Hypocrisy/duality:

Michael Neill describes the sense of ‘Uncanny’ in the use of doubles: ‘the uncanny world of Changeling, with its contradictory, double selves’ → CHANGELINGS

- Beatrice is ‘transformed into her own dark double’ → ‘In what the act has mad you, y’are no more now.’
- This idea of the ‘evil substitute haunts the play’
- Vermandero says of his castle: ‘our citadels/Are plac’d conspicuous to outward view./On promonts’ tops; but within are secrets.’ Allegory for corruption of the society; and reality lying beneath façade, mask.
- Beatrice’s dual nature, her façade of virtue is hypocritical, maintaining mask of modesty: ‘Though thou writ’st maid, thou whore in thy affection’ — duality of nature
- De Flores, called ‘Honest De Flores’ by Tomazo, is in fact a ‘viper’ and ‘serpent’
- Antonio/Tony
- Patricia Thomson: maid Diaphanta ‘has to fill the dual role of honest virgin and bawdy waiting-maid’
- Use of ‘asides’ provides insight into character’s inner lives vs outer facades, motivations and desires concealed by the masks they present to the world

Ben Jonson, Volpone, 1606 –

- Typical Renaissance City Comedy: addressed social hypocrisy, materialistic greed, avarice; use of masks, performance of roles; set in Venice — disengagement with morality.
- Addressing social customs and financial dealings of the new and prosperous merchant class. Plots were about social-climbing and greed, often moralizing. Popular due to present sense of possible social transformation e.g. Mosca. Expose corruption and amorality but celebrate wit and ambition.
- De Flores comparison to Mosca, who wears mask of servility to master, Volpone, but he has ‘eye ever on the advantage’. ‘I could skip out of my skin, now, like a subtle snake, I am so limber.’ Masks/fluidity of identity, self.
- Mosca - ‘change a visor, swifter than a thought’
- Volpone’s impersonation of an invalid, in order to amass a fortune from gifts → like Antonio’s impression of an idiot; performance — costume of ‘ointment’ and ‘caps,’ has a ‘feigned cough’.
- Greenblatt argues that because V’s identity is self-fashioned, he is utterly free, ‘liberated even from himself, uncommitted to a single, fixed role.’ Renaissance individual autonomy?
- Theatricality – ‘Volpone transforms himself into a theatre in which he is both actor and audience.’ [Greenblatt].

Morality

Duality is strongly linked to morality in this play, the artificial mask of goodness disguising inner corruption. Moral decay at core of the body politic [see castle metaphor]:

- ‘hidden malady’ within Alsemero represents societal concealed corruption beneath courtly surface;
- Mirrors De Flores’ corruption between his mask of servility, which ‘shelter[s] such a cunning cruelty’
- Inescapability of sin, temptation: Isabella: one ‘need not gad about to seek her sin’
During the Renaissance, there had been a centralisation of power in the monarch at the expense of the influence of the aristocracy; Span Trag 'views with alarm a system that concentrates power in a single crowned head' [Maus], with the King's inattentiveness contributing to the disaster. Portuguese subplot – Portuguese Viceroy has the power to exact revenge on whom he chooses → rash decision to have Alexandro murdered, with little evidence; contrasts to the painstaking efforts of Hieronimo to petition the Spanish King, and then plot and organise the murders.

The enactment of revenge t/f 'blurs the line between personal retaliation and political coup.' Taking the law into one's own hands demonstrates a lack of faith in the system → t/f, 'blood vengeance subverts the power of the crown' [Maus]. Viceroy- 'They reck no laws that mediate revenge.' (I.iii.48). Disregard for establishment.

Dual role of the revenger: the revenger seeks to restore balance and justice to the social order, but undermines it at the same time; 'double bind' [Maus].

Hieronimo and Horatio are not of high birth, and rely upon the patronage of the king, wielding no influence of their own – they distinguish themselves through their hard work and skill; appear to be achieving their own social advancement. Appearance of meritocracy is a mirage – 'birth rather than worth remains decisive in a Renaissance court' [Maus]; Lorenzo's choice of Balthazar as a companion, a man of his social caste, over Horatio; Spanish king flirts with his Portuguese counterpart, ignoring Hieronimo's information.

Revenge tied up with beliefs about nobility; ignoble not to seek justice. Gordon Braden: play documents the 'problematics of morality and self-respect' – Hieronimo chides himself, 'for shame' to 'neglect' his duty to his son; Bel-Imperia also chastises his delay. Nobility held to a higher chivalric code – Alexandro: 'Not that I fear the extremity of death-/For nobles cannot stoop to servile fear' (III.i.40-41).

Religion

Description of Underworld 'pagan; not a Christian world. Hieronimo's pagan dirge for Horatio in Latin – the audience would not all have been able to understand. A pre-Christian world, and to explore primal and medieval ideas of vengeance?

Katharine Eisaman Maus claims that religion is not attractively presented in the play; the Underworld 'seems as capricious and nepotistic as the court of Spain; it reproduces rather than compensates for the defects of this world.' Hades makes his decision based upon Proserpine's flirtatious intervention; Don Andrea is allowed to dictate the fates of the dead, and misplaces them.

However, arguably the religious dimension, and presence of Ghost allows a degree of catharsis to the end of the play; although all characters are dead, the good will be rewarded and the bad punished, allowing for an element of didacticism. Revenge- 'place thy friends in ease, the rest in woes./For here though death doth end their misery,/I'll there begin their endless tragedy.' (IV.v.46-48).

GENDER:

Bel-Imperia is interesting Renaissance female protagonist; Kyd explores ideas of agency, and limitations of female autonomy. Name 'Bel-Imperia' reflects the conflict in her character = 'beautiful dominion.' Inevitably under the control of men, throughout the play she attempts to assert her own agency.
Work shared between men and women; farming labour carried out ‘irrespective of sex’; education available to all; Hythloday views them as an untapped resource, full of potential. ‘Both sexes are given military training.’ Women can be priests.

Paul Turner: ‘rigidly patriarchal character of Utopian society’ – inequality of the monthly repentance: ‘no provision is made for the domestic shortcomings of the male.’ Society has patriarchal structure: the household comes under ‘the authority of the oldest male’; ‘wives are subordinate to their husbands’

Paul Turner: ‘in sexual matters the penal code is barbarous.’ Brutal punishment for pre-marital sex (life-long celibacy) provides incentive for marriage; conditioning

Prospective bride and groom ‘exhibited stark naked’ to each other – marriage compared to buying a horse; ‘don’t even bother to take it out of its wrappings’ – objectification.

INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY:

The government’s treatment of its citizens contradicts Renaissance notions of individual agency, frequently suffocating the individual as well as nurturing it, through tight control and supervision. Sanford Kessler: ‘the restricted quality of their lives’ makes Utopia ‘hard to reconcile with any version of [...] philosophical excellence.’ The strong influence the state wields over the lives of its citizens means that personal liberty is often sacrificed in exchange for social equality and stability.

- Repression of the individual: ‘all with the same language, laws, customs [...] all built on the same plan ... all look exactly alike’ – homogeneity; deliberate effacement of individuality, encouraging citizens to serve society rather than themselves
- ‘everyone on the island wears the same sort of clothes’
- Never hear a Utopian’s name
- Lack of private property, whilst it ensures equality, no disparity between living conditions; privacy of domestic spaces compromised: ‘anyone can go in and out’ – neighbourhood surveillance invasive
- Free time: ‘not to waste their time in idleness and self-indulgence, but to make good use of it in some congenial activity’; must be usefully employed, purposeful. Paul Turner: ‘heavy casualties among the minor pleasures of life, especially the more frivolous ones’
- Lack of respect for the individual, coldly uprooted: ‘surplus population is transferred, ‘supernumerary adults’ – an indistinct mass rather than individuals
- ‘Young not allowed to sit next to each other at meals, but mixed up with elder generation: surveillance, preventing rebellious thought – ‘respect for the older generation tends to discourage bad behaviour amongst the younger ones – since everything they say or do is bound to be noticed by the people sitting just beside them’ – watched, scrutinised. Unable to engage in private conversations
- Limited freedom of movement – Utopian needs permission to travel. Paul Turner: ‘lack of personal liberty’; ‘severely punished’ for travelling without a passport. Metaphorical difficulty of movement reflects general claustrophobia and paralysing effect Utopian social policies have upon individual autonomy generally
- ‘everyone has his eye on you, so you’re practically forced to get on with your job’ – totalitarianism; close supervision of the state. Sinister.

On the other hand, the radical ideals of Utopia would have been alien to early sixteenth-century English society, which inhibited individual autonomy through repressive social