

Some have seen Vittoria as an innocent, unjustly accused; others as a calculating, confident manipulator of the truth. How do you view Vittoria's position in the trial scene?

So far in 'The White Devil' the audience have been presented with two sides of Vittoria one as a 'femme fatal' and the other an innocent victim. Whilst it is evident from the way in which the trial of Vittoria is conducted she is subject to gross injustice and sexism she is not just a mere victim. In fact by looking at earlier actions of Vittoria it can be said she lies and is perhaps to some extent worthy of her treatment.

Let us first consider the role of Vittoria as a seductress and an immoral character within 'The White Devil'. In order to determine whether Vittoria is justly accused by Monticelso and Francisco it must be decided whether her actions were worthy or such treatment. In the trial Monticelso calls Vittoria a 'most notorious strumpet' which is deeply insulting implying she is being described as nothing more than a prostitute especially as she comes from 'Venice' which was famous for prostitution. However, the attack on Vittoria is not unfounded from Monticelso as in the previous act the audience has seen how promiscuous Vittoria is. For example, Vittoria wears the jewel Brachiano gives her 'lower' which is a sexual reference which alludes to the pair's adulterous like behaviour. In a religious society such as the one in which the play is set adultery would be considered a serious sin and therefore Webster's contemporary audience may feel that Monticelso's accusations towards Vittoria are in some way justified.

Vittoria may also be thought not to be a victim in the trial scene as she demonstrates confidence in her trial. The most obvious example to take here is Vittoria's dealings with the lawyer. Firstly, Vittoria objects to the use of Latin, demanding that the lawyer speak in 'his usual tongue' so that others in the court may understand the proceedings. This is clearly confident but could be viewed as calculating as if the whole court understands Vittoria's trial they may be more likely to support her and give it its unfair nature. Moreover, if a Vittoria were a victim then it would be unlikely for her to be able to demonstrate such confidence in the court room as victims are often portrayed as feeble and weak characters. Eventually the lawyer is told to 'put up his papers' by Francisco in order to meet the wishes of Vittoria. This act makes Vittoria look even less of a victim as she is manipulating the situation to get what she wants her trial even seems a little fairer as a result.

However, despite Vittoria's immoral behaviour she may be seen as unjustly accused because she has not committed the murder of Camillo for which she is being prosecuted. The audience know this accusation to be false because they have witnessed the murder in a dumb show in the previous act and know the true perpetrator to be Flamineo. The stage directions say that 'Flamineo pincheth upon his neck' so the audience would witness him murdering Camillo and simultaneously proving Vittoria innocent. Therefore, as Flamineo is letting his own sister take the blame for a crime he committed it could be said that he is actually the calculating character in the play. This thought can be supported by the asides given by Flamineo in the scene of the trial. Flamineo says he puts on a 'feigned garb of mirth' in order to 'gull suspicion' explicitly stating that he is trying to deflect the blame onto his siblings Vittoria and Marcello who are also arrested. If Flamineo is putting on a comical act to rid himself of suspicion it is he who is calculating and manipulating and not Vittoria.