The class structure and hierarchy of the play

Antonio

Cardinal Ferdinand

The aristocracy - established order.

Importance of the:
Political
Public
Military
Dynasty

Display
Theatrical
Hollow
Artifice
Repressive
Self-projection

The Duchess

Antonio (position gained though ability rather than birth)

Bourgeois (in her values)

Importance of the family

Private

Administrative

Individualistic

Introspection

Reflection

Self-reflection

Delio

Bosola (socially marginalised?)

Economic

Upstarts?

- Socially mobile and unstable world?
- Is Webster challenging the established hierarchy?
- Is the play an early celebration of bourgeois values?
- Is Webster presenting an older order which is no longer meaningful?
- Whigman argues that Ferdinand is an embattled aristocrat, resisting an onslaught of upward mobility. He has an obsessive pride in the purity of blood.
- The Duchess' marriage threatens the brothers' identities as aristocrats.
- Is the corrupt and decadent past being replaced by a more promising future?
- Friction between the dominant social order and the emergent pressures toward social change.