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## Crucifixes and Capuchins: Desecrated Rituals in *The White Devil*

This essay, which is taken from chapter three of "Staging Sacred Things," examines the use of cross properties in the seventeenth-century theater. In the chapter, I argue that in order to deploy such a controversial symbol on the public stage, the theater companies displaced these properties into foreign contexts and associated them with the actor's bodies, making them markers of personal virtue rather than idols to be worshiped. This strategy is especially evident in plays with nationalistic overtones: European soldiers fighting in the Holy Land wore crosses on their tunics, and in such settings the cross became a less problematic symbol of generic Christianity. The crucifix stood on the opposite end of the spectrum from these painted military emblems, and was deeply offensive to Protestant reformers because it contained an image of the body of Christ. This section reveals, however, that crucifixes survived in private homes and on the stage throughout the early 1600s. I point out that in *The White Devil* (1612), John Webster was able to present a small, jeweled crucifix in a positive light by introducing it as an element of a family inheritance system. Alluding to the role that small crosses continued to play in recusant families, Webster evokes sympathy for his embattled matriarch while ultimately questioning the stability of the object she values so highly.