Essais.* In this specific instance, Montaigne quotes the line, "The fall of the drop hollows out a stone" (vol. 9, p. 22). This is thus an example of a place where, even if Webster had not read *De Rerum Natura* itself, he would have had access to Lucretius's thoughts and language by way of Montaigne.

this paper, one of protrusion versus intrusion; pyramids and pillars are constructions that jut out of the landscape, while prints are impressions left behind by material forms.[10] Pyramids/pillars and prints also bear different sexual valences. Pillars (and, to a lesser extent, pyramids) are phallic structures, and the image of the Cardinal as a pyramid reduced to "a kind of nothing" can be read as a symbolic castration that erodes his sexual power and more generally fits with the dispersal of body parts and self that characterizes the brothers by the end of the play. The image of Ferdinand's and the Cardinal's fame as snowy impressions similarly undermines their masculine power. Impression as a metaphor has historically been used to depict an active male form impressing upon a passive and malleable female form.[11] After Ferdinand and the Cardinal metaphorically "[f]all in a frost" and leave their impressions in the snow (a stereotypically passive and feminine medium), however, the sun melts their prints. Their impressions, in other words, do not last, thereby undermining their masculine imprinting powers.

The challenge to the male power of impression inherent in Delio's metaphor of melting prints fits with the play's larger interrogation of gender through a number of tropes that challenge the distinction between male and female. Lynn Enterline, for instance, has examined the category confusions embodied by hyenas, mandrakes, and twins in the play, demonstrating the way that each of these tropes destabilizes typical gender binaries ("Hairy on the In-side"

[10] In Sir Thomas Browne's 1658 text *Hydriotaphia, or Urne-Buriall*, pyramids and pillars are in fact considered together. In this text, Browne criticizes the process of monument-making on the premise that monuments "are naturally constituted unto thoughts of the next world, and cannot excusably decline the consideration of that duration which maketh Pyramids pillars of snow, and all that's past a moment" (qtd. in Chalk 383). In other words, what is the use of creating monuments if they too ultimately fail the test of time? Browne's critique of monuments combines the pyramid and pillar references present in Webster's work, claiming that time turns stereotypically stony and enduring pyramids into nothing more than ephemeral, snowy pillars.

[11] In the *Timaeus*, for example, Plato genders nature as a female "mother or receptacle," explaining that "[i]ts nature is to be available for anything to make its impression upon" (1253-54). For Plato, if the "receiving thing" is the mother, then "the source" of impression is the father (1253). In my next section I will examine Aristotle's similar description of conception.

106-13). The feminization of Ferdinand's and the Cardinal's dispersed matter can also be situated within the larger feminization of the ancient atomist tradition. Matter has long been gendered feminine, and as a philosophy exclusively of matter, materialism was subject to charges of femininity from the outset. Pamala Gordon, for instance, highlights the Roman revulsion for the word *voluptas* (pleasure or delight) due to its associations with an emasculating excess of pleasure (109-10). She notes that this word features prominently in *De Rerum Natura* and even appears in its first line, which opens the sensual hymn to Venus (110).[12] Yet while Webster follows the tradition of pejoratively feminizing materialism when it comes to his denigration of Ferdinand and the Cardinal, he diverges from this model in his representation of the Duchess, whose material legacy he depicts as positive and long-lasting. In this privileging of feminine matter, Webster in fact appears closely aligned with Lucretius and his glorification of the goddess Venus, through whom "every kind of living thing is conceived" (1.4-5).

## "My picture, fashioned out of wax": The Duchess as a Waxen Woman

In contrast to Ferdinand and the Cardinal, who are likened to whirling tempests of scattered matter, pyramids worn away to nothing, and prints in the snow that melt away without a trace, Webster presents the Duchess as a character with a substantial material legacy—a legacy closely linked to the stereotypically feminized medium of wax. Before examining the Duchess's

[12] The hymn to Venus is another section of *De Rerum Natura* cited by Montaigne in his *Essais* (vol. 8, pp. 28, 80). Montaigne specifically quotes the lines about Venus pouring her sweet speech between Mars's lips (*DRN* 1.29-40)—a vision of language that ties Venus to Lucretius himself, who also imagines his verses as sweet (1.945). In both the hymn to Venus and Lucretius's famous honey and wormwood passage, variations of the words *suavis* (sweet) and *loquella* (speech) occur. Jessie Hock argues that "[h]aving already invoked Venus as his muse, Lucretius aligns the Venus of poetic inspiration with the Venus of sexual seduction and associates his poetry with the pleasures of the flesh" (4). I see a connection between Lucretius's gendered vision of poetic production and Webster's own depiction of the Duchess's material legacy, which I will argue is gendered feminine and connected to Webster's larger poetic concerns.

legacy, it is thus worth pausing to offer a brief overview of wax's material and philosophical history in order to better understand the Duchess's association with the medium.

Wax's most important property is its malleability—its ability to be shaped and reshaped (Maxwell 4).[13] Art historian Roberta Panzanelli highlights that this malleability enables wax to paradoxically embody many sets of "binary oppositions," both physical and metaphorical, including "warm and cold, supple and solid, life and death, ephemeral and permanent, amorphous and polymorphous" (1). From the classical period onwards, wax's malleability also made the material physically well-suited to a variety of artistic and literary processes, from wax casting techniques, to votive and effigy-making, sealing practices, and writing technologies (from the classical period through the early Renaissance, people used styluses to write in wax tablets that could then be wiped clean or erased).[14] Wax's simultaneous impressibility and erasability also established it as a philosophically rich material through which to think about both the function of memory and the changing of material forms.[15] In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, for instance, Pythagoras invokes wax to figure metempsychosis:

> The spirit wanders, comes now here, now there, and occupies whatever frame it pleases. From beasts it passes into human bodies, and from our bodies into beasts, but never perishes. And, as the pliant wax is stamped with new designs, does not remain as it was before nor preserve the same form, but is still the selfsame wax, so do I teach that the soul is ever the same, though it passes into ever-changing bodies. (15.165-72)

[13] Throughout this paragraph, and specifically in my focus on the connections between wax's material and theoretical properties, I am drawing from Lynn Maxwell's excellent introduction to *Wax Impressions, Figures and Forms in Early Modern Literature: Wax Works*, which provides a clear elucidation of wax's historical existence as both material and metaphor.

[14] See Stallybrass's "Hamlet's Tables and the Technologies of Writing in Renaissance England" for a history of these tablets and their persistence into the early modern period.

[15] In "Pygmalion's Wax: 'Fruitful Knowledge' in Bacon and Montaigne," Jenny C. Mann traces the Greek and Roman tradition of imagining "the mind as a block of wax subject to impression by perceptions of the outside world, as if stamped by a seal or signet ring" (370). She argues that once the Greek philosophical "theory of memory" reached the Roman world, it "migrate[d] to a different intellectual and institutional context: the art of rhetoric" (372). Cicero, for instance, when discussing the memory work required for rhetorical performances, draws upon the concept of the mind as a wax tablet covered in letters (372).

Pythagoras's wax assumes some of the qualities of Lucretius's letters in its capacity for endless rearrangement, and yet this passage has an uneasy relationship with materialism. Pythagoras's statement is at once materialist in its emphasis on matter that is never destroyed but merely changes forms, and fundamentally anti-materialist in its depiction of the soul as immortal, enduring beyond the life of the physical body. Lucretius writes that at the moment of death, the matter of the spirit scatters with the rest of the body: "the whole nature of the spirit is dissolved abroad, like smoke, … falling to pieces at the same time" as the aged body (3.459-62).[16] For Lucretius, in other words, the spirit or soul does not retain an incorporeal essence that travels from body to body in the way that Ovid's Pythagoras describes. This distinction becomes important in the final act of *The Duchess of Malfi*, where the Duchess's own spirit endures in a waxen manner more aligned with the philosophy of Ovid's Pythagoras than with Lucretian materialism.

Wax also has a long association with women, and particularly with the maternal body and mind. Aristotle, for instance, imagined the female womb as wax "waiting to take on a man's print" (Maxwell 6)—a conceptualization that influenced ideas about women, wax, and conception well into the early modern period. Discussing the relative roles of men and women in generation, Aristotle asserts that "the female, as female, is passive, and the male, as male, is active, and the principle of the movement comes from him" (1132). The woman, in other words, is "passive and moved," providing the raw material which is shaped by the "active and motive" form-giving male (Ibid). Aristotle turns to wax as a concrete example to illustrate his argument: "that one thing which is produced [the offspring] comes from them [the parents] only in the sense in which a bed comes into being from the carpenter and the wood, or in which a ball

[16] Montaigne quotes several lines from Lucretius's musings on the nature of the soul (vol. 5, pp. 162-72).

comes into being from the wax and the form" (Ibid.). In the example of the ball, the "wax" represents the female material, and the "form" represents the male movement. Yet despite Aristotle's depiction of the male as the one who gives form to the wax-like female material, anxieties proliferated about the woman's ability to shape this material herself. These fears reached a fever pitch in the early modern period, where stories circulated about the power of the maternal imagination to shape, or even disfigure, the waxen child in the womb. Discussing Renaissance theories of the maternal imagination, for instance, Lucia Dacome cites the practice of giving pregnant women "nuptial dolls made in wax, sugar and plaster" "in order to propitiate the making of beautiful children" (Dacome 532). Dacome also draws attention to the early modern belief that a pregnant woman should gaze upon beautiful paintings and sculptures to help improve the appearance of the child in her womb (Ibid.).[17]

As this brief sketch of wax's history suggests, there are two distinct, yet related, ways to think about wax: as material and as metaphor (Maxwell 3). As a physical medium, wax had a number of practical, literary, artistic, and religious usages in the classical and early modern periods. Philosophers in turn endowed these practical usages with greater metaphorical and theoretical significance, using wax to grapple with questions of memory, perception, gender, and bodily metamorphosis. Lynn Maxwell persuasively argues that it is precisely this duality that makes wax such a powerful and versatile material "to think with" (16). My examination of wax in *The Duchess of Malfi* recognizes this duality; I attend to both wax's physical appearance in the waxworks episode and to its latent presence throughout the play as a metaphor that expresses different kinds of change and transformation.

[17] Valeria Finucci recounts that in Torquato Tasso's 1581 *Gerusalemme liberata*, a black woman (who is married to a black man) gives birth to a white child after gazing upon a painting of the white figure of Saint George while she is pregnant (44). This story illustrates the power assigned to the maternal imagination in the early modern period, which in this story changes the skin color of the child in the womb after the father's initial imprinting.

Given the widespread preoccupation with the Duchess's body—and particularly her maternal body—throughout *The Duchess of Malfi*,[18] it is perhaps unsurprising that the Duchess is linked to wax on numerous occasions in the play. The first such link occurs in Act 2, Scene 1, when Bosola, suspicious that the Duchess is pregnant, muses, "She wanes i'the'cheek, and waxes fat i'th'flank" (2.1.66). Here, Bosola employs "wax" as a verb in the sense of to grow or to increase. Paired with the verb "wane," the metaphor Bosola presents is that of the waxing and waning moon—a metaphor that has long been used to figure the pregnant female body. In the Callisto story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, for instance, Ovid chronicles the duration of the nymph's pregnancy with the description, "Nine times since then the crescent moon had grown full orbed" (2.453).[19] He makes a similar move in the Pygmalion myth, where, "ere the ninth moon had brought her crescent to the full, a daughter was born … Paphos, from whom the island takes its name" (10.295-97). The connection between lunar cycles and pregnancy is a strong one; just as the moon waxes and wanes, so too does the pregnant female body, with pregnancy serving as a symbolically waxen form of creation (Maxwell 176). When Bosola refers to the Duchess with the verb wax and alludes to the moon's cycles to insinuate that she is pregnant, the play is clearly drawing on this tradition. The fact that the English word "wax" can be used to denote both the moon's cycles and the material of wax, with its long-standing

[18] In "'Hairy on the In-side': *The Duchess of Malfi* and the Body of Lycanthropy," Lynn Enterline argues that "the Duchess appears as a body *everyone* is trying to look at … Her pregnancy only deepens the mystery, rendering her body a truth always veiled, yet constantly offered to view" (86).

[19] Jonathan Bate suggests that "the trick of making the [passing of moon cycles] serve … to reveal a pregnancy may have been learnt by Shakespeare from [Ovid's] Callisto story," citing as evidence Polixenes's first lines in *The Winter's Tale*: "Nine changes of the wat'ry star hath been / The shepherd's note since we have left our throne" (Bate 225, *WT* 1.2.1-2).

identifications with women and maternity, only multiplies the resonances of Bosola's aptly-chosen metaphor.[20]

It is not just characters like Bosola who label the Duchess's body as waxen; the Duchess herself employs both the noun and verb versions of the word "wax" to conceptualize her own changing body. Preparing for bed before her mirror in Act 3, the Duchess playfully proposes, "When I wax gray, I shall have all the court / Powder their hair with orris, to be like me" (3.2.59-60). Like Bosola, the Duchess uses the verb "wax" to characterize a body in flux, imagining the way that the color of her hair will change as she grows older. She depicts her aging body as waxing or morphing, not dispersing into atoms—a depiction which can be contrasted with Lucretius's description of aging as a process of simultaneous melting and scattering. Speaking of old age, Lucretius writes, "by minute degrees age breaks the strength and mature vigour, and melts [*liquitur*] into decay," with particles "scatter[ing] [*dispargit*] abroad on all sides" (2.1131-35).[21] Here again, as in his passage on wax and snow, Lucretius does not distinguish between melting and scattering, but understands them both as rearrangements of matter. Lucretius thinks of aging as a slow process of one's matter both melting and scattering away. Bosola's and the Duchess's lines comparing the Duchess to wax mark the beginning of Webster's departure from Lucretian materialism to the extent that Webster starts to parse different kinds of material decay and legacy. In Webster's conceptualization, the condition of waxing or morphing is a form of change preferable to scattering because it preserves a fundamental identity or essence.

[20] While the etymological connections between the noun and verb versions of the English word "wax" remain murky, they may both have roots in the Germanic word "*wa χs*," meaning to grow, possibly making "the etymological [meaning] … 'that which grows (in the honeycomb)'" (*OED* etymology for "wax, n.1").

[21] Montaigne quotes the first part of these lines in his *Essais* (vol. 6, p. 75).

The Duchess's invocation of the word "wax" to think about her changing body is furthermore a particularly loaded one due to her positioning before a mirror. Central to an understanding of this scene is the Latin word *imago,* which can, among other definitions, refer to an artistic representation or likeness of a person, a visual or auditory reflection, a rhetorical comparison, and a copy (*OLD* def. 1, 3, 7b, and 9). This scene seems to be engaging with Ovid's Narcissus and Echo myth, in which *imago*s, both verbal and visual, feature prominently. Ovid's Narcissus and Echo story is a pivotal one for Webster in this play. One feels its influence most in the echo scene in Act 5, Scene 3, which I will examine shortly, but Webster's preoccupation with mirrors and echoes throughout the play owes a great deal to the Narcissus myth.[22] This myth centers around two kinds of *imago*s or reflections: the visual reflection of Narcissus in the pool, and the auditory reflection of Echo's voice.[23] It is also a story in which, as I noted at the beginning of this paper, wax appears at a pivotal moment: "as the yellow wax melts before a gentle heat, as hoar frost melts before the warm morning sun, so does [Narcissus], wasted with love, pine away" (3.486-90). Wax's presence in this story is fitting due to the material's associations with replication, artistic representation, and doubles. Beyond these thematic resonances, the word *imago,* which recurs throughout the story, can also denote wax death

[22] Lynn Enterline addresses the connections between *The Duchess of Malfi* and the Narcissus myth in "Hairy on the In-side." She recounts Pausanias's alternative Narcissus story, in which Narcissus has a twin sister, and "call[s] attention to the subtext of Narcissus's visual obsession with his own image" in order to elucidate "the egoistic nature of Ferdinand's melancholia" (106-107).

[23] In the philosophical materialist tradition, mirrors and echoes are fittingly often examined alongside one another. In his consideration of simulacra in *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius explains that mirrors "fl[i]ng back" "images thrown off from … things" (4.98-109), and also addresses the way that verbal matter can be "dashed upon solid places and thrown back," as "in solitary places … the rocks give back the same shapes of words in their order" (4.570-76). And in her *Philosophical Letters* (letter XXIV), Margaret Cavendish, discussing the common argument that "the seeing of ones face in a Looking-glass, and Eccho, are made by impression and reaction," expresses her belief that "the glass in its own substance doth figure out the copy of the face," and that in the case of echoes "the air patterns out the copy of the sound, and then the sensitive corporeal motions in the ear pattern again this copy from the air" (69).

masks of the variety commissioned by ancient Roman nobles (*OLD* def. 2),[24] making wax a particularly apt material to chronicle Narcissus's death. Here we see a moment of intersection between wax as matter and as metaphor: wax is employed as a metaphor to describe a character's death, but this metaphor also resonates with wax's physical role as a material used to commemorate the dead in Roman culture. Despite Narcissus's death however, and despite Echo's disembodiment, neither character vanishes into oblivion; their legacies are preserved through metamorphosis and through poetry. Echo's voice continues to reverberate, and Narcissus's body transforms into "a flower, its yellow centre girt with white petals" (3.509-10). Recall that another figure in the *Metamorphoses*, Pythagoras, also invokes wax as a material to think about the metamorphosis of bodies. The Duchess's own symbolically waxen metamorphosis similarly ensures her legacy, which is also preserved through verse.

The infamous waxworks episode of Act 4, Scene 1 constitutes a critical step in this metamorphosis. Ferdinand, in an effort to drive his twin sister into madness, stages a disturbing spectacle for the Duchess. He arrives in the dead of night, pulling back a curtain to unveil what at first appear to be the dead bodies of the Duchess's husband, Antonio, along with their three children, but which are subsequently revealed to the audience (and not the Duchess) to be wax figures. Before he uncovers these wax bodies, Ferdinand employs a wax-inflected metaphor in one of his comments to the Duchess, ominously giving her a dead man's hand and telling her to "bury the print of it in [her] heart" (4.1.45). Lynn Maxwell draws attention to the way that this metaphor establishes the Duchess's heart as "a soft, retentive, wax locale" able to receive imprints, consistent with Ferdinand's characterization of his sister "as material he can mold and inscribe" (137). Ferdinand's threat thus draws upon the trope of matter as feminine, imprinted

[24] See Chapter 1 of John Pollini's *From Republic to Empire: Rhetoric, Religion, and Power in the Visual Culture of Ancient Rome* for a comprehensive historical examination of these wax death masks.

upon by the male form-giver. By presenting the Duchess as a woman with an impressionable heart, Ferdinand primes the audience for a scene in which a weak Duchess is passively imprinted upon by Ferdinand's devious theatrics. This scene again blurs the boundaries between wax as material and metaphor. Ferdinand employs a wax metaphor to establish the Duchess as a metaphorically waxen figure who will be impressed upon by the literal wax bodies she is about to encounter. And in Ferdinand's eyes, this is precisely the outcome that is achieved. At the end of the waxworks episode, Ferdinand gleefully exclaims, "Excellent—as I would wish! She's plagued in art: / These presentations are but framed in wax / By the curious master in that quality, / Vincentio Lauriola; and she takes them / For true substantial bodies" (4.1.108-12). A closer reading of the Duchess's response to the wax bodies of her husband and children, however, reveals that she has a keener eye for Ferdinand's theatrics.

Even if early modern audiences watching this scene believed the figures behind the traverse to be the dead bodies of Antonio and the children until they heard Ferdinand's speech (the likely scenario given that the actors playing Antonio and the children probably posed as the wax figures), the Duchess's language suggests that she "is not fooled" (Chalk 394).[25] Immediately after laying eyes on the bodies, the Duchess laments:

> There is not between heaven and earth one wish
> I stay for after this; it wastes me more
> Than were't my picture, fashioned out of wax,
> Stuck with a magical needle, and then buried
> In some foul dunghill; and yond's an excellent property.
> For a tyrant, which I would account mercy. (4.1.60-65)

[25] In "The Wax Figures in *The Duchess of Malfi*," David Bergeron writes that "[t]hough the theater audience is initially caught in the stage illusion of these wax figures, Webster finally widens the ironic gap of perspective by informing us and letting the Duchess persist in the belief that the figures truly are Antonio and the children dead" (335). I do not think that the "ironic gap" is as large as Bergeron suggests that it is. I agree with Brian Chalk's assessment that the Duchess "is not fooled" (394).

It seems hardly a coincidence that the Duchess's first response to the wax bodies is to describe her own body as wax.[26] She evidently recognizes the figures before her for what they are: artistic representations. On the one hand, the Duchess's likening of her own body to a wax effigy that has been stabbed with needles seems to fulfill Ferdinand's depiction of her as a waxen and impressionable woman.[27] On the other hand, however, the Duchess is not simply a passive and unsuspecting witness in this scene. While her metaphor is one of great pathos that acknowledges the disturbing influence of the figures before her, it also expresses her clear attention to the material props in this scene. The Duchess's use of the phrase "excellent property," which Michael Neill glosses as a "theatrical accessory" (75n4), foreshadows her subsequent declaration, "I account this world a tedious theater, / For I do play a part in't 'gainst my will" (4.1.81-82), which Brian Chalk argues "provides further evidence of her awareness of her brother's design" (394). Taken together, these lines reveal the Duchess's keen understanding of the material theatricality of the scene staged before her.

If the Duchess recognizes that Ferdinand's figures are simply wax simulacra, then why does she react so strongly to them, expressing her own wish for death? Given her account of the world as a "tedious theater" in which she must "play a part" "'gainst [her] will," it is possible that the Duchess is simply acting here, performing an exaggerated version of the role that

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[26] Enterline ("Hairy on the In-side" 101), Chalk (394), and Maxwell (139) all call attention to the way that the Duchess's lines seem to gesture toward her awareness of the fact that the bodies before her are wax. Furthermore, in Act 4 Scene 2, the Duchess references her children in a manner that suggests she knows they are still alive. Immediately before she is murdered, the Duchess gives one final order to her waiting-woman Cariola: "I pray thee, look thou giv'st my little boy / Some syrup for his cold, and let the girl / Say her prayers ere she sleep" (4.2.190-92). While Neill's footnote in the Norton edition of the play suggests that the Duchess "seems to have forgotten the waxwork figures that made her think her children dead" (85n2), I read these lines as further proof that the Duchess recognized the figures as wax in Act 4, Scene 1 and never believed her children dead in the first place.

[27] In her chapter "Wax Arts: Projects of Transformation in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* and Donne's *Sappho to Philaenis*," Lynn Maxwell proposes "wax magic" (a term she coins that she defines as a version of "sympathetic magic" "intended to impact a person through the manipulation of wax simulacra") as a useful way to understand "Ferdinand's vision of torture and work on the duchess's psyche" (135).

Ferdinand has set out for her. It is not like the Duchess to bow meekly to Ferdinand's will, however, and so it is important to acknowledge that even as the Duchess recognizes that the figures are props or copies, these representations legitimately affect and agitate her. Her agitation can be attributed in part to the fact that, even as she realizes that the figures before her are not dead bodies, she understands that soon they will be. The Duchess's horror thus comes from witnessing the future enacted before her. It also seems to me, however, that her emotional response is related to the material used to represent her husband and children. As I discussed earlier, wax is a material closely tied to the female body, and particularly to the maternal body and the woman's womb. On a subconscious level, the Duchess's uneasiness with these figures—especially those of her children—likely derives from the fact that these waxen forms, rather than existing within her own body under the jurisdiction of her maternal shaping powers, are placed outside of her under the control of men, including her own brother and the male wax portrait artist Vincentio Lauriola.

It is important to distinguish between the Duchess presenting herself as waxen and Ferdinand presenting her as waxen. When Ferdinand alludes to the Duchess's heart as impressionable, he invokes the long-standing misogynistic trope of women as passive, feminized wax matter subject to male impression—a trope that can be traced all the way back to thinkers like Aristotle. When the Duchess figures herself as wax, on the other hand, she is doing something very different. The Duchess reclaims Ferdinand's characterization of her as waxen, using this label to reveal her knowledge of her brother's trick. Furthermore, due to her identity as a mother, the Duchess's imagined wax self-portrait also resonates with wax's connection to pregnancy and fertility in a way that draws attention to the power of female creation. Wax may have historically been invoked by male philosophers to reinforce sexist stereotypes about

women as passive, but, as thinkers like Cavendish make clear, the physical and theoretical malleability of the medium allows for other ways to conceptualize it that leave space for female agency. It is in this latter spirit that I call the Duchess a "waxen woman."

If Ferdinand imagines the Duchess's waxenness pejoratively, figuring her as raw matter susceptible to male impression, and the Duchess reclaims this description to reveal that she has seen through her brother's plot, then Webster himself goes a step further, presenting waxenness itself as a positive quality that elevates the Duchess and distinguishes her material legacy from that of all the other characters in the play. Before discussing her posthumous legacy, however, it is necessary to examine one final scene that cements the Duchess's status as a waxen female figure: the moment of her death. In Act 4, Scene 2, Webster aligns the Duchess with two literary women who undergo significant material changes chronicled by wax metaphors. The scenes that I am about to examine once again straddle the boundary between wax as matter and metaphor. These women are literally waxen, to the extent that their bodies wax, or change (notably, they are also all represented at various moments as pregnant), but they are also metaphorically waxen, to the extent that the medium of wax is used to figure this bodily transformation. Situating the Duchess within this lineage of waxen women helps contextualize her own unusual transformation from life to death, woman to echo. The Duchess is waxen in both life (she gives birth to children, her body changes, she describes herself as a wax "picture") and death (her endurance as echo is a metaphorically waxen condition), and it is thus only fitting that her transition from one condition to the other is achieved by way of an implicit allusion to wax, a long-standing figure for state change in the ancient and early modern worlds.

The Duchess is murdered not long after witnessing Ferdinand's waxworks episode, and her final moments, as narrated by Bosola, firmly situate her within a literary tradition of waxen

women. Bosola, standing before what he believes to be the dead body of the Duchess, is in for a surprise when the body begins to move:

> … She stirs! Here's life!
> Return, fair soul, from darkness, and lead mine
> Out of this sensible hell! She's warm, she breathes!
> Upon thy pale lips *I will melt my heart*
> To store them with fresh color. —Who's there?
> Some cordial drink! —Alas! I dare not call.
> So pity would destroy pity. —Her eye opes,
> And heaven in it seems to ope, that late was shut,
> To take me up to mercy. (4.2.325-33, my emphasis)

The Duchess's extraordinary (and extraordinarily brief—she dies shortly after) reanimation, along with Bosola's reaction to it, strongly evoke Ovid's Pygmalion myth. In Ovid's story, Pygmalion sculpts an ivory maiden with whom he falls in love, appealing to Venus to ask that the woman be brought to life. Venus complies, and the miraculous occurs:

> When he [Pygmalion] returned he sought the image of his maid, and bending over the couch he kissed her. She seemed warm to his touch. Again he kissed her, and with his hands also he touched her breast. The ivory grew soft to his touch and, its hardness vanishing, gave and yielded beneath his fingers, as Hymettian wax grows soft under the sun and, moulded by the thumb, is easily shaped to many forms and becomes usable through use itself … The maiden felt the kisses, blushed and, lifting her timid eyes up to the light, she saw the sky and her lover at the same time. (10.280-94)

Wax plays a pivotal role in this moment of transformation, chronicling the statue's transition from cold to warm, inanimate to animate, art to life. As a liminal medium that itself straddles all of these states and binaries (and that is itself often used in early stages of the sculpting process, either for modeling or as a part of the "lost-wax" bronze casting technique), wax is the perfect material to describe the woman's transformation.

Bosola's speech clearly borrows from Ovid's famous scene of animation. Bosola, like Pygmalion, expresses disbelief that the female body before him is warm, marveling that she who appeared dead comes to life and opens her eyes. While Bosola does not directly define the

Duchess as waxen, his use of the word "melt" and his hope to lend the Duchess's lips "color" resonates with Ovid's invocation of wax to illustrate how Pygmalion's statue bridges contradictory states. In her brief revival, the Duchess similarly straddles life and death. While the Duchess does not, like Pygmalion's statue, literally transform from one material to another, she is certainly revived or reanimated in a manner that calls back to Ovid's myth, and that presages her coming material transformation into an echo.

The Duchess's reanimation also alludes to another early modern play that draws inspiration from Ovid's Pygmalion myth and that was being performed just as Webster was finishing *The Duchess of Malfi*: William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*.[28] In this play, the Sicilian king Leontes, enraged by what he believes to be an affair between his wife Hermione and his friend Polixenes, instigates a series of events that culminates in Hermione's apparent death. Sixteen years later, Hermione's friend Paulina presents Leontes with a statue of his wife. Just as Bosola expresses guilt as he stands before the Duchess's presumably dead body, the seemingly lifeless statue of Hermione elicits feelings of remorse in Leontes:

> … O, thus she stood,
> Even with such life of majesty – warm life
> As now it coldly stands – when first I wooed her.
> I am ashamed. Does not the stone rebuke me
> For being more stone than it? (5.3.34-38)

[28] Many critics have drawn attention to the similarities between these two plays. David Bergeron notes that *The Winter's Tale* was being performed just around "the time Webster may have been finishing *The Duchess*," and concludes that *The Winter's Tale* might very well have influenced Webster's play (332). Bergeron furthermore ties Hermione's transformation scene to Webster's waxworks episode, presenting Hermione's transformation as more positive to the extent that it "leads to transcendent joy and reconciliation, while [Webster's] wax figures belie the truth to the Duchess and encourage her longing for death" (333). My problem with this reading is that Hermione's transformation does not lead to "transcendent joy and reconciliation"; at the end of the play, her son Mamillius remains dead, and we never hear her speak to her husband again. I believe that Hermione's and the Duchess's reanimation scenes are in fact powerfully united by the theme of maternal loss.

Like Pygmalion's ivory maiden, Hermione's statue emerges as metaphorically waxen to the extent that it straddles life and death, life and art, observer and object, and, importantly, hot and cold ("warm life / As now it coldly stands"). The word "warm" becomes even more important when Hermione's statue begins to stir. Leontes famously responds to this miraculous animation with the cry, "O, she's warm!" (5.3.109)—an allusion to Ovid's Pygmalion myth and implicitly to its wax metaphor. Webster appears to borrow from Shakespeare's Ovidian allusion with Bosola's line, "She's warm, she breathes!" Taken together, Ovid's Pygmalion myth and Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* help situate the Duchess's revival within a larger context of literary moments of female animation. In describing the Duchess's temporary reanimation, Webster, like Shakespeare, looks back to Ovid's Pygmalion myth and its pivotal metamorphosis that hinges on a wax metaphor. It is valuable to place the Duchess within this lineage of waxen women because in the final acts of the play, it becomes clear that her legacy is a waxen one.[29]

## Materialist Echoes at the Duchess's Grave

The Duchess's material presence in Webster's play does not end with her death. In Act 5, Scene 3, she returns, albeit in a different form—that of an echo. As Antonio and Delio traverse "the ruins of an ancient abbey" (5.3.2), an echo begins to toss their words back to them. The stage directions specify that this echo comes "*from the Duchess's grave*" (5.3.19sd)—a fact unbeknownst to Antonio and Delio, who have not yet learned of her death. The fact that the echo is situated within a larger landscape of monumental ruins highlights the extent to which

[29] It is also worth noting that Pygmalion's statue, Hermione, and the Duchess all appear pregnant at various moments in Ovid's, Shakespeare's, and Webster's texts. While I do not have room to pursue this connection more thoroughly in this paper, this is another way in which all three of these women appear as waxen. Lynn Maxwell makes a pithy and insightful remark about Pygmalion's statue's pregnancy and childbirth that is worth citing here: "The wax woman waxed with the moon and, in perhaps the most waxen act of reproduction imaginable, bore a child" (176).

this voice serves as yet another form of memorialization. As opposed to the inert stone ruins of the abbey, however, which are in the process of being worn away to nothing, much like the metaphorical pyramid that Bosola invokes, this echo is dynamic and lively. Like the character Echo in Ovid's original Narcissus and Echo story, the Duchess's echo occasionally makes slight modifications to the phrases that it repeats. When Antonio observes of the echo, "'Tis very like my wife's voice," the echo calls back, "*Ay, wife's voice*" (5.3.26-27), and when Antonio says that he believes it impossible "To fly your fate," the echo cautions, "*Oh, fly your fate!*" (5.3.36). Through these subtle acoustic alterations, the Duchess's echo changes the meaning of Antonio's words. The echo does not simply passively repeat; it also actively warns.

Some critics have taken issue with such an active reading of the Duchess's echo. Brian Chalk, for instance, claims that "the echo functions in the play much in the same way that monuments do: just as monuments are meant to compensate for the loss of the dead that they represent, the echo creates the impression that some form of posthumous communication is possible. But what Antonio hears is the reverberation of his own voice returning back to him in distorted form" (399). While I appreciate Chalk's situation of the echo within the play's larger dynamics of memorialization, I disagree with his suggestion that the Duchess's echo is nothing more than a neutral auditory reverberation. Antonio himself seems to believe that it is something more. When he asks, "Shall I never see her [the Duchess] more," and the echo repeats, "*Never see her more*," Antonio notices that the echo only repeats the final words of his sentence, marveling, "I marked not one repetition of the echo / But that" (5.3.43-45). He notices, in other words, that the Duchess's echo seems to be selectively repeating information. One way to understand this selective repetition is to frame the echo as not just an auditory reverberation, but also as a material force.

Taking into account a materialist understanding of sound and echoes helps explain the way that the Duchess's echo operates as a material force in the play. Ancient and early modern materialists understood echoes as matter, as demonstrated by the writings of Lucretius and Cavendish. Lucretius's explanation of echoes in *De Rerum Natura* is situated within a larger discussion of sound and the senses. He uses the fact that raising our voices can rough up our throats to support his claim that voices and words are material, arguing that since "the voice often scrapes the gullet, and a cry issuing forth makes the windpipe rougher," "voices and words [must] consist of bodily elements" (4.528-34).[30] Lucretius similarly understands the echoes of voices as material, describing that "in solitary places … the rocks give back the same shapes of words in their order," "buffet[ing] back and repeat[ing] the words thus trained to come back" (4.573-79). Here the distinct material "shapes" of the words that bounce back and forth between the rocks reveal the materiality of echoes. Lucretius also assigns a significant degree of agency to the rocks, which do the work of "buffet[ing]" the echoes.

Lucretius's description of how we hear voices (and therefore echoes of voices) is similarly grounded in the material. Once released from the body, Lucretius asserts that "one voice is dispersed suddenly into many voices, since it distributes itself amongst many separate ears, stamping on the words a shape and clear sound" (4.565-67). The voice here is once again

[30] For a prominent literary example of the materiality of words and voice, see Chapter 55 of Rabelais's *Le Quart Livre*, the frozen words (les parolles gelées) episode. In this story, Pantagruel is traveling on a boat and encounters a collection of frozen words whose sound can only be released by holding the icy words until they thaw: "Les quelz, estre quelque peu eschauffez entre nos mains, fondoient comme neiges et les oyons realement" (1072). I find this episode interesting not only because of the way that it presents words and voices as tangible, but also because the words are figured as snow that melts ("fondoient comme neiges"). Another similar moment occurs in Chaucer's *The House of Fame*, where the narrator recounts that Fame's city stands upon a "feble fundament" of "yse" (ll. 1130-32). Carved (or "y-grave") into this ice are the names of "famous folkes," with some of the inscriptions "conserved with the shade" and others "almost of-thowed" in the sun (ll. 1136-60). Intriguingly, Chaucer employs the verb "wexe" to describe the waning fame of those whose icy names are melting away (l. 1146). Here we thus find another latent pairing of wax and snow. These textual moments from Rabelais and Chaucer fit into a larger tradition of thinking about voice as material and words as "fleshy" (both Augustine and Dante, for instance, also conceptualized voice and words in this way).

an active force; it "distributes itself" (in Latin, "*se dividit*," an active verb) to the listeners' ears, distinctively shaping and "stamping" ("*obsignans*," also an active construction) the speaker's words. Cavendish rejects such metaphors of impression in her *Philosophical Letters*, arguing, as she does with wax and snow, that while "many Learned men say, that as all perception, so also the seeing of ones face in a Looking-glass, and Eccho, are made by impression and reaction," she believes that in the case of echoes "the air patterns out the copy of the sound" (69). In response to the question of whether the air can thus be said to speak, Cavendish equivocates, "I cannot tell that; for though I say, that the air repeats the words … yet I cannot guess what [its] perceptions are" (69-70). She leaves open, in other words, the possibility that matter is agential.

While Lucretius's and Cavendish's accounts of echoes differ in terms of the activity and passivity of the various forces involved, their discussions both frame voices and echoes as matter with at least a potential for liveliness. The Duchess's echo in Webster's play can certainly be situated within this materialist tradition. Lucretius's thoughts clarify the way that the Duchess's echo is not simply disembodied sound, but rather a material force. And Cavendish's musings furthermore open up the possibility that the Duchess's echo, more than an acoustic reflection, speaks in its own right. To employ Cavendish's vocabulary, the Duchess could be understood to "pattern out" Antonio's language but then alter this pattern, reflecting back a version of his words that carry a different message.

Unlike Ferdinand and the Cardinal, whose matter disperses beyond recognition upon their deaths, the Duchess retains a material essence. The Duchess as echo is made up of the very same matter, or atoms, as the Duchess in her human form. This matter has just been reconfigured, like the letters in Lucretius's sentences, or the wax in Pythagoras's metaphor for

the enduring spirit.[31] As I discussed previously, however, there is an important difference between Lucretius's discussion of the reconfiguration of matter and Pythagoras's theory of the transmigration of souls: Lucretius believes that the spirit scatters with the body when it dies, whereas Ovid's Pythagoras believes that the spirit, while changing forms, retains a singular essence that passes from creature to creature. In depicting the Duchess's transformation into an echo that retains both the Duchess's matter and her own inner essence or identity, Webster, like Ovid's Pythagoras, manipulates the classical materialist tradition. He retains one of its central elements, the rearrangement of matter, combining this idea with the concept of metempsychosis. Webster's engagement with the materialist tradition can be itself understood as a performative act of materialist rearrangement. Just as Lucretius likens the rearrangement of atoms into new configurations to the rearrangement of letters into new words, Webster combines elements of various literary and philosophical traditions into unique new combinations.

Act 5, Scene 3 of *The Duchess of Malfi* is notable not only for the Duchess's echo, but also for what I read as its echoes of *De Rerum Natura*. At the opening of the scene, Antonio enters into a series of philosophical musings about the fragility of memorials that strongly resembles Lucretius's own discussion of monuments cited earlier. Antonio meditates:

> And questionless, here in this open court,
> Which now lies naked to the injuries
> Of stormy weather, some men lie interred
> Loved the church so well, and gave so largely to't,

[31] The performance history of the play may support this reading. According to David Carnegie, in the early modern period, Echo was "presumably played by the actor of the Duchess" (81). While it is impossible to know whether the actor playing the Duchess would have physically reemerged onto the stage during the echo scene (as we know happened in the nineteenth century, and as often happens in modern performances of the play), at least one other play contemporaneous to *The Duchess of Malfi*—*The Second Maiden's Tragedy* (1611)—included a tomb scene where a female ghost emerged onto stage (Carnegie 81, 6). Carnegie notes that "[i]t is possible Webster asked for the same tomb he would have seen the King's Men use in Middleton's" play, which would further support the possibility that the Duchess as echo, like the ghostly maiden in Middleton's play, constituted a physical presence on stage (6). If this was indeed the case, then in Jacobean performances of the play, the Duchess as echo would have quite literally been comprised of the same matter as the Duchess in her human form, since both would have been played by the same actor.

> They thought it should have canopied their bones
> Till doomsday; but all things have their end:
> Churches and cities, which have diseases like to men,
> Must have like death that we have. (5.3.12-19)

Antonio's emphasis on the vulnerability of even the holiest of buildings to the same forces of decay that threaten all life recalls Lucretius's assertion that even "the gods' temples and their images wear out and crack, nor can their holy divinity carry forward the boundaries of fate, or strive against nature's laws" (5.306-10). After Antonio finishes speaking, the Duchess's echo repeats his last words, to which Delio responds, "Now the echo hath caught you" (5.3.20). Delio's comment is particularly resonant given Webster's apparent engagement with Lucretius here (or, at the very least, with a materialist vocabulary about memorial legacy). In these lines, Webster appears caught in a metaphorical echo chamber of his own. Like Ovid's Echo and that of the Duchess, Webster attempts to repeat with a difference the words of those who have come before him, but risks becoming "caught" or trapped within this prior language.

Lucretius, too, was well aware of this tension. Throughout *De Rerum Natura*, the poet demonstrates an acute awareness of his dialogue with past authors, which he frequently expresses through the metaphor of the footprint, which, like the echo, conveys a sense of impression and repetition. As I noted at the beginning of this paper, in his opening to Book 3, Lucretius addresses his atomist predecessor Epicurus, writing, "and now on the marks [*vestigia*] you have left I plant my own footsteps firm, not so much desiring to be your rival, as for love, because I yearn to copy you" (3.3-6). *Vestigia* is a word that appears repeatedly throughout *De Rerum Natura*, and can refer not only to footprints or tracks, but also more generally to "visible trace[s] or remnant[s] of something which no longer exists or is present" (*OLD* def. 7a). The word thus fits within the larger memorial economy of *De Rerum Natura*, and with Lucretius's interest in the various kinds of traces that we leave behind. As I also noted, however, despite

Lucretius's admiration for Epicurus, he also demonstrates his desire to break from Epicurus's footprints and chart a new path of his own, declaring at the beginning of Book 4 that he is setting out into "[a] pathless country" "where no other foot has ever trod" (4.1-2). Lucretius does not anticipate that his footprints will trace the definitive path of knowledge; he expects that his readers will engage dynamically with his words and ideas, much as he engaged with the philosophies of those who came before him. In Book 1, Lucretius explains that "for a keen-scented mind," the examples, or "tracks" (again, *vestigia*) that he provides "are enough to enable you to recognize the others for yourself" (1.402-3).[32] Here, *vestigia* emerge as material traces that, like echoes, reveal the narrator's larger concerns with what it means to be an author engaging with past traditions. Writing demands an awareness of both those who have come before you, whose words you trace and echo, and an awareness of those who come after you, who will in turn trace and echo your own words. This knowledge of course brings risks; an author's words, once released into the world, will be cited, transcribed, misconstrued, echoed, and rearranged in ways that are beyond the author's control. (Lucretius's own textual fate is an excellent example of this problem; his remarkable poem was neglected or studied in secrecy for centuries before its revival in the early modern period for a variety of purposes including to support or undermine current political factions.) Despite these risks, writing is also, like the Duchess's echo or Lucretius's footprints, a way to survive beyond death. The immortality it brings, however, is not constant or fixed, but dynamic and ever-changing, much like the Duchess's legacy itself.

[32] This is yet another Lucretian line quoted by Montaigne in his *Essais* (vol. 9, p. 95).

## Conclusion

The Duchess's legacy is not tied to a stone tomb or monument of the variety she imagines at the beginning of the play when she tells Antonio that she is "flesh and blood," "not the figure cut in alabaster / Kneels at my husband's tomb" (1.1.441-43). Her legacy is rather dynamic and lively, more closely aligned with wax than with stone. The Duchess's echo serves as a particularly salient example of her waxen legacy. Echoes, like wax, are associated with doubles, repetitions, and *imago*s. Both are dynamic forces of repetition and reshaping, and both are meta-poetic figures for authorship and poetry. If the first four acts of the play begin to present the Duchess as a waxen woman, then the echo scene completes this project by depicting her material rearrangement and spiritual perdurance. The Duchess is the only character in the play who is offered such a legacy. Immediately before he dies, Bosola cries out, "Oh, I am gone! / We are only like dead walls or vaulted graves / That, ruined, yields no echo" (5.5.94-96). Bosola laments what he knows will be his own lack of legacy; he will not, like the Duchess, have an echo. The "we" in these lines is not universal. It refers to the male characters dying around Bosola, but not to the Duchess, who lives on as an echo. It is significant that it is a female character to whom Webster grants this legacy. Here, waxenness emerges not as a feminine weakness, but rather as an ability to be reshaped that is tied to the kind of legacy that outlives the death of one's human form. It is this legacy which makes the Duchess a powerful author figure.

While many critics have read Bosola and Ferdinand as playwright figures in *The Duchess of Malfi*,[33] the Duchess herself is another author surrogate in the play. Discussing

[33] Michael Neill claims that Bosola often "serv[es] as a kind of mask for the dramatist himself" ("Introduction" xviii), and Owens presents Ferdinand as "a double for the dramatist, with the waxwork tableau figuring as an ironic, self-deprecating comment on the playhouse's powers and limitations to simulate life" (870).

Ovid's Narcissus and Echo myth in *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare*, Lynn Enterline argues that "Echo is a compelling figure for Ovid's narrator" considering that "[f]ew writers have so fundamentally based their poetic project on recycling the stories, and sometimes the words, of other previous discourses and texts" (57). Just as Echo repeats Narcissus's words with a difference, Ovid recycles past stories but puts his own unique stamp on them. Webster, too, is a great recycler of words, and the Duchess's echo functions as a salient metaphor for Webster's own imitative work. That the Duchess is a woman does not preclude her from emerging as a double for the playwright; Webster in fact seems to suggest that her associations with wax, fertility, creation, and echoes make her a particularly compelling author surrogate. The Duchess is not merely an actor in a "tedious theater" as she claims to be in Act 4, but she is also an author figure whose enduring legacy is one to which Webster himself aspires.

Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* invokes and subverts a number of texts and traditions, notably including classical materialism, in order to outline two opposing versions of material legacy that structure the play: utter dispersal and waxen reshaping. Within the world of the play, the former is best embodied by Ferdinand and the Cardinal, and the latter is best embodied by the Duchess. The Duchess serves as a surrogate for Webster himself, and her posthumous endurance as an echo speaks to Webster's belief, as expressed in *A Monumental Columne,* that it is not through "guilded Monuments" that men and women will live on, but rather through the "Poets pen" (l. 325). By the end of the play, it becomes clear that the Duchess's legacy does not only endure in the form of her echo. Webster's play is itself a monument to her.[34] *The Duchess of Malfi* is its own sort of tombstone; it is even inscribed with the Duchess's name. This monument is not an alabaster statue, a pyramid, or a pillar of snow, all of which could dissolve

[34] Michael Neill similarly reads *The Duchess of Malfi* as "a monument to the Duchess herself, a device which (like the echo scene's own monument) enables her to speak beyond death" ("Monuments and Ruins" 75).

into oblivion. It is rather a literary monument, a monument composed of words *as* matter, much like Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* is composed of letters *as* atoms. These words, as waxen and malleable as the Duchess herself, will endure and continue to be reshaped long beyond her death as well as that of her author.

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