INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6” x 9” black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
RICE UNIVERSITY

Sexual Discourse in the Jacobean Theater of Social Mobility

by

Margaret M. Sticpewich

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

Meredith Skura, Director
Professor of English

Edward Snow
Professor of English

Martin Wiener
M. G. Jones Professor of History

Houston, Texas

May, 1997
Copyright
Margaret M. Sticpewich
1997.
ABSTRACT.

Sexual Discourse in the Jacobean Theater of Social Mobility

by

Margaret M. Sticpewich

Social mobility was a feature of life in early modern England, and its effect on the gentry was the material for a number of plays written in the first decades of the 17th century: Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*, Massinger's *The Maid of Honour* and *The Bondman*, and Middleton's *The Changeling*. In these plays the dramatists examine the moral questions of fitness for membership in the elite. They use received notions of sexual desire and gender hierarchy together with a narrative of social mobility to question and to legitimate this mobility. Social aspiration and sexual desire could be put into a productive dramatic relationship because in contemporary thought they were connected at a fundamental ethical level. Their theatrical conjunction put sex into discourse in Foucault's sense and deployed it in new ways.

The first three plays investigate the possibility of a more inclusive elite which would be open, through marriage, to virtuous outsiders. Though the social mobility of the protagonists does not threaten the hierarchy, the erotic energy which is inseparable from
their aspiration has a disruptive potential which calls their project into question. Nothing less than a transformation of the desiring self is required to legitimate their ambition. In the downward mobility represented in *The Changeling* there is no transformation of the self; uncontrolled desire leads to chaos in the social order, and the play constructs a cleavage between the respectable and the morally reprehensible parts of society.

Though the plays endorse the control of desire as the touchstone of acceptance into the elite, the theatrical representation of this desire in the struggle to deserve status functions in a productive rather than a repressive way. It creates a secular sexual discourse which became an integral part of the entertainment provided by the commercial theater. Moreover, this representation of desire is deployed to change the way society is perceived. The audience is persuaded to envisage an elite reformed by the inclusion of people of merit from outside it, and to accept the corollary of this— the separation and exclusion of the morally reprehensible.
Acknowledgements.

I should like to express my gratitude to my adviser, Meredith Skura, for her consistent support and encouragement throughout my years at Rice. My thanks also go to the other readers on my thesis committee, Ed Snow and Martin Wiener, for their help and approbation. I am grateful to the other members of the English Department for their friendship and encouragement and to the office staff who made it possible for me to stay in touch with the campus while I was away overseas.

I am greatly indebted for their help during my research and reading to the staff of Fondren Library, and to the staff of the London Library and the British Library. Without their help I should never have been able to develop and complete my dissertation.

Finally, I offer my thanks to my beloved family for their genuine interest in my work and their unwavering support.
Table of Contents

Introduction 1

“Th' ambition in my love”: *All's Well That Ends Well.* 12

*The Maid of Honour*: “her master-piece.” 51

*The Bondman*: “Master of himselfe.” 93

*The Changeling*: “a frightful pleasure.” 129

Epilogue. 184

Works Cited. 191
Introduction.

In England in the early seventeenth century, anxiety amongst the gentry about their social status was acute. This anxiety was part of a more general concern about their position as leaders of the commonwealth under a new King whose controversial policies became matters of discussion by an increasingly wide public. These problems were used as material for a number of plays written in the first decades of the seventeenth century, for example: Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*, Philip Massinger's *The Maid of Honour* and *The Bondman*, and Thomas Middleton's *The Changeling*. I shall argue that staging the problems of social aspiration and authority inevitably put them in a relationship with sexual desire. In these plays, received ethical notions about sexuality and gender order were used together with a narrative of social mobility both to legitimate and to question this mobility. The theatrical conjunction of social ambition and sexual desire "put sex into discourse" in Foucault's sense, in a number of new ways, and it helped to shape the character of the theater as commercial entertainment. In three of the plays—*All's Well That Ends Well*, *The Maid of Honour* and *The Bondman*—the legitimation of social mobility leads the protagonists to focus on themselves as subjects of sexual desire in an attempt to renounce or transform that desire. In *The Changeling*, sexual discourse is produced by the representation of sexual transgression against the patriarchy, a transgression which is followed by social and moral degradation. This fall enacts the separation in contemporary society of the morally reprehensible from the
"better sort" in the name of social order.

Like many other writers, I am indebted to Foucault. His writing on power and sexuality in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, and his later work on the construction of the sexual subject I found suggestive and thought-provoking. It prompted my interest in the production of sexual discourse in the drama of the early seventeenth century and its relationship to certain contemporary social changes. Although Foucault was notoriously cavalier in his treatment of the early modern period, I do not agree with David Cressy that the use of his ideas for this period should be dismissed as "an exercise in anachronism and dislocation," (125). Again, while I acknowledge that Foucault's concept of power is controversial, I have found his distinction between productive and repressive power pertinent to the early seventeenth century. James's reign seems to exemplify the operation of "juridical power," but at the same time it was marked by the appearance of productive power relations. Just as the early modern period in England saw the beginnings of what Foucault calls "dividing practices," or attempts by authority to discipline society, power was also operating in other productive ways: to incite sexual discourse and to deploy it. The Protestant habit of spiritual self-examination, the drive for moral reform, and the commercial theater were all sites for the development of secular sexual discourse and for the construction of the subject. Not all social historians eschew Foucault or consider him unhistorical: A.L. Beier in *Masterless Men* and Peter Brown in *The Body and Society*, for example, refer to him favorably. His influence on some new historicist critics is substantial. Recent sexual studies of the early modern period, as Domna Stanton shows in *Discourses of Sexuality*, follow Foucault in historicizing
sexuality, which they treat, like subjectivity, as an effect of ideological discourse, rather than as an unchanging constitutive aspect of the individual. My work is based on this assumption and on the belief that subjectivity is culturally constructed in gender-specific ways, a matter ignored by Foucault.

A great deal of the recent criticism of early modern drama has been concerned with what Susan Zimmerman calls its "preoccupation with sexual desire," (5). Though the interests of these critics vary enormously, a common theme is the adverse effect of the patriarchal system on women. Whether it is the result of men's insecurity over their own identity, as in the work of Laura Levine and Janet Adelman, or what Lisa Jardine calls "the patriarchy's unexpressed worry about the great social changes which characterize the period," the need to shore up male power is expressed, they suggest, in the assertion of control over women's sexuality. Some writers, like Coppelia Kahn and Madelon Gohlke, see the theatrical representation of sexuality as an enactment of the repression of the feminine, while others, like Susan Zimmerman and Valerie Traub, believe that this representation had a destabilising, transgressive effect on the patriarchal social structure. There is a tendency in much of this writing to reify the idea of the patriarchy as an internally coherent, inflexible power structure dedicated to the subordination of women at all levels of society. I believe that this exclusive focus on the control of the feminine is misleading because it ignores other ways in which the hierarchy functioned and other pressing concerns which occupied authority. Certainly, the power structure was informed by assumptions of male dominance over women: it was, after all, a system built on "natural" hierarchies. It is clear that gender hierarchy was indeed an issue at the time, but
it should be considered in the context of other manifestations of the tensions and uncertainties produced by a period of turmoil and change. Representation of sexual desire in the theater had more complex origins than a narrow focus on patriarchal power would suggest. In the first decades of the 17th century these tensions were especially evident in the gentry class, the small elite whose traditional role had been the leadership of the commonwealth. It was under pressure at this time for a variety of reasons. Its composition and function were changing in response to changing political and economic conditions. This is the context of the plays which I discuss. In these plays, the authority of the ruling elite is at stake and sexual desire acts as a catalyst which reveals the moral failings at the heart of authority. The issue of women's status and the control of feminine sexuality is secondary to the wider question of who is fit to rule. My thesis will focus on the theatrical deployment of sexual desire to examine, in *All's Well That Ends Well, The Bondman* and *The Maid of Honour*, the possibility of a more flexible and inclusive elite, and in *The Changeling* to demonstrate the vulnerability of an elite which is unable to control the morality of its own members and dependants.

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the need to maintain a stable society and an orderly hierarchy was seen as paramount, and there is evidence that this feeling was shared by women. Rapid and poorly understood social and economic change produced tremendous concern at many levels about the need to maintain order. There was a general perception that things were getting out of control, that "There is in the whole world a deluge of iniquity," which would be punished by divine wrath, as Henry Goodcole said in 1620. This view was the basis of the drive to reform morals, and led to
a variety of responses which the authorities hoped would keep society stable. These included the imposition of an increasingly harsh criminal code, an attack on the culture of the poor, and the attempt to subject certain groups—vagabonds, the poor, bastard bearers, whores and witches—to rigorous control. It also led, as Susan Amussen has shown, to a renewed emphasis on gender hierarchy and on discipline in the little commonwealth of the household. All these targets of control were seen as moral problems, signs of possible disorder in an ethical system whose larger manifestation was the divinely designed cosmos. Disruption in one aspect of this system was inevitably linked with disruption in another.

One feature of the contemporary social upheavals was rapid social mobility up and down the social ladder. This movement was hardly new, and had been recognized, like usury, as a fact of life by contemporary historians such as Harrison. However, its pace had quickened and its scale intensified in the early Stuart period, partly as a result of James's sale of honors. Its most significant features were a large rise in the number of those claiming gentry status and an alarming increase in the numbers of landless poor and vagrants. Lawrence Stone calls this mobility "a seismic upheaval of unprecedented magnitude," while Keith Wrightson sees it as a factor in the gradual transformation of the established hierarchy through a process of increasing social polarization. Of course, "social mobility" like "sexuality" is an anachronism. It is a colorless phrase which drains the emotional and moral content from an activity which, for the Elizabethans and Jacobeans, ranged from the endeavors of noble ambition to "sordid thrift," the pursuit of wealth, or frantic competition for place. The criticism and mockery of social aspiration,
the abhorrence of money-grubbing and excessive consumption that abounded in contemporary writing, were informed by the same thinking as was the concern about the dangers of uncontrolled sexual desire. Both social striving and desire were potentially disruptive of the rational order on which society was founded. At the physical level, the indulgence of bodily pleasures was seen as the concomitant of the idleness and "effeminacy" which was part of material gain. From the religious and ethical viewpoint, ambition and desire were seen as aberrations of the will—vain, worldly longings which fallen men and women pursue when they were not guided by reason. Reason showed that the only proper object of aspiration was God. The doctrine of original sin, the root cause of all disorder, put sexual desire at the very heart of the struggle between will and reason. Moreover, because of the Fall, that proof of woman's imperfection, order was gendered to the extent that the feminine occupied the inferior position in the various binary structures of the hierarchical system. It is not surprising, therefore, that any concern about the destabilising effects of social mobility should focus on that older, more accessible, original source of human error, sexual sin.

In a period of economic shifts and social realignments the commercial theater was uniquely placed to register and to participate in social change. It was, itself, a metaphor for social mobility. For some of the enterprising men of the middling sort who had invested their money in the new public theater, its profits provided a route to gentility. To critics like Stubbes and Gosson in the 1570's, however, it was part of the dislocation that seemed to threaten the stability of traditional values and hierarchies. The drama employed the very skills and enacted the processes which were the stuff of social
mobility. From the shape-changing players whose profession was a constant reminder of the unenforceability of the sumptuary laws, to the provisional nature of gender on stage, the theater suggested that social identity was not part of a stable, God-given order, but was precarious and vulnerable to change. Though this perception of the theater continued, by the first decade of the seventeenth century play-going had become the fashionable pastime of the better sort and the status of actors was changing. The King had taken over the patronage and control of the theaters, and there is evidence that certain playhouses had become an accepted part of the establishment. It was in this context that the plays which I shall discuss were staged.

Because sexual desire and social aspiration shared in a fundamental way the same religious and ethical discourse, the drama was able to put them into a dynamic, productive relationship in these Jacobean plays. All the plays are concerned with the proper function of the patriarchy and three of them investigate the possibility of opening this ruling group to include virtuous outsiders. The play about downward mobility, *The Changeling*, is different; it represents a fall from gentry status as a plunge into the moral and social abyss. There was clearly a need for a new imaginative foundation for a legitimate social mobility which would accommodate the contemporary realities of social change and yet endorse the traditional values on which the belief in the divine order was based. The plays which I discuss are all informed by the profoundly ethical purpose of differentiating between those who deserve status and those who do not, between the noble and virtuous on the one hand and the low and the morally base on the other. In this discussion I have avoided, as far as possible, using "class" in its modern meaning; in all
the plays, the social movement takes place within the gentry, considered in its broadest sense to include people who were on its fringes. Three of the plays, All's Well that Ends Well, The Maid of Honour and The Bondman, attempt to legitimize the rise, through marriage, of deserving outsiders into the higher gentry. Their social ambition is represented through erotic relationships, but this is not accomplished by allegory; rather the fundamental ethical connection of the two drives allows each to illuminate the other. Because the social assertiveness of the protagonists is inseparable from their sexual desire, their aspiration is called into question because of its disruptive potential. Although it is clear that, far from endangering the hierarchy, these people will only benefit it, nothing less than a disclosure of the desiring self and its radical transformation is required for the legitimation of their enormous ambition. No self-transformation is undertaken in The Changeling. This play uncovers the operations of willful sexual desire in the unexamined self and its destructive effects on the social order. It is the base upstart who discloses, in his arrogant self-knowledge, an ambition for sexual gratification that destabilizes the established hierarchy.

In these plays, the project of distinguishing the virtuous from the base, of discovering the qualities that fit people for rule, is subverted by the conflation of erotic desire and social aspiration. The erotic low which energizes the protagonist is not eliminated by self-transformation after all: on the contrary, self-disclosure often leads to erotic revelation. The theatrical use of these interdependent desires produces a secular sexual discourse separated from the ethical basis which the two desires had in common. Though the drama sought to connect sexual desire and social ambition for a moral
purpose, the attempt to represent mobile social identities shifts attention away from the
timeless moral values and opens up a site for the production of sexual discourse as
theatrical entertainment, as commodity. This is not the "sugar on the pill" of Tudor
morality plays, or lowlife vulgarity, though it has elements of these. It is itself a function
of social mobility and social differentiation: it is offered for the sophisticated
theater-goer's pleasure—shocking, titillating, sentimental, not yet perhaps aesthetic. Later
it will become the material for urbane acerbic wit—the "loose thought said with such a
grace" of Caroline comedy and tragicomedy.

Two critics, Valerie Traub and Mary Beth Rose, have written substantial books on
the relationship of sexual desire and the drama of the English Renaissance. My approach
is very different from that of Valerie Traub, whose project in *Desire and Anxiety* is to
demonstrate that the multiple, discontinuous, transgressive nature of desire in the drama
destabilizes its inevitable textual containment. Traub's use of contemporary historical
evidence is based on the psychological implications of male hegemony and the patriarchal
structure. By concentrating on the meta-structure of male power as the basis of her
historicization, Traub ignores important material evidence which affected the way the
patriarchy worked. Because I focus on the use to which sexual desire is put in the
dramatic interpretation of social mobility, emphasizing the social hierarchy and its role in
structuring sexuality, I situate my discussion more firmly in contemporary Jacobean
society and politics. Of course the literary critic no longer sees this "history" as a solid
framework of reality in which literature is produced. There has been much innovative
interdisciplinary writing which upsets old positivist assumptions in its search for new
approaches to the past. Nevertheless, it is to the mainstream social historians of the early modern period that the historicist literary critic must go for the socio-political context of the work he is discussing, whether he depends on the massive accumulations of data of Lawrence Stone or Christopher Hill or Anthony Fletcher or the more narrowly focused work on church courts or literacy rates. Foucault cannot give us that. And the literary critic inevitably takes into account the historians' often conflicting interpretations of that data. Indeed, much of the literary criticism of the drama of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is based on a single, much-debated interpretation of the period—that it was a time of radical change.

Mary Beth Rose argues in *The Expense of Spirit* that there was a major shift in the discourses of love and sexuality in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods towards a new valuation of private life and the rising prestige of marriage. In the drama, Rose sees an ongoing conflict between the old representation of love and sexuality and a new elevation of private life which "grants greater centrality to women," (176). This elevation should not, however, be seen as the trajectory of the drama, because, as Margot Heinemann had pointed out, there were a great many plays being written whose impact was intended for the public political sphere, not the private, and for this reason they were suppressed and later lost or overlooked in the changing tastes of the Restoration. Rose believes that in tragicomedy there occurs a separation of the sexual realm from the socio-political, which, she says, indicated a relinquishing of old unifying cultural values and the recognition of a separate, but equally valued, sphere of private life. I doubt that the sexual discourse of the drama of this period was part of a turn away from the quest for honor in active public
life on the part of the gentry towards the "heroic enterprise" of marriage. The pressures and tensions experienced by the gentry at this time inform the plays which I discuss, where they emerge as a focus on honor. Honor was a matter of concern in contemporary society where the ethos of chivalric heroism had all but disappeared. When these plays deal with private life and marriage, these subjects concern the status and function of the gentry in the hierarchy, matters which were under discussion at the time. If women acquire a new centrality, it is a function of the theater's participation in this concern about the male power structure. When sex and marriage are valorized in the plays I discuss, it is because they facilitate appropriate social mobility into the upper class. If the old Manichaean representation of women is being displaced by the ideal of chaste wife, it is because marriage is used to reduce the threat of the upwardly mobile man or woman by domesticating them. I agree with Rose that sexual discourse was developing as an independent realm, but if this helped to augment the prestige of marriage and the dignity of private life, it also established the realm of sexual experience as part of commercial entertainment, an area within the dominant discourse.
"Th' ambition in my love": *All's Well That Ends Well*.

The program for the RSC's 1992 production of *All's Well That Ends Well* showed a raised arm and hand wound round with the thorny stem of a rose, while the fingers clutch the red bloom which lies in the palm. It was a flamboyant introduction to a rather austere, conservative performance, and it proclaimed, as the production did not, the play's concern with feminine sexuality, for the rose was both the emblem of sexual love and of virginity. The thorn stood both for "love's prick" and St Paul's "thorn in the flesh"—the sin of concupiscence, (*AYL* 3.2.110; 2 Cor.12:7). The Countess, awaiting the lovesick virgin Helena, uses the rose as a positive image of sexual passion: "If ever we are Nature's, these are ours; this thorn / Does to our rose of youth rightly belong; / Our blood to us, this to our blood is born:"¹ (1.3.126). At the same time the complex allusiveness of "thorn" and "blood" hints at the perils of sexual desire, because in contemporary usage, "blood" could refer to sexual passion. These ambiguities are part of the play's substratum of alternative language which is used to bypass the simple polarity of women's chastity and their disruptive desire so common in orthodox discourse,² (Weimann "Bifold Authority" 410). The use of this language enables the play to explore more freely the

¹ All quotations from *All's Well That Ends Well* are from the Arden Shakespeare, ed. G.K. Hunter, London: Routledge, 1989.

² Other examples of the use of "blood" to mean sexual passion are the dying Vittoria's words at the end of *The White Devil*, "O, my greatest sinne lay in my blood" (5.6.240), and Angelo's "Blood, thou art blood," as he meditates on his obsession with Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, (2.4.15).
possibility of a virtuous feminine sexuality which might be used to heal and sustain an ailing elite.

At its most inflexible, the faltering aristocracy of France in All's Well That Ends Well resembles the old, hierarchical society which Foucault, in The History of Sexuality, describes being displaced gradually by a "society of sex," (147-8). Such an aristocratic society, he says, is based on kinship ties, the "deployment of alliance" through arranged marriage, and the maintenance of the existing social system. It is a society where, in Foucault's words, "power spoke through blood." Blood in such a traditional society has a symbolic value, he says. It means the power of the sovereign to shed blood, the honor of war, descent from noble blood, the danger of corrupting one's blood and so on. In this society, "blood remained an important instrument in the mechanisms of power, its manifestations and its rituals." He contrasts this kind of society with the modern one where power operates through the deployment of sexuality. In a society of sex, "the mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, its capacity for being used." The society which Shakespeare imagines as the court of France would be, for Foucault, a society of blood: it values war, kingly power and noble descent. Yet this society of blood has to accommodate itself to another kind of "blood"—the blood of Helena's sexual passion. It is this "blood" which the poor physician's daughter uses to bridge the social gulf between her and the nobleman she aspires to marry. Before it can be an acceptable infusion into the blood of Bertram's noble pedigree, however, this blood must be transformed into something less disorderly, less threatening to the nobleman's
honor and to the social order.

Through the familiar tale of a humble girl who mends her fortunes, the play investigates the idea that an erring elite can be rehabilitated and strengthened by the social advancement of those who have shown themselves to have merit.\(^3\) However, ambition, like the sexual desire from which it is inseparable in this play, is potentially destabilising for the social order. Various specious secular arguments are put forward in the play which seek to validate Helena's sexual and social aspirations by representing them as really virtuous or natural. They all fail to diminish the threat of her self-seeking desire. It is Helena who must transform herself. She does this, and rids herself of her disruptive desire by using a Foucaultian "technique of the self" in which self-knowledge, Christian renunciation and Stoic self-control all have a part, (The Use of Pleasure, 11). To read All's Well That Ends Well in this way is to make use both of Foucault's early work on the relationship of sexuality and power and his later emphasis on "the question of the subject." Helena's deployment of sexuality for exogamous marriage does not, of course, result in "a society of sex," though it does have political implications for the established hierarchy: the acceptance into the elite of the virtuous outsider who has controlled her desire and deployed it for the achievement of chaste marriage into the ruling group. In the end, the problem for the elite is not so much Helena's desire as the power of a woman who has mastered herself through submission to Providence, a power which superseded earthly authority. The theatrical representation of this deployment of sexuality

\(^3\) See Kenneth Muir, The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays on the origins of "clever wenches" tales in the folklore of many countries.
contributes to the proliferation of a sexual discourse which, though grounded in the ethics of "the flesh," is also innovatively secular, precisely because it is a product of the commercial theater. Mary Bly has written recently of the "potentially seductive effect on the audience" of watching the dramatization of feminine sexual desire in All's Well That Ends Well, (37). The reason, she argues, that they must take Helena's desire seriously is her "extraordinary self-knowledge." This understanding of herself as "a subject of desire" (Foucault, The Use of Pleasure 7), together with a transformation of that desire which is spiritual but not ascetic, belonging, on the contrary, to life in the world, allows Helena to make herself into a person of formidable authority. But the play makes clear that her authority is not her own, but God's.

All's Well That Ends Well has finally broken with its dismal stage history of non-performance or evisceration to be one of the most frequently produced Shakespearean plays of the 'nineties.4 The Royal Shakespeare Theatre staged it in two successive seasons—1991 and 1992. Its present popularity may be a tribute to the way a modern audience responds to the triumph of an independent, resourceful woman in a male-dominated society. The predominantly male audience of the seventeenth century, however, might have reacted very differently to what they saw, perhaps, as the spectacle of a young nobleman being coerced into marriage with a woman whose only qualification for status was sexual passion dressed as virtue and elevated as saintliness. Much of the criticism of the play has focused on the problem of Helena's "dual" nature—especially the

---

4 See Russell Fraser's account of the play's stage history in his introduction to the New Cambridge edition of All's Well That Ends Well.
contrast between her active sexuality and her Griselda-like piety and submission in the latter half of the play. Some critics have used a psychological approach to the problem, while others see it in terms of Protestant understanding of the sacred and the secular. More recent writing on the play focuses on gender issues, such as Helena's masculine role as desiring subject or the tension between the ideologies of marriage and homosocial ties. None of these critics takes into account the play's concern with the relationship of social status and merit in the context of the volatile, faction-ridden conditions of the end of the old queen's reign in 1603 and the beginning of James's rule. The paradox of Helena's nature is a function of her social advancement into a faltering elite. Because the play interrogates both the establishment and the social climber; it mediates amongst the ambiguities in contemporary thinking about social mobility and actual practice. The aging and despondent elite which it represents is in need, not just of youth and vigor, but virtue and merit. Both Helena's deployment of her sexual ambition and her ability to transform its disruptive potential are necessary if she is to win her way into the ailing society of blood, to reform and sustain it.

Julie Solomon, in her recent article on *All's Well That Ends Well*, links the play to James's wholesale creation of knights at the beginning of his reign, which, she says, "de-

---

5 For example, Janet Adelman in "Bed Tricks" pp. 151-174; Barbara Hodgson in "The Making of Virgins and Mothers" (47-71); Ruth Nevo in "Motive and Meaning in All's Well That Ends Well" Ch.2. Examples of the second type are, Peggy Munoz Simonds in "Sacred and Secular Motifs in All's Well That Ends Well" (35-59); Cynthia Lewis in "Derived Honesty and Achieved Goodness," (147-70).

6 For example, Carolyn Asp, "Subjectivity, Desire and Female Friendship in All's Well That Ends Well", (48-53); Michael Friedman, "Male Bonds and Marriage in All's Well That Ends Well and Much Ado," (231-249); David McCandless in "Helena's Bed-Trick", (449-68).
naturalized" the social order and revealed it to be culturally constructed, (134-69). She argues that the play uses a medical analogy to examine this potentially radical confrontation of nature by culture: the current challenge to conservative Galenism physicians by Paracelsians who believed in the human capacity to transcend the "natural" limits of knowledge. She thinks that the play suggests an epistemological shift, a reconception of social reality. This would be difficult to support with contemporary evidence. Social mobility had a long history, and the distinction between the perceptions of a natural and a man-made hierarchy which Solomon draws seems too rigid.7 The existence of a social hierarchy in which the best and wisest ruled was seen as "natural" in the sense that it conformed to the law of nature, and this was thought self-evident. Yet there was nothing fixed in the composition of the hierarchy. Its man-made deficiencies would always have been obvious, especially when the undeserving were elevated. The chief concern expressed in contemporary writing was not the constructedness of the system so much as the question of who deserved to rule. Though James's creation of knights caused much adverse comment, the gentry class had been expanding in numbers since the mid-sixteenth century.8 There are other, more pertinent social contexts to be taken into account. Solomon's reading of the play does not account for the undeniable importance of Helena's sexual power and of the effect of this power on the ruling elite,

7 Alan Macfarlane believes that "from at least the 13th century" people in England were socially mobile, acquisitive, rampant individualists, and that there was no significant transition from one kind of society to another in the 16th and 17th centuries, (Ch.7).

8 D.M. Palliser writes: "The heralds . . . made nearly 4,000 grants of arms between 1560 and 1640. By the end of Elizabeth's reign the number of recognized gentry must have been enormous," (83).
especially its honor code. The contemporary phenomenon of social mobility through marriage is relevant here, too, as is the loss of morale and confusion amongst a section of the elite caused by the failure of the Essex revolt of 1601 (James, "Crossroads"). This event and its repercussions are, I believe, an important context for the disarray and despondency of the aristocracy in the play, and the sense of uncertainty occasioned by the infiltration of the upstart Helena.

In the fluid conditions of early seventeenth society, "there was widespread agreement that social mobility was wreaking havoc with traditional distinctions of status," (Palliser 97). Though social mobility was an accepted reality, contemporary writing suggests that social climbing by individuals continued to cause anxiety as it had in the previous century. Resentment of the social climber had a long history. In the mid 16th century humanists inveighed against people who put selfish interest before the common good, men who are "given to seek their private wealth only".\(^9\) Radical Protestant preachers like Latimer denounced nouveaux riches merchants and those who are always "climbing, climbing" up the social ladder, "some of them far above their degrees," thereby endangering the godly hierarchy of the well-ordered commonwealth, (Skinner 226-7). By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the pace of social mobility had intensified. Patterns of social inequality were changing and there were shifts in the relative size of particular social groups and the nature of their differentiation, (Wrightson 191). Discussion of mobility usually took place in the context of achieving the status of gentility, the social level to which Helena aspires in her pursuit of Bertram.

In the highly competitive society of the early modern period, one of the most common ways up the social ladder was advantageous marriage, (Stone 29). There is evidence that the old social hierarchy was indeed being altered by the practise of intermarriage between different, but adjacent social groups: the landed gentry married into the families of city merchants or the higher ranks of the professions. Keith Wrightson believes that under the pressures of social and economic change, society came to be viewed as clusters of intermarrying groups rather than as the old, formal hierarchy of degree, (Wrightson "The Social Order" 191). In All's Well That Ends Well, the aristocratic hierarchy of France opens itself to a determined, independent young gentlewoman without means, a physician's daughter, who is driven by her desire for a young nobleman. The circumstances by which this fictional union of the professional class and the nobility is achieved could not be more different from the alliances of gentle blood with citizen money referred to in contemporary writing. Though the play does not reproduce contemporary practise, it uses Boccaccio's tale of an enterprising girl who makes good to interrogate both social aspiration and the elite which was its goal. Attitudes to social mobility are as complex and contradictory in the play as they were in contemporary society.

For Bertram, the lowly gentlewoman's pursuit of her "ambitious love" oversteps the bounds of degree. Moreover, her erotic energy inverts proper gender order and by implication, threatens the hierarchy itself. Such unruly passion in a virgin was hardly a

10 Lawremce Stone writes in "Social Mobility in Early Modern England," that "members of the trades and professions rose in wealth, numbers and social status relative to the landed classes" at this time and comments that the status of the medical profession was rising.
passport to alliance with the aristocracy. In contemporary ethics, social aspiration and
sexual desire were indissolubly linked. All worldly desires were trivial and sinful
because they seduced men away from the love of God. When Robert Greene wrote in his
criticism of upstarts that "the end of all beeing is to knowe God, and not . . . to creep into
acquaintance," he neatly combined a snobbish distaste for the social climber with a
religious conviction about the nature of the virtuous life, ("A Quip for an Upstart
Courtier," 232). The influential humanist writer, Juan Luis Vives, groups ambition,
avarice and lust together as the results of selfish, intemperate desire for the worldly goals
of honor, money or sex, (Norena, 178). Women's sexual desire was especially culpable
because it recalled original sin, the source of all human error and irrationality. The
Platonic strain in early modern psychology elevated love as the most powerful and
important force in the universe, but sexual desire was seen as a brutish passion which had
to be controlled by reason, the faculty which brought humans closer to God. This
hierarchy of mind and body was mirrored in the natural order of the society of degree: It
is not surprising that Vives considered that "Sex is the pleasure of vulgar people,"
(Norena 45). Helena, a poor virgin driven by her passion for someone so far above her
that she sees herself "not in his sphere," seems, therefore, an unlikely candidate for a
heroine of successful social advancement into the nobility. Yet the play makes the point
that the aging elite needs rejuvenation. Authority, in the person of the King, sickens. Old
values are changing; noble, courteous soldiers like Bertram's father are a dying breed, and
the young courtiers are unguided, restive, starved of opportunity for active service. The
King welcomes the young people, Bertram as the hopeful son of the King's old comrade
in arms, and Helena as the blessed "sweet practiser" to whom he entrusts his cure. By the union of these two, the nobility will be restored to health and virtue, but before this can happen, Helena's potentially disruptive desire must be transformed. Her recognition of her own desire and her determination to change herself authorizes her move into the elite.

Shakespeare's focus on the power of the heroine's sexual desire is an addition to the source. In Painter's story of *Giletta of Narbonne*, we are merely told that Giletta feels fervently for Bertramo, "more than was meete for a maiden of her age," (qtd. in AWW app.145). However, in the very next tale in Painter, *Tancred of Salerne*, which has long been recognized as a possible source of the King's speech on virtue in *All's Well That Ends Well*, the heroine Gismonda speaks directly and eloquently of her powerful sexual feelings, (Painter 185). Not only does she defend her base-born yet virtuous lover in much the same terms as the King defends Helena, but she also makes her physical passion clear. She tells her father that she is "begotten of fleshe ... as yet but yonge, and thereby full of lust and delight." This confession of sexual feelings and the equally forceful argument for virtue may well have contributed to the conception of Helena's "dual" nature. The staging of what David McCandless calls, "the unrepresentable spectre of feminine sexual desire and male dread," is, of course, theatrically alluring (McCandless 449). It is also integral to the project of interrogating social mobility and at the same time it enlarges the scope of the play beyond the problem of social ambition to the question of who deserves status.

The revelation of Helena's self-knowledge in soliloquy convinces the audience of the real possibility of the transformation of her selfish desire. This transformation must
come, not from any specious secular rationalization, but from a moral and spiritual change in the aspiring subject herself. The theatrical representation of this change gives it a significance for society as a whole. It is not merely a private, personal conversion. David McCandless, in his recent article, also discusses Helena's transformed subjectivity. He sees it as an effect of patriarchal discourse, while I argue that it is a process necessary for her rise in status. He thinks that the change which Helena brings about in herself is repressive, a conscious effort to "feminize her desire," aimed at achieving the image of submissive Woman imposed on her by a patriarchal society. This, he says, works against the play's "provocative interrogation of gender roles," (450-454). The play is not primarily concerned with interrogating gender roles. It is concerned with social mobility into the gentry. The gender order is important in so far as its disruption signified disruption of the social order in general. Feminine sexuality and its problems are central to the play as they were central to the idea of sin, but Helena's changed subjectivity transcends concerns of gender. It demonstrates, in a period of uncertainty about authority, the possibility of moral transformation and its effects on the commonweal— the renewal of the ailing elite.

The task of transforming Helena's passion begins early in the play, when the King and the Countess accept her potentially dangerous autonomy and sexuality by assimilating it to a rhetoric of "virtue" and "honesty". Helena earns the King's support for her marriage plans by curing his illness. When Bertram objects that she is just a poor physician's daughter, the King leaps to his healer's defense. He invokes the old wisdom that virtue is the true nobility. Her virtuous deed, the King says, is more important than
blood or name. "From lowest place when virtuous things proceed, / The place is dignified
by th' doer's deed," (2.3.125-6). More disturbing is his endorsement of the levelling
sentiments of the proverb, "There is no difference of bloods in a basen," which mocks
Bertram's preoccupation with his noble blood, (Tilley D.335). Mixed together, the King
says, our bloods are the same: "Strange is it that our bloods, / Of colour, weight, and heat
pour'd all together, / Would quite confound distinction, yet stands off / In differences so
mighty," (2.3.118-20). The King, however, will not allow this notion to curtail his own
power. He intends to use his prerogative to add "honour and wealth" to Helena's natural
virtue. The "society of blood" is to remain intact in spite of the King's levelling
sentiments, because he has the power to ennoble the base, "as 'twere born so," as Bertram
says. But the audience knows better. If the King has the power to raise Helena, she had
used her powers to raise him. "But follows it, my lord, to bring me down / Must answer
to your raising?" Bertram remarks, ironically drawing attention to the interaction of the
erotic and power. The King's enthusiastic support for Helena's virtue is based on the
mysterious cure he has undergone at her hands, a cure which, it is suggested by Lafew,
owes as much to Helena's sexual powers as to her father's receipt. Because of the sexual
undercurrents of the healing, the virtue which the King ascribes to Helena and which he
insists is more important than "blood" or name, remains, in spite of its humanist
associations, closely connected with that other meaning of "blood"– the blood of her
sexuality. This ambiguity interrogates the King's motives and his plans for his
"preserver," and by implication, even his authority.

The tussle between the King and Bertram is a matter of honor. Honor was the
peculiar prerogative of gentility, and it was gendered. Men who were not of the gentry could not claim honor, but women of other classes could, as women's honor was their chastity, (Barber 46-8). The King asserts that true honor comes from virtue, not one's ancestors. "Honours thrive / When rather from our acts we them derive / Than our foregoers," (2.3.135-6). The virtue which the King ascribes to Helena belongs to the rhetoric of humanist advice to rulers and combines Christian goodness and the classical ideal of right action undertaken for the public good. The King clearly intends this notion of virtue to be the model for his courtiers and his espousal of it is to be backed up by his princely authority. In the course of the play it is demonstrated that it is precisely this virtue which Bertram lacks. He stands on the honor of his rank, his birth and his prowess at arms. In the changing political climate of the late sixteenth century, the male code of honor had shifted its emphasis away from military valor and loyalty to the noble community of honor towards an ideal of public service and the possession of personal moral qualities that were independent of descent. The failure of the Essex revolt of 1601 not long before the play was written, and the Earl's abject repudiation on the scaffold of the canons of the honor community had a profound effect on the way the public perceived the honor of the gentry, (James "Crossroads" 455). These events may well have contributed to the play's critical treatment of the narrow, increasingly discredited code of military honor which Bertram and the upstart Parolles espouse. In its place we are tentatively offered another kind of honor— that of a gentlewoman of the middling sort— which is not connected with rank but only with virtue and sexual "honesty."

The king of France makes it clear that, like James I, he considers himself "the
fountaine of all honor," (James "Politics" 379): "It is in us to plant thine honor where / We please to have it grow," he says, (2.3.156-7). Bertram sees a threat to his honor in this coercion into marriage to a woman of lower rank. When he protests, his disobedience as a subject threatens the King's honor. If Bertram represents a discredited notion of selfish private honor, the King, too, may justly be accused of using a different notion of honor to justify his personal interest in the lowly Helena. The cause of his conflict with his ward, and ultimately its mediator, is Helena, whose only claim to honor, as a woman, is her chastity. Astonishingly, the King holds up this middle-class virgin as the bearer of the virtue which humanists like Elyot and Erasmus had insisted alone should be the foundation of godly rule, (Skinner 234). The King's support of Helena seems, at first sight, to be a very radical move aimed at creating a purified ruling elite. The implication of this Christian humanist thinking was that leaders need not come from an hereditary ruling class based on lineage and wealth, but from lower levels of society. Unlike the rich Giletta in the source story, Helena is represented as poor: she always insists on her lowly estate—"my homely stars"—as she puts it. However, the humanists’ apparent egalitarianism was neutralized because the virtues, they said, were more fully displayed in the ruling elite. It was therefore essential not to tamper with existing social distinctions.11

The force of the disturbing royal radicalism in the play is likewise muted because the meaning of "virtue" and "honor" shift when they are applied to women. For women,

11 Lawrence Humphrey wrote in 1560 that the virtues "shine and glitter in a nobleman" more brightly than in anyone else and that noblemen "accomplish more copiously and plentifully than the dregs and dross of men," (quoted in Skinner, 238).
these attributes had more to do with their sexual morality and reputation than with
distinction earned by public service. The only challenge to the establishment is
Bertram's, and the King is merely making use of the "virtue is the true nobility" argument
to silence his ward's rebellion and to maintain his own natural sovereign authority. The
play makes this clear, and also suggests that Helena's kind of virtue is an attribute of the
middling sort, a guarantee of respectability amongst people like Helena's "poor but honest
friends." When the Countess says that Helena "derives her honesty and achieves her
goodness," her use of "honesty" is both a tribute to the upright character of Helena's
physician father and to Helena's own spotless reputation, (1.1. 42). In Act 3, Margaret, a
citizen of Florence, says, "Well, Diana, take heed of this French earl; the honour of a
maid is her name, and no legacy is so rich as honesty." Through its association with
women's "honesty," these humanist qualities become citizen virtues and are comfortably
domesticated. For the aristocratic Bertram, such qualities would not have been an
attractive alternative to his code of masculine chivalry. It seems, then, that the virtue
which has been ascribed to Helena is no more than a sort of middle class respectability
given a humanist gloss and ennobled by the King's praise, not a quality with any potential
to disrupt the establishment. In contemporary society, disruption was the last thing
anyone wanted.

The King's attempt to validate Helena's drive upward through the rhetoric of

---
12 The enormously popular conduct books, which were directed to the bourgeois reader, were
full of warnings against the dangers of sexual laxity. The middling sort at this time were very
anxious to protect their reputation. Martin Ingram in Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England,
1580-1640, says that actions of defamation for redress against sexual slanders increased
markedly from about 1570 into the first decades of the next century.
humanist virtue fails to convince. His support for the poor physician's daughter and his insistence that Bertram accept his prince's choice of a wife suggest that the King may be acting from self-interest rather than from a noble, disinterested desire to promote virtue in his court. The only virtue that Helena, a poor gentlewoman, has to offer is her chastity or honesty, and Bertram will not allow his honor to be compromised by these homely values. While the play seems to offer these attributes of Helena's as an alternative to the inherited "blood" which is so important to Bertram, it always represents them in tension with the powerful sexual desire which drives Helena's upward mobility and which the favor of the King has done nothing to dispel. Ambiguities of language draw attention to the continuing interplay of sexuality and virtue in Helena's upward mobility. Words like "honour", "honesty," "blood", "virtue," and "nature," have sexual connotations which reverberate throughout the play. At the center of these ambiguities is Helena herself who is a type of unruly woman—clever, eloquent, sexually voracious, "more wise, peradventure, than a woman ought to be," (Painter 180). At the same time she has some of the qualities of the shamefast virgin, is spoken of as a model of virtue and honesty, and, in the second part of the play, she acquires a saintly quality. Helena herself hints at this double nature when she asks the Countess to imagine the sort of feelings where one could "Wish chastely and love dearly, that your Dian / Was both herself and love," (1.3.208-9). Renaissance iconography abounds in images joining voluptas and castitas, passion and chastity, symbolizing for the neo-platonists the dual nature of love, both sensuous and chaste, (Wind Ch.5). On another level, the possibility of sexual passion and virtue co-existing in chaste married love was suggested in some Protestant advice
literature, but it was a difficult subject.\textsuperscript{13} The purpose of the allusion to this neo-platonic paradox here is, I believe, to draw attention to the other and more troubling paradox: the possible union of two radically incongruent entities— a poor physician's daughter and a nobleman. Even Helena's name suggests the same conjunction of opposites. Lavatch compares her in a ballad to Helen of Troy, that emblem of feminine sexuality. It is also possible that her name might refer to Saint Helena, the British saint, the mother of Constantine, and the discoverer of the True Cross at Jerusalem whose power was able to restore the dead to life.\textsuperscript{14} In the hands of an accomplished modern actress, all these contradictions can be assimilated via psychological realism into a "complex" character. However, in the context of seventeenth century society, they might have suggested the clever self-presentation which was an essential skill of the upwardly mobile.

Helena is a protean character as befits one who is planning to change her social status. The society which the play represents is in flux and she is well able to take advantage of these fluid social relations; she has ways of adapting herself which would have gladdened the hearts of the authors of the conduct books.\textsuperscript{15} Her first soliloquy, in

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{13} When John Wing writes, "for man and wife to be made so mutually blind with the liking of each other . . . is doubtlesse a praiseworthy blindnes," (cited in William and Malleville Haller, "The Puritan Art of Love" p.260), he sounds like a Neo-Platonist, for whom the blindness of passion was the model for the highest spiritual love.

\textsuperscript{14} David Hoeniger says, "Though Protestant reformers rejected such beliefs, Anglican churches kept the name and the story remained widely familiar in Shakespeare's time," (293). The city church of St.Helen's, Bishopsgate, was certainly known to Shakespeare.

\textsuperscript{15} Giovanni della Casa writes, "it behooves you to frame and order your manners and doings, not according to your own mind and fashion but to please those with whom you live, and after that direct your doings." In his Passions of The Mind in General (1604) Thomas Wright gives advice on dissimulation as a social strategy whose aim is to achieve "profit and commoditie" for oneself and the commonweale. He calls it "prudence" to distinguish it from craftiness, an attribute peculiar to foreigners, not Englishmen. This protean ability was loathed by many thinkers, from (continued...)
which she shows that she is not in fact the dutiful grieving daughter that the Countess thought her to be, might be expected to reveal her "true" self. But the chaste sentiment of this idealized, platonic rumination on her love for Bertram: "But now he's gone, and my idolatrous fancy / Must sanctify his relics," is immediately undermined by her bawdy, witty exchange with Parolles on virginity. This scene, concluding with her decision to take action to achieve her desires, demonstrates Helena's ability to use a variety of languages when it suits her, from the courtly style to Parolles's soldier's bawdy. Her powerful soliloquy, "Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie, / Which we ascribe to heaven: the fated sky / Gives us free scope," has echoes of Cassius's, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, / But in ourselves, that we are underlings," (JC 1.2.138-9). It unexpectedly reveals "little Helen" as a woman who is ready to substitute her overweening confidence in her own capabilities for faith in the power of Providence.

This kind of language was usually associated with Epicureanism or with "atheists" like Edmund in King Lear. This impression is reinforced by the way she speaks of "nature," not as the expression of God's will in the world, but as having to do with observable facts like the natural affections. The social gulf separating her from Bertram was, in her first soliloquy, an occasion for the expression of hopeless, ideal love: "'twere all one / That I should love a bright particular star / And think to wed it, he is so above me," (1.1.84-5). Now, in this soliloquy, this gulf has ceased to represent the immutable order of established society, but is a divide which must be bridged by the exercise of her own will.

---

15 (...continued)
Montaigne to men of religion like Gervase Babington, the Bishop of Worcester. It was seen as the attribute of flatterers, courtiers and players.
She puts her trust in her own efforts to win her love and in the power of natural desire to bridge the gap which fortune has placed between her and Bertram: "The mightiest space in fortune nature brings / To join like likes and kiss like native things," (1.1.219).

"Nature" was a word which, like "virtue" was fraught with ambiguity. Nature could mean God or copulation. Indeed, it had a whole range of sexual meanings, (Gordon Williams 2: 935-6). 16 It seems clear that Helena's invocation of nature in this speech is designed to have this deflatory allusiveness. Her use of "kiss," a euphemism for "copulate", confirms the godless tone of the whole soliloquy, and at the same time, puts a bawdy spin on her solemn words. The natural affections are not necessarily a force for good. 17

The attempt to transform Helena's sexual and social aspiration by assimilating it to humanist "virtue" failed; the next effort at validation invokes this idea of "nature" in its skeptical sense, signifying an alternative order in the world, operating independent of God. "To follow nature" could mean either to act according to God-given reason or, for the skeptic, to follow one's sensual desires. 18 According to the accepted Stoic-Christian wisdom, the "law of nature" was essentially the same as God's moral law in the universe, and was an idealized version of the way things were: a hierarchical system in which everyone played his allotted part. In the play, "nature" is frequently used in secular,

16 In Dekker and Middleton's 1The Honest Whore, written at about the same time as All's Well That Ends Well, Hippolito says that whores are "the very slaves of nature," (2.1.363).

17 Lavatch uses "kiss" as a similar euphemism when he defends cuckoldry, "he that kisses my wife is my friend," (1.3.47).

18 Audrey Chew, in Stoicism in Renaissance English Literature, Ch. 3, examines these different uses of "nature" in her analysis of both Stoic and Epicurean thinking.
skeptical ways which interrogate this wisdom. Helena, as I have said, declares her faith in the power of natural passion to level differences in estate. Both the Countess and Parolles invoke the idea of "nature" to justify Helena's desire: the Countess, by associating it with her own youth, and Parolles by linking it with the operation of usury. Both arguments suggest that the law of nature operates independently of God. Both imply an endorsement of the levelling of social difference, as does Helena's use of the word. Parolles's lecture to Helena on "the rule of nature," the moral evils of virginity, and the commercial advantages of losing it, turns the moral code upside down. The preservation of virginity, he argues, is both unnatural and sinful. Parodying biblical strictures, he says that it is a form of self-love and disobedience, while the loss of virginity is "rational increase" like the profits of usury. Invested, both virginity and money breed more of the same. Sexual relations have, in Parolles's secular creed, been unfixed from their place in the moral system and have become as autonomous and mobile as money. The connection of feminine sexuality and usury was a commonplace and was an aspect of contemporary unease about economic change, (Agnew 125). Here it is extended to suggest the mobile, polymorphous quality of Helena's social identity which, like money, transcends class boundaries. Virginity, Parolles says, is "a commodity "

19 Montaigne called the sexual act "natural" and suggested that it was intended by nature "to make us all equal and to put on the same level the fools and the wise, and us and the beasts", Essays, 3:5. p. 669. Fulke Greville, the Sydneian and Calvinist, suggests, in Chorus Sacerdotum in Mustapha, that natural desires, the desires of our "blood," were a moral problem: "If nature did not take delight in blood, / She would have made more easy ways to good," (Dean, Renaissance Poetry, 144).

20 In Dekker's Northward Ho! Phillip Bellamont says to his father, "You were wont to say venery is very like usury, that it may be allowed tho it be not lawful," (3.1.85).
which must be used while it is "vendible." "Within the year it will make itself two, which
is goodly increase," (1.1.145). Helena, in the second part of the play, does turn her
commodity to profit in the hasty, anonymous exchange of the bed-trick. "Get thee a good
husband, and use him as he uses thee," says Parolles. She takes his advice, but she
transforms his "wicked meaning" into a "lawful act"—the rightful, and, of course truly
"natural" use of marriage, (3.7.45). By then, nature has been brought back to its proper
ethical meaning.

The Countess asserts the naturalness of passion as she muses on Helena's love for
her son.

Even so it was with me when I was young;
If ever we are nature's, these are ours; this thorn
Doth to our rose of youth rightly belong;
Our blood to us, this to our blood is born:
It is the show and seal of nature's truth, (1.3.123-8).

She sees desire as a natural fault of youth. Because we are all human, and therefore
"nature's," this passion is in our blood.21 "Blood" here has multiple allusions. It suggests
both the blood of sexual passion and the blood which is common to both women as
humans. It looks back to the Countess' advice to Bertram in which she reminded him of
the importance both of the blood of his noble house and virtue: "thy blood and virtue /

21 The Countess may of course be suggesting that she and Helena are "nature's" because
they are women, and women are dominated by natural passions in a way that men are not.
contend for empire in thee, and thy goodness share with thy birthright!" (1.1.57-8). It looks forward to the King's great speech on the levelling indistinguishability of bloods in Act 2. Much has been written about the Countess' grace, nobility, and tolerance and her support of Helena. Bullough says that Shakespeare added this character to give moral credibility to Helena's project, (387). More recently, Janet Adelman, for whom the central theme of the play is Bertram's fear of the sexualized maternal body, writes that the Countess' threatening maternal power is expressed through the other women, "whatever her intentions as an isolated character." "She herself is kept innocent of agency" (Suffocating Mothers 79). The Countess, I think, has a more active role to play in her relationship with Helena. As Helena's advocate and surrogate mother, she tacitly endorses the girl's passion. Because she identifies Helena's feelings with her own experience, she is in a sense complicit with Helena's sexuality. By admitting that passion is in the blood they share as human beings, she, a noblewoman, puts herself on a level with the poor physician's daughter. Helena has already invoked the power of nature to level differences in estate. In the old aristocratic order of which the Countess' husband was part, communal values were founded on an idea of nature as the God-given hierarchical order, and of blood as inherited status. Bertram's courteous father treated those "who were below him" in society "as creatures of another place, / And bow'd his eminent top to their low ranks, / Making them proud of his humility," (1.2. 42-3). This noble courtesy was the cement which held the hierarchy together. The "blood" of Helena's sexual desire, on the other hand, has a levelling rather than a harmonizing effect. It is "nature's," and is common to all, irrespective of rank. Helena, unlike Bertram's
father, is concerned, not with maintaining social harmony, but only with her own ambitious, selfish love. When she calls on nature to unite her with Bertram, she is speaking of the way her natural passions can empower her to get what she wants.

The Countess' relationship with her husband's old country retainer, Lavatch, recalls the traditional social order and its values. For him sexual discourse belongs to the language of original sin or to the traditional bawdry and mockery of popular comedy whose theatrical form was clowning and farcical jigs, (Baskervill Ch.3-4). Lavatch's humor, however, is used for sophisticated satiric commentary on the sexual mores of his betters.22 His use of a homely proverb to justify his hopes of marriage, "I am driven on by the flesh, and he needs must go that the devil drives," mocks Helena's attempts at elevated language. Is nature, "the power that mounts my love so high," no more than this? Lavatch brings sexual discourse back to its old home— the sins of the flesh and the need to acknowledge them: "I have been, madam, a wicked creature, as you and all flesh and blood are." Differences in rank are not an issue because this discourse belongs to mankind and the frailty of the human will. This is close to the idea that all of us are subject to natural passions, but it is inherently more pessimistic. Marriage, for him, is at best, a necessary evil, the cause of cuckoldry. Even the honorable scars of war might be the effects of syphilis, the wages of lechery: "Yonder's my lord your son with a patch of velvet on's face," (4.5. 90-4). Worldly ambition, the vanity of the court, are put in their place by these reminders of the uncontrollable animal side of human nature. This

22 This may have been part of the move away from broad humor which was made by the King's Men in the early part of the century, a move which was itself part of upward mobility. See Gurr, (151).
Augustinian view of human sexuality lay at the heart of the moral anxieties of the age, at odds with the optimistic, secular attitude that Helena embodies in the first part of the play. The comic parallels between Lavatch's and Helena's marital ambitions are based on an experience of Fortune's whims and of the yoke of the flesh which are shared by all men and women, as fallen sinners. As such, these parallels serve to recall a sense of traditional communal values which many thought were being eroded in times of social and economic change. At the same time, the differences in the worldly prospects of the clown and the would-be lady point to a disintegration of these values and a realignment in society. Lavatch, too, needs the Countess to back his marriage because he, like Helena, is poor. The Countess asks, aghast, "Wilt thou needs be a beggar?" as if she imagined him on the parish, the kind of burden that made local authorities seek, in the early 17th century, to control the marriage of the poor.23 Like Helena, his rank puts him at a disadvantage: "Service is no heritage," he says, and like Helena, "barnes," the "issue a' my body," will be a blessing, a substitute for "heritage." Helena too has no inheritance, but the child she conceives will ensure her position in Bertram's family line. The gulf between the plebeian and the respectable cultures is made plain. Though the lowly Lavatch would beggar himself with his ambitions of descendants, Helena the gentlewoman will use her fertility to establish herself in the nobility. For Lavatch, sexuality is part of the curse of Adam. Though Helena would also subscribe to this

23 Martin Ingram writes of the widespread hardening of attitude among "the better sort of people" towards fornication, bastardy and immorality. In certain areas, the zealous Puritan element in local government introduced more stringent discipline, using "religion as a prime instrument of social control and self-advancement" (Ingram 230). The result was socially divisive, writes Patrick Collinson, (The Birthpangs of Protestant England, 56).
orthodoxy, she will use her sexuality to get what she wants in this world; Lavatch simply hopes to avoid the "broad gate and the great fire" in the next.

The Countess' sympathy with Helena's natural passion is not only complicit with a levelling of social distinctions; it leads to the suggestion of incest. Though she and Helena are not related by blood, the Countess extends her feelings of affinity for her adopted daughter by insisting on calling herself Helena's mother: "I say I am your mother. / And put you in the catalogue of those / That were enwomb'd mine," (1.3.138-9). Horrified by the incestuous implications of this claim, Helena repudiates it by recalling the difference in rank between her and Bertram as if it guaranteed difference in blood relationship: "The Count Rossillion cannot be my brother. / I am from humble, he from honoured name," (1.3.150). This crucial difference in status is precisely the basis of Bertram's objection to taking Helena to wife. "I know her well: / She had her breeding at my father's charge— / A poor physician's daughter my wife! Disdain / Rather corrupt me ever!" The fact of Helena's humble birth would be, for him, the source of corruption to his name; for Helena, the guarantee of the separateness of their bloods ensures that no corruption can occur. From this point of view, the corollary of Bertram's fear of marriage outside his social group is tolerance of incest, the most extreme form of endogamy.24 More important than this, however, her repudiation of incest prepares the way for Helena's transformation. It forces her to disavow any common "natural" bond with Bertram and to insist upon her social inferiority in order to affirm her distance from him:

24 Ferdinand's desperate desire to avoid contamination with degrading social inferiors in The Duchess of Malfi is a more extreme example of Bertram's attitude. See Whigham (169).
"My master, my dear lord he is; and I / His servant live, and will his vassal die. / He must not be my brother," (1.3.153-5). To have the same blood as Bertram precludes marriage because it suggests incest. Their social difference, on the other hand, opens the possibility of alliance.

Though she has rejected the levelling aspects of her desire, Helena's confession to the Countess of her love reaffirms her powerful sexuality. Though she defends her love as poor but honest, her use of an alarming metaphor of endless and unquenchable passion seems to contradict the modest spirit of her earlier words: "Yet in this captious and intemperate sieve / I still pour in the waters of my love / And lack not to lose still," (1.3.197-9). The vestal virgin Tuccia carried water from the Tiber in a sieve in order to prove her innocence of a charge of incest. Helena, too, is guiltless of incest, but her sieve more closely resembles the sixteenth century emblem which shows water being poured into a sieve held by a blindfold cupid.25 An accompanying verse begins, "Fond love is chiefly likened to a sieve, / In which the more you pour the water in, / The more is spilt, by letting thow drive." Though this refers to young men's love and the loss of semen which was said to shorten life—Parolles calls it "spending his manly marrow"—"water" also connoted "the vaginal terrain," (Gordon Williams, 3:1504-5). Helena's words evoke a reckless outpouring of love. The use of the sieve emblem here suggests a largesse of love rather than the restraint of chastity. On the eve of her journey to court she admits that her plan to cure the King is motivated by self-interest—her desire for Bertram. No

25 Guillaume de la Perriére, The Theatre of Fine Devices. Emblem XVII. I am indebted to Peggy Munoz Simonds for this reference.
attempt to validate her "ambitious love" as virtue or justify it as "natural" has succeeded in mitigating her sexual energies. The invocation of nature has raised the spectre of social levelling, the same kind of disruption to the established order that the King had implied when he insisted that, in her virtue, Helena was nature's "immediate heir", and needed no title to the attribute. In the later part of the play, however, Helena herself begins the task of changing the sexually forward aspects of her protean personality, and a religious discourse is brought into play which repudiates the secular tone of the rhetoric of humanist virtue and the skepticism of the idea of nature. A very different tradition, that of the saint's story, is invoked so that her sexual energy may be transformed by a power greater than that of the King or nature— the grace of God.

When she goes to court to cure the King, Helena becomes a channel of divine healing. What Lafew might have seen as an impudent girl's effrontery, Helena represents as the influence of a power outside herself— she is the "weak organ" through which "a blessed spirit" speaks.36 Nature, that was to bring her and Bertram together, now takes a back seat to grace. Helena had been determined to "deserve" Bertram, to win her love by "showing her merit," and now it is made clear that her miraculous cure of the King was "inspired," the result of God's grace applied to her will, (2.1.147). This accomplishment, and Helena's later renunciation of her self-serving ambition, her submission to Providence and her control of her desire, owes much to the tradition of the saint's story. This genre flourished throughout the Middle Ages and continued into the Reformation when

---

36 In Osbern Bokenham's version of the life of St Lucy, God tells the saint that "it is not you who speak but it is the spirit of your almighty father on high in heaven's bliss." Quoted in Sheila Delany's introduction to A Legend of Holy Women, (xxvii).
Protestants used the earlier, papist stories as models to write about their own martyrs. These new elements in the play not only alter and heighten the more matter-of-fact tone of the Painter source, but they give the story of Helena's rise in status a significance which goes far beyond successful social climbing. Her sexuality is certainly not eradicated, but finally it is transformed, elevated from the secular to the spiritual, from desire to the crown of chaste marriage fulfilled by procreation. Madeleine Doran believes that one of the major influences on romance plots were miracle plays or dramatized saints' legends, with their "separations, wanderings . . . dangers overcome and trials passed until the final triumph of reunion or martyrdom," (103). Such tales lent themselves to secularization, as in the story of Griselda or Filocolo.  

In the introduction to her translation of Osbern Bokenham's fifteenth century *Legends of Holy Women*, Sheila Delany says that the development in the previous century of "a new tradition of affective lay piety, emphasizing a personal, passionate attachment to Jesus and his saints," provided a favorable environment for the reception of this unique all-female hagiography, (xxvii). It is this same emotional quality which enables the ethical content of the saintly genre to be absorbed so easily into the secular fabric of the play.

I shall argue that the saintly tradition is used in *All's Well That Ends Well* to draw attention to issues that these stories raised in other historical contexts in order to examine issues raised by social mobility in the play's own time: for example, women's sexuality and the possibility of a more virtuous social order. The tradition of the female saint's

---

27 J. M. Manly claimed that it was from these essentially romantic stories that "the populace developed their taste for romantic comedy and tragedy," (141).
story is deeply involved with Christianity's long history of ambivalence towards human sexuality. In the saint's tale, a virgin girl defies her family, male authority, and her traditional gender role to overcome the world and maintain her chastity. Her heroic struggle to achieve this sexual autonomy is rewarded by special spiritual powers and she is chosen to be the bride of Christ and holy mother. Since one of the central conventions of the story was the attack on the saint's virginity, eroticism was an essential element, an eroticism officially sanctioned by the church. The stories, which were written to be read aloud to congregations, were extremely popular in England from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, when, according to Thomas Heffernan, they "became the poor man's equivalent of chivalric tales of the chanson de geste and the romance," (271). To interpret these stories simply as moral exempla is inadequate, he says. In the late Middle Ages, virginity came to be valued more than martyrdom as the perfect imitation of Christ, and the genre's depictions of young virgins horribly martyred defending their chastity may have been designed to denigrate female sexuality as part of a deliberate advocacy of ascetic ideals. More than this, Heffernan suggests that the saint's renunciation of the values of the world, the inversion of social norms, and her ultimate heroic transcendence offered to the late medieval audience a vision of a different, ascetic social order, based not on blood kinship, but on spiritual community.

The reformers, of course, rejected the ideal of celibacy as an unnatural Popish practise and advocated the joys of virtuous marriage. If the church had exalted celibacy for its own purposes, the Protestant reformers now denigrated it to discredit the papists. Helena's story neatly turns the saintly biography on its head by having its protagonist put
her life on the line so that she can lose her virginity to the man she desires, not save it for Christ. In its carnivalesque exploitation of this aspect of the saint's tale, the play celebrates the Protestant ideal of chaste marriage in this world as against virginity and spiritual union with Christ in the next. Yet the use of the saintly story leaves a residue of doubt about the precise status of triumphant feminine sexual autonomy within a Pauline marriage. Like the saint, Helena, empowered by God's grace, has taken control of her sexuality, but while the saint has achieved this control by repudiating the demands of the flesh, Helena has done so by insisting on their fulfillment. The play draws attention to Christianity's inherent ambivalence about marriage. There existed on the one hand, the long tradition exalting celibacy based on the models of Christ and Mary, the fear of original sin, and the neoplatonic opposition between flesh and spirit. On the other was St Paul's emphasis in scripture on mutual "due benevolence" in marriage, (1Cor.7:3.4). Sixteenth and seventeenth century Protestant writers struggled to overcome this ambivalence in their widely read advice books advocating "chaste" marriage.

In the play, Bertram and Parolles espouse what Glenda McLeod calls "career misogamy," which advocated celibacy but not necessarily chastity, (McLeod 68). Bertram's despairing cry, "O my Parolles, they have married me!" is a reminder that the bourgeois discourse of marriage and domesticity ran counter to their exclusively male ethos. Marriage, according to the misogynous tradition, was emasculating. This was both in the literal sense that Lavatch implies when he says, "The danger is in standing to't; that's the loss of men, though it be the getting of children," or in the sense that it was a handicap— a "clog," to quote Bertram— for men who sought fame and honor, (3.2.40-1).
A corollary of this second sense was the status-conscious feeling that, as Montaigne said, marriage was "better suited to simple plebeian souls," (3:5.647). Even an advocate of marriage like Pierre Charron, who, rather like the Countess, defends "the copulation of male and female" as "natural," has doubts about the suitability of marriage for men of "heart and spirit." It seems a pity, he says, "to bind men to the flesh like beasts in a stable," (77 and 165). Parolles shares this view, and even uses the same metaphor when he urges Bertram to the war: "France is a stable; we that dwell in't jades. / Therefore to th' war!" (2.3.280-1).

Basic to these concerns was uncertainty about women's sexuality in the marriage bond. Though the Protestant writers insisted on the need to maintain the gender hierarchy of the household, they held out the prospect of mutual sexual love, and stressed that payment of "the dues" of marriage was essential to married happiness. At the same time, they warned that the married state was not to be an excuse for "the concupiscence of the flesh:" the object of marriage was to bridle carnal lust. For men, at any rate, chaste marriage was to be "a plain pleasure" but for women, perhaps, it hinted at the endorsement of a certain equality, at least in private life, (Charron 168).28 This ambivalence about the status of marital sexual love was associated with ambivalence over the place of "mutuality" in other aspects of the hierarchical household order. Uncertainty about bourgeois marriage and its implications for male power—spent hugging "his kicky- wicky here at home"—underlies Bertram's readiness to defy his King and to embrace the

28 Anthony Fletcher believes that this "clerical approval of real mutuality in bed if not at board was, for its time, an immense and radical step forward," ("The Protestant Idea of Marriage ", 179).
aristocratic ethos of honor and the worthless Parolles. But the utter failure of this kind of honor code in the play does not necessarily imply an endorsement of honorable marriage. The play uses the saint's story to demonstrate Helena's ability to transform herself from sexually forward, self-driven social climber to the self-sacrificing chaste wife who is guided by Providence. But this transformation brings problems with it because the pervasive eroticism and the power and autonomy which the saint acquires are central features of the saint's story. Although the play inverts the enigmatic purpose of the original, the outlines of the story remain intact. In the play too, "the subject is enmeshed in an erotic matrix," (Heffernan 273). This eroticism is exploited for theatrical effect and at the same time it is used as a misogynistic rationale for the interrogation of Helena's power and upward mobility.

In the traditional story, the saint was usually a comely virgin of good family who, with great courage, rejected her relatives, her lover or husband, defied authority and gave up all material considerations to be the bride of Christ. She is delivered up to martyrdom in which she must suffer sexual abuse while she defends her chastity. She dies, is saved, and finally is transformed from virgin into mystical mother, like the Virgin Mary. She becomes "an icon of the fecund," (Heffernan 277). Like the saint, the virgin orphan Helena sets out alone in pursuit of her goal. At court, she humbly offers herself to the King, in defiance of expert male opinion on the case—"the congregated college"—as a channel of divine healing. She is willing to submit herself, if she fails, to having her "maiden name seared, . . . ne, worse of worst extended / With wildest torture" and death, (2.1.170-2). The erotic effect of sexual cruelty inflicted on the virgin martyr is suggested
here in the way Helena associates "A strumpet's boldness, a divulged shame"—"shame" could mean genitalia— with torture on the rack.⁹ A current of erotic innuendo also underlies the mystical, religious atmosphere of the cure scene. Lafev's remarks before and after it suggest that it is the King's virility which will benefit from Helena's ministrations— her touch could "araise King Pippen"— and he casts himself in the role of "Cressid's uncle" when he brings Helena to the King. Much of this sexual innuendo is comic, especially if we are to believe with Hoeniger that the audience would assume that the King's fistula was anal, (Hoeniger 293). The bawdy humor serves as a skeptical misogynistic commentary on the religious language Helena uses and on her healing mission. Nevertheless, as the vessel of divine grace, Helena achieves a formidable power in these scenes.³⁰ Like the saints, she takes charge of her own sexuality, and in so doing, she acquires a certain dominance over men. In the scene of her triumph, when Helena, beside the newly invigorated King, surveys the assembled noblemen from whom she shall choose a husband, sexual power is reversed. In the saint's story, the men would have

---

²⁹ Gordon Williams points out a related use of "shame" in Measure for Measure, where Isabella uses the word to mean coitus when she rejects Angelo's sexual advances: "And strip myself to death as to a bed / That longing have been sick for, 'ere I'd yield / My body up to shame," (2.4.100). Williams, 3:1226.

³⁰ Interest in, and debate about "the influence of the imagination upon the body, of the mind upon matter, and of words, incantations and written charms upon physical objects," was strong in intellectual circles at this time, and was associated with Neo-Platonism and hermeticism, according to Keith Thomas (p.266 ff). Frances Yates argues that the hermeticists' study of "natural magic" was part of a patriotic, Protestant, reforming movement. It flourished under Elizabeth until the last years of the century, was opposed by James I, but was revived by the circle around Prince Henry,(p.77 ff). Calvinism opposed popular magic as diabolical, but there is no suggestion that Helena's activities are of this kind. Like the hermeticists, Helena's white magic is imbued with piety and dependent on the moral purity of its user. "Natural magic... showed an obsession with the production of marvellous effects by natural means," Thomas says of the hermeticists, (p.270). This must be what Lafev means by "a heavenly effect in an earthly actor," (2.3.24).
been her tormentors; Helena, "simple maid" though she protests she is, has them at her mercy. But her trials are just beginning. She has yet to undergo martyrdom and transformation from virgin to wife and mother.

From now on, Helena's autonomy is increasingly subordinate to God's grace, and it is this grace, not her ambitious desire which directs her formidable will. Like the saint, she renounces the world's goods and the authority of men. Though the king is her patron and protector, she disregards her new-won status at court and her claims to Rossillion. These worldly advantages mean nothing to her. Her protean personality, which seemed so adapted to social climbing, now invites a different perception as it moves closer to the complexity of the saintly persona. This could combine, "in a single icon," writes Heffernan, "images of the virgin, the mother, the rich and the poor, the humble and the regal, the frail and the strong, the captive and the free," (261). Her response to Bertram's refusal to consummate the marriage is submission and obedience to her husband as her lord: "In everything I wait upon his will," she says, (2.5.53). At the same time, she makes it clear that she knows what her marital rights are when she asks for a kiss. The purpose of her decision to renounce her native country and her new-won status for barefoot pilgrimage is to expiate the sin of her "ambitious love." This decision is also prompted by an almost maternal concern for Bertram's physical well-being, expressed in an emotional language of compassion for his imagined suffering: "Is't I / That . . . expose / Those tender limbs of thine to the event / Of the none-sparing war?" (3.2.104). In the

---

31 In the source story, Giletta goes to Rossiglione where she puts everything in order and endears herself to the Count's subjects.
context of Helena's transformed sexuality, Bertram moves between positions of dominance and subordination. Like the Christ figure in the saint's story, he is both revered lord and helpless boy in need of succor, (Heffernan 189-90). To the Countess, Helena is an "argel" whose "prayers, whom heaven delights to hear / And loves to grant" may secure redemption for the sinful Bertram, (3.4.25-7). The lord speaks reverently of her "austere sanctimony" and her "holy undertaking," (4.3.47-8). She feigns death in order to ensure Bertram's safe return from the war. "He is too good and fair for death and me, / Whom I myself embrace to set him free," (3.4.15-16).

Her pretended death is a self-imposed martyrdom which leads her to another kind of "death"—in her husband's bed—and the outcome of this is, paradoxically, life, motherhood, the final crown.32 For the virgin saint, too, the consummation is salvation, marriage to Christ and mystical motherhood. Helena contrives to have it both ways: The dues of holy matrimony have been paid, and at the same time chastity has somehow been vindicated both in the person of Diana, undefiled, and in her own person, undefiled within the strictures of Pauline marriage. The ancient Christian ambivalence about sexuality has been resolved in "chaste" marriage. While Helena acknowledges her own legitimate sexual pleasure in the fulfillment of the marriage bond—the "such sweet use"

---

32 "Still the finer's the crown," Helena says, as she journeys to claim her husband, (4.5.35). St Jerome, in his "Letter to Eustochium" praises chastity and writes of the crown promised to the virgin, (Schulenburg, "The Heroics of Virginity"). John Wing wrote, much later, in his advice book, The Crowne Coniugall or the Spouse Royall, as he struggled to exalt the married woman but maintain the natural hierarchy of gender: "a woman of strength is the Crowne" of her husband, "a marvellous honor to a man, being unto him his glory, and his joy." For him, "the woman of strength," was "a woman of grace, one in whom holiness prevaleth," 16. There is something of both Jerome and the Protestant divine in Helena's virtuous determination to be Bertram's wife in substance, not just the shadow.
made of her by her husband— in the same breath she castigates Bertram's wanton male lust as defilement of that bond: "when saucy trusting of the cozen'd thoughts / Defiles the pitchy night; so lust doth play / With what it loathes for that which is away," (4.4.23-5). Her words are redolent of her own moral and physical distaste for illicit lust. They also echo traditional male fears of feminine sexuality: the pitch darkness of hell— like Lear's outburst:"there's hell, there's darkness,"— and the anonymity of whoredom. Helena's words are a warning to men that this kind of sexuality is not part of chaste marriage.

They are a warning from one whose authority to warn is derived from Providence. Like the saint, Helena has earned this power because she is a vessel of grace and has transformed herself. Like the saint she has by-passed gender and class order. While the saint renounced her sexuality, Helena has transformed hers and has conformed her unruly desire to the requirements of chaste marriage, so that she can at last "live sweetly where she dies," (1.3.212). The paradox of death and life parallels the transformation of the saint from suffering virgin to "icon of fertility." Diana's triumphant words when she reveals the pregnant Helena are, "Dead though she be she feels her young one kick. / So there's my riddle: one that's dead is quick," (5.3.297). Helena had to die, to become spirit to sanctify the flesh, to make sex in marriage holy.\footnote{Adelman also sees Helena as a Virgin Mother, but for her this image functions to neutralize the threat of incest in marriage, (Suffocating Mothers 86).}

In this way the medieval saint's story has been pressed into the service of a different, secular ideal: not of divinely sanctioned chastity, but advantageous marriage; not of death and transfiguration, but transformed sexual power and fertility. In both story
and play, sexual discourse is produced because the erotic is an essential part of the struggle for autonomy by these powerless women. In the saint's story, the martyr's debasement by male tormentors and her final triumph over them in salvation deployed sexual discourse in ways sanctioned by the church. In the play, Helena's transformed desire is deployed in the interests of social mobility through marriage, its lawful consummation and its fulfillment in procreation. The marriage restores virtue to nobility, and Bertram is taught what it means to betray his blood by neglecting virtue, by being a traitor to the higher part of man.\(^{34}\) In spite of her origins, Helena will be a valuable addition to a faltering aristocracy. Social mobility seems a force for good. Indeed, the King is so pleased by the outcome of events that he is eager to engineer another match between "honesty" and rank and offers the humble Diana the choice of a husband. But the aristocratic "society of blood" has been infiltrated by a sexual power which has survived domestication as "honesty," saintly renunciation or containment by chaste marriage. Will the old distrust of the flesh remain to haunt the discourse of chaste marriage and mutual "benevolence"? Helena has found that Venus and Diana can be united, not by renouncing her sexual power but by controlling it and using it in certain ways. Though she is a vessel of God's grace, she has, in Foucault's words, "transformed herself into an ethical subject" (The Use of Pleasure, 72-77), not by following a Christian code of ascetic conduct in a life of renunciation and penance, but by a kind of Stoic askesis, a "practice of the self," involving self-knowledge and self-control. The aim of

\(^{34}\) We are given some sense of the conviction that man is fallen and in need of grace when the two lords discuss Bertram's plan to seduce Diana: First Lord: "Now God delay our rebellion! As we are ourselves, what things are we!" Second Lord: "Merely our own traitors,"(4.3.19-20).
the code was union with God; that of the practice was virtuous action in the life of the world, (Martin and Gutman 42-48).

Helena's aims were virtuous, but although she was not worldly, she always had the world in mind. At the end of the play she still has a disturbing power which Bertram might see as a potential threat to his masculinity and the code of honor. "Will you be mine now you are doubly won?" she asks the abject fellow, who now has to face the prospect of "hiding his honor in a box" for the foreseeable future. Is this the nightmare of women's rule, the thin end of the wedge of social disruption? But Helena is not an emblem of disorder. She has certainly used her sexual powers for social mobility but she has demonstrated that their transformation in chaste marriage and procreation will sustain the aristocratic order, not disrupt it. In a delicately equivocal move, the King has been proved right in the end. Helena did, as he said, merit elevation. But his authority has been confirmed by one who had no need of it because she was empowered by Providence and her own will. Bertram's discomfite and the King's uncertainty have combined to ensure that the denouement of the play has remained, for many critics, profoundly unsatisfactory. Seen in the light of the saint's story, which, I have argued, has deeply influenced the latter half of the play, the resolution is less puzzling. Thomas Heffernan has proposed that the saint's triumph may have suggested to the late medieval lay audience the possibility of an alternative, ascetic social order, an order based, not on blood relationships, but on Christian community. Nothing so radical as this is offered in the play. But Helena's successful move upward promising the rehabilitation of a faltering aristocracy is the outcome of her own efforts to transform herself, assisted, not by the
power of worldly authority, but by the grace of God. Her story may have suggested to audiences a model for a new elite, not a "society of blood," but a ruling class open to union with the godly and virtuous wherever they were to be found.
The Maid of Honour: "her master-piece."

If All's Well That Ends Well celebrates, however tentatively, a new infusion into the society of blood, Massinger's The Maid of Honour warns of the loss that society could incur by ignoring merit.¹ Like Helena, Massinger's heroine is an ardent, forceful yet virtuous gentlewoman who seeks marriage into the elite, but in this play the final joyful union is refused. This rejection of the body pulls the tragicomic form out of shape in a way that both enhances the play's theatrical effect and allows Massinger to drive home a political point about the ruling hierarchy. The final thwarting of consummation breaks apart the dynamic relationship of desire and social status, the force which had driven the play, leaving in its place a rift through which can be viewed only sterility and stasis.

Because Massinger's interest in the politics of his time is well documented, most of the criticism of this play and of The Bondman focuses on the playwright's use of his fictions to comment indirectly on the current political situation: specifically, on the differences of opinion over the possibility of England's involvement in the Palatinate, and the challenge to Spain which this involvement would ensure. Criticism of this kind ranges from S. R. Gardiner's early essay to Patterson's work on "the hermeneutics of censorship." In spite of her more sophisticated analysis of the play's ambivalences, she, too, sees them as political allusion, as "being keyed in, so to speak, to the Palatinate," (Patterson, 83).

¹ Philip Edwards, one of the editors of The Plays and Poems of Philip Massinger, dates the play 1621-2. All quotations are from this edition of the play.
Certain contemporary concerns are, I agree, palpable presences in the play: allusions to divided opinion on foreign policy in the 1621 parliament, the question of the use of royal prerogative, especially when it infringed on the subject's right to private property, and the freedom to discuss these things—all matters raised in James's early parliaments. Equally important, but apparently unnoticed by critics, is the oblique evocation at the end of the play of the threat to the nation of a revived Catholicism which a successful Spanish match would ensure. These subjects would have been of intense interest to the educated, sophisticated audiences for whom Massinger wrote his plays. The royal proclamation of 1620 forbidding discussion of state affairs is evidence of the presence in the country of "an aroused and informed opinion," (Kevin Sharpe, Faction and Parliament 33). Two other recent critics of The Maid of Honour, Ira Clark and Robert Turner, discern a different socio-political intention in Massinger's plays. They argue that in this and in other plays, Massinger is urging generosity and gratitude—"mutually grateful patronage"—or in Turner's words, the dramatist is imagining "a world of harmonious exchange" as a healer of social ills, (Turner 362). The politics of The Maid of Honour are inescapable, but a narrow focus on these aspects of Massinger's work is often at the expense of other important considerations, such as the constraints of the tragicomic form, or the play's erotic elements, which themselves are inseparable from the politics of the play. The critics I have mentioned largely ignore these things.

I shall argue that Massinger in The Maid of Honour exploits the tragicomic mode

---

2 Thomas Cogswell writes that in this period of uncertainty over foreign policy and the outcome of the Spanish match, a whole generation became interested in politics and were anxious to have access to information about them in spite of Whitehall's efforts to control the circulation of this information. ("England and the Spanish Match," 128).
which he had learned in his collaboration with Fletcher, using the comic drive of the love story, but deliberately thwarting the happy outcome of that drive at the end, undermining the resolution which gives the genre its optimistic character in order to make a political point. This point is not "the burning issue of war and peace" which Heinemann says is clouded, in this play, by "moral ambiguities;" it is also more specific than an analysis of "the location and definition of honor in the modern world," which Patterson sees in the coded ambivalence of the play, (Heinemann, "Drama and Opinion" 241; Patterson 82). Massinger, I believe, is pointing out the need for a more inclusive, responsive elite, by showing the loss, both moral and material, which that elite sustains in failing to reward generosity and merit in those outside its ranks. The material loss in the play is money; the moral loss is virtuous sexuality— an idealized femininity which is Protestant, popular and English.

Though this femininity is essential to the realization of the political purpose of the play, I do not think, as Clark and Edwards do, that the assertiveness of the heroine indicates that Massinger was advocating "reformation in the status of women," or that he had "empathy for women's concerns."3 Camiola owes her strength to her namesake in the source story and to her function in a tragicomedy which is shaped by contemporary national, not sexual, politics. The key to the play's political allusions is her money. Like its source story, Camiola and Rolande, the issue of money and who has it is a powerful

3 Edwards in "Massinger's Men and Women" 49, and Clark 166. These critics are making an assumption about the author's intention which I dispute. However, it may well be that the representation in contemporary theatre by male actors of active, assertive women was received by some of the audience as an assertion of potential feminine power challenging the patriarchy, as Ursula Heise argues.
undercurrent in the play. Money was also a pressing contemporary issue. At the root of so many of the current national concerns to which the play covertly alludes were financial problems: the royal finances were in a desperate situation and the problem of how to remedy them was the concern of all James's early parliaments, (Lockyer 173-86). There was a deep recession in the economy at the time the play was written, and the question of war in Europe was a question of how to fund such a war without placing too great a burden on the tax-paying population. In the play, this fundamental problem of money largely concerns the heroine, the wealthy gentlewoman Camiola, whose down- to- earth qualities of moral decency and plain speaking combine with a wider concern for public honor in the political sphere. These attributes could be associated with what historians call "country" values in this period, to distinguish them from the interests of the court elite. Camiola, however, comes under scrutiny in the play. Because a woman was inherently without power, her wealth is as potentially disruptive as were Helena's sexual energies.

Like All's Well That Ends Well, The Maid of Honour is concerned with social mobility in the sense that the elite and the society which it leads can only benefit from

---

4 John Chamberlain wrote about this problem to Carleton on Feb. 10 1621, "But the difficulty will be how and where these supplies shold be raised, for yt is most certain that England was never so generally poore since I was borne as yt is at this present, insomuch that all complaine they cannot receve their rents..." (2:342).

5 Roger Lockyer uses these terms. Revisionist historians tend to reject a clear opposition between court and country and argue for a fundamental consensus. However, Richard Cust writes in "After Revisionism" that there was a "country" identity which carried an increasingly ideological slant as it came to refer to critics of the crown in Parliament and to a dynamic, activist view of politics. The "court" was a convenient symbol for many of the things that were considered wrong in the body politic - popery, for example. Camiola does not, of course, represent this group in any simple way, but she has strong, independent views which are opposed to court values.
opening itself to the aspiration of virtuous outsiders. That these issues are examined through erotic relationships is fundamental to the theatrical purpose of the popular genre of tragicomedy, and to the fact that the personal and the political were seen as parallel spheres of life, part of the same universal moral order. Massinger had learned his trade by writing tragicomedy in collaboration with Fletcher. Recent critical discussion of this heterogeneous and controversial genre seems to fall roughly into two groups. Some writers see tragicomedy as escapist stuff, largely apolitical and designed to appeal to a sophisticated upper class audience, including Inns of Court men and gallants.6 Others insist that the genre's "interaction with seventeenth century politics points towards the source of its aesthetic energy," (Maguire Intro.7). Nancy Klein Maguire writes that "when polarization (and politicization) is particularly strong in a society," the "dichotomous perspectives" of tragicomedy make it easy for dramatists" to set up and oppose any ideology, and the potential for depicting two opposing perceptions of reality make tragicomedy a natural tool for politicizing." Massinger in The Maid of Honour was undoubtedly engaged in such an enterprise, setting up the model of an erring and arrogant elite in order to show various ways in which it could be challenged and reformed. But tragicomedy is an optimistic genre which usually moves towards the reconciliation of such antagonistic groups, "a resolution that reasserts and restabilises the legitimacy of traditional hierarchies," (Cohen "Politics" 173). Though the diverse and conflicting elements in The Maid of Honour move towards accommodation, Massinger boldly pulls

6 Lee Bliss, for example, writes that political concerns remain subordinate in these plays and that they reflect a Jacobean interest in psychology.
the comfortable comic resolution out of shape, making complacency about the status quo impossible, and at the end the political problems still hang in the air. In tragicomedy, the erotic relationships, the chaos of incontinent passion, usually give way to moderation and legitimate unions. In *The Maid of Honour* the disarray of sexual love is replaced by celibacy and retreat from the world.

Sexual issues and politics are closely interrelated in tragicomedy of this period and critics differ widely in their estimation of this relationship. Some see the erotic as an allegory of the political: William Proctor Williams writes that "Fletcher's stress on the politics of love . . . is the dramatic equivalent of James I's political writings about divineright monarchy,"(145). The prevailing belief that the family was the primary analogy for the state undoubtedly made it possible to see correspondences between the erotic and the political in these plays, and to use them in various ways. But the stage is not the same as a domestic conduct manual, or for that matter, a sermon, and whether it follows that, as Cohen asserts, there was "an overt equation of the crisis of sexuality and the crisis of monarchical rule," is difficult to establish. Clark says that in Massinger's plays, "public and private matters merge inseparably." He believes that the plays advocate accommodation and reformation not only in public affairs, but also suggest a parallel transformation in gender relationships, for example, "bringing women more effectively into sociopolitics," (155). These judgments put so much emphasis on ideology that they ignore the theatrical use to which representations of women were put.

---

7 Walter Cohen, "Prerevolutionary Drama". Cohen reads the tragicomedy of this period as "symptomatic" of the upheavals of the revolution to come.
Tragicomedy became popular at about the same time that the private theaters established themselves as the preferred alternative for the sophisticated theater-goer who wanted to avoid the hoi polloi at the Red Bull and The Curtain. *The Maid of Honour*, one of the first plays which Massinger wrote unaided, was probably first performed at the Phoenix in Drury Lane, a theater fast acquiring a social cachet to rival that of Blackfriars. The status of the private theaters was one aspect of a social mobility which led to the growing polarization of theater audiences and later, of repertoires, (Gurr 165 ).

Dramatists, including Massinger, were outspoken in their disdain of popular plays with their "nasty bawdy jigges" that satisfied the low taste at the northern playhouses. The fact that the tragicomedy being offered to the sophisticated patrons of the private theaters itself contained a great deal of often outrageous sexual material suggests that the dramatists were engaged, not in making moral judgments, but in distancing themselves from the tastes of the meaner sort. The 1612 order suppressing "lewd jigges, songs and daunces" at the end of plays was aimed at avoiding disorderly gatherings of such people, not at moral censorship, (Baskervill, 113). Massinger, was, I believe, like Fletcher, trying to appeal to a knowing and sophisticated, theatrically experienced audience, an audience which, in the previous decade, had helped to set the fashion for satire like Marston's, which was offered by the boys' companies. The satiric treatment of romantic love as lust was a legacy which tragicomedy inherited from this fashion and from the popularity of

---

8 Bentley says that the Phoenix and Blackfriars were the favorite haunts of the elite of town - the twin resorts of fashion, (6:61).

9 Dekker quoted in Baskervill, (112).
satiric city comedies. The genre was able to put this legacy to use in its characteristic structure of moving from the disharmony of violent passion to reconciliation, virtue, and moderation. At the same time the dramatists took advantage of the entertainment possibilities of representing sexuality to a sophisticated urbane audience. As Kathleen McLuskie argues, sexual issues were used as material for theatrical effect, not just ideology: "sex and politics are brought into play both in the sense of into operation and into playfulness," ("A Maidenhead," 93). The use of the erotic to illustrate the advantages of harmony in the public and the private sphere did not preclude its use as titillating entertainment. The tragicomedy of this period exploited contemporary political issues and the gender relationships with which they were analogically connected to produce theatrical pleasure, a pleasure which was partly erotic. Massinger's exploitation of the erotic has both an ideological and a theatrical purpose. However, it would not be true to say of his independent work, as McLuskie has said of Fletcherian tragicomedy, that it demonstrates the "witty treatment of sex as commodity and pastime," where "ideological struggles become grist to the theatrical mill," ("A Maidenhead" 98). Massinger's political purpose is quite as strong as his interest in creating theatrical pleasure for its own sake. Though he has added erotic elements to his source for *The Maid of Honour*, the effect of these materials is comic rather than witty in the Fletcherian sense because it depends on the staging of scenes of inversion of the social and gender hierarchy which are carnivalesque.

---

10 R.A.Foakes writes that tragicomedy employs clever "theatrical manoeuvres" to accommodate sexuality and lust — the legacy, he says, of the fashion for satire of the early years of the century— to comic form with its forgiveness and reconciliation, (82).
The problems of social mobility were already inherent in the Painter story of *Camiola and Rolande* which the play dramatizes, but not the problems of desire. The central issue of the story is the difference in rank between a rich knight's daughter and the nobleman she aids and hopes to marry. The relationship between the two hinges, not on love, but on recompense for a service. Massinger has added the love of Bertoldo and Camiola and the erotic attraction between Bertoldo and Aurelia, Duchess of Siena. Desire and ambition are intimately connected and work together in ways that can be either dangerous or beneficial to the commonweal. Rank is sexualized: uncontrolled lust amongst the elite reveals the dangers of capricious power in the courts of the absolute rulers, King Roberto and the Duchess of Siena—both additions to the source story. Camiola, the simple virgin whose goodness stands as a model for the imperfect elite, sets herself in opposition to this sexual/political power by virtue of her wealth and her own down-to-earth sexuality. To express this sexuality, she adopts a language which is popular, not Petrarchan, but which avoids the coarseness of lowlife speech. This mixture of social levels and of styles of speech was a feature of the theory of tragicomedy set down by Guarini and imitated by Fletcher. Guarini had compared tragicomedy to Plato's republic, which "combines contrary classes of the noble and base," and he said that sublime language should be tempered by the humble style, (Yoch 115-116). These ideas worked well with Massinger's interest in social inclusiveness.

Such an interest was not new, of course, and I believe that the figure of Camiola owes much to other playwrights. Rather than being a symbol of women's rights in Massinger's vision of a reformed hierarchy, as Clark would have her, she is better
understood as the middle-class, Jacobean heir of the independent, outspoken heroines of Shakespearean comedy like Rosalind, who are empowered to interrogate the status quo without destroying it. Like these heroines, who "acted with the freedom of commoners and the power of patriarchal institutions," she uses carnivalesque inversion to give substance to the idea of a more inclusive ruling hierarchy. ¹¹ The ideology which drives this purpose is patriotic and nationalistic, designed to appeal to the contemporary mood of the early 1620's, as was a play like Greene's nationalistic Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, written in 1590. But Camiola is not, like Rosalind, a product of the court, an aristocrat who incorporates the attributes of a broader section of society. Nor is she like Margaret, the fair maid of Fressingfield, a dairymaid from the shires whom the King confers on Lord Lacy, like "Albion's diadem," in Greene's play. Though Camiola is a simple gentlewoman, her wealth puts her in a position of power in relation to the elite and enables her to take issue with it in a way that the women in the earlier plays were not. She has something very practical to contribute to a more inclusive elite if it is worthy of her gifts. Yet she must use her power judiciously.

Camiola's power as well as that of the elite comes under scrutiny in this play. Camiola is an "heir," and her wealth is mentioned several times during the play. Jardine writes of the increasing wealth of women in the early seventeenth century, a wealth which resulted from large settlements on daughters, (Ch.3). These settlements were designed to attract a good husband and to keep estates intact. This may have been one of the ways the

¹¹ Tennenhouse 41. The function which Tennenhouse believes Shakespeare gives to his romance heroines in the late 1590's may well have influenced Massinger in the 1620's when patriotic feelings were again running high.
Jacobeans understood Camiola's "economic leverage," but Camiola's role is not to be the target of fortune-hunters seeking her in marriage; she soon sees off Fulgentio who is after her money. Her area of influence is to be wider than this, because she sees herself as the bearer of public honor. The other heir in the play is the comic upstart Sylli. the banker's son, whose "best taking part," his wealth, does not tempt Camiola, she tells him at the beginning of the play. There is an implicit comparison between Sylli's utter self-absorption and self-love— "Narcissus, as they call me,"(I.2.20)— and Camiola's financial generosity and her desire for Bertoldo. She admits early in the play, "Did not modesty forbid it / I should be ask that from him, he sues to me for," (I.2.64-5). Sylli's love, by contrast, is self-love and is by definition, barren, the equivalent of financial hoarding. His wooing of Camiola is an absurd parody of courtly love, artificial and extravagant compared to her plain language of the heart. Camiola's money is to be given to the deserving, and her virtuous sexuality to the man she loves. But her generosity has a more public face than merely being an expression of her love; she rivals the king as giver of largesse when she pays Bertoldo's ransom.

The king, who is the ultimate source of all gifts and honors, dishonorably withholds his money even from his next of kin, though he gives it to "his minion for a masque," (3.2.120). Camiola, on the other hand, is idealized not only as an alternative source of largesse, which she dispenses to the deserving, but as a potentially fruitful woman. In holding Bertoldo to his marriage promise, she hopes, no doubt, to get a return on her investment, a return which will allow her to put her virginity to "use" in Parolles's sense and produce heirs for her noble husband. Financially and sexually, she is full of
promise. But the powerful woman who lived without patriarchal supervision of her wealth was an anomaly. Helena's sexual power was potentially dangerous to the social and gender hierarchy; the danger in Camiola's case is her money. If lust among the elite is figured as tyrannical power, Camiola's sexuality is figured as her financial power—her "liberality." She deploys her money to achieve her marriage in much the same way that Helena deploys her sexuality. It is only when Camiola renounces her worldly desires that the elite is forced to confront its own shortcomings. Helena transformed her desire through chaste marriage and procreation and was received into the elite. Camiola's rejection by Bertoldo results in a transformation of a very different kind. She renounces the world to dedicate herself to God and the celibate life. While Helena used her sexual power to reform and sustain the nobility, Camiola deliberately takes her purse and her person out of their reach. Like the jilted widow in the source story, Camiola has found more deserving recipients for her fortune.

Two parallel changes of social status are examined in the play: Bertoldo's proposed elevation to princely power by the Duchess of Siena, and the gentlewoman, Camiola's attempt to secure the nobleman in marriage by way of recompense for her payment of his ransom and the restoration of his freedom. Both projects involve troubling inversions of gender and social hierarchy, but Camiola's incorporates elements of the carnivalesque which, because they are associated with festive social inclusiveness, seem more benign. The Duchess' elevation of Bertoldo is an addition to the source designed to illuminate Camiola's project by providing a contrast. Its protagonists are noble and their capricious, self-indulgent lusts contrast sharply with Camiola's initial
reasoned self-restraint and her later considered decision to follow her desires. This
decision, in its purity of intention and its defiance of royal authority, highlights the willful
irresponsibility of which absolute power is capable in the form of the Duchess' sexual
whims. In order to legitimate Camiola's attempt to move into the elite, Massinger first
establishes her virtue and makes clear her conviction that the social order must be put
before individual desire. The attributes of this simple gentlewoman are defined from the
beginning in contrast to the shortcomings of the elite, especially the weakness and
venality of the effeminate court. The play opens with the favorite Fulgentio selling
information, and a couple of carpet knights who are mocked by the arrogant Bertoldo, the
King's bastard brother, Camiola's suitor. Just as contemptible as the favorite is the comic
butt of the play, the moneyed upstart and wouldbe courtier, Signor Sylli, who dances
attendance on Camiola.

Although Camiola confesses her love for Bertoldo, her reason, "like a tyrant" tells
her to resist her desire. She refuses Bertoldo because of their difference in birth. Though
she loves the nobleman she does not, like Helena, believe that natural affections can level
differences in rank. On the contrary, she tells Bertoldo that the union of the noble and the
base is unnatural. "Tissue / And freese [are] in the same garment monstrous," she says, in
an effort to characterize the gulf between them. The clothing metaphor seems oddly
domestic in contrast to Helena's powerful invocation of Nature in her soliloquy on the
difference between her and Bertram. However, Camiola's words are a reminder of
specific contemporary concerns with status and the economy which are inseparable from
the erotic elements of the play. In recent Parliaments, a number of bills seeking to restrict
the use of costly fabric to the nobility had been defeated in the House of Commons. The bills aimed both to boost the depressed domestic cloth trade and to stabilize the social hierarchy, (Kent 50-1). Camiola puts herself firmly in the conservative camp. It is the upstart banker's son, Sylli, who confidently asserts the levelling doctrine that Camiola repudiates; "Men are men, / The King's brother is no more: good parts will doe it / When titles fail," (1.2.174-6). Sylli's position as Camiola's allowed fool is reminiscent of the relationship of the clown Lavatch with the Countess in All's Well That Ends Well, and he too has a parodic function. But while Lavatch's remarks served to recall that men of all ranks share the same sinful condition, Sylli's notions of equality are more worldly and secular, though they are disguised as sexual vanity—his "good parts." He, like all upstarts, sees himself as equal to the best. If Lavatch stood for the old hierarchical order which his late master epitomized, Sylli is a new man, combining both the empty pretence of the courtier and the dangerous power of wealth when it is in the wrong hands.

Camiola's virtue is also contrasted with Bertoldo's deficiencies. Though Bertoldo appears to Camiola as "the only sun in honour's sphere," the kind of honor he espouses is questionable from the start. Though his criticisms of the King for preferring idleness and ease before the honor and valor of warlike action are telling, he himself goes to war for the wrong reasons, breaking the code of the Knights of Malta which bound him never to draw sword against ladies. His bastardy itself suggests a flawed nature and he is quick to give up his order's vow of celibacy in his pursuit of Camiola. Though he mocks the effeminate carpet knights, he himself is effeminate in a profounder sense: he is ruled by womanish passion. There is a hint of this when he tells Camiola that for her love, he
would give up military glory and "like Anthonie / Pursue my Cleopatra!" (1.2.107-8).
The educated part of the audience would remember that Antony made "his will lord of his reason," (Ant. 3.13.3.). Bertoldo's rash criticism of the King, his exhortations to go to war and the popular support he gathers, may well have recalled the outspoken critics of the crown and the court in James' early parliaments, men who were known as "patriots" or the "popular party." James called them "fiery spirits," (Lockyer 126, 151). In the play, this behavior is associated with a discredited honor code which is superseded by the honor which Camiola represents.

Though Camiola's indomitable virtue is clear, she, like Helena, cannot be a heroine of chastity. The rescue of the blood royal by middle-class money must be motivated by something stronger than mere gratitude for a past favor as it was in the source. Camiola is moved by her love and it is made clear that though she is virtuous, she is made of flesh and blood: she speaks of her "frailtie" to Bertoldo: "You are too noble / To seek me (though my frailtie should consent) / In a base path" (1.1.149-50), and later confesses her love for Bertoldo as her "weakness" when she sends Adorni off to pay the prisoner's ransom. The sexual innuendo of her comic backchat with Sylli also tempers the first impression of her as implacably chaste and prepares the way for the festive aspect of the inversion of hierarchy which her proposed move into the elite involves. Camiola's heroic encounter with the King's evil favorite Fulgentio is itself a scene of mockery, misrule, and inversion. Her conquest of the man who bears the King's ring is essentially a matter of language. By using her tongue to good effect, Camiola acquires the privileges of misrule, what Jardine calls, in her discussion of Desdemona, "licence to carp," (120).
Unlike Desdemona, the independent, wealthy Camiola continues to make judicious use not only of her freedom to speak, but of her power to act when she defies her sovereign's edict and later converts him to her own view of the nature of a subject's obedience to royal authority. In this scene with the King's favorite, Fulgentio, courtly pride and effrontery are mocked unmercifully in various ways: by the page, "Tamburlaine in little," who postures like his master; by the failure of Sylli's valor; and by Camiola's sturdy refusal to be impressed by one whose chief claim to eminence is that he has "credit with the King," (2.2.105).

This scene is important in two ways: it prepares the way for Camiola's radical stance against authority, and it establishes her as a populist figure by allowing her to use language which is straightforward and plebeian yet without the taint of vulgarity, a language which is designed to appeal to a broad section of the non-courtly audience, including those who sympathized with the "country" viewpoint. By "country" I mean those who stressed the need to uphold the liberties of the subject, were Protestant and patriotic and were loyal to the king, but critical of his pro-Spanish foreign policy and distrustful of the intrigue and debauchery of the Court. Camiola refuses to be dictated to by a man who, though he claims to be "a kinsman of the king's," is, in her judgment, a corrupt courtier. But there is more to this than her certainty of her own moral superiority. Beneath Camiola's insistence on her personal autonomy runs a current of insinuation about the subject's rights to his own property, a topic much debated in early Jacobean parliaments. "I am queen in mine own house; nor must you / Expect an empire here," she warns Fulgentio (2.2.77-8). When the favorite shows her the King's ring and says, "By
this he does command you to be mine; / By his gift you are so," she protests that, "though the king may / Dispose of my life and goods, my mind's my own, / And never shall be yours," (2.2.166-9). She also accuses Fulgentio of pursuing her for her wealth. In the next act, Camiola decides to use her wealth in a way that expressly violates royal authority. However, the unsettling implications of Camiola's forceful independence in this scene are diminished by her depiction as an artless girl who uses what she calls "plain language." Although she speaks with force and dignity, her speech is more often distinguished by its pragmatism and its homely turn of phrase. Though she is not a scold, she still has the common touch. She wonders, for example, if Fulgentio has been sent "as a smocke-agent to me" (2.2.96), and she uses proverbial speech to criticize him: "Rich you are, / Divelish rich, as 'tis reported, and sure have / The aides of Satan's little fiends to get it, / And what is got upon his backe, must be / Spent you know where;— the proverb's stale—" (2.2.154). When she gives her reasons for refusing Fulgentio's offer of marriage, she lists the physical attractions she looks for in a man, which Fulgentio, the man Bertoldo refers to as the "state catamite," lacks. Here her language is close to low comedy:

    And for the fairnes
    Of your complexion, which you thinke will take me,
    The colour I must tell you in a man
    Is weake and faint, and never will hold out
    If put to labour, give me the lovely browne,
    A thicke curl'd hayre of the same dye, broad shoulders,
A brawnie arme full of veines, a legge without
An artificiall calfe, I suspect yours,
But let that passe, (2.2.141-147).

The colloquial vigor of this language would be bold even for Rosalind. "Labour" suggests sexual activity here, as it does later in the play when the soldier, Captain Lacomo describes how he earned his legacy from "A buxome widow . . . And that too, my backe knowes, I labour'd hard for," (3.1.54). The color brown, too, had sensual overtones, Edwards says in a note to his edition of the play. Language such as this, which recalls the pleasures of festive comedy, shifts attention away from the power of this lady whose lack of male relatives and whose independent means put her outside patriarchal control, which, in this play, means outside monarchical control. Though Fulgentio's angry response to Camiola's rejection uses the misogynistic language of satire—"which of your grooms / Your coachman, fool, or footman, ministers / Night-physic to you?"—Camiola's language, while it has dramatic precursors, strikes a new note. In its frankness and forcefulness, it recalls the cheerful, confident sexuality of a Rosalind, while its naivete and physical specificity is reminiscent of a rustic clown. While Shakespeare's romantic heroines interrogate patriarchal power, they themselves are part of society's elite. Camiola's simple language and forthright honesty, at least in this part of the play, put her outside the elite. Massinger is searching for a way of representing a person who could challenge and correct the king without threatening kingship or the hierarchical order. As

---

12 In Henry VIII, Surrey says to Wolsey, "I'll startle you / Worse than the sacring bell, when the brown wenche / Lay kissing in your arms, Lord cardinal," (3.2.294-5). A note in the Arden edition of this play says "brown wenche" means a slut.
a woman, Camiola embodies a long tradition of contained kicking against the pricks. and
she has, as Jardine writes of other female characters, the license of the scold. More than
this, she has some of the attributes of the truth-telling fool and of the clever wench of folk
tales who uses feminine cunning to set things to rights. Syllis running comic
commentary on Camiola's dialogue with Fulgentio helps to take the edge off Camiola's
defiance of the king's favorite. His aside, "Sure I must love her / Before the day, the
prettie Soule's so valiant," focuses on Camiola's charming femininity, and so deflects any
serious interpretation of her provocative use of a royal title in her description of herself as
"Queene in mine owne house." He turns her dignity to mock heroic.

Though the scenes of misrule give Camiola the privilege of speaking out, the real
source of her bold assertiveness is her independent means and, like Helena's determined
desire, this wealth is potentially disruptive to the social order. In a later scene, it is made
clear that Camiola uses her wealth in the right way. She celebrates her birthday in the
manner of a great lady: her social status, her wealth and above all, her liberalty are
emphasized. She receives rich gifts from important people, but much is made of the gold
largesse she bestows on her grateful servants. She has the air of one who has taken upon
herself that rapidly declining aristocratic duty of "hospitality." She understands the social
obligations as well as the power conferred by wealth. In the same scene, her
uncompromising attitude to the preservation of degree is reiterated when she chides the
faithful Adorni whose birthday offering has been an attempt to defend Camiola's honor
against Fulgentio's slanders. Such an action would have been appropriate for Bertoldo,
she says, but not for him. Bertoldo had hoped to make Camiola his wife, "A height I
hope / Which you dare not aspire to" (3.3.74-5), she warns, making clear her opposition to any disruption of social order.

Immediately after this, however, she decides to pay Bertoldo's considerable ransom and to take him as her husband, thus apparently contradicting her own principles and, of course, defying her sovereign. This change in Camiola's principles is never treated as feminine fickleness as it is when the Duchess Aurelia falls in love with Bertoldo and she is accused of changing from "A second Pallas " to "a wanton Helen," (4.4.141-4). The alarming inversion of the natural social, political, and gender order which follows from Camiola's decision to ransom Bertoldo against the King's edict is partly justified by the exigencies of fortune which often work against the deserving. In the early part of the play, Camiola insists that she is Bertoldo's inferior because of his royal blood and his noble attributes of mind and body. When, however, he is a despairing captive in chains, abandoned by his friends and by his royal brother, dishonored by his Order, the tables are turned. Camiola is in the dominant position because of the power of her wealth. When she complains, however, in her soliloquy about Bertoldo's plight, that virtue and deserving must "serve fortune still," she contrives to represent Bertoldo's fall in moral rather than political or social terms. She attributes to Bertoldo (mistakenly), the inner virtues of character which were increasingly seen as the signs of true honor. She suggests that this "too eminent" virtue of his is the victim of the king's malice or is at the mercy of fortune in an imperfect world where Manichean forces of good and evil struggle with one another. She laments the wreck of his honor: "Thou only sun in honor's sphere, how soon / Art thou eclipsed and darkened!" (3.3.153). This representation mitigates the
threat of the social and gender inversion which her dominance implies.

All this distracts from the realities of the situation: social status is perilously contingent upon circumstances, and birth does not guarantee status, a fact which must have been clear to the audience, many of whom had experienced social descent in the fluid conditions of Jacobean society. In practical terms, unless money can be found to pay his very large ransom, the status and career opportunities of a nobleman will be in ruins. Camiola, a wealthy woman outside the elite, has it in her power to restore Bertoldo to high status, but she mystifies this power by treating the situation, not merely as a matter of clearing Bertoldo's honor and giving him back his rightful place, but as the restoration of public honor itself. This honor has been lost, not only by the king's rejection of his brother, but by a more general decline in morals in high places: "O more than impious times! when not alone / Subordinate ministers of justice are / Corrupted and seduced, but kings themselves, / The greater wheels by which the lesser move. / Are broken or disjointed!" (3.3.142). The audience would be reminded forcibly of the scene of court corruption with which the play opened. The price to be paid for Camiola's efforts on the nation's moral behalf is small—marriage to the King's brother—which alone will satisfy the lady's honor.

Complex and evolving notions of honor in this period confront one another in the play, and are enmeshed with problems of gender. Walter Cohen writes that the tragicomedy of this period "presupposes an analogy between the family and the state, deploying the love-and-honor code to produce a series of homologies and articulations that make women integral, even central, to the fate of the nation," ("Prerevolutionary"
128). Male control of female sexuality is, Cohen says, "conceptualized as masculine honor." However, notions of honor were not static, and in this play, women's honor interacts with changing male honor codes in a way that goes beyond the analogies which Cohen refers to. It may be useful to examine the play's use of the idea of honor in a more historically specific way. As in *All's Well That Ends Well*, when a woman becomes the bearer of male honor, the concept shifts and becomes identified with feminine honor which was not associated with rank. Camiola, of course, is mistaken about Bertoldo's honor. He is not a man of honor in the currently accepted sense, because he has defied his prince to undertake, with other malcontents, an ill-advised military action against the Duchess of Siena. Moreover, he has broken the oath of his Order which forbade him to draw his sword against a lady. When he is in prison, he does not bear his fate with Christian fortitude and patience, but falls into despair. Bertoldo, like Bertram in *All's Well That Ends Well*, espouses a discredited notion of honor, whose main aim was individual military glory, not inner virtue and unselfish service to the commonweal and its head. Bertoldo's military adventure was, ironically, prompted by the same "desperate valor" that Camiola found so culpable in Adorni's attempt to defend her honor against Fulgentio's slanders. Camiola's defiance of her prince is, however, a different matter. It is the King's failure to uphold honor that causes Camiola to take action. She sees honor as part of a virtuous and Christian character. The king's refusal, for "politique ends," to aid his brother and to allow others to do so, seems to her to break "the ties of nature and

---

13 See James, "English Politics and the Concept of Honor," on Sidney's advice in *Arcadia* on the need for men of honor to be able to endure changes in fortune, (387-9).
religion." She calls it "atheisme." Though she admits that she is uttering treason, she
feels justified, for these reasons, in opposing the King's edict and in arrogating male
power to salvage male honor:

    I find in me

    Some sparks of fire, which, fanned with honor's breath,

    Might rise into a flame, and in men darken

    Their usurped splendour, (3.3.160-164).

Camiola is making a dangerous move. In defying the king, she is invoking an
earlier use of the honor code when it was adopted by political activists, like those who
opposed Richard II. These men used the honor code as a focus for legitimate dissent
against monarchical authority, "if it had failed the governing class it was supposed to
lead," (James 406). This kind of thinking was revived amongst certain groups in
Parliament in the 1620's who were dissatisfied with James's foreign policy and who
loathed the debasing of honors through their sale by court favorites. This was not a self-
seeking pursuit of honor as is Bertoldo's rash valor, but something undertaken for the
good of the state. In Camiola's hands, the subversive implications of this radical, active
dissent are transformed because the honor she vows to uphold becomes blurred with her
own feminine honor. This honor was of a different kind. Unlike male honor, women's
honor was not only independent of rank and blood, but it was founded on a moral
attribute, her chastity, not on competitiveness or aggression. This idea of honor was not
unlike the notion that male honor was based on inner worth or character, like the honor
that the princesses in Arcadia teach the princes to adopt. It was gaining ground in the
early 17th century, (Barber, 33).

Camiole's personal honor is beyond reproach, as she makes clear to Adorni who presumed to defend it with his sword. Though she dissent from the king's edict, she makes every effort to show her loyalty to the king. She offers no threat to authority as she is an ardent upholder of the status quo and her action on Bertoldo's behalf is motivated only by "good intents": to restore him to his rightful position. What is more, she is prepared to part with "fifty thousand crowns, Adorni; / Two parts of my estate!" Her next words abruptly shift the focus from her exalted ideas of honor to her feminine feelings, and at the same time are a reminder of the relationship in this play of money with sex. She tells her go-between Adorni, "Yet I so love the gentleman (for to you / I will confess my weaknesses) that I purpose / . . . To ransom him, and receive him / Into my bosom as my lawful husband," (3.3.197-8). She seems, like all women, at the mercy of irrational desire rather than the guardian of public honor. This scene epitomises the interaction between theatrical and ideological levels in this tragicomedy. On the one hand, Camiola's money allows her to take on male political power and frees her to take the sexual initiative, a position usually reserved for men or whores. Both these moves could be dangerously disruptive for the order of things. On the other hand, the erotic is treated in a comic way to minimize this threat. Consider the comic potential of the kiss she prints on the astonished Adorni's lips and her instructions that this salutation shall be transferred to the noble Bertoldo's hand, a rider designed, no doubt, to safeguard the proprieties both of sexual behaviour and deference due to rank. This, and Adorni's doleful appeal to the audience at the end of the scene, "I am half / Hanged out o' the way already.— Was there
ever / Poor lover so employed against himself / To make way for his rival?" (3.3.218),
exploit the theatrical potential of status inversion as carnival. Again, the pleasures of
carnival are temporary, and this defuses the subversive potential of his heroine's actions.
At the ideological level, the useful potential of Camiola's wealth and the sincerity of her
motives are given political legitimacy by the appeal to honor.

A number of critics, who, like Turner, write about Massinger's interest in the
values of patronage, notice that Camiola's generosity to Bertoldo is not freely given; she
expects something in return—marriage. Camiola's language when she asks Adorni to pay
Bertoldo's ransom on her behalf suggests an absence of trust which would have been part
of a gift with no strings attached: "Let him swear / A solemn contract to me; for you must
be / My principal witness," (3.3.205). This is a self-interested exchange, typical of the
relations of the market place, relations which Massinger criticizes in his city comedies.
Christian writing had long condemned as "spiritual usury," "this hoping for gratitude or
some other kind of binding obligation, in return for giving a loan that is otherwise given
grazio," (Shell 75). Her words may, however, have had a contemporary political
significance rather than being connected, as Turner believes, with Massinger's
idealization of patronage. Camiola seems guilty of what King James called "merchant-
like dealing," and abhorred. When Parliament, in "the relatively harmonious first
session" of 1621, finally was persuaded to vote the King two subsidies without
demanding any concessions on his part, it was a gesture which demonstrated the love and
harmony between King and people. James thanked them "for this their free, noble, and
no merchant-like dealing." This relationship was in strong contrast to the bargaining over
the royal prerogative symbolised by the earlier Great Contract which, of course, collapsed, (Lockyer, 132-3).\(^\text{14}\)

If Massinger did indeed have the relationship of parliament and the King in mind when he wrote this part of the play, it appears that he is careful to avoid taking up any clear position. Camiola's language does seem to savor of the market place, but if she is indeed being "calculating," as Turner calls her, it is for good reason, a reason which concerns her honor. The obligation which Camiola lays on Bertoldo is marriage, and this, like an economic exchange, involves a contract. But the only way in which Camiola could undertake to pay the ransom of a man she loves without compromising her honor was to marry him. In the source story, this is the reason for Camiola's expectations of marriage: she is not in love with Rolande. In rescuing male honor, Camiola must protect her own. Surely Massinger means that the relationship of Christian marriage can transcend the dishonorable aspects of market exchange. Camiola, who later calls herself Bertoldo's "better angel," not only redeems his honor but raises him from the state of abject, un-Christian despair into which he had fallen and, by their marriage, would bring him back into the bonds of the political community headed by the king, bonds which Bertoldo had rashly repudiated. This redemptive gesture is not the behavior of the woman who finds herself in a world upside down and takes advantage of being in the dominant position; it is the action of a woman who aims not only to salvage the honor of

\(^{14}\text{In 2 Henry VI, "merchant-like" is used to describe behavior which is the opposite of a gentleman's honor. Whitmore says, in refusing to accept an offer of ransom money with which the Duke of Suffolk hopes to save his skin: "Therefore when merchant-like I sell revenge, / Broke be my sword, my arms torn and defaced, / And I proclaimed a coward through the world," (4.4.41-3).}\)
the erring elite but to uphold the honor of the commonweal, and this includes her own. In
the final analysis, public honor and the honor of the humble gentlewoman depend upon
one another.

When Adorni wakes the shackled Bertoldo from his sleep of despair with
Camiola's offer, the prisoner's rhapsodies of joyful gratitude to his benefactor sit oddly
with the language of commerce. Adorni calls the marriage contract a "debt due for your
freedom" and Bertoldo accepts in similar vein: "A payment! an increase of obligation. /
To marry her!—'twas my nil ultra ever: / The end of my ambition," (4.3.88-90). The
dramatic irony of his reference to ambition is brought home when he later accepts the
Duchess' offer of marriage because it will bring him higher status: "There is no stop
between me and a crowne, (4.4.154). It is Bertoldo who exhibits the mercenary values of
the market in choosing the Duchess' more attractive marriage proposal. Bertoldo's actions
and language when he learns that Camiola has set him free enact the social and gender
inversion which Camiola has been so careful to underplay. He is ready to kneel to Adorni
and declares himself the "bondman" of his deliverer, Camiola. He will "live and die her
charity's slave," (4.3.78). His extravagant vows of service to Camiola are soon forgotten
in his anxiety to accede to the Duchess' importunities. In his changeableness, Bertoldo
shows that he is ruled not by reason but by his passions, as is Aurelia. There is nothing of
carnival about the inversion of social and gender order which occurs in the affair of
Bertoldo and the Duchess. Bertoldo's weaknesses pale beside the capricious behavior of
a woman who is also a prince and should act accordingly. Instead, she uses the
advantages of her exalted position to exploit the nobleman's weaknesses and satisfy her
private desires. "Repine who dare; / It is our will," (4.4.107). Because she is a prince, the consequences could endanger the state. Contemporary opinion held that a socially superior woman who chooses a man from a lower social rank, as the Duchess of Malfi did, can only be motivated by lust, and the consequences are always disastrous.

In her first appearance, Aurelia displays the attributes of a tolerant ruler and a magnanimous victor. However, the inability of her officers to control her soldiers' cries of "whores" when she appears prepares us for the "more than suspected looseness" which she herself will soon display. Aurelia's sudden overwhelming desire for Bertoldo is an almost grotesque demonstration of the traditional belief in women's essential inconstancy and its disastrous consequences.15 Her courtiers look on amazed as she woos Bertoldo, who is below her in rank as well as being her erstwhile enemy and prisoner. While Camiola justified her actions by their "good intents," and could explain the reasons for her change of heart towards Bertoldo, Aurelia can only describe her transformation as an involuntary physical state: "Sure his lips are poisoned, / And through these veins force passage to my heart," (4.4.63-4) and she justifies her actions by claiming the privilege of her royal power. Stage directions which have the Duchess entering and exiting several times while she waits for Bertoldo to make up his mind reinforce the impression of a flighty and willful woman. Our reaction to her is mediated through the skeptical comments of her general, Gonzaga, one of Massinger's decent chaps who have their heart in the right place. Gonzaga taxes her with her transformation from a ruler whose "blood

15 De la Perriere quotes the saying, "No surety in a woman's minde, Her fancy changeth with the winde."
was governed / By her discretion, and not rul'd her reason," (4.4.138-9). Once she
"appear'd a second Pallas," and had "the reverence and Majesty of Juno," but now she has
become "a wanton Helen." He believes that she is possessed by the devil. Like Camiola.
Aurelia is explicit in her admiration for male physical attributes: "These eyes / Whose
every glance stcre Cupids empti'd quiver,...These rudie lips, of whose fresh colour,
cherries / And roses were but coppies," (4.4.92-3). But while Camiola used colloquial
speech, Aurelia's praise of Bertoldo is in a style which seems to imply a sophisticated
sensuality associated with the court and is absent from Camiola's artless enthusiasm.

Since the Duchess' loose behavior is indefensible, her only recourse is to claim the
prerogative of her royal power: "As I am / A Princesse, what I doe, is above censure, /
And to be imitated," (4.4.127-8). Aurelia's uncontrolled desire is a symptom of the
danger of the willful use of absolute power. The Duchess tells her general to consult
Bertoldo, rather than her, on the matter of the disposal of a soldier. The reaction of
onlookers to this careless delegation of authority to the nobody Bertoldo is: "Grown up in
a moment/ A favorite!" (4.4.153). The parallel with King Roberto and his Fulgentio is
obvious. Later in the play, the couple demonstrate the insoluble clash of gender and
social hierarchy which their union implies. Bertoldo declares that although he is to be the
Princess's husband, he will never "forget the duty that / I owe her as a servant," that is, as
the subject of a prince, (5.2.11-12.). Aurelia, however, puts aside her superior status and
says that she expects only "fair equality". She vows that, "All the prerogatives of my high
birth cancell'd / I'll practise the obedience of a wife," (5.2.18-19). It is clear that in this
alliance, the demands of gender order and political hierarchy cancel each other out.
Aurelia is aware of the prevailing wisdom that, "Queens themselves, if they / Make choice of their inferiors, onely aiming / To feed their sensuall appetites, and to raigne / Over their husbands," "commit / Authoriz'd whoredome," (5.2.19-23) and vows not to be guilty of this "crime." Gonzaga, who has the role of wise commentator, is skeptical of Aurelia's intentions. He says, "when once / The griping hunger of desire is cloyd, / (And the poore fool advanc'd, brought on his knees) / Most of your Eagle breed, I'll not say all / (Ever excepting you) challenge againe, / What in hot blood they parted from," (5.2.27-31). He is saying that women like Aurelia are motivated by lust and want always to be dominant. As Lisa Jardine says of the Duchess of Malfi who believes that her inherited power entitles her to do as she wishes, "we are witness to the acting out of a taboo," (90). Women who assert their power are represented as sexually wayward and threatening to the social order and they must be punished for it. It is a foregone conclusion that even women with "economic leverage" cannot get away with "spirited independent behaviour". However, The Maid of Honour is a tragicomedy, and the Duchess of Siena is taught the error of her ways, not by her murderously obsessive male relatives, but by a woman who knows better how to exploit her economic leverage.

The scenes of misused princely power in the Sienese court parallel the arbitrary use of royal power by the king and his favorite in Palermo. Because the ruler of Siena is a woman, the representation of the dangerous consequences of uncontrolled female passion provides an obvious contrast with the behavior of the virtuous gentlewoman, Camiola. At the same time it parallels Roberto's court and the evil effects of a king's "passionate will" there. It is significant that in the scene following the Duchess'
imperious insistence on her own incontrovertible will, the King of Sicily tries to use his authority to force Camiola to accept Fulgentio's suit, "to / Correct your stubborn disobedience." In a few simple but telling arguments, Camiola puts the king right on some fundamental principles of the rights of sovereigns in relation to their subjects.

"Tyrants, not kings, / By violence from humble vassals force / The liberty of their souls. I could not love him; / And to compel affection, as I take it, / Is not found in your prerogative," (4.5.63-67). The use of the word "prerogative" here, at a time when the royal prerogative was being discussed in parliament, suggests, as Heinemann and other critics have said, that the drama of the 1620's had a part in making current ideological conflicts "visible and understandable for those outside as well as within 'the political nation,'" (239). However, Camiola never questions the king's sovereignty and her criticism is based on moral and religious precepts as it was when she opposed the king's edict. At the end of the scene, Camiola compares herself with the penitent woman who bathes Christ's feet with her tears.16 There can be few more fervent endorsements of just monarchical rule in literature. Both the king and Fulgentio are affected by Camiola's bold stance. The king agrees that just rule must come before attachment to favorites, but as much as the men are impressed by the substance of Camiola's words, they are struck by her outspoken fearlessness. Fulgentio admires "the constancy and bravery of her spirit," and the king exclaims, "Excellent virgin! / How I admire her confidence!" (4.5.68-69).

Why is it that Camiola is praised, not blamed, for her independence, confidence

16 The allusion is to Luke 7:38. The emotional religious tone here is reminiscent of some of Cleora's speeches in The Bondman.
and outspokenness—attributes which were considered in much of the writing of the period to be dangerous signs of unruliness in women? Her eloquence reaches its height at the end of the play when, armed with her contract, and determined to "Labour to right myself," she successfully argues her own law case against Bertoldo. The assertiveness of women like Camiola have led Clark and Edwards to the opinion that Massinger was advocating "reformation in the status of women" in his plays, (Clark 166). I believe that Massinger has a political purpose in this play, but I doubt that this purpose included an agenda of reform for women. The early 1620's, when England's policy towards Spain hung in the balance, would have been perceived, for most of Massinger's audience, as a time of national crisis. The play speaks from this context, rather than from a debate which was still seen as "the woman question," a side issue, the material for a current pamphlet war. Though maintenance of the gender order was one of the targets in the drive for social and political stability, this play does not address these concerns. When, because of the disruptive behavior of certain court ladies in the second decade of the century, the debate about women became a political issue which threatened to divide and destabilize the elite, Middleton exploited it in The Changeling. In this play, however, Camiola is serving a higher purpose, higher in the sense that it was national, not factional. The audience is being asked to imagine a leadership which did not close its ears to dissident but loyal opinion, which was open to the influence of a wider group than it was accustomed to consult, a group which epitomized honest, traditional English values, yet had the means to make itself heard, and was a power to be reckoned with. Camiola possesses these attributes and can wield this power.
As I have said, Camiola has many of the attributes of the heroines of romantic comedy: she is clever, eloquent, managing; she enjoys comic backchat; she is both resolutely virtuous and desiring. But she is different in many ways from comic heroines. She has a sophisticated political sense and is directly involved in state politics in a way that Shakespeare's comic heroines never are. To counteract this unwomanly trait, she has a pragmatic, plebeian quality which links her to the clown and to folklore tradition rather than to the witty heroine whose origin is the court, like Rosalind. When the play darkens in the way that tragicomedies do, and her marriage plans miscarry, her virtue, the basis of her honor, always in the foreground to justify her amazing political daring, is increasingly emphasized. This helps to bolster her righteous anger and to prepare the way for the extraordinary denouement of this melancholy tragicomedy. Massinger has used a variety of elements to create a character which is central to the political concerns of his play: the need for an elite which will open itself to people of merit from outside its own circle.  

The tragicomic frame which both permits and constrains the elaboration of these concerns is exploited by Massinger at the end to drive home his political ideas in a way which has immediate force and contemporary relevance. Instead of a joyful union, he stages an ominous separation. Camiola is a simple gentlewoman who offers no challenge to the social order, but her virtue empowers her to speak her mind and to confront and challenge vice and injustice where she sees it. This honest goodness should have made her an acceptable candidate for marriage into the nobility, but the moral failings of that nobility

---

17 I cannot see in this play what Cohen sees in other tragicomedies of the period — "a parallel treatment of women and the lower classes."("Prerevolutionary Drama" 142). Camiola is of the gentry; "class" here is an inappropriate category.
resulted in her rejection.

Camiola's eloquence at her "trial" is so driven by righteous anger that at times it hovers on the edge of scolding or impudence. She is the opposite of the silent, modest woman who was idealized in so much literature, yet she is listened to with respect and admiration by her noble audience as she peremptorily demands justice of the king and rails against Bertoldo and the Duchess. Seen in the context of assertive women in other plays, she represents something new. She is not quite in the tradition of the garrulous domestic scold or shrew of folk tales which helped to shape Katherine or the witty Beatrice. Nor is she a monstrous man-woman like Joan of Arc or the terrifying Queen Margaret who reject traditional womanly qualities. She does not seek to disrupt the wider political order, like Cleopatra. Yet Camiola's eloquence always has a political rather than a domestic context and ultimately it has a political purpose; in this last scene she creates for herself the forum of a public court. But despite her eloquence and her exalted audience, Camiola insists on the plainness of her speech. She scorns the "rhetorical flourishes" of a "hired tongue." "I stand her mine own advocate; and my truth, / Delivered in the plainest language, will / Make good itself," (5.2.75-6). This is the same Camiola who told the king to his face that she did not have to love her sovereign's vices; the same Camiola who made it clear to Fulgentio that he was so effeminate that she was "doubtful whether he was a man." This is the license of carnival. Camiola's defense is full of the honest anger of the ordinary woman from outside the ruling elite who has been wronged. In using assertive speech usually reserved for men of the upper class, she becomes a figure of misrule, who, like Paulina or Emilia, uses this as a way of voicing legitimate
grievances.

In the Painter tale, Camiola's long, angry speech in which she demands justice is the focus of the story and at its center is the problem of rank. She is enormously resentful that she should seem unworthy to have "the sonne of a King as husband" because she is merely the "daughter of a knight," (359). She defends her own worth with great passion: "I have put on a Royall heart and manners that is able to get, and purchase royall Nobility," and she dwells on the helplessness and debasement of Rolande when he was a prisoner. Massinger catches some of this fiery spirit in Camiola because for her too, the matter of rank is paramount. Prince Ferdinand's suggestion that Bertoldo may have put Camiola aside because of "the distance and disparity betweene / Their births and fortunes" (5.2.93-4) touches a nerve and she is goaded into righteous anger. Her earlier preoccupation with public honor forgotten, she asks the court, in a splendid evocation of Bertoldo's degradation as a powerless prisoner, to imagine a situation where their positions were inverted so that Bertoldo was her "inferiour" and owed her everything as her "manumised slave." "In return, he ruined his preserver, / The prints the irons had made in his flesh / Still ulcerous; but all that I had done, / My benefits, in sand or water written, / As they had never been, no more remembered!" And his only reason was "his ambitious hopes / To gain this duchess' favour," (5.2.129-35). Then she turns on the Duchess, and claims that her beauty is superior to Aurelia's, suggesting that neither the Duchess' rank, nor her beauty, are natural attributes but products of art and flattery.  

18 In the Painter story the same association between noble blood and good looks is made and challenged in the case of Rolande. His "goodly personage" and beauty are part of his royal attributes, which he loses in prison and this loss, Camiola suggests, changes their positions. The (continued...)
Camiola, however, quickly acknowledges her own vanity. Abandoning the misrule that made inversion of hierarchy possible and allowed her to vent her anger, she cedes everything to the woman of high rank: "You are all beauty, goodness, virtue; and poor I not worthy / As a foil to set you off." (5.2.151-2) She puts herself into the lowest order of women. However, she still insists that Bertoldo is bound to her, "though to all men else I did appear / The shame and scorn of women." Camiola's final humility and her deference to rank, coupled with her steadfast insistence on her rights, win her the day. Through the use of temporary misrule, Camiola has been accepted into the elite and she has made Bertoldo and Aurelia see the error of their ways. Prince Ferdinand says that her mind would be "ample fortune / For an absolute monarch," and Gonzaga calls her a "Phoenix"—a powerful, active, masculine emblem in Tudor iconography which had been associated with female power in the person of Elizabeth, (Jardine 165). Bertoldo, on the other hand, is the object of his brother's contempt. "You have shown yourself of such an abject temper,/ So poor and low-conditioned, as I grieve for / Your nearness to me,"
(5.2.160-1). But Camiola has not finished yet. By renouncing her worldly desires, she means to be revenged on the whole pack of them.

Camiola's final retreat from her triumph into the religious life has been variously interpreted by critics. Some see it as another artificial theatrical effect in the manner of Fletcher, or a skeptical Jonsonian twist reminiscent of Epicoene.\textsuperscript{19} Clark thinks that

\textsuperscript{18} (...continued)
idea that social hierarchy can be changed by circumstances and is not inherent in rank and birth is of course important in the play.

\textsuperscript{19} See Peter Mullany and Russ McDonald.
Camilo's self-imposed renunciation is part of a general reformation that all the characters need, (171). Although Valerie Traub does not refer to Massinger, her argument that powerful, articulate, desiring women are silenced, sidelined or "monumentalised" in the masculine discourse of such plays as *The Winter's Tale* or *The Duchess of Malfi*, may be used to elucidate the ending of *The Maid of Honour*. Traub says that women are treated in this way because of "male anxiety toward female erotic power," which must be "psychically contained," and that certain plays enact this containment, (26). Like Helena or Rosalind, Camilo has at the end of the play a great deal of power, yet she seems to impose stasis on herself by seeking a "secure haven" where she will be "dead to the world." The King speaks of her as if she were dead already: "May she stand / To all posterity, a faire example / For noble Maides to imitate," (5.2.298-300). I believe that Camilo's deliberate rejection of marriage to Bertoldo in favor of celibacy would have signified much more to the contemporary audience than the silencing of a strong woman because of profound male fears of disempowerment. Massinger is less interested in containing his character's power than in using it for maximum theatrical effect and for making a strong political point.

Camilo has been responsible for a series of status and gender hierarchy inversions through which she has justified her right to take her place amongst the nobility by marrying the penitent Bertoldo. Instead she removes herself from society to devote herself to a celibate religious life. Like Helena or Rosalind, she stage-manages the denouement of the play to achieve the maximum theatrical suspense. But the "marriage" which Camilo arranges for herself and her plans for the other characters are not like the
joyful comic resolution of romantic comedy, or even the more equivocal achievement of Helena's miraculous fecundity. More in the manner of Richardson's *Clarissa* a hundred years later, Camiola is as meticulous about her legacy as she is about her arrangements for her departure from the world. As a surprise ending of the kind favored by Fletcherian tragicomedy, the denouement succeeds theatrically. It does offer, like most of the genre, a reconciliation and a resolution of antagonisms, but they seem forced and joyless and their price is too high. The comic humiliation of the upstart Sylli, too, has darker implications, as I shall show.

Cohen writes that the plays written in the decades before the revolution sometimes show "a symptomatic inability to achieve closure, to produce a persuasive reassertion of male, aristocratic, and usually absolutist control," ("Prerevolutionary Drama" 132). He sees this as a kind of "ideological uncertainty"—a judgment which allows him to characterize the plays of this period as "pre-revolutionary." These inadequacies of resolution are certainly a feature of *The Maid of Honour*. However, the problems of 1621 were not those of 1640, and I do not believe that the less than satisfactory ending of this play suggests any potential failure of traditional monarchical authority. Its significance is more specific than that. The Painter story ends on a note of angry defiance. Camiola tells Rolande to, "Abide, in God's name, on thy royall nobilitie;" she will find better people to leave her money to than his heirs. 20 The mood of the end of the play, by contrast, is one of pious resignation and praise of the virtue of rejecting the "poisoned baitez" of the

20 Jardine writes that in Painter’s stories, "women...are rewarded for their virtue or chastened for their misdemeanours, ... acquiescing with gratifying resignation to their (deserved) punishments." (181). This is not true of Camiola and Rolande.
world's "wealth and pleasure." But these pieties cannot erase the reality of Camiola's righteous anger at being jilted for a Duchess, of the consciousness of her own virtue and "the assurance of my merit," which make her "scorn to stoop so lowe" as to kneel to Bertram to sue for what she has lost, (5.1.108). This defiant pride in her own worth which makes her refuse deference to the nobleman is much closer to the mood of the source story than the friar's description of the celibate life, or Camiola's ecstatic,"This is the marriage! This the port to which / My vows must steer me!" (5.2.267).

Camiola, like Painter's heroine, is not only conscious of her own moral worth but of her financial assets. It is at the end of the play that the matter of money surfaces again. By rejecting marriage and the world, she bestows her wealth elsewhere, and she specifies where she will bestow it: "I am dead to the world, and thus dispose / Of what I leave behind me"—after she has rewarded Adorni, the rest will go to the church and to pious uses. Effectively she takes her money and her person out of circulation. Bertoldo is to resume his ascetic life as a Knight of Malta. Instead of the fruitful union of virtuous sexuality and wealth with noble blood, there is only contemptus mundi, celibacy and the denial of life at the end of the play. I believe that Massinger meant this to be understood as a loss and read as a warning to those in authority who failed to reward merit outside the favored court circle and who blocked preferment for the deserving. One of the other "surprises" offered at the end of the play is the information that Camiola's other suitor and comic butt of the play, the brainless Sylli, is the heir of the wealthy banker of Palermo. Camiola has allowed Sylli, whose vanity matches that of Fulgentio, to have hopes of marriage, something she never allowed the favorite. Sylli is "thrust off" the stage just as
he finally realizes that Camiola has been leading him on and his hopes are dashed. In his last speech, he revealed that the king was heavily in his debt and he offers not to sue if the king "wears his colours" at his wedding. Not only does the comic cruelty of Syllis's ultimate disappointment dramatically balance the ascetic mood of the last scene but it adds an ambiguous note which unsettles the complacent pieties of the final speeches. In rejecting Camiola and the wealth she represents, the elite may have put themselves at the mercy of the Syllis, the moneylenders.

Camiola's rejection of the world and the flesh is not, like Helena's self-transformation, a way of controlling and using her potentially disruptive sexual energies in the service of the hierarchy. Rather, the dramatist has deployed her renunciation as a negative image of the construction of the self with which to confront and warn the hierarchy. In its total submission to the ascetic code of an alien religion, it would have been viewed with disapproval by the largely Protestant audience for whom the Pope was the anti-Christ. The fact that Camiola is to become a nun has a significance which critics seem to have neglected. In the early 1620's, as a decision about the marriage of Prince Charles to the Infanta was awaited, there were great fears of a Catholic / Spanish takeover of England. Popular dislike of popery and opposition to the Spanish match does not need to be rehearsed here. Some of Buckingham's relatives became Catholics and there were "persistent rumours of the royal family's conversion to Rome," (Cogswell, 118). Popery and perverted sexuality had been associated in the public mind since the Protestant

21 Chamberlain wrote in 1621 that "there is great complaint of the increase of popery every where...The Spanish ambassador is not ignorant of the yli affection generally borne him, and therefore beeing or seeming to be afraide," goes to "the Kings house at Nonsuch...to avoide the feare and furie of Shrovetewsday," (2:343).
propaganda of the early Reformation.\textsuperscript{22} The connection was an integral part of Middleton's record-breaking anti-Catholic play of 1624, \textit{A Game At Chesse}. In this context, the friar's words, "as a principal ornament to the church, I seize her," may have sounded alarming to the audience. His long speech, detailing Camiola's renunciation of the world's pleasures and the mortification of her senses may not have elicited in them the pious reaction of the king that "there being nothing / Upon this stage of life to be commended, / Though well begun, till it be fully ended," but have been treated with skepticism because of its association with unnatural celibacy. In Massinger's play, \textit{The Picture}, the independent heroine Sophia wants to separate from her husband and lead a celibate, religious life. Wise old Eubulus is aghast that so good a woman should "turn nun." "To the ould sport againe with a good luck to you! You need to breed, not destroy the race of goodness," he tells her. In Greene's patriotic play of 1590, \textit{Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay}, the same kind of hearty language persuades Margaret, the keeper's daughter, the fair maid of Fressingfield, who is about to "be shorn a nun," to marry her knight of the shires, and take her place amongst the mighty of the land.\textsuperscript{23}

Camiola does not deserve the fate of a sequestered life. She is virtuous but she is also worldly: she is wealthy but liberal, and while she is chaste she has a healthy

\textsuperscript{22} Much blame was heaped on Buckingham for his part in promoting the Spanish match and some of the criticism took the form of obscene libels of a sexual nature, (Cogswell 125).

\textsuperscript{23} Lord Lacy says: "Why, how now, Margaret; what, a malcontent? A nun? What holy father taught you this, To task yourself to such a tedious life As die a maid? 'Twere injury to me To smother up such beauty in a cell. Sc.ix, ll 53-57.

Margaret's descriptions of the religious life are remarkably similar to those in Massinger's play.
sensuality and has no time for effeminate courtiers. Massinger was, I believe, trying to convey in Camiola the epitome of an honest, English, Protestant gentlewoman, whose qualities were the equal of any noble. For her to become a nun would be unnatural, un-English, the equivalent of the sterile effeminacy of the king's degenerate court. The end of the play, notwithstanding the king's complacent pieties, suggests that the exclusion from society of this virtuous gentlewoman signals a loss both in human and financial terms, not only to the elite but to the nation. By human, I mean both Camiola's virtuous sexuality and her moral qualities which, because they could have been identified with the "country" position, transcend gender. Bertoldo's misplaced patriotism and his pursuit of false honor set the play in motion; the elite's loss of the real thing brings it to a close.
The Bondman: “Master of himselfe.”

At the height of the slaves' revolt in Massinger's The Bondman, the mysterious slave Marullo reaches the chamber door of Cleora, the patrician's beautiful daughter. She thinks that he is going to rape her. She has vowed to remain blindfold and mute until her lover, Leosthenes, has returned from the war with Carthage which has drawn all the young gentlemen away to fight for their country. In this defenseless state she awaits, trembling, "the grand Captaine / Of these libidinous beasts"—the rebel slave leader Marullo.¹ It looks as if Marullo, like his fellow bondmen, means to enjoy the erotic opportunities offered by the chaos of misrule. But Marullo is in fact the Theban gentleman, Pisander, not a slave at all. He has taken on the role of bondman in order to win Cleora and avenge Leosthenes' earlier dishonorable behavior. To this end he has encouraged the slaves to rebel against their oppressive Syracusan masters by taking over the city while the latter are away at the war.² The audience is, of course, in the dark about Marullo's real identity, and it is by no means clear that his gentility will ensure his good behavior. Marullo, however, refrains from taking advantage of his power. He stops at the very threshold of Cleora's room. He rejects in himself the appetite which he let loose

¹ The Bondman was licensed for acting in December, 1623. All quotations from the play are from Philip Edward's edition in The Plays and Poems of Philip Massinger.

² B.T. Spencer, in his 1932 edition of the play, discusses Massinger's use of Diodorus Siculus' account of the servile wars in Sicily. It includes the story of a "Roman knight" who falls in love with a slave girl, and, having "enjoyed her," "he was the more wonderfully enflamed and even to madness" so that he incites a widespread slaves' rebellion in order to marry the girl. Massinger's hero is likewise inflamed but there's method in his madness: it has more ambitious and calculated ends.
when he fomented the rebellion. Empowered by rational self-control, Marullo deliberately exploits the slaves for his own ends. He wins Cleora's love and does a service to the state by reforming the decadent Syracusan elite. This clever, manipulative outsider proves that he has more to offer than his rival Leosthenes, whose claims to Cleora are based merely on his birth and martial exploits.

Like *All's Well That Ends Well* and *The Maid of Honour*, *The Bondman* tells the story of an arriviste, an outsider who, after a struggle, improves his position by means of marriage into the elite, an elite which is sorely in need of reform and rehabilitation. In this play, too, the sexual desire of the protagonist is inextricably enmeshed in the social and political activities which are part of his struggle to attain his end. Most of the critical interest which *The Bondman* has attracted is based on its allusions to contemporary politics. Although these allusions are not central to the main story, and are largely confined to Act 1, they may provide significant evidence for the way the play was received at the time. *The Bondman* was performed privately for Prince Charles at the end of 1623.³ Two months before this, the prince, amid wild public jubilation, had returned from Spain without the Infanta. It seemed to many that there would be a change in foreign policy opening the way to involvement in the war in Europe. In spite of a number of royal proclamations prohibiting discussion of these and other state matters, the King's pro-Spanish policy had been much criticized in speech and in print. Limon, who argues that the first part of the play was re-written to support the political agenda of Buckingham

---

³ This fact is taken to be of political significance by Annabel Patterson. But *The Changeling* was also privately performed for the prince in 1624. I find the political import of this event less clear.
and the Herbergs, offers convincing evidence that some of the language in *The Bondman* bears a close resemblance to the language of Thomas Scott's anti-Spanish pamphlets of the early 1620's. Heinemann writes that in *The Bondman* "the case for a bold foreign and military policy is directly and powerfully dramatized" (241), and Patterson says that it is difficult not to see the play as "a comment on the new anti-Spanish militancy of Charles and Buckingham," (84). Undoubtedly in *The Bondman* as in *The Maid of Honour* and in several of his other plays, Massinger is making coded political criticism of current politics. But it does not do justice to the play to reduce it to political comment or to part of what Limon calls a deliberate "propaganda" campaign. Clark, on the other hand, rejects these attempts to demonstrate specific topicality, arguing instead that Massinger advocates certain general principles in *The Bondman* as in his other work—Clark says he wants to "interpret Massinger whole." Massinger, he says, is proposing moderate moral and political reform, specifically advocating in this play reward for meritorious service, (126). Again, this seems to reduce the play to its ideological content. It flattens out its complexities and contradictions: its gross comedy, its erotic allure, its sentimentality.

A dissenting voice amongst these critics is Edwards, who has doubts about "Massinger urging his monarch on to action in a tragicomedy at the Cockpit." Elsewhere he says that any political implications that the play might have "is a commendation of the play's breadth, but not an explanation of the play's function," (*Plays and Poems* intro. 1:303). Just what is the function, then, of this tragicomedy, a genre which, Edwards seems to suggest is an unlikely vehicle for promoting state policy? There is a body of critical opinion, as I have shown in the last chapter, which argues strongly for the
interaction of 17th century politics and tragicomedy. I do not believe, however, that the function of the play is limited either to political comment, or to broad ideological proposals. It is too self-consciously theatrical for that, and its theatricality speaks directly to its privileged audience. I shall argue that in *The Bondman* Massinger is using the current volatile political situation to engage the knowledgeable private theater audience, challenging them to share imaginatively in the exploits of a clever and daring gentleman who was afraid neither to seize opportunities nor to make them in his pursuit of his ambition. The end of 1623 was, for many English men and women, a time of celebration. The return of the Prince from Spain "was the turn of Christendom," in the opinion of the M.P. Sir Benjamin Rudyerd. It was also a time of crisis, a potential watershed in national policy, when the irresolution and pacifism of the past years of James's rule might have been transformed into an opportunity for patriotic action, for making a reality of the expansionist hopes to which the Protestant faction was committed. *The Maid of Honour* was written in the shadow of the Spanish match; by the time *The Bondman* was staged that shadow had gone. There is a vigor and a sense of urgency and excitement in *The Bondman* which was absent from the earlier play.

In a period of diminishing patronage and its monopoly by royal favorites and their clients, there was intense competition amongst the gentry for preferment. "Social climbing was endemic in this society," writes Fletcher, (103). Anxiety and frustrated

---

4 Qtd. Cogswell, 127.

5 Massinger sought the patronage of the Herbert family, with which his father had been associated. William Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke, was considered leader of the Protestant faction in Parliament. Sir Benjamin Rudyerd was an ally of Pembroke.
ambition was prevalent both in court circles and amongst the men who moved in the wider social, political and cultural milieux of London— the Inns of Court, the great houses of peers, and of course, the theater. The play offered to these men the spectacle of a gentleman’s successful bid to win a prize while playing for very high stakes, and his emergence from the contest with his reputation enhanced and his future assured. *All’s Well That Ends Well* and *The Maid of Honour*, through their representation of virtuous femininity in their heroines, focus on moral excellence as a justification of social mobility into the elite, but *The Bondman* consciously enacts the process of making it to the top.

With his dual identity, his flamboyant methods and his "deep designes," Marullo offers a model for upward mobility for the clever, ambitious self-presenters at the Phoenix who were themselves performers as they competed for status in Jacobean society. Yet the tragicomic function of the play goes beyond this. At the end, the hero is rewarded for his virtuous service, but his success depends on his clever exploitation of the interplay of sexual control and sexual license. Any political impact that the play might have had cannot be separated from the allure of its promised sexual violence, the matrix in which power is produced. Marullo’s struggle for power has created a complex sexual discourse which provides the essential tragicomic excitement—"the danger, not the death:" rape threatened but not accomplished.  

---

6 Malcolm Smuts writes of the instability and tension in this period amongst people in fashionable circles, and of their hunger for news, Peck, Ch.6.

7 Quoted by Doran, 207. The phrase was used by Guarini in his description of tragicomedy in his *Compendio*, 1601, a work which influenced Fletcher. Kathleen McCluskie comments that political issues are trivialised in this play by the contrivance of the plot, and she says that Massinger exploits the slave rebellion more for its (continued...)
The public issues at stake in the play are these: Syracuse is a state in need of reform. Sybarites and petty tyrants amongst its upper ranks have put the pursuit of wealth before the safety of the country. It is unfitted to defend itself either from the menace of Carthage without or the danger of moral decay within. This is the context of the rivalry of two gentleman for the prize of the patrician's daughter, Cleora. They are Leosthenes, the Syracusan, and Pisander, a Theban whose earlier suit for Cleora was thwarted and who is now disguised as the slave, Marullo. Through the leadership of the Corinthian general Timoleon, that model of rational control, who is always "master of himself," the nobility re-discover their dormant valor. The Carthaginians are defeated and Leosthenes distinguishes himself beyond all others. But the job of cutting out the rot at the heart of the ruling elite within Syracuse has to be done by someone who is closer to them and those who serve them— the enigmatic, manipulative slave Marullo. The mobile identity of the protagonist is suggested though not revealed at the beginning of the play. Cleora's brother Timagonas speaks of "Farre fam'd Pisander," Leosthenes's rival for Cleora, whom he had earlier sent "discontented home." Then Cleora's slave enters, "a strong limm'd knave," with "a strange aspect," (1.1.41). They are, of course, one and the same person, but the audience is never quite sure of this identity until near the end of the play.

7 (...continued)
sexual excitement than its political significance, (Revels History 4:199). I argue that the sexual excitement is an essential component of the political significance.

8 In this, as in many other respects, The Bondman owes much to Jonson's Catiline, a play which is concerned with the misuse of power and the pursuit of private greed. There, the Chorus laments that Rome has become too wealthy and complacent: "shee doth joy / So much in plentie, wealth and ease, / As, now, th' excesse is her disease." (Act 1. I. 549-50).
Marullo is a protean figure, an actor, a master of disguise and manipulation. His is a virtuoso performance in a play which draws attention to role-playing. At times his political and personal aims are so closely interwoven with his theatrical talents that it is difficult to separate them. This theatrical quality is part of his fascination. Though he transforms himself into a hero of noble love and saint-like, suffers for it, he retains some of the fearful attractions of the Vice or the machiavel because of the way he appears as both dangerous demagogue and upholder of popular liberties. He exploits people for his own ends, displaying a kind of Tacitean cleverness which was considered an asset for the ambitious gentleman at the Jacobean court as he competed for status. He teaches the decadent nobility a lesson by confronting them with a terrifying image of themselves when he incites the slaves to revolt. At the same time he achieves his own ends—recognition by the hierarchy and the love of the patrician's daughter. He proves his worth by transforming himself from reckless amorous adventurer to virtuous selfless lover, a transformation which, like Helena's, combines Stoic self-mastery and Christian humility.

The ideological center of the play is the imperative of controlling appetite by reason, and it is this which justifies the devious methods by which Marullo rises to power and provides a sober moral balance to the hectic theatricality of his actions. This familiar notion, evidence of the prevailing habit of thinking of everything in terms of its opposite, offered a moral structure within which the intense competition for power and preferment amongst an increasingly frustrated gentry could be imagined and integrated into received

9 In his depiction of his hero as performer, Massinger may well have been influenced by the clever slave who led the rebels in Book 32 of Diodorus Siculus' history of the Sicilian servile wars. The man was "a conjurer," an entertainer "who juggled and played the fool,"—an actor in other words— but he became an accomplished leader.
patterns of thought by Massinger's audience. In the play, as in the highly mobile Jacobean society, private ambition is entangled with the imperative of public duty and the importance of upholding one's honor and reputation. At the time The Bondman was written, frustration and disillusionment with royal policies at home and abroad had put a strain on the "civilized" concept of honor centered on service to the state and bestowed by the prince. James in 1621 referred to himself as "the fountain of all honor," but his court was perceived by many contemporaries as licentious and venal. Unworthy upstarts, men whom Fulke Greville called "children of favor and chance," were promoted; status was for sale. No wonder there was a nostalgia for the more heroic Elizabethan days when the noblemen of England, it was said, championed the Protestant cause, (Lockyer 16). The new edition of Arcadia in 1606, and the publication in 1610 of Fulke-Greville's Life of Sidney with its criticism of the morals of James's court, rekindled interest in Sidney as the ideal Protestant hero-soldier and gallant courtier.

Although the chivalric ideal had become modified and integrated into the function of the centralized state ruled by a godly prince, the dissident, assertive side of the

10 Patrick Collinson comments on the pattern of moral thinking which allowed Protestants to see their world as polarized into godly and ungodly, a thinking "which bundles everything into polar opposites . . . the prevalent mental and rhetorical habit of addressing every proposition or topic of investigation in terms of its contrary or antithesis, the method of binary opposition or inversion," 147.

11 A.J. Fletcher analyses the code of behavior of gentlemen seeking office in the Elizabethan and Stuart periods. "Urgent public issues offered a convenient front for the pursuit of private rivalries . . . An intermixture of personal hostilities and issues of principle was of their essence . . ." ("Honour,Reputation and Officeholding" 103).

12 For men like the Earl of Essex and Fulke-Greville, the Scots favorites and later "new men" like Buckingham, were upstarts who exploited the state for their own benefit, displacing the old nobility. (James "Crossroads" 422).
tradition of honor continued to be invoked by men who felt themselves excluded from high office, like the Earl of Essex and his followers in 1601. This tradition of activism was revived in the 1620's amongst those who, like the third Earl of Essex, were dissatisfied with James's pacific policies and his elevation of upstarts, (James "Crossroads" 418). The thinking of both these generations had been influenced by the pessimism of Tacitus' history and of Continental political writers who drew a parallel between decadent first century Rome and contemporary conditions.  

13 This encouraged a more cynical, pragmatic view of politics and the court. In the struggle for power and prestige, heroic endeavor could be combined with cunning political know-how. "A moderate amount of deceit and subterfuge were considered necessary in any government," (Salmon 171). The traditional military function of the gentry had lapsed in the long peace with Spain, and in the competition for peace-time preferment the code of honor had evolved into a stress on self-assertiveness and clever manoeuvring. "The ambiguities of the code of honor it seems played into the hands of those most adept at underhand behavior and at sailing close to the wind," writes Fletcher, (94). At the same time, men like those in the opposition group led by the third earl of Essex considered themselves heirs of Sidney's ideals. They upheld "the old English honour" with all its military implications, despised its commodification by James and felt themselves natural leaders of the nation. Many of them were involved in commerce and had strong ties to London.

---

13 The Tacitean writers rejected the traditional providentialist approach to history. Instead, "history became a field for the play of the heroic energy of the autonomous politic will, seeking to dominate events by the control of the politic arts," (Guy 415).
merchants and "the disgruntled gentry."\textsuperscript{14}

The preoccupation of the plays of this period with social status suggests that there was a pressing need for a new imaginative foundation for representing legitimate self-assertion in the achievement of status in the hierarchy. The changes in the honor code which had developed as a response to new social and political conditions are the context for the astonishing methods used by the hero of Massinger's play to prove his worth and achieve his ambitions. \textit{The Bondman} attempts to bridge the gap between old and new discourses of status, to put forward a pragmatic, assertive notion of worth which would accommodate the realities of social mobility and offer the privileged audience an imaginative way out of their frustrations. Massinger invites them to indulge in an exciting vision of an active, assertive, confrontational mode of achieving preferment, tempered by wise self-control and Christian patience. Status is won by an outsider, an opportunist, for whom the end justifies the means.\textsuperscript{15} To disassociate virtue from pedigree, he is not afraid to take on "the lowest / Condition of a man," aligning himself with the slaves, (5.3.200). Though he practices realpolitik he is motivated by ideal love. His strategy is both to incite Utopian sexual license in the slaves and to control desire in himself. He combines bold effrontery, deviousness and selfless love—Sidney mixed with Machiavelli. However, when he attempts to insist on the opposition of appetite and reason by repudiating his association with the sexual license of the slaves and adopting

\textsuperscript{14} Vernon Snow, "Essex and the Aristocratic Opposition to the Early Stuarts," 229.

\textsuperscript{15} Cicero, the good leader in \textit{Catiline}, is also an equivocal character who uses others for his ends. He, like Marullo, is of questionable origins. Catiline scorns him as a "burgess's son."
Christian patience, the erotic discourse produced by his methods does not disappear but persists in another form. The tension between masculine assertiveness and religious forbearance—the complex interplay of desire and control deployed in the interests of power—produces a sexual discourse which gives the play its dramatic force.

Marullo's rival is Leosthenes, or rather the partnership of Leosthenes and Cleora's brother Timagoras. They are bonded by a strong Ciceronian friendship—"I am thine, (and pardon me / Though I repeate it) thy Timagoras" (1.1.26)—and they represent a traditional code of honor in which the rewards go to men of birth and military distinction. Later in the play, a proud, jealous, violent Leosthenes urged on by Timagoras, demands Cleora as his right, "She's my valor's prize," (5.2.84). But the play does not endorse this ethos. Virtue does not consist of brave deeds whose aim is selfish glory and reward. The man who truly deserves honor acts for the public good, not merely for private ends. The model for this morality is the Corinthian general Timoleon, whose "glorious parts" are proclaimed by "the ready tongues of all good men," (1.3.107-9). Yet no absolute morality is being invoked here; instead it is a more pragmatic virtue where the end may justify the means for the sake of the good of the state. Timoleon felt justified in killing his own brother, rather than see him establish an absolute monarchy and become a tyrant in Corinth: "I chose rather / To prove a pious and obedient sonne / To my Country my best mother, then to lend / Assistance to Timophanes, though my brother, / That like a Tyrant strove to set his foote / Upon the Cities freedome," (1.3.133-6). Seen in this light,

16 In 1 Henry IV, Hotspur's courage is reckless and its aims are selfish, but Prince Hal has the welfare of England as his goal.
Marullo's drastic methods of reforming the Syracusean elite seem more acceptable. Pisander later justifies his own actions by saying of the slaves' revolt, "Nor was ever cure / But with some paine effected," (5.3.226).

It is Timoleon who states the moral principle which is central to the whole play: "He that would governe others, first should be / The Master of himselfe." This belief postulates a dual hierarchy which confers political power on some men. He asserts the natural equality of all men, except the vicious, who are justly "mark'd for slaves / to serve the virtuous," (1.3. 96 and 100-101). The natural hierarchy of reason and passion in the individual is the model for other hierarchical relationships, and power over others properly belongs to him who can maintain the opposition in himself.¹⁷ Freedom lies, not in self-indulgence but in the rational control of desire. The need for reason to control the passions was, as I have said, a commonplace.¹⁸ The corollary that only those who can control themselves should have control of others is at the center of the moral discourse of this play.¹⁹ It is clear that Timoleon is one of these men, and in the course of the play it turns out that Marullo, though a bondman, is no slave in the moral sense, but is also one "who has a divine ruler within himself." His moral self-mastery eradicates his political

---

¹⁷ B.T. Spencer, in his edition of The Bondman, discusses the neo-Stoic origins of this notion that slavery is "the bondage that ensues from caring for the pleasures of the body." He quotes from Seneca: "This is the pleasure that is worthy a man and a noble mind, not to fill and flatter the bodie, not to provoke his lustful desires, which are least hurtful when they are most quiet," (48).

¹⁸ See Thomas Wright, The Passions of the Mind in General, (3).

¹⁹ When the Duchess of Siena in The Maid of Honour succumbs to her passion for Bertoldo, she loses credibility as a ruler. In The Duke of Milan, too, the failure of Sforza to control his jealous passions makes him a bad ruler. The ill effects that result when the ruler indulges his passions is discussed in Plato, (The Republic, IX): "The tyrant . . . has run away from the region of law and reason, and taken up his abode with certain slave pleasures which are his satellites," (quoted in Foucault The Use of Pleasure, 71).
servitude in the sense that it demonstrates Socrates' belief that "the incontinent are bondservants."20

The problem for the elite of Syracuse is that far from being masters of themselves, they are enslaved by the good life which their wealth allows them to indulge, "as if that the gods / Indulgent to your sloth, had granted you / A perpetuity of pride and pleasure," (1.3.208). The nobles, as slaves to their appetites, lose the rational control of their lives which is their best defense against political enslavement, Timoleon says in Act 1. Abandon rationality for base appetite and you face disorder, barbarism, slavery, effeminacy. The play gives substance to the moral metaphor of enslavement to pleasure by its use of the political reality of a class of slaves, the low of the hierarchy, to whom the rulers are made vulnerable by their self-indulgence. Cleora values this group "next to Horses, / Or other beasts of carriage," (1.3.338-9). Marullo is one of them. Massinger gives both moral and political significance to the bondmen. Though they are used to suggest the power of the irrational part of the soul which reason should master, they also allude, as I shall show later, to what Heinemann has called "dangerous and subversive popular forces" in contemporary Jacobean society, (qtd. Patterson 74). They are the victims of the irrational tyranny of their masters who, because of that very irrationality, are themselves weak and vulnerable to invasion by the same Low over whom they tyrannize.21 Womanish

20 Quoted in Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, (80).

21 Massinger's source for this part of the play, Diodorus Siculus's history of the slaves' revolt in Sicily, makes a great deal of the cruel treatment of the slaves by their master and mistress. This to some extent justifies the rebellion and the killing of the couple. Massinger, however, shifts the focus of the revolt away from the consequences of oppression to the strategies of Marullo, the clever rebel leader.
weakness and arbitrary rule are twin aspects of the man who is ruled by desire, not reason.

As some writers have argued, in all culturally constituted hierarchies, the dominant term needs the other to define itself, but at the same time they are mutually dependent and their difference threatens to collapse into identity.22 Timoleon, aware that this collapse is happening in the sybaritic elite of Syracuse, warns the senate that the country's weakness is the result of the corrupting effect of their rulers' love of ease and pleasure, which has led them to a life of self-indulgence, to "prize their mucke above their liberties," (1.3.232). But Cleora, the girl whose "brave masculine spirit" Timoleon admires when she rallies the reluctant nobility to support him, is a paricipian of a different kind. Unlike the licentious court ladies, she is the embodiment of modesty and chastity. She has distanced herself from the weaknesses commonly attributed to the feminine—her qualities put her "beyond her sex". Her honor is the equivalent of male valor. Like Camiola, she makes herself the bearer of male honor, but with far more diffidence and far less potential threat to the gender order. In transcending the feminine Other in herself, she has become an able advocate of the ideal male hierarchy in which the base is subordinate to the noble.23 When some senators suggest using laborers and slaves to defend Syracuse, Cleora is appalled and insists on the need to distance the noble from the base. "Honor, wonne in warre," she says, is the privilege of "free and generous Spirits,"

---

22 See Peter Stallybrass and Alan White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression.

23 Jardine calls women like these in the drama the "saving stereotypes of female heroism," (Ch. 6).
of "you that are borne Noble," not of bondmen. To allow them this privilege would
"Make them become your masters," (1.3.336). Both Timoleon and Cleora know that the
maintenance of power depends on the separation and control of the lower by the higher,
whether in the soul or in the state. But when the ambivalence of carnival overtakes the
city these oppositions become more difficult to uphold.

Certain of the nobility are already contaminated by vices that properly belong to a
baser class. If authority belongs to those who exercise rational self control these nobles
do not deserve to belong to the ruling class. Order in the household, the microcosm of
the state, is upside down. 24 The men are effeminate, like the impotent Lord Cleon and his
feeble son Asotus. The women, Corisca and Olympia, are dominant and sexually
voracious. This reversal of gender hierarchy is another symptom of the disorder in
society which is the result of enslavement to the baser faculties. Also indicative of the
collapse of order is the women's taste for "grosse meate"— for the sexual services of
tradesmen and tailors— men outside their own class. Some of the dialogue is a savagely
satirical attack on the morals of a ruling nobility which should be concerned with higher
things. Their language betrays them for what they are. The satire works through the
exploitation of the gap between the high status of the speaker and her low moral level.
Radically different ideas or things— the base or sexual— are juxtaposed with the high, fine
or valuable, so that the latter are degraded in the process. "Ille kisse him for the honor of

---

24 "It is impossible for a man to understand how to govern the common-wealth, that doth not
know to rule his own house, or order his own person; so that he that knoweth not to govern,
deserveth not to reign." John Dod and Robert Cleaver, A Godly Forme of Household Government. For the ordering of private families, according to God's Word. (quoted in Amussen 38).
my Country," (1.3.48) offers Corisca when she hears of the great general Timoleon. Her response to his challenging address to the senate is "He's a clowne, I warrant him," (1.3.160). Later she complains that the war interferes with her sex life: "Fie on these warres,/ I am starved for want of action, not a gamester left / To keep a woman play," (2.2.31). When the praetor announces that the great Timoleon is about to arrive in Syracuse "to redeeme us / From slavery, and oppression," Lord Cleon is most concerned about hiding his precious money. "These Lads of Corinth / Have nimble fingers," he says, (1.3.40). This is satire in the classical tradition, and it has affinities with Jonson's depiction of Roman decadence in Catiline. Yet, though the nobles are despicable and their women lustful, they do not display the vicious brutality of the conspirators in Jonson's play, men whose wickedness was also fostered by excess and luxurious living. There is, of course, a political lesson to be learned from the spectacle of a debased ruling class whose authority is so eroded that their city can be invaded by the bondmen who serve them, but these scenes, like the scenes with the slaves, easily slide into comic misrule.

The antics of the lascivious, enfeebled gentlefolk are presented as popular comic theater, so that the moral lesson is overshadowed by the dramatic entertainment. Several of the scenes are carefully "staged" for the audience's enjoyment. In the first scene between the cuckolded lord, old Cleon and his wife, we see the slave, Gracculo, like a cunning servant in a Roman comedy, making sly, witty comments to the audience on the sexual performance of his master. In another scene, where Asotus woos his mother who is impersonating Cleora, and a slave acts as the latter's maid, they behave like
incompetent actors in a play. "We'll have a Scæne of mirth, / I must not have you sham'd for want of practice," and "holde, you forget, / I onely play Cleora's part," (2.2.67, 136). Asotus' bumbling efforts quite detract from the suggestion of incest. The one scene of cruelty where Asotus beats Gracculo is transformed by the slave himself into a piece of knockabout farce. Dramatically, of course, the comic aspects of these scenes provide a foil for the grave discussions of the Senate and the modest eloquence of Cleora. Massinger's conception of the bondmen is informed by an eclectic mixture of classical sources. He uses slavery both to signify the bondage of the human soul to appetite, and at the political level, to insist that they are part of a chain in which nature joins all humanity. However, when these ideas are pressed into the service of theatrical entertainment, the model most useful to the writer of tragicomedy is the popular tradition of the anarchy of festive misrule, when the social order is temporarily turned upside down and the low supplants the high.

The bondmen are the low of the hierarchy, and provide the carnivalesque misrule which is associated in The Bondman with play-acting and with the "theater" which Marullo / Pisander will direct when he stages the slaves' revolt. The treatment of misrule oscillates between legitimate criticism of the hierarchy, and a chaotic license stage-managed by Marullo, where criticism is less important than the voyeuristic pleasures of promised sexual violence which are offered to the audience. The role of the slaves recalls in many ways the ambiguities of charivari, a feature of popular culture which would have been familiar to Massinger's audience. Its use of festive criticism was

25 See B.T. Spencer's analysis of the classical sources of the play.
also theatrical in style, but it too sometimes spilled over into real insubordination.26 Like the charivari, the slaves' lewd mockery of their masters draws attention to and implicitly criticizes extreme violations of the "natural" social hierarchy, like those of which the Syracusan nobility were guilty. Furthermore, the slaves' festive misrule has an anti-authoritarian motive which calls into question the legitimacy of that hierarchy, as did the charivari. It is to the slaves' resentment of injustice that Marullo appeals. Their conquest of the city is an inversion of a different kind from the moral disorder represented by the decadence of the nobility, though it will offer to the nobility a horrifying and exemplary image of its own failings. The slaves' conquest is a rebellion which overturns the social, not merely the moral hierarchy, and therefore poses an immediate political threat. It constitutes the main plot, as it is the basis of Marullo's strategy to best his rival, win Cleora and to gain recognition by the Syracusan leaders for his public service. This service will be to show the danger to the state of the effects of the indulgence of appetite by the decadent elite of Syracuse. As a moral lesson on how to run a society, Marullo's daring project might have been a grand demonstration of the value of self-mastery, of the obvious advantages of reason's rule. Instead it shows the inherent instability of the dual hierarchy of reason and passion, of high and low. In spite of its dangers, the Low has attractions. In the case of the satire attacking the decadent nobles, the didacticism of the political lesson was overshadowed by the entertainment offered by its comic representation. When the slaves run riot in the city, the dangers of rebellion are deflected

26 These customs "reflected a sense of the precariousness or artificiality of . . . hierarchy; and bore witness to ambiguities and unresolvable conflicts in the ideal and actual social system," (Ingram 97).
on to the seductiveness of misrule, the titillating excitement of sexual license promised by Marullo's show. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White write, "Repugnance and fascination are the twin poles of a process in which a political imperative to reject and eliminate the debasing low conflicts . . . with a desire for this Other," (5).

In the language of Bakhtin, the bondmen represent the "grotesque body," the sensual, non-rational aspect of humanity, corresponding with the oppositions of reason and passion, the high and the low—opposites which must be maintained if society is to be orderly. But the grotesque body was associated with festive excess and erotic license. Though it is outrageously disorderly and in need of control, its festive function of mocking the aberrations of the elite has, like the charivari, a certain legitimacy. Moreover, misrule itself is an exciting and seductive escape from order. Violence has its own appeal. Marullo instigates the revolt both for personal advantage—to demonstrate his own political effectiveness and to win Cleora—and as a public service: to bring home to the nobles the perils of their moral weakness which has made them tyrants. Personal reform amongst the elite, it is suggested, will ensure return to a just hierarchy where ruler and ruled resume their proper places. But to achieve his aims, Marullo stages the nightmare of social inversion, of the world turned upside down, when the violent appetites of the low threaten to engulf the city. This mad saturnalia is orchestrated by an actor, a Vice figure, who is enacting this collusion between the high and the low as he plays the Lord of Misrule within his part as the slave. He tells his sister, who is also playing a role, that he is just manipulating the bondmen: "These thick-skinned slaves, (/I use as instruments to serve my ends)," (3.1.2-3). He plans to frighten Cleora into
confronting him and hearing his case, and he uses his sister to terrify her by exaggerating
the sexual threat of the slaves, especially Marullo himself. Timandra seems to enjoy her
part as she paints a terrifying picture of the ravishing to come: "Are there Gods, yet suffer
/ Such innocent sweetnesse to be made the spoile / Of brutish appetite?" (3.2.5-7).
Because Marullo is acting a part, and is the director of misrule, the political threat
inherent in the representation on stage of rebellion is diminished; in some sense it is a
part of Marullo's theater. The force of Marullo's memorable and incendiary speeches is
also compromised for the same reason. The speaker of "Equall nature fashion'd us / All
in one molde: "and the orator who urges the slaves to "redeeme you from the darke vale
of Servitude," (2.3.33 & 85) is, after all, simply putting on a performance for his own
purposes. The slaves themselves behave more like performers than rebels. They act the
clown, crack topical jokes and play the part of community protesters, inflicting comic
shaming punishments on Cleon and his repulsive family.

Marullo encourages the misrule as part of his "Revenge for my disgrace"—that is
the disgrace of the rejection of his earlier suit for Cleora. Yet we know that Timandra's
long speech describing the horrors of the revolt to Cleora (whom she terrifies with the
threat of imminent rape) is probably mostly fiction. It is a performance by one who is
acting a part, instructed by another actor, Marullo, for his own dark purposes. It is made
clear to us that Cleora believes the woman's lurid descriptions because Timandra tells her:
"doe not wring / Your innocent hands," and Massinger's stage directions, designed for the
reader, drive home the message that Cleora is indeed terrified: "Cleora starts," "Cleora
wrings her hands," "Cleora shakes." The audience is being teased into partial belief too,
since part of what Timandra says tallies with Poliphron's description of the revolt in the last scene. "Hell, I thinke is broke loose, / There's such a varietie of all disorders, / As leaping, shouting, drinking, dancing, whoring, / Among the slaves; answer'd with crying, howling, / By the Citizens and their wives," (3.1.38-42). At least for a time, the chaos is real and there is a real danger to the status quo. The slaves threaten to "not leave / One house unfir'd . . . Or throat uncut of those / We have in our power," (4.2.88-92). But the revolt fails when the rebels, cowed by the sight of their returning masters's whips, flee and leave Marullo alone on his stage, desperately seeking another role.

Any representation of popular rebellion must have had uncomfortable associations for Massinger's audience. The last disturbance was the Midlands Rising of 1607 which prompted James to move against enclosing landowners. His efforts were ineffectual "in holding up the course of economic change, and after a brief pause the process of enclosing commenced again," (Lockyer 3). In 1621 "in the depths of the depression," came the first general enclosure bill, opposed by some M.P.s who "feared agrarian disturbances," (Guy 208 and Hill 69).27 For the sensibilities of the contemporary audience, then, the rebellious potential of the slaves' revolt would have been significant. By implication, the disguised gentleman who is able to deploy it for his own advancement is a man to be reckoned with—perhaps feared, perhaps admired. This is the point of the tinder-box situation Massinger has created for his daring hero. A gentleman has

---

27 Ingram writes that anti-enclosure riots "seemed to have involved elements of charivari," and cites a noisy, festive, threatening demonstration against Sir Giles Mompesson, the "projector" whom Massinger was said to have parodied in his portrait of Sir Giles Overreach, ("Ridings" 91).
fomented a popular rebellion—a nightmare dreaded by all right-thinking Jacobins. But in this tragi-comedy, the hero will in the end, turn the chaos and the failure of the revolt to his advantage and to that of the state. The disagreeable connotations of the political situation are diffused by their implication in the sexual violence of misrule, which also represents them as part of a kind of theater. Timandra promises Marullo, "I will discharge my part" (3.1.37), by which she means that she will describe the revolt in such a way as to incite sexual terror in Cleora. Marullo, she says, "hath rais'd these mutinous slaves, / Who have begun the game by violent Rapes, / Upon the Wives and Daughters of their Lords: / And he to quench the fire of his base lust, / By force comes to enjoy you,"

(3.2.21-24). Some of this is true; some is play-acting. The carnivalesque confusion is a scene of appalling social disorder, but it also offers the audience the excitement of witnessing transgression and sexual license.

The effect which the reported rampage of the slaves is calculated to have on the audience is the theatrical pleasure of suspense, sexual titillation and an invitation to sexual fantasy. It is not designed to make them fear for the stability of their own social order. At times, of course, the mysterious gentleman who leads the revolt seems not to be acting, but to mean business. He has a plan to seize the whole country, but it sounds more like an orgy than a coup d'état. He tells the slaves, "Now if you dare / Fall upon their Daughters, and their wives, breake up / Their Iron chests, banquet on their rich

28. Gentry leadership of political demonstrations had come to an end by the turn of the century, and "early Stuart elections show that the gentry had come to conceive of their political relationship with all those below them in status in terms of management... Control of the people, who cannot safely be given their political heads, has become a key issue of county politics," (Fletcher and Stevenson, intro.11). This context must be taken into consideration in any interpretation of what may seem to the modern reader to be Marullo's cynical use of the slaves.
Beds," (2.3.110-12). Some of the slaves' talk hints at a revolutionary sectarianism, of a kind which linked political and social equality with sexual freedom, like the Family of Love. Like Jack Cade in 2 Henry VI (4.7), and even Gonzalo in his imagined commonwealth in The Tempest (2.1), the rebel slaves invoke a Utopian sexual license where women as well as goods are held in common. The slave Cimbrio says, "She's common good, / And so we'll use her." Gracullo: "We'll have nothing private . . . We are equals, / I will know no obedience," (3.3.120-124).

Of course, the Jacobean government looked with disapproval on the activities of radical sects. On the other hand, to associate popular dissidence with the disorderly sexual appetites of the low was a way of trivialising such phenomena as the activity of ignorant fools. Gracullo and his friends, who are drunk, are made to appear ridiculous. The play boldly takes the allowed sexual license of these comic lowlife characters too far, so that it offers dangerous, tantalizing glimpses of transgression as well as comedy. But it is sexual, not political transgression. Massinger in The Roman Actor had written about the relationship between the voyeuristic pleasures of theater and tyranny. The kind of theater that Marullo stages with his slaves is a microcosm of tyrannical power in which the director hovers between the cruelty of the tyrant and the fearful comedy of the Vice. He cynically manipulates others for his own ends and at the same time offers the theatrical pleasures of sexual license and a flirtation with danger. Massinger succeeds in

29 See Goldsten, "A Note on Shakespeare's Utopia and Sexuality."

30 In Seneca's Controversia vii 6, the main source of the play, "A tyrant allowed slaves to ravish their masters' wives . . . Although all the slaves had violated their mistresses," one slave protected his master's daughter. In the play, Pisander is both the tyrant and the good slave, (Philip Edwards comments, intro. 303).
making tragic-comic theater rather than tragedy out of power politics. Marullo's daring strategy breathtakingly crosses the line separating high from low, reason from passion, virtue from wickedness, through his use of misrule. The slaves' revolt fails him at the military level, but he has already had a moral victory by declaring to Cleora his renunciation of the appetites of the low. Once the audience has been entertained with his theater of forbidden license, Marullo can pull back from the brink, return to virtue and go on, as I shall show, to become a hero of self-effacing ideal love and moral reform. Massinger lets his audience have their cake and eat it. Virtue has triumphed through very devious means. What was base in Marullo's methods—his deception of Cleora, his cynical manipulation of simple people—has been assimilated to the erotic titillation of theatrical entertainment. However, the sexual discourse produced by the courting of misrule is never silenced. It continues to proliferate even in the apparently virtuous realm of pure love and Christian renunciation.

Marullo soon moves to distance himself from the appetites of the slaves he has exploited and to assert the authority of reason in himself. Instead of raping Cleora, he declares himself her devoted servant. In the same move he establishes his political and personal credentials by separating himself from the slaves' license and choosing rational love. He still manipulates Cleora and plans to use the fighting power of the slaves to force Leosthenes to give up his claim to her, and to buy her "free consent" at the price of her father's and brother's lives. Cleora has confined herself in her room to prove to Leosthenes her absolute chastity. Just as Marullo invokes and uses the low other of the social hierarchy for his own ends, Leosthenes earlier in the play invoked the feminine
other in order to distance it and control it. His idealized devotion to Cleora revealed itself early on as a desire to assert his authority over her because, like the slaves, women have no self-mastery. Worried about the absence of authoritative men—"when nor Father / Is here to awe you; Brother to advise you; / Nor your poor servant by"—he constructs her imaginatively as a potentially disorderly woman, prey to loose desires, (2.1.147). While he calls up this image of her as alluring and weak-willed in order to establish rational masculine control over her in his absence, at the same time he fantasises her rape, "By such as keepe a Catalogue of their Conquests, / Wonne upon credulous Virgins," (2.1.151). Later in the play, when the slaves' revolt has been put down, he continues in these fantasies in spite of Cleora's spotless reputation. He says to her maid: "I know Cleora fell too, / Heav'ns help in vain invok'd," and he imagines the sun being unable to look upon the scene, (4.3.36-8).

When Marullo is found hiding in Cleora's chamber, Leosthenes and Timagoras immediately assume that she is guilty. Before Leosthenes left for the war he was doubtful of Cleora's ability to resist seduction. Her response to that doubt was to echo the male construction of the feminine by seizing upon the other extreme of the image he had constructed: she adopted an absolute chastity, a disavowal of pleasure given form by a voluntary deprivation of the senses. She had herself blindfolded and took a vow of silence. She retreated to her chamber, "My tombe, if you miscarry: there I'll spend / My

---

31 Ian Maclean says that at all times, in all cultures, woman is associated with the opposite of the dominant term in a binary structure, (3).
houres in silent mourning," she told Leosthenes, (2.1.195). 32 Yet there is another, more disturbing aspect to Cleora's "hyperbolic exaltation of chaste, silent, modest obedience," as Clark calls her behavior here, (173). Her chamber not only keeps her safe as the closed classical body of the masculine ideal, but it also isolates her as if she were in a prison cell. Her inability to see makes her seem as powerless and vulnerable as a blindfolded prisoner about to be decapitated.33 It is in this state of extreme vulnerability that Marullo confronts her in his disguise as potential rapist, fulfilling Leosthenes' worst (or best) fantasy.

It seems that the need to assert authority by excluding the other in its various forms involves continually re-imagining it, (Bushnell 22). While Leosthenes constructs Cleora as a focus of unstable desire, Marullo, on the other hand, invests her with the transcendence which he himself aspires to and will achieve by controlling his own passion. He calls her "best of virgins" and "my better angel." But this construction, too, produces erotic discourse. At Cleora's chamber door, Marullo rejects desire in himself in order to transform his identity. He shifts from his role as one of the dangerous servile low to Petrarchan "servant." To proffer such service to a chaste woman, like the neo-platonic worship of the Ideal beauty, is to be ruled not by desire but by rational

32 This containment of female erotic power is discussed by Valerie Traub, (Ch.1).

33 The voyeuristic potential of the powerless woman is realized in the painting of Lady Jane Grey being led, blindfold to the block by solicitous male attendants. This picture was used to good effect as the program cover of a play, Death and the Maiden, about the rape and torture of a woman dissident by the Argentinean military regime.
love. Like Timoleon he is master of himself, and by inference, fit to rule others. His association with misrule must be discarded so that he can emerge as a clever but moral man whose machinations turn out to have beneficial consequences for the state as well as being the means of winning the patrician's daughter. As the noble Pisander, he is, of course, already a leader of men, but in his carefully staged act of self-denial at Cleora's door, he proves to her that he possesses virtue, the real test of status, which sets him, even as a slave, above others.

Yet it is not so easy to separate the high from the low, virtue from appetite. The scene at the threshold of Cleora's inner sanctum, when the slave watches but does not touch this blind, terrified, powerless woman, is a blatant invitation to voyeurism. The very language of his renunciation is fraught with erotic imagery which belies his moral transformation. He sees Cleora as a collection of "dainties" denied to him: "which I take in at / My greedy eyes, deny'd my famish'd senses." Later in the speech he calls them "viands." "Dainties" had various sexual connotations, including "prostitute" and eating was commonly used as a metaphor for sex, (Rubinstein 69).35 Cleora's vow of silence and her retreat to her room has effectively closed her. Like Bakhtin's "classical body," she is unapproachable, without openings. Marullo, nevertheless, is determined to penetrate

34 This part of the play has connections with the ideas of honor put forward by Sidney in Arcadia. The princes are taught through their ideal love of Pamela and Philoclea to endure prison and to practise patient endurance rather than resort to violent action. "They progress beyond heroic virtue through human to heavenly love, completed by religious patience," (James "English Politics and the Concept of Honor 1485-1642," 390).

35 Corisca uses eating to mean sex in this play when she says that she is "queasie stomack't" compared to the lustful court women, who prefer "Grosse meate...some that are hungrie / Draw on their shoomakers," (2.2.43-8).
her—"The Organs of your hearing are yet open"—with the story of his "sufferings." While he assures her he is her "servant," he keeps reminding her of what he might have done to her:

"even now,

When my rebellious passions chide my dulnesse,

And tell me how much I abuse my fortunes,

Now tis in my power to beare you hence,

Or take my wishes here, (nay, feare not Madam,

True love's a servant, brutish lust a Tyrant), (3.2.77-84).

By invoking the opposites of love and lust he recalls the tension inherent in the Petrarchan structure between the desire of the lover to possess and dominate, and his declaration of submissive love. By reminding Cleora of his enormous self-denial—"and, what is a taske / Would trouble Hercules to undertake, / I doe deny you to my selfe"—and of the extent of his powerlessness—"Forget not, I lose my selfe, to save you. / For what can I expect, but death and torture" (3.2.96), he constructs her as a dominant figure who has power over him. He begs her to "Reward my temperance with some lawfull favor, / Though you contemne my person." Yet it has been clear all along that it is he who seeks power. This mastery of the self, this maintenance of the hierarchy of reason and appetite, which was to replace the ambivalence of carnival, collapses and reveals itself not so much as a repudiation of base appetite, as another deployment of it on the route to power. Like Richard III in his wooing of Anne, Marullo has taken on the submissive role to achieve
his own ends. Such "effeminacy" carries with it the taint of vulnerability to desire which self-mastery was supposed to eradicate. It turns out that the erotic is not so easily cast off. Even as Marullo distances himself from the licentious grotesque body by adopting the stance of rational love, he begins to focus on himself as a "subject of desire," to use in Foucault's sense. Self-rule does not shut down sexual discourse but constructs it differently. It works as an incitement to discourse. The ambivalent sexuality of carnival, with its heady mixture of utopian promise and threat of chaos has been replaced by a focus on inner thoughts and desires. Marullo's parting words to Cleora are calculated to elicit impure thoughts though the speaker has renounced illicit acts. "When you are sated / With thinking of Leosthenes, as a fee / Due to my service, spare one sigh for me,"

(3.2.114). "Sated" was a word associated with sexual excess and "service" had a double meaning, (Partridge, 179, 181).

Marullo continues to manipulate Cleora through his sister Timandra. She dwells deliberately on the suffering in store for Marullo, "death with torments," which awaits him because, "Though she were in your power, and yow spurr'd on / By insolent lust," he left "The fruit untasted." In accepting his punishment as "a glorious martyrdome," (4.1.17) it is he who is in the physically vulnerable position. On the run after the slaves back down, he is thrown into prison. Loaded with chains and tormented by the enraged Leosthenes and Timagoras, Marullo, the lord of misrule no longer, resembles nothing so much as a suffering saint. We hear how he is "spurn'd and spit on / By the insulting officers, his hands / Pynion'd behind his backe: loaded with fetters; / Yet, with a

36 I made this connection after reading Rebecca Bushnell's Tragedies and Tyrants.
Saint-like patience, he still offers / His face to their rude buffets," (5.1.47). The submissiveness of the Petrarchan lover is subsumed by the resignation of Christian martyrdom. Helena compensated for her unwomanly assertiveness by embracing saintly renunciation. Marullo's saintly endurance transforms him from his earlier roles of potential rapist and dependent lover into a persona which is both virtuous and strong. His suffering is both a penance for his desire, and a proof of his strength in the face of tyranny. As for Cleora, she sees Marullo as "a weake man," the victim of Leosthenes' and Timagoras' implacable male power. Marullo has learned the value of Christian patience and love instead of relying on heroic self-sufficiency. As a slave, the Other in the hierarchy of power, Marullo has much in common with the Other in the hierarchy of gender, a position Cleora knows she occupies in her relationship with Leosthenes. It is as if Marullo's suffering has allowed him to participate in this Otherness in a way Leosthenes never could.  

Marullo is shut away in his cell, helpless, and as vulnerable as was Cleora in her chamber when she waited for the rampaging slaves. There is a strong erotic content to this identification. Timandra tells Cleora that Marullo's tortures are like those of an animal which men bait "for their pleasure," whereupon Cleora hurries to his cell to assure him "I doe partake thy tortures,"(5.2.9). Cleora accepts as his "free confession" Marullo's admission that he deserves punishment for his previous lust. He tells her that "all the

37 The pointedly Christ-like evocation of his situation is reminiscent of the treatment of Candido, the patient citizen in 1 The Honest Whore.

38 Louise Schleiner discusses the way in which gender disguise in romance, such as that of Pyrocles / Zelmaine helps the exploration of different gender roles. In the same way perhaps, Marullo learns from his experience as a slave at the opposite end of the social hierarchy.
torments flesh is sensible of" are "a soft and gentle penance," "for my intent of violence to such pureness." Thus the rape which did not occur is recalled again, but now Marullo himself is the victim of violence and Cleora can see his violated body. Earlier in the play, Cleora had told Leosthenes that, "I love Marulloes faire minde, not his person" (4.3.201), but this scene seems to belie her claim. Her wish to share Marullo's suffering, her tenderness and her tears, suggest that she sees his violation as her own, and in some way acquiesces in it. Indeed, as Marullo talks of dying, with "these white and innocent hands closing my eyes thus," she makes herself clear. She says, "beleevt, Marullo, / You have wonne so much upon me, that I know not / That happinesse in my gift, but you may challenge." Leosthenes and Timagoras, in hiding, watch in fury a scene of amazing sentimentality in which the patrician lady offers herself to her abused slave.39

This focus on intimate private feelings produces another kind of sexual discourse. Though Marullo uses the elevated, spiritual language of Petrarchan love, their relationship is too mutual, too intimate for ideal love. Indeed, Marullo has released Cleora from the position of ideal not-woman to which Leosthenes' misguided impulse to control had driven her. The frisson of sexuality which is present in the scene does not in the least detract from Cleora's chastity because it is purified by the aura of religion and the unspoken promise of marriage. In this way the chaste patrician lady, the upholder of the hierarchy, has confirmed the worth of the scheming outsider by pledging herself to him. The world has been turned upside down, but there is no carnivalesque laughter here.

39 The atmosphere of this scene may well owe much to Senecan drama, and to an increasing interest in "the sentimental pity evoked by the depiction of innocence and virtue amidst evil" that was characteristic of this drama. (Kerman 66).
The eroticism which was introduced by the low and then discarded, lingers, though transformed, almost sanctified. Its levelling utopian aspects, however, surface in Cleora's hints of radical exogamy. The link between the politically utopian and the erotic is fainter but still persists when Timandra says, as she describes Marullo's torture, "Let it be granted,/ Marullo is a slave, hee's still a man," (5.1.41) and in the trial scene, when Marullo is proud that Cleora looks on him "As a weake man, and not her fancies Idoll," (5.3.124).

Marullo's saintly renunciation shows up the selfish violence of the chivalric ethos which is endorsed by Leosthenes and Timagoras. They are seen to be jealous tyrants whose masculinity and social status continually need to be proved against the imagined frailty of women on the one hand and the assumed baseness of the lower orders on the other. This is made plain in the formal trial scene at the end of the play which exonerates Marullo, and discredits Leosthenes. That a trial should decide the outcome of their rivalry rather than physical combat itself suggests a bias against the chivalric ethos. Leosthenes believes that his "high birth," his wealth and his honors make him worthy of Cleora and that he "should not need to plead for that, which you / Should joy to offer," (5.3.80-81). Her scorn of him only proves the irrationality of women, who, he says, are "all made up of passion," "seduc'd / by the false light of your too violent will." More than that, "loose desires, insatiate as the grave," make her find the strong-backed bondman attractive.\(^{40}\) Cleora's cross-class preferences fill Leosthenes and Timagoras with the

\(^{40}\) Like Ferdinand, Leosthenes' rage at Cleora's love for a man of another class is expressed as sexual jealousy for the physical attributes which characterize that class: "some strong-thigh'd (continued..."
repugnance of those who are determined to keep the "society of blood" pure, like Ferdinand in *The Duchess of Malfi*, (Whigham 167).

Marullo, on the other hand, speaks from the position of "virtue in raggs" (5.3.40), of one whom Cleora has seen simply as "a weake man." Because of this he can expect nothing, but only offers her the service of his pure love. Once the superiority of his virtue is established, Marullo, his honor outraged by Leosthenes' insults, abandons his humility and reveals himself as the "bold Theban" Pisander, Leosthenes' social and military equal. He also reveals that Leosthenes is already engaged to Timandra, Marullo's sister. The Syracusan leaders accept Marullo's justification of the slaves' revolt as a timely "cure" of the abuses of power and the slaves are pardoned after they promise to be "obedient and humble to their masters." Apart from Timoleon's conventional closing speech promising pardon and celebration, the slave Gracculo has the last word. Again he speaks like a clown of traditional popular comedy, coming out of his role to make contemporary jokes and allusions. Can this be one of the rebels who were guilty of "licentious outrages, / Which noble enemies forbeare to practise / Upon the conquer'd," according to Pisander's description of the revolt? (3.3.158). Clearly any uncomfortable political implications of social inversion have been dropped, and Gracculo is simply helping out with the happy ending. The grotesque body was not a challenge to the traditional order because the disguised gentleman who led them turned out to have laudable aims. His great speeches to the slaves about standing together for liberty, even his address to the Syracusan leaders

---

40 (...continued)
bargeman, / Or one o' the woodyard that can quoit the sledge / Or toss the bar," (*The Duchess of Malfi*, 2.5.42-5).
on the proper function of the commonwealth, seem to have been designed as much to exemplify his rhetorical skills as they are to indicate his political opinions. Marullo, the ambitious outsider, is above all, a clever self-presenter. Like Ambidexter, he is a vice who is at home at all the social levels of the play. Dissimulation and the manipulation of others, even the woman he loves, is his forte. He embodies all the attributes that critics of the theater like Gosson and Prynne saw as detestable and subversive. Yet he is triumphant and his strategies bring discredit to his rival and approval from the Syracusan leaders. Even the fiery Timagoras humbles himself to say that he "will studie / In my future service to deserve your favor / And good opinion," (5.3.215).

Pisander's achievement can best be understood in relation to various contemporary contexts, both social and dramatic. One has to do with the changes in the code of honor in the conduct of the gentry which Anthony Fletcher describes. Pressures of competition for office were expressed, not in open conflict of the feudal chivalric kind which Leosthenes and Timagoras espouse, but by a different, more devious kind of manoeuvring and assertiveness which combined self-interest with service to the state. As I have said, the plays of the period suggest a search for a way of representing legitimate social climbing, the struggle for status by those with merit. There were certain common notions that were available for use in this dramatic representation. That Marullo succeeds in his ambition while operating from the position of "the lowest condition of man," a slave, one who is outside the hierarchy, is an example of the time-honored idea that virtue is the true

41 Like the competitive gentlemen of contemporary society, Pisander/Marullo is concerned to preserve as well as reform the system. "An ultimate respect for the law and the concern to preserve gentry hegemony were strong inducements against behaviour that disrupted order for any length of time." (Fletcher 94).
nobility. As Timoleon says, "For vertue though in raggs may challenge more, / Then vice set off with all the trimme of greatnesse," (5.3.39). Though Pisander has made his way by devious means, he has nevertheless demonstrated that he is a man of "temperance," one who is master of himself, and moreover, able to control the bondmen and use them to perform a public service. In this he possesses an attribute fundamental in contemporary moral thinking. The object of his rational unselfish love is a woman who has so far transcended the feminine that she embodies all the noble virtues enshrined in the male hierarchy. When she confers her favors on the lowly Marullo it is not because of lust, as Leosthenes claims, but because she recognizes these virtues in him. Her commitment to the separation of noble and base has not changed; it is simply that a bondman has proved to have noble qualities. She endorses elevation by merit. Clark sees Cleora as an example of Massinger's idealization of "female chastity into the principle of women's individual integrity and rights, thereby winning women more powerful positions in his reformed traditional hierarchy," (167). In spite of her eloquence and her courageous defense of the bondman, I do not believe that Cleora ever really challenges the male power structure. The chaste woman in this play is used to neutralize the potential threat of social disruption to the hierarchy by an ambitious man. She is offered to him in marriage and so incorporates him into the hierarchy by domestication.

Though Marullo turns out to be a gentleman, not of course a bondman, he is still a devious schemer and an interloper. He is not a new man raised to uncomfortable greatness like Antonio, the Duchess of Malfi's steward, looking for identity in a changing society. But his identity is uncertain as far as the audience is concerned, and his methods
questionable. The play challenges us to entertain, at least as a possibility, this aspiration of the base slave for the patrician, an aspiration that launches itself across an unimaginably enormous social and moral gap. When he turns out to be a gentleman after all, one who will scarcely rock the social boat, his machiavellian methods look like clever ploys compared with the enormity of a slave's desire. It is, of course, the erotic excitement engendered by this desire and all the theatrical masks it assumes to achieve its end, that makes the play so entertaining, which offers us the "danger, not the death" of the tragicomic genre. Desire, like ambition, is inherently destabilising. Like carnival it overturns hierarchy. The low invades the high and the very determination to reject desire ensures its return in some form—in Marullo's speech at the door of Cleora's private chamber and the "confession" in prison of his lust for her while she witnesses his eroticized suffering. Finally cunning self-assertion wins a place in the hierarchy and desire will be controlled through marriage. Though in the final court scene Pisander behaves with virtuous restraint and Cleora represents the surrender of her person to him as payment for a debt, it is not this cool display of rationality which makes the play memorable, but the erotic fallout of Marullo's unstoppable ambition.
"The Changeling: "a frightful pleasure."

"A frightful pleasure" is the way the madhouse keeper in *The Changeling* modestly describes the entertainment he has planned to celebrate the wedding of the lady Beatrice Joanna. It is to be performed by madmen. Perhaps such a horror will offer a frisson of pleasurable excitement to the guests. Though we never see the promised show, the play offers us other frightful pleasures— the brutal murder of a defenseless nobleman and the coupling of the lady Beatrice Joanna with her loathsome servant which was its price. Beatrice Joanna's willful defiance of patriarchal authority was the catalyst for the collapse of order in the household of her father, Vermandero; it was her uncontrolled desire which empowered the base upstart and allowed him to have his will in his master's castle. Before long it becomes clear that Beatrice Joanna herself belongs morally not in the castle but in the madhouse, part hell for sinners, part bridewell— the dark underside of civil society. Critics have tended to give the madhouse less attention than the powerful murder plot or have ignored it altogether. Far from being a rather embarrassing adjunct, the madhouse is central to the play as a deterrent symbol, a representation of the corrective institutions of Jacobean society familiar to the audience of the Phoenix. Drawn as they were from the ranks of the respectable, they would have shared the contemporary alarm at the rising crime rate and the general fear of disorder in the 1620's. They, like the

---

1 All references to *The Changeling* are from *Regents Renaissance Drama*, Ed. George W. Williams, Lincoln: Univ of Nebraska Press, 1966.
wedding guests in the play, might have experienced a pleasurable shudder watching the fearful spectacle being staged for their pleasure: the degradation of a lady by a servant and her descent to his level, a fitting punishment for a whore and a murderess. It is an erotic pleasure that is being offered—part of the sexual discourse which is the product of the association of social status with moral deserving.

This combination of titillation and moral condemnation was characteristic of the popular crime pamphlet, a genre which rapidly increased its output at the end of the 16th century. The Changeling’s main source, a story from John Reynolds’s immensely successful collection of exemplary narratives of 1621, The Triumph of God’s Revenge against the Crying and Execrable Sinne of Wilful and Premeditated Murder, was at the upmarket end of a whole range of contemporary popular literature about shocking crime, especially the disruption of familial hierarchy by sexual sin and murder. The popularity of these stories testified to the current concern about morality, and to the widespread belief that standards were in decline especially in society’s basic unit, the family. The festive pleasure afforded the reader by the exciting subject matter is transformed at the end of the stories into the satisfaction of moral superiority, of identifying with the forces of order when the criminal is brought to justice. Though the play uses much of the material in Reynolds’ tale it has enough connections with revelations of scandals in court circles like the Overbury trial of 1613, and the Roos case of 1619 to enable it to function

---

2 "In the century before the Civil War, what contemporaries admired most, the quality they sought most avidly in their own lives, was order, the establishment of control, the obliteration of chaos," Carol Z. Wiener, quoted in J.A. Sharpe, (145).
in a more complex way than as staged exemplary fiction.\textsuperscript{3} The play draws attention, at a time when public hunger for news was increasing while public confidence in authority was low, to the sorry state of an elite so obsessed with faction that they failed to maintain order in their own households and left the guilty unpunished. \textit{The Changeling} capitalises on the public's appetite for moralised sensational news stories in order to bring under the vulgar scrutiny of the pamphlet-reading public the recent scandal in court circles to which the play briefly alludes.\textsuperscript{4}

Although, as Salingar says, \textit{The Changeling} is not a tragedy of state, its savage mockery of notions of status and honor point to a connection with contemporary problems in court circles. The play dramatizes, not the fall of princes, but of a lady whose willful sexual desire involves her with a presumptuous servant and brings disaster to her father's household. At the Jacobean court, the domestic did not merely correspond to the political; it was inseparable from it. The scandalous behavior of ladies like the Countess of Somerset and Lady Roos brought havoc in its train and dishonor and virtual political extinction to their families. The exemplary project of staging Beatrice Joanna's fall involves the exploitation of her sexual degradation, made all the more pleasurable for the audience because her fall from virtue is also a fall in status. This spectacle works as

\textsuperscript{3} The Earl of Somerset and his wife, the former Frances Howard, were found guilty of abetting the poisoning of Sir Thomas Overbury. Lady Roos and her mother plotted against Lord Roos, whom they threatened with divorce on the grounds of impotence. The grounds for Frances Howard's divorce from the Earl of Essex had also been impotence. The King condemned the role of the women in the Roos case, comparing the mother to the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Gardiner (3:193-4) and Chamberlain (2:214).

\textsuperscript{4} I refer to Diaphanta's words, "She will not search me, will she? / Like the forewoman of a female jury? (4.1.99-100) which have been taken to refer to Frances Howard's divorce trial in 1613 when she was medically examined by a female jury.
an incitement to the kind of erotic discourse produced by many of the exemplary crime stories written for profit in the expanding literary market. Like these stories, *The Changeling* has its deterrent aspect and this, too, offers the satisfaction of identifying with the imposition of order. The play dispenses with the lengthy moralising so typical of the crime story. In its place is the madhouse, part medieval hell for sinners, part secular disciplinary institution. The lady, it is implied, belongs here in this chaotic bridewell at the margins of society with the mad and the outcast—fit only to be the object of discipline or fascinated scrutiny by the morally superior.

Unlike the other plays I have discussed, the sexual discourse of *The Changeling* is produced through the representation of downward, not upward mobility. Of course, the play is not a reflection of the kind of social problem which Middleton satirizes in *The Ant and the Grasshopper*, where the profligate young heir loses his father's estate and ruins his poor tenant farmers at the same time. Yet the play assumes an awareness of a society where such disasters are not uncommon. However, like *The Bondman*, its social context is a fictional world elsewhere. Both plays focus on the moral fibre of the central character, not on social or economic factors as the clue to the protagonist's success or failure. In *The Bondman* success is attributed to self-discipline and skill; in *The Changeling* moral failing leads inexorably downwards. In Massinger's play the "bondman" instigates an inversion of hierarchy in the city in order to demonstrate his own rational control of appetite. He deploys this control to achieve his ambition and he is rewarded by those in power. In *The Changeling*, however, the lady's failure to control her sexual desire produces disorder and death in her father's castle, and brings it perilously
close to the chaos of the madhouse, its dark Other, the natural place for sinners like her and her lover and all who have put themselves outside rational society. In both plays the erotic excitement is produced by imagining the sexual contamination of the high by the low in a world turned upside down. In *The Bondman*, the slave's desire for the patrician is transformed and legitimated, though the eroticism persists. In *The Changeling*, the erotic spectacle of the lady's sexual defilement by her repugnant servant is justified because her own feminine willfulness and defiance of patriarchal authority has put her amongst the rejected of society.

The prestige of the ruling elite was at a low ebb at the time *The Changeling* was written. The court was seen by many as the centre of faction and depravity in a nation whose moral standards were deteriorating.⁵ Court extravagance, moral laxity, and the elevation of the base appalled many of the gentry⁶ and was deplored by the moderate Puritan industrious sort who formed the readership of the growing number of news sheets and satirical pamphlets. The vacillations of official foreign policy looked dangerously pro-Spanish and pro-Catholic to this news-hungry, Protestant, upwardly mobile public.⁷ These factors, and the series of scandals involving leading noble families must have been seen by many as a demonstration of the moral bankruptcy of the nation's leaders and the decline in the ethos of honor and patriotic service which the Protestant tradition of the

---

⁵ William Cornwallis, the essayist, wrote that courtiers were "the maligners of the true nature of virtue and only friends to their own ambition and desires," quoted by J.M. Salmon, (177).

⁶ Chamberlain 1: Feb 1612 and June 1613.

⁷ In the 1620's, "wider publications of national and continental affairs and preparations for war acquainted a wider world with the business of Parliament and Council," Kevin Sharpe, (21).
Essex circle still represented to a large part of the public. James, fearful of the potentially anarchic threat of public interest in state affairs, reacted by forbidding discussion of them in 1620. He also moved to regulate preaching. It was in this volatile atmosphere that the pamphlet controversy about women flared up again, this time over women's masculine fashions in dress. Scandals at court, especially the role of women in the Overbury poisoning of 1613, had provoked an outburst of misogynistic comment, (Wright 482). In 1619, the case of Lady Roos, who was in the Tower at the time, had led the usually good-humored John Chamberlain to comment "if the tenth part of that be true which is commonly reported, I have not heard of so forward an ympe, and yt was more then time that such a cockatrice shold be crusht in the shell," (2:220). In 1620, "the insolencie of our women," in their wearing of masculine dress moved the King to direct preachers "to inveigh vehemently" against them. He called on their husbands or those "that have or shold have power over them" to bring them into line, (Chamberlain 2:286, 289).

In his reaction to this apparently trivial matter, James was demonstrating the crucial importance of order in the little commonwealth of the household as an indicator of the stability of the whole kingdom. Even Chamberlain's comment that "The world is very much out of order," in his letter about women wearing masculine dress, itself indicates

---

8 Malcolm Smuts writes in "Diversity and Cultural Change at the Court of James 1," that tensions in the upper levels of society "demonstrably affected literary trends" and fictional intrigue in Jacobean plays were readily interpreted by audiences "as veiled allusions to contemporary events," (107).

9 At home the economy had taken a sharp downturn and there were fears that widespread poverty might lead to violence. (Lockyer 261)
that disruption of gender order had far-reaching implications for a society which believed that everything is connected. The belief that complex political structures had their origin in the hierarchy of the family or household was indeed accepted all over Europe.¹⁰ Monarchs' claims to allegiance were considered analogous to parental rights. Both systems were patriarchal. The Protestant Reformation, by dispensing with priestly authority, had elevated the authority of the heads of households so that they stood in God's stead to their children and servants. "To fathers within their private families Nature hath given a supreme power," wrote Hooker, (qtd.Hill Society and Puritanism 446). Because the basis for both political and domestic patriarchy was the fourth Commandment, obligations in public and domestic life alike were charged with moral significance. The outburst of the pamphlet controversy, with its emphasis on proper gender order, demonstrated a widespread anxiety about the maintenance of social stability, what Susan Amussen calls "the panic resulting from rapid social and demographic changes in the period." "Because of the ideological relationship between family and state, the control of gender disorder symbolically affirmed all social order," (Amussen 182). By seeking a divorce, Frances Howard was disrupting order in the basic unit of society because she had flouted the natural authority of parents and husband. Her subsequent arraignment for murder was inevitably linked with her earlier unruliness. The outrage with which it was greeted by the public demonstrated the widespread nervousness about social stability.

¹⁰ Jean Bodin had written "All will be well with the commonwealth where families are properly regulated." Quoted by Patrick Collinson, 60.
In 1613 the Lady Francis Howard successfully sought a legal annulment of her marriage to the Earl of Essex on the grounds of his impotence "versus hanc" in order to marry the King's current favorite, the Scot, Robert Carr. Soon after her remarriage, for which Middleton, like Jonson and Campion, wrote a masque, factional politics bent on destroying the alliance of the Howard family with the influential Carr involved the couple in a murder investigation. The murder victim was Sir Thomas Overbury, who had been opposed to their marriage. They were accused of being accessories to the murder, were found guilty and put in the Tower. Lesser people who had confessed to being involved in Overbury's poisoning were executed. There was unprecedented public interest in both the divorce hearings and the murder trial and contemporary comments refer to the theatrical nature of the events, with Frances Howard in the leading role. Though she was being used as a political pawn in the changing court alliances and factions, public outrage during the divorce hearings focused on her wantonness as the cause of all the trouble, and her guilt in the murder trial confirmed public opinion. She was demonised as a witch, a murderer and an adulteress, the epitome of court depravity. Numerous underground scurrilous obscene ballads and "libels" appeared, mocking her, but a proclamation prohibiting "lavish and licentious speech" precluded the naming of the noble personages involved in the case, (Bromham and Bruzi 8).

The Earl and Countess of Somerset were released from their privileged confinement in January 1622, and The Changeling was licensed in May of the same year. A play about a lady who has her betrothed murdered because she fancies another
gentleman more could not have failed to remind its audience of these earlier events.\textsuperscript{11} The explosion of pamphlet writing in the 1620's had managed to foster, in spite of censorship, an ongoing public debate about affairs of state. To allude to court scandal in a play was to reassert the potential power of the theatre to bring contemporary concerns into the public domain in spite of censorship. But more than this, by using as their source a story from a new piece of popular journalism—*The Triumphs of God's Revenge* was first published in the latter half of 1621—Middleton and Rowley reduced the affairs of the great who are not good to mere fodder for the literary market, part of a commodity which could be bought and sold. Moralised crime stories had, like plays, a very low status. What could be a more fitting punishment for the sexual aberrations of the elite than to be prostituted by the pen? Providing pleasure for profit was the job of both whore and journalist. The erotic, like money, had no class loyalties: "for gold wants eyes / And, like a whore, cares not with whom it lies," Middleton wrote in *The Ant and the Grasshopper* (105). The play's visual representation of a world of lust, murder and madness intensifies the voyeuristic aspects of the printed crime story. Indeed, the play mischievously exploits, for theatrical effect, the very rupture in the social order which the scandal-ridden Jacobean court itself precipitated, and which the play seems to seek to condemn. The disintegration of public virtue and the court scandals which were perceived as part of it had become a commodity, a part of the literary and theatrical market. Though the lesson

\textsuperscript{11} A number of writers make a connection between Frances Howard's story and *The Changeling*: David Lindley in *The Trials of Frances Howard*, A.A. Bromham and Z. Bruzzi in *The Changeling and the Years of Crisis*, and Lois Potter in her introduction to Francis Osborn's *The True Tragicomedy Formerly Acted at Court*. 
that uncontrolled sexuality has fearful consequences is clear, what counts finally for the
audience, as it does for Deflores\textsuperscript{12} at the end of the play, is "the pleasure." Because it is
inherently untheatrical, the overt preaching of the popular crime genre is absent from the
play. In its place as deterrent looms the world of the madhouse, part hell, part chaotic
corrective institution, towards which all downward mobility is destined. Yet it too offers
its voyeuristic pleasures. Like the Reynolds' tale and others of the same genre, the affair
of Beatrice Joanna and Deflores has the allure of a story of sex and violence, allowing a
glimpse of chaos in the social order, of a world upside down where the will has broken
free of normal controls. The madhouse offers not the comfort of moralising, but the
satisfaction of viewing the exciting scene of disorder—experiencing the "frightful
pleasure"—from the safe perspective of the respectable onlooker who is outside the
institution. The madhouse, with its hints of a darker alien world of outcasts from the
social hierarchy, functions as deterrent and at the same time, promotes the spectacle of
disorder as theatre.

Middleton's own experience in the field of popular journalism had been social
satire like \textit{The Black Book} and \textit{Micro-Cynicon} where his targets are the traditional
subverters of the commonwealth—"smoky gallants, riotous heirs, strumpets that follow
theatres and fairs, gilded nos'd usurers, base-metall'd panders" . . . "money and the breed
of it," and of course, upstarts, (\textit{Black Book 7}). Though the scourging of contemporary
vice had a moral purpose— to expose a corrupt society— it was a different enterprise from

\footnotesize{12 I use this form, "Deflores," rather than "De Flores," (the form used in the edition of the play
from which my quotations are drawn) because the former is the way the name was spelled in the
first printed edition and it so clearly evokes the sexual role of the character.}
the pious, exemplary narratives of criminals brought to justice like the story on which The Changeling is based. The increasing demand for this "deterrent literature" must be seen in the context of widespread concern over increasing crime and fears of disorder—fears that "the very bonds of society were endangered," (Wrightson 149). The moralised crime stories were presented as "news" or at least as real life experience. They usually occurred within the household of the middling sort—wife killing husband, servant his master, father his children—"The poisoned rancour of domesticall treacherie," (Collier 1:4). They represented a violation of the social order by showing its collapse in the household, the microcosm of the state. In The Changeling, Middleton conflates two popular crime pamphlet story lines, the inversion of degree and the disruption of order by uncontrolled feminine sexuality. Together they bring about chaos in the household of Vermandero. The social order is violated when the servant Deflores murders Piracquo, courtier and gallant, and rapes Piracquo's betrothed, the lady of the castle, Beatrice Joanna.

The crime stories were characteristically full of religious moralising and often ended with the criminal's confession and a warning to the reader to amend his life. Frequently a providential occurrence revealed that the crime and its consequences were part of God's purposes. Like the other new kinds of journalism that proliferated at the time, this writing both catered to and shaped popular taste. These stories were valued by the newly literate, often Puritan middling sort for their practical moral usefulness: they were regarded as "improving" spiritually and useful in ordinary life, writes Clark in The Elizabethan Pamphleteers. Peter Lake however, stresses the ambiguities of these didactic stories. He draws attention to their "exploitative, indeed in some sense, pornographic"
elements when they deal with extreme violence and sexual licence, especially uncontrolled female sexuality, (262). Their effect, he says is both controlling and festive, admonitory and titillating. It would of course be both reductive and anachronistic to suggest that this genre of writing was simply sensationalism aimed at the new literary market.13 Elizabeth Clark discusses the complex effect of the appeal of the genre to the "innate conservatism of popular thought," shown in the use of conventional ideas, while at the same time the use of plain speech, vivid description, and direct emotional appeal worked to involve readers in new ways, (36).

Reynolds, in the dedication to the fourth edition of The Triumph of God's Revenge is clearly aware of the moral ambiguities of his genre. He emphasises at the beginning of the collection that his aim is "to profit the soul" and that his work would not make the purest Virgin blush. He distances himself explicitly from "our lewd and lascivious pamphlets" and writing which would "infect youth with scurrility." "I have consecrated my pen rather to instruction," he says loftily. There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Reynolds' didactic purpose or to assume that the tremendous popularity of his book had little to do with its moral and religious content. There was, after all, an enormous demand for religious books at this time. His dedication in 1621 of Book 1 of The Triumphs to the Duke of Buckingham, and the subsequent parts to other important

13 In a later article, "Popular Form, Puritan Content? Two Puritan appropriations of the murder pamphlet from mid-seventeenth century London," Peter Lake discusses the complex interaction of Puritan moralising and popular elements in the murder pamphlets.
nobleman, shows that he was aiming at the high end of the literary market. His anxiety
to distance himself from lower literary genres might also be connected to his own success
as an author of popular romances, one of which was second only to The Triumphs in
popularity. Though he may take the moral high ground, there is undoubtedly an elemen:
of titillation in Reynolds’ didacticism, a problem perhaps inherent in the genre, like the
danger of the satirist being defiled by the vices he scourges. His "histories"— their truth
all vouched for by Lord Abbott himself, the former Archbishop of Canterbury—all deal
with sexual sins which are committed in exotic places and lead to murder. "Nothing" he
writes defensively in the Preface to the Reader of the 1663 edition, "so soon allures or
draws a Reader to peruse and read, as a strange Theam and Argument." In this edition,
the fourth History, The Changeling’s source, is illustrated with a comic strip sequence of
small engravings showing dramatic moments in the story, for example, Beatrice-Joanna
and Deflores in bed together being threatened by Alsemoro armed with a pistol. Reynolds
notes that he added these in order to "make the impression strike deeper." By
using the more visual medium of the theatre, Middleton and Rowley achieve the
immediate impact that Reynolds and other authors of deterrent literature were probably
aiming at, but it is an impact which inevitably highlights the sensational aspects of the
story and mocks elitist literary aspiration.

Most writers of the period register an ambivalence about writing for the general

14 Jerry H. Bryant says that the three anti-Spanish tracts attributed to John Reynolds which
resulted in his imprisonment in 1624 are the result of Reynolds’ association with the Duke of
Buckingham and his support of the Duke’s policies, (105-17).

15 Cheap pamphlets were often illustrated by crude woodcuts, but these engravings are a
technical advance.
public. They disdained the vulgar reader or playgoer and those who, for profit, catered to their tastes even though these writers themselves were involved in the trade. "I prostitute my pen in hope of gaine," said Nashe, (qtd. Clark 28). Many writers preferred to think of themselves as educated gentlemen with learned, discerning, perhaps noble patrons rather than as producers of a commodity which was for sale to any "illiterate Gull" or "Mechanick Asse" (Wright 97) who could pay. In the early 17th century the number of authors seeking patronage had increased out of all proportion to the supply of patrons. Kathleen McLuskie in her essay "Patronage and Commerce in Early Modern Drama," says that writers' distaste for the commercial market and their nostalgia for a traditional way of valuing culture was particularly strong in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. She sees it as part of the widespread unease about social change which was perceived to be destabilising familiar forms of hierarchy. Dekker had this in mind, perhaps, when he complains that, at the theatre, "your stinkard has the self same liberty to be there in his Tobacco-Furnes, which your sweet courtier hath," (The Guls Horn-Booke, 47).

Dekker was thinking of the market when he wrote of playwrights bartering "that light commodity of words" for something even more insubstantial, "plaudites, and the breath of the great Beast,"(47). In his address to the reader in two of his published plays, Middleton wittily disparages his own work in a way that might be designed to appeal to a certain kind of consumer. The preface to The Family of Love compares the appeal of new plays to that of fresh prostitutes, "wenches new falne to the trade" who are most desired by the "neatest gallants." At the beginning of The Roaring Girl, Middleton writes of fashions in play-making, saying that his play is "fit for the Times, and the Termers . . .
Light-colour Summer stuff . . . good to keepe you in an afternoon from dice," (Steen 30).
This satiric, self-deprecating awareness of the demand for ephemera suggests that
Middleton is hoping to appeal to an educated, sophisticated, theatrically experienced,
males audience, rather than to the general public, to Dekker's "great beast." However, in
the masque, The World Tost at Tennis, which Middleton and Rowley wrote for a noble
wedding, there is a passage disparaging the vulgar taste for news: "here a pettifogger a'
the pillory, a bawd in the cart's nose, and a pander in the tail: hic mulier, haec vir,
fashions, fictions, felonies, fooleries . . . a hundred havens has the balladmonger to traffic
at, and new ones still daily discovered," (154). With its brief evocation of the excitement
of the merchant-adventurer's "traffic" and its flash of bawdy, this remark epitomizes the
equivocal attitude of writers to popular taste. Their scorn for the lower forms of popular
writing certainly did not prevent the authors from taking advantage of current gossip in
their own plays. Some scholars, Lois Potter and Margot Heinemann for example, believe
that The Witch (1615) exploits the malicious talk about Frances Howard's sexual behavior
at the time of divorce proceedings. In 1624, with the deeply unpopular Spanish policy on
the rocks, Middleton was able to ride on a triumphant tide of anti-Spanish feeling and
stage, with relative impunity, his unprecedentedly successful, michievously anti-Catholic
play, A Game at Chesse. In the same year, Rowley collaborated with Webster and others
on Keep The Widow Waking, a lost play whose exploitation of current crime and domestic
trouble created a scandal when it played at the Red Bull.

My point in drawing attention to this ambivalence towards writing for the public
taste is to show that while Middleton was very much a writer in the new literary market,
ready to take advantage of current fashion, he would nevertheless have been, like his contemporaries, conscious of the status of different kinds of writing and of the public to whom they appealed. Clara Gebert, in her introduction to *An Anthology of Elizabethan Dedications and Prefaces*, classifies writers of this period into a hierarchy linking social status with the type of literary activity. At the top is the noble amateur genius, like Sidney, at the bottom, the hack writer, like Taylor. She places Middleton, with Dekker and Nashe in the second last rank, as "men of training and literary taste forced to write down." Whether this is true of Middleton or not, "writing down" is just what Middleton is up to in *The Changeling*. I believe that Middleton uses the popular crime story mode—sex and murder, discovery and confession—and adopts a deliberately low tone to tell something of the story which could never be told about the aberrations of the nobility. This effectively degrades the aristocratic sinner by subjecting her to a symbolic downward mobility through the lowest form of literary genre. If the destructive sexual willfulness of Beatrice Joanna reminded audiences of Frances Howard, then the play would have succeeded in putting her and all upper class whores where they belonged, in the public domain, with other criminals, to be a spectacle for the vulgar. In the masques which they wrote for Frances Howard's sumptuous marriage to Robert Carr after her divorce from the Earl of Essex, Campion and Chapman had both depicted her as the helpless victim of Rumour, at the mercy of "vulgar voices," of those who spoke against

---

16 The festive misogyny of Swetnam's *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and unconstant women . . .* of 1615 is suggestive, too, for Middleton's "writing down" of his subject. Swetnam also writes depreciatingly of his own work as an idle pastime—"esteme this book onely as the toyes of an idle head." Contemporary critics discredited his pamphlet by putting it at the lowest level of print culture, (Purkiss 83).
the marriage. They depict popular opinion as a danger to the stability of society itself. At a very different festive occasion, also authorised by the State, Ann Turner, one of the Somersets' accomplices in the poisoning of Overbury, also found herself, in her notorious yellow ruffs, on display for the crowd. She was standing on the scaffold, awaiting execution. There are echoes of this second kind of theatre in the way *The Changeling* offers up the sinful, humiliated lady Beatrice Joanna for the "frightful pleasure" of the onlooker. She stands revealed in her "ugly whoredom" at the brink of the madhouse, whose inmates' animal cries might have suggested to the audience the dangerous confusion of false rumour in Campion's anti-masque or, in more palpable form, the baying of what Empson, in his essay on the play, so anachronistically calls "the mob." (138). There is, however, no danger to social stability in this representation, however, because the play transforms the potential disorder of the madhouse into theatre.

Though the Somerset / Overbury affair lent itself to treatment as a story of shocking domestic crime, its upper class provenance prevented it from quite fitting the pattern of exemplary literature. By the time of the murder trial, the King and those who wanted to change the balance of faction at court were eager to get rid of the Somersets, but they wanted to minimize the disruption in the corridors of power while keeping the public happy. Though the Somersets were found guilty and imprisoned, the real burden of the crime was displaced on to the lesser folk who had been hired to poison Overbury. They were found guilty, confessed, and were publicly hanged. But it was still by no means clear to the public—gentry or commons— that justice had been done or that the
rupture in the fabric of authority had been mended. In spite of Lord Chief Justice Coke's promise that "the great flies shall not escape, but receive their punishment," (Cobbett 929), James pardoned the Countess almost immediately and the couple were later freed. Carr was replaced by another favorite. Far from putting the public's mind at rest, the trials epitomised the instability of the ruling elite and by implication of the hierarchy itself. While references to the earl and Countess of Somerset had to be confined to underground scurrilous verse, writers could satisfy the public's appetite for news by offering accounts of the hirelings whom the couple used to poison Overbury. It was safer to demonise the base upstarts who hoped to be "pleasing to the greater sort" and then to moralise their stories in the manner of the murder pamphlets. This is what happens in the pamphlet, The Just Downfall of Ambition, Adultery and Murder, and in the long poem, Sir Thomas Overbury's Vision, (Harleian Miscellany 7). The murderers are upstarts driven to kill a virtuous gentleman by greed for money and hope of preferment. They confess, repent and are hanged. Here was a story familiar to murder pamphlet readers— the inversion of degree— the servant murders his master, a noble man is struck down by an "overbold incroching upstarte" whom he trusted, (Collier 4). The culprit is discovered, he confesses, repents, and is duly tried and hanged. Order is restored. At the end of one such pamphlet, the writer warns against upstarts: "Nourish not in your courteous countenance the contemptuous aspirers of inferior reputation," (Collier 11).

17 A group of gentlemen asked Weston as he stood on the scaffold to tell them whether or not he really did kill Overbury, Francis Bacon recorded. (The Works of Francis Bacon 12:211).

18 "Since the first nullity to this instant . . . the devil could not have invented a more mischievous practice to our state and church than this hath been, is, and is like to be. God avert the evil." (Bacon, quoted in William McElwee The Wisest Fool in Christendom 229).
In *The Changeling*, Deflores is such a trusted inferior who turns on his betters. He, however, refuses to be made the scapegoat. Vermandero, the lord of the castle, thinks highly of him and never dreams that he is harboring the murderer of the noble Piracquo in his household and the man who is blackmailing his daughter. Beatrice Joanna, rather than oppose her father's wishes, hires the "ominous, ill-faced fellow" as assassin. Like Weston and Franklin, the Countess of Somerset's hired poisoners, Deflores is the tool of a highly-placed woman whose determination to get what she wants is the initial cause of the trouble. But unlike Weston and Franklin, Deflores does not repent and is not brought to justice. Instead, it is he who dispenses justice. He ensures that the "big flies" do not escape by becoming the instrument by which Beatrice Joanna is punished for her defiance of her father and her obstinate pursuit of her own desires. Instead of taking the blame himself as the lady expects, he insists on the levelling power of sin and does not allow her to hide behind the privilege of her rank and her honor. The plot may well have been conceived as a vindictive populist alternative to the pardoning and release of the Countess of Somerset, who was the focus of so much public outrage and was so reviled in the underground press at the time of her divorce and the murder

---

19 Habits of deference were so strong that children rarely challenged parents. "Deciding whom children should marry was the greatest single source of conflict between generations amongst Napier's patients," writes Michael MacDonald in his study of the case histories of the 17th century divine / psychologist Richard Napier, (97).

20 It is tempting to see Franklin as the inspiration for Deflores. According to Lindley he was "the most loathsome of those accused". Ann Turner pleaded that she should not be executed on the same day as he, "for he is so foule," (152).
Satiric attacks on upper class women combining "moral outrage and class antagonism" (Lindley 8) were not uncommon at the time. The play might even be seen as a bizarre alternative ending to Chapman's elitist allegory Andromeda Liberata, (1614) which he wrote in support of the Countess' marriage to Robert Carr. In that poem, Frances Howard is depicted as the hapless, innocent Andromeda who is threatened by "The monstrous beast (a whale), the ravenous Multitude" (line 92), which represents popular opinion opposed to the marriage. In The Changeling, the lady is not, like Andromeda, rescued by a hero, but becomes the victim of the monstrous underling, Deflores. In this context then, it is appropriate that in The Changeling the punishment of the lady of the castle should be social degradation. Because of her moral failings she falls from her high position and is regarded at the end as a common whore by the people around her. She has earned this degradation because she assumed that the privilege of rank would shield her from punishment. It is appropriate too, that the punishment for her sin should be sexual degradation—her rape by a loathsome underling. It is as if the Countess of Somerset had been forced into sexual relations with Weston or Franklin.

21 Sir John Holles wrote in a letter of 1616 about the public hope for the execution of the Somersets. "Day by day they watch the Tower, least the execution should be stolen from them: so desirous we be of novelty, as we care not who be hanged to feed that humour. (qtd. Lindley 188). A letter of 1616 from Gerard to Carleton says that the public hoped for an execution and resented the Countess's pardon, (White 117). Lady Roos "was cursed horribly by the people" as she went to the Tower, (C SPD CV Feb 20 1619).

22 Middleton had reason to take issue with Chapman. In 1615 Chapman, piqued by the popular success of Middleton's Triumphs of Truth pageant, referred to it disparagingly as popular ephemera in his dedicatory epistle to his translation of The Odyssey.

23 In his confession at the Overbury trial, Weston had complained to Franklin of the Countess' ingratitude. He said "Now the Countess' turn is served, she used him unkindly," and repeatedly claimed that the promised reward was slow in forthcoming, Cobbett (949). Franklin told his examiners that the Countess "was able to bewitch any man," (942). Taken together, the (continued...)
The project of uncovering and punishing the sinful disorder in Vermandero’s household becomes an occasion for the festive mockery of a willful upper class woman who gets what’s coming to her when she is undone by an ugly servant.

Martha Wiggins points out that by the early 17th century the hired assassin in plays was a stock type, already a dramatic cliche. His “behaviour followed familiar patterns” and, she says, it would be assumed that "a contract to kill would involve money changing hands," (128). The appearance of such a character in The Changeling comes at the very end of a thoroughly worked over convention, and is its last use in the years between The Duchess of Malfi and the closing of the theatres. It also happens that in this period the most notorious hired murderers of the 17th century, the Overbury assassins, were in the public eye. In Jacobean tragicomedy, variations on the assassin's role were often used to avoid the actual murder while still evoking the danger, as in The Malcontent and The Honest Whore. Deflores paradoxically both subverts and fulfills the traditional role of the assassin. His demand for sexual favors instead of money or preferment is a comic twist in the tradition which sits uneasily with his vicious efficiency as a killer. But this twist is not merely a piece of clever Fletcherian plotting; it has a purpose— to demonstrate the moral equality of the assassin and his employer. Deflores’s lust reveals that Beatrice Joanna’s wantonness is the mirror image of his own base appetite. His possession of the lady is the physical sign of her degradation, her descent to the level of a common murderer.

23 (...continued)
resentment of the one man and the impertinence of the other are suggestive for the construction of the character of the imagined tool villain Deflores.
The relationship of Deflores with the malcontent type of assassin, like Flamineo or Bosola, is revealing in another way. Deflores is not driven to murder as they are by need or bitter melancholy produced by exclusion or alienation. Though he does say of himself that "hard fate has thrust me out to servitude" (2.1.48), the source of his desperation is not social or economic failure. It is frustrated sexual desire. In terms of the current psychology and his understanding of his own odd behavior—"Whatever ails me?" and "I shall have a mad qualm within the hour again, / I know't"—Deflores is suffering from love sickness (2.1.27 and 79). This involves an excess of blood in the liver, as Beatrice Joanna herself astutely observes, (2.1.80). In drama, the symptoms of the lovesick man closely resembled those of the gloomy malcontent. But there is little danger that Deflores will become the victim of love melancholy, (Babb 131). Such fashionable indulgences were the prerogative of the leisured classes and typical of idle courtiers rather than servants. Deflores is too vulgar to languish. Frustrated love in someone of Deflores's station has potential rather for comedy, and the dramatists draw on a completely different dramatic convention to represent this.

In another way, however, Deflores is closely related to the malcontent assassins. Like them he is cynically manipulated by his upper class employer. The dukes who employ Bosola and Flamineo "show an aristocratic contempt for their instruments; to them assassins are base men doing a useful job, like dustmen," (Wiggin 182). Beatrice Joanna shows the same contempt for her servant as she considers his suitability to be the bearer of "blood-guiltiness": "The ugliest creature / Creation fram'd for some use," and she wonders why she hadn't thought of this before: "I ha' marr'd so good a market with my
scorn," (2.2.44-45). She deliberately sets out to charm "his dog-face" so that she can use him. When the murderer demands his reward, Beatrice Joanna reminds him of his position: "Think but upon the distance that creation / Set 'twixt thy blood and mine, and keep thee there," (3.4.131-2). In Webster's plays the hired killers get nothing from their powerful masters. But in The Changeling the worm turns and Deflores does get his "pleasure." He can only achieve this because his employer as a woman has herself relatively little power in the hierarchy, especially when she loses her main asset, her virginity. The erotic excitement of the play arises from the way her arrogant superiority is brought down by the desire of a loathsome plebeian in circumstances that are shocking but serve a kind of rough justice. The appropriateness of this justice is reiterated when Beatrice Joanna continues to use her privilege to conceal her use of poor Diaphanata to further her ends. The vindictive pleasure offered by the spectacle of the lady's degradation is however, not solely a matter of the justice of the case, but is also related to the fact that the justice is meted out by a man who is sexually repulsive to her.

Deflores has been changed significantly from his counterpart in the Reynolds story, and from the "loyal Biscayne" who rapes his mistress in Leonard Digges' Gerado the Unfortunate Spaniard, another source for The Changeling, printed in March 1622. In the former he is "a gallant gentleman" whom Beatrice Joanna rather fancies, and in the latter he is a shadowy lovesick servant who is soon dispatched by Isadora. Though Deflores in The Changeling is a gentleman in reduced circumstances, "gallant" is hardly appropriate and the gallantry he attempts is treated satirically. Middleton and Rowley make him a plain man, with a plain man's speech, a trusted, useful servant, "honest
Deflores." The other change from the source is his ugliness, an attribute which has complex moral and psycho-sexual implications. A foul exterior was thought to signal a moral foulness within. As Bacon said, "Certainly there is a consent between the Body and the Minde," (*Essays* 198). Deflores's inner evil seems to be on display yet his employer and the noble Piracquo are blind to it and trust him. Piracquo's brother recognises it too late and Beatrice Joanna, plotting her own evil, chooses to ignore the warning sign. In a play that relies heavily on visual effects—dumb shows and visual symbols—Deflores's ugliness might be seen primarily as a theatrical convention denoting moral evil. It is unconnected with his literary origins. Beatrice Joanna loathes him because of his repulsive appearance and connects this with the sense he gives her of ill omen, of danger. She refers to him several times as a serpent. For the Elizabethans the relationship of moral and physical ugliness was rooted in Genesis: it was the repulsive serpent which first made Eve the cause of original sin. The allusion to the serpent or satan is strengthened by the other biblical references in the play. A number of critics have commented on the frequent use of images of the Fall. As I have said, The Changeling certainly has a moral dimension like the exemplary crime stories, but I cannot see the play as primarily an allegory of the Fall. Besides, such language was commonplace in the current discourse. For example, in Sir Thomas Overbury's poem, *The Wife*, published posthumously and immensely popular because of the interest in his murder, he refers to the married couple as Adam and Eve. In his comments on the Roos affair of 1619, King James referred to the parties involved—Sir Thomas Lake, Lady Lake and Lady Roos—as Adam, Eve, and the serpent respectively, (Cal SPD.CV. Feb 20 1619).
In *The Changeling* the comic treatment of Deflores's appearance shifts our attention away from the generic evil which Deflores as loathsome serpent may represent to the sexual implications of physical ugliness. It puts the didactic content of the play into tension with the festive appeal of the proud lady being brought down by the despised ugly servant. Beatrice Joanna's complaint, delivered to the audience alone on the stage after the rape scene, that "This fellow has undone me endlessly" (4.1.1) might well have been seen as comic, and is certainly a more telling account of her degradation than her confession to her father in allegorical terms at the end that she has "strok'd a serpent," (5.3.66). It is very clear from the beginning that Beatrice Joanna's revulsion is physical and sexual as well as moral. Deflores knows it is and seems to enjoy using this knowledge as a weapon in his campaign to possess her. This is made obvious in the incident of the dropped glove when he says: "no matter, if but to vex her, I'll haunt her still; / Though I get nothing else, I'll have my will," (1.1.232-3). The sadistic violence of their language in this scene—"I know she had rather wear my pelt tann'd / In a pair of dancing pumps, than I should / Thrust my fingers into her sockets here," prefigures the rape to come, and Deflores's persistent forcing of his presence upon the girl suggests a remorseless progress towards violation.

The play insists on the palpable materiality of Deflores's ugliness more than on its moral significance. Deflores himself is voluble on the subject. Like Richard III he "freely descants on his own deformity," (Garber 44). Far from seeing himself as part of a Biblical subtext he assumes that his bad face is the problem. Beatrice Joanna "At no hand can abide the sight of me, / As if danger, or ill-luck, hung in my looks. / I must confess,
my face is bad enough," (2.1.35). He sees his appearance in realistic, not moral terms and, given women's strange tastes, hopes to turn it to his sexual advantage. Deflores refers three times to women who have a taste for repulsive men. These "odd feeders" "feed heartily" on "slovenly dishes" and "which is stranger, refuse daintier for 'em," (2.2.153-4). In this way he shifts the moral emphasis away from the evil which his own ugliness betokens to the morality of women who are turned on by this sort of thing. The play is at one level, concerned with the familiar Renaissance topos of the discrepancy between outward appearance and inner truth and the uncertainties to which this discrepancy leads. However, those in authority who ought to be able to deal with these problems—Vermandero, Piracquo and Alesmoro—are all blind to the outward signs of Deflores's inner evil, and fooled by Beatrice Joanna's outward mask of innocent beauty which hides her wickedness. The play briefly allows the audience to consider the idea that, given the right circumstances, evil hypocrisy may flourish with impunity.

It is significant that Deflores's only reference to his social status as a gentleman comes—almost as a non sequitur—at the end of his long speech about ugly faces that are doted on by women. Uglier men than he have been beloved, he says, and he goes on to describe one such, with "wrinkles like troughs where swine deformity swills / The tears of perjury that lie there like wash / Fallen from the slimy and dishonest eye," (2.1.43-5). This description assumes a link between physical ugliness—"swine deformity" and morality—"tears of perjury" and "dishonest eye." In its grotesque specificity it is reminiscent of Middleton's detailed description of the face of the degenerate pimp in the brothel scene in his social satire, The Black Book. After this description, Deflores says.
"Though my hard fate has thrust me out to servitude, / I tumbled into the world a gentleman." A connection between physical and moral foulness and low social status seems to be implicit in all this. Perhaps Deflores seeks to mitigate his physical disadvantages and their moral implications by claiming a status to which he is entitled by birth alone and not by moral deserving, just as Beatrice Joanna does.

In this sense, then, Deflores, because of his ugliness, shares with the malcontent his sense of exclusion, of being on the periphery of society. The kind of exclusion which is important to Deflores is exclusion from sexual access to a lady, the daughter of his employer. The sexual longing of a servant who has designs on his mistress is matter for both laughter and fear: he is both popular clown and plotting machiavel. Like the grotesque comic villains of the morality plays, or the machiavel Richard III, he ingratiates himself with the audience as he reveals his skepticism about his betters, (Weimann *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*, 68). He represents himself as a victim of the lady's patrician scorn- "Now do I look to be most richly rail'd at" (2.2.65), but he denies her the respect due to her rank. He sees her less as a lady than as a woman, a member of a class inferior even to himself by virtue of its innate moral weakness. Both horrible and comic, he draws attention to his physical failings and uses them to his own advantage, as does Richard, to win the sympathy of others who are disadvantaged: "There's daily precedents of bad faces / Belov'd beyond all reason. These foul chops / May come into favour one day," (2.1.84). His astonishment when Beatrice Joanna decides to favor him is reminiscent of Richard's reaction to Anne's acceptance of him— "And yet she will debase her eyes on me, . . . On me, that halts and am misshapen thus?" (R3 1.2.251-55).
His asides have a cocky, colloquial turn of phrase and his wit has a coarse edge to it designed to appeal to the man in the street. Deflores's physical defects, too, give him a license to dispense with the social niceties. He has the freedom of speech of the base. It is this that enables him to be so bold and persistent in his address to Beatrice Joanna even at the beginning. John Chamberlain in one of his letters of 1612 mentions the publication of Bacon's new essay, *On Deformity*. Some of Bacon's remarks are applicable to this despised aspirer, this devious, trusted fellow. "Whosoever has anything fixed in his person that doth induce contempt, hath also a perpetual spur in himself, to rescue and deliver himself from scorn; therefore all deformed persons are extreme bold . . . it stirreth in them industry . . . to watch and observe the weakness of others," (*Essays* 199). Their superiors never believe "they should be in possibility of advancement, till they see them in possession." Perhaps the very physical disadvantages which proclaim Deflores's evil nature and place him at the margins of society work to empower him, freeing him to seek the object of his aspiration, his master's daughter.

Deflores uses his persona as comic / menacing misrule figure to mock the style of wooing used by his betters. His rough plain speech tends to parody and deflate the courtly style used by Beatrice Joanna's other admirers and by Beatrice Joanna herself in her conversations with them. His first encounter with the lady elicits a vicious directness from her which is only constrained by Alsemero's presence and which contrasts oddly with her polite explanation of her "infirmity" to her lover. The scene with the dropped glove focuses on the loathing which her physical abhorrence for Deflores reveals. Already Beatrice Joanna begins to seem an unworthy object of ideal love and more of a
"Joan" than a blessed Beatrice. The mock heroic scene where an eager, randy Deflores offers Beatrice Joanna his "service" is a comic parody of the chivalric style. It effectively demolishes any pretensions Beatrice Joanna may have to the role of the chaste, noble mistress. He kneels to her and offers the "service" that this not so virtuous lady wants—the murder of Piracquo. The high point of the satire on service is the assassination itself which Deflores accomplishes in a particularly cowardly way, stabbing Piracquo, whom he has persuaded to disarm, while his back is turned. His behavior is reminiscent of that of another base killer of the gentry described in a murder pamphlet as: "not like a soldiour or a gentleman, but like a brutish manquellour and murderous conspirator." He returns triumphant with the beringed finger, the ghastly trophy of the symbolic castration of his better. Here, Deflores's parodic "service" is given another dimension when it is verbally connected with the low comic plot. There, in the last scene, the old husband Alibius, jealous of his young wife says, "I would wear my ring on my own finger."

The parody continues when Deflores behaves as if his honor has been cheapened by Beatrice Joanna's crass offer of money as a reward. He, her "servant" is offended by being treated like those "verminous fellows" who "destroy things for wages." By his mocking manipulation of the idea of knightly service, he plays with Beatrice Joanna's

24 Middleton often gives names which denote moral qualities, like Deflores. While Beatrice means blessed, Joan has associations with lower status, e.g. "Jone is as good as my lady," in Swetnam's Arraignment, (qtd Purkiss 77).

25 The word "service" is parodied in a similar way in one of the scurrilous ballads written about Frances Howard. Of the poisoned oyster administered to Overbury: "O there was a swete piece of service," ("Poems from a Seventeenth Century Manuscript . . ." (69).

26 These words are used to describe the upstart, Cosby, who, in a murder pamphlet of 1591, treacherously stabs Lord Bourgh while the latter, at Cosby's suggestion, is kneeling down taking off his spurs, (Collier 9).
fastidious lady-like naivete, a naivete which is belied by her responsibility for the recent
scene of casual brutality. After he has made it clear that he intends a different kind of
service to her, one whose end has nothing to do with the lofty aristocratic ideals of honor,
he reveals his contempt for her reputation: as far as he is concerned, her changeable
affections have already made her a whore. At the same time, by insisting that her
physical virginity is essential to his pleasure—his reward for his "service"—he further
degrades the ideal of chastity as part of the concept of honor. Deflores turns the world of
aristocratic honor upside down and substitutes the achievement of sexual pleasure for its
endless deferral in the idealization of perfect love.

The tension in the scene where the assassin claims his reward builds gradually
through a succession of misunderstandings which are finally brutally resolved by
Deflores. The basis of these misunderstandings which are so essential to the dramatic
effect of Beatrice Joanna's climactic degradation is the difference in social status of the
two protagonists—Deflores and the "Lady," the title by which Beatrice Joanna is most
commonly addressed. Beatrice Joanna does not in fact have the attributes of an ideal
lady—chaste in her affections and virtuous in her conduct— but it is dramatically
important at this juncture to represent her as a creature from a world beyond the reach of
her hired killer. It is also important to emphasize her feminine qualities which have led
her astray—her lack of foresight, for example. She is represented here as dense as she is
wicked: a silly woman who clearly needs a firm male hand to pull her into line even if it
has to be Deflores's. The language these two use when they talk about the murder reflects
these differences of class and gender. Deflores is practical, plain, direct, even brutal;
Beatrice Joanna is all lady-like fastidiousness. She seems incapable now of speaking powerfully as she did in the scene of the dropped glove: "Take 'em and draw thine own skin off with 'em," or when she orders her assassin to kill her betrothed: "Take him to thy fury." Instead she registers a poetic delight at the news of the elimination of Piracquo: "My joys start at mine eyes; our sweet'st delights / Are evermore born weeping," while Deflores in his crude way jokily produces the horrible finger. Beatrice Joanna is shocked at the sight: "Bless me! she exclaims, "What hast thou done?" like a housewife chiding a careless cook. She quickly recovers herself and, lady that she is, speaks to her useful servant politely and appreciatively, wishing that he would take his money and leave. Since money is no object in her exalted milieu, she offers him a great deal of it, doubles the sum, and then asks him to name his own price. When this is ineffective, she is genuinely puzzled, full of feminine hesitation: "I'm in a labyrinth. / What will content him? . . . I know not what will please him." Her naive innocence and openness are calculated to double the audience's relish of the dramatic irony and of the expectation that soon this stupid, willful woman will get her come uppance. After this we watch the edifice of Beatrice Joanna's status crumble before Deflores's impeccable moral and practical logic.

He urges his demands on her in plain, forceful, masculine language—she calls it "bold" because it comes from a servant. When she realises his drift all she can do is to try to protect herself physically from the sound of his words as he continues linguistically to beat her down. Her final attempt to stand on the dignity of her rank by reminding him of their social disparity—"Think but upon the distance that creation / Set 'twixt thy blood and
mine, and keep thee there,"— allows Deflores to expound an idea at the heart of the play's implied criticism of the hierarchy, an idea that tends to be lost in the more dramatically interesting matter of the lady's degradation. It is a version of the old "virtue is the true nobility." Morally the lady is as bad as he is and this equality, he says, is more fundamental than any difference of birth. "Look but into your conscience, read me there; / 'Tis a true book; you'll find me there your equal . . . Y'are the deed's creature," (3.4.137-8). It is ironic that it should be Deflores who exhorts Beatrice Joanna to look into her own conscience to recognise evil, since he hardly qualifies as a spiritual adviser. Just before her rape, Beatrice Joanna again alludes to him as Satan, the "viper" with whom she must engender. Contemporary preachers like John Abrernethy were constantly hammering away at the need to examine one's inner self in order to avoid what so clearly afflicts Beatrice Joanna— "spiritual blindnesse" caused, they said, by Satan— the eclipse of reason, judgement, understanding. This confusion in Deflores's function— he is both moral adviser and a satanic figure— is inherent in the role of comic villain, the vice who was both bogeyman and the challenger of authority. Deflores has a double role as wicked upstart and the popular instrument of bringing down the proud lady. The form of his exhortation to examine her conscience is reminiscent of the words of the nun Isabella in Measure for Measure where she reminds the hypocrite Angelo of his own fallen nature: "Go to your bosom, / Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know / That's like my brother's fault," (2.2.137). In both scenes, what appears to be a piece of sound moral advice turns out to be an incitement to sexual discourse. Angelo is sexually aroused and sees Isabella as the devil disguised as a virgin. Deflores assumes that the murderess is
also a whore, making what was then a perfectly valid connection linking one sin with another, murder and adultery. Since she is a murderess—"what the act has made you"—she has lost her innocence and, having betrayed her betrothed, has committed "a kind of whoredom in thy heart." As whore she is sexually available to him or to anyone—potentially "sutler to an army royal." Their changed relationship of power is given visual impact by the reversal of positions with Beatrice Joanna kneeling to her "servant" Deflores, offering him all the wealth she has if he will spare her honor. As he prepares to take his reward, Deflores counsels her to "Silence . . . one of pleasure's best receipts," (4.3.168). The moment of his assertion of physical power over her is also the triumph of his linguistic superiority. Having silenced her by argument he now has the temerity to transform an enforced condition into a component of their mutual pleasure.

The rape of Beatrice Joanna is not the end of Deflores's aspirations. His ambition is the private enjoyment of sexual pleasure, not the publicly acknowledged achievement of power or wealth like so many other aspirers in drama. It is mutual pleasure that is in his mind when, before he rapes her, he tells the terrified Beatrice Joanna, "Thy peace is wrought forever in this yielding" (3.4.169), and later when he assures her that he has planned the fire and the murder of Diaphanta because of his concern for "the safety of us both, / Our pleasure and continuance," (5.1.50). The treatment of rape in The Changeling is different from its treatment in Women Beware Women and both accounts contrast strongly with the unequivocal condemnation of rape usual in the drama.27 The Duke's

27 See Suzanne Gossett, "Best Men are Moulded Out of Faults: Marrying the Rapist in Jacobean Drama."
rape of Bianca in *Women Beware Women* was an expression of his power to take what he wanted. Bianca herself, by submitting to the nobleman, was reinstated in the manner of life to which she had been accustomed. Deflores, mere servant that he is, has also taken what he wanted, but he and Beatrice Joanna are joined in a very different kind of relationship, one which depends, not on the assertion of power and the display of wealth but on deception and secrecy. The nature of their attachment is ambiguous. She praises his "service" to her, a double entendre which has already been used in Deflores's parody of chivalric love. She still maintains that "His face loathes one" (5.1.70), but admits that "I'm forc'd to love thee now." Has she become an "odd feeder" after all, a woman who takes perverse pleasure in the sexual attentions of a loathsome man and prefers them to idealized love? Not only does the play hint at this but it briefly toys with the idea that it may be possible even for the base to enjoy lives of illicit sexual indulgence in secret.²⁸

Glimpses like these of forbidden sexual territory offer the audience a titillating alternative to the more conventional moral perception of Deflores as the evil one. It is possible to see here too, hints, not so much of a Utopia where goods and women are held in common, but of that personal dream of "revolution and pleasure" which Foucault associates with the repressive hypothesis.²⁹ But soon after Deflores's talk of "our pleasure and

²⁸ I owe this idea to Kathleen Maus who, in her discussion of *Epicoene*, writes of the difficulty of enforcing social discipline in a large urban community.

Deborah G. Burks emphasises the difficulty for the law of detecting women's sexual misdemeanors because of their secrecy. I think that the play suggests that upstarts like Deflores may be able to get away with illicit sexual pleasures undetected.

²⁹ "Something that smacks of revolt, of promised freedom . . . slips easily into this discourse on sexual oppression . . . revolution and happiness; or, revolution and a different body, one that is newer and more beautiful; or, indeed, revolution and pleasure," (*The History of Sexuality*, 7).
continuance," he is troubled by the ghost of the man he has murdered— he calls it "a mist of conscience"— and we are returned abruptly to the moral world. It is clear after all that Providence will ensure that he will not get away with it. In the same vein, like a voice from a murder pamphlet, Lord Chief Justice Coke said of the Overbury murder trial that he "observed the finger of God in the manifestation and bringing to light of this matter," (Cobbett 928).

The lady is humiliated and debased by a man who is her social inferior and who aspired to possess her sexually. Her treatment would have been seen by the audience as an appropriate punishment for her high-handed ways and for her uncontrolled sexual desire. After the Overbury trial there was a great deal of vindictive pleasure at the fall of the great, not only of the immoral lady but of the King's beloved Scot, the Earl of Somerset, (Lindley 160). Edward II's liaison with the low-born Gaveston brought about his destruction. The upstart Deflores is, however, the instrument for the punishment of the immoral lady, a punishment which was appropriate to her fault in much the same way as Edward's death by poker in Marlowe's play. Of course it is futile to seek for correspondences amongst these three varied sets of circumstances, two of them fictional. But in each of them matters of social status are inextricably intertwined with sexuality. *The Changeling* belongs to the body of writing spawned by the widespread public resentment of aberrant court behavior, in particular that of Frances Howard in seeking a divorce from the noble Earl of Essex and of both Somersets for plotting the death of Overbury. The play's treatment of Beatrice Joanna's degradation is connected to the popular resentment of Frances Howard who had betrayed a great nobleman for a man
who had been a mere page until he became the King's minion. The obscene "libels" which were produced by the Somersets' fall were not only directed at Frances Howard but they also mock Somerset's elevation from his lowly beginnings. Public concern about faction in high places was vented as moral outrage at sexual license, whether it was homosexual or heterosexual. By the time the play was written, the new favorite, Buckingham had taken Carr's place. The play exploits, for theatrical purposes, the interplay of sex and status in current attitudes towards the elite.

However, like the crime stories to which it is related and the Reynolds' tale which is its source, The Changeling's titillating spectacle is grounded in traditional moral notions. It is part of a broad concern about contemporary morality, and about the threat to social stability of what seemed to be a "deluge of iniquity" in the nation. Wayward behavior in women was a convenient focus of these concerns since order in the family was considered the touchstone of a stable society. Feminine insubordination could threaten stability in a variety of ways, from the undermining of a nobleman's honor in the case of Frances Howard to the subversion of gender difference or social rank by a woman's choice of dress— the occasion of the King's wrath in 1620. In the same year, the threat to social stability from a very different source prompted the King, at Bacon's instigation, to set up a commission to deal with the growing problem of the poor, the idle and the vagrant, who, at a time of economic hardship, might "be driven to desperate


31 It may be significant that Marlowe's Edward II was reissued in 1612 and performed publicly in 1622. (Orgel, 25).
courses," (Lockyer, 261). In the madhouse plot of the play, the threat of uncontrolled feminine sexuality is put in the wider context of contemporary measures taken by the authorities to control social disorder.

In two of his comments on the Essex divorce hearing, Chamberlain, in his common-sense way, settles on the basic cause of the general indignation aroused by the Somersets: the irresponsible behavior of the powerful and the effect of willfulness. He wrote, "great folks will have their ends, without respect of friends or followers," and later, "All this business rises from wilfulness," (Sept 9 1613). It seems clear that he means by "wilfulness," Frances Howard's determination to have her will and change her man.

Women's proverbial willfulness is also linked to their changeable affections— the proverbial "woman is a weathercock"— in The Changeling. The trouble starts when Beatrice Joanna changes her "saint" from Alonzo to Alsemoro, (1.1.150). Two very different pieces of writing from this period, one of them secular, the other one a sermon, take up this question of having one's own way and its connection with change. In the pamphlet Haec Vir, a man and a woman are so changed by their use of the fashions of the other sex that they have difficulty identifying each other's sex. In her defense of her dress, the mannish woman of Haec Vir invokes the joys of freedom of choice in a world where change is the natural order of things. "Now for me to follow change, according to the limitation of mine own will and pleasure, there cannot bee a greater freedome. Nor do I, in my delight of change otherwise then as the whole world doth, or as becommeth a daughter of the world to doe. For what is the world but a very shop or warehouse of change? . . . to conclude, there is nothing but change, which doth surroun and mixe
withall our Fortunes," (qtd. Wright 495). She goes on to evoke a world full of potential pleasures where man (not woman) has the power "to alter, frame and fashion, according as his will and delight shall rule him." The man-woman justifies her love of change by pointing to the world's condition as one of constant change: "sometimes Riches, sometimes Povertie, sometimes Sickness: now Pleasure; presently Anguish," and so on. But by her use of the commercial metaphor—"a very shop or warehouse of change"—she shifts the emphasis away from the medieval and Renaissance commonplace of Fortune's unpredictable changes to the idea of change as an effect of the human activity of choice, of the exercise of the will in the pursuit of pleasure. In The Changeling, Beatrice Joanna too is determined to have her will, to have freedom of choice in the marriage market as the mannish woman wants the liberty to choose from the great world of sensuous delights. The upstart Deflores has his will and unlike Beatrice Joanna, enjoys the pleasure which he longed for, though not of course its "continuance."

The moral underpinning of this concern about change and choice formed the sermon material of many of the preachers of the period, for example, John Abrenethy and Thomas Adams, both part of the same socio-political milieu as The Changeling and Haec Vir. The former dedicated his work to the Earl of Somerset; the patron of the latter was the Earl of Pembroke with whom Middleton has been associated. Those who follow their own will, "whose waies are right in their owne eyes" (Abrenethy 66) are sinners because they deviate from God's path, in allowing their passions to dominate their reason. They have been deformed from the image of God into beasts and suffer from "spirituall frensie." Both preachers use a language to describe sin which has much in common with
the language of *The Changeling* and both refer to institutionalised madness. In his sermon of 1615, *Mystical Bedlam, Or, The World of Mad-Men*, Thomas Adams says that sins are "a crue of Mad-men" whose master is the Devil. He makes it clear that someone who persists in willful conduct is suffering from spiritual madness which will finally lead to Hell. He describes a sinful person as "an erring starre reserved for the blacke darknesse," (46). Beatrice Joanna at the end speaks of Deflores in rather the same way:

"Beneathe the stars, upon yon meteor / Ever hung my fate 'mongst things corruptible,"

(5.3.155-6). Adams pours scorn on those who imagine, (like Beatrice Joanna) that one is free to seek one's own happiness: "thou imaginest felicity to consist in libertie, and liberty to bee nothing els, but ... a power to live as thou list." The willful pursuit of variety, these "refractory and perverse affections" are a deviation from the way of righteousness. He describes this behavior as "a roving, wandring, vagrant extravagant course ... conceyving a multitude of thoughts with much anxiety," (46). We are reminded of Beatrice Joanna and her "giddy turning." He too refers to "hic mulier," and deplores "such translations and borrowing of formes." "Is hee not madde, that knows not himselfe?" "For pride and madness are of the feminine gender," (51). In the contemporary religious culture, all sin is madness. "Trust not spiritual madnesse, lest it bring you to eternal Bedlam," which is Hell, (79). The moral implications of madness in *The Changeling* owe a good deal to this kind of thinking and its deterrent message. The thinking represents the religious dimension of the widespread perception in the nation that there was a moral crisis, and it was on this that the central and local authorities based their attempts to control what were seen as the disruptive elements in society.
The madhouse scenes of *The Changeling* have long been something of a problem both for critics and directors of the play. R. H. Barker wrote in 1958 that "it would be nice if we could forget that the play has a comic story at all." Recent critics who are interested in the psychology of the powerful sexuality of the main plot often deal summarily with the madhouse or ignore it altogether. Others who believe that the play has political significance treat the madhouse as an extension of an allegory which concealed forbidden topics. The 1993 BBC production of *The Changeling* omitted the madhouse altogether, as did Brad Fraser's 1992 re-working of the play, *The Ugly Man*. Some critics see the madhouse scenes as a literal representation of the power of passion over reason, making visible the fall into sin of the main plot. Bawcutt, in the introduction to his edition of *The Changeling*, writes that the play "is based entirely upon traditional attitudes . . . The moral world of *The Changeling* is the orthodox Christian view of sin and punishment," (Bawcutt xlvii). Doob, drawing on Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, says that the play is about the madness of sin and that the madhouse shows us how sin changes men into beasts. Though these beliefs do inform the play and invite a moralised reading of it, they are not, I believe, the whole story. Yet the madhouse does provide the deterrent message of the moralised crime story because it is the ultimate sink of degradation reserved for the confinement of sinners like Beatrice Joanna.

---

32 Margot Heinemann in *Puritanism and the Theatre* barely notices the madhouse plot. Peter Morrison in "A Cangoun in Zombieland: Middleton's Teratological Changeling," is only interested in Beatrice Joanna's sexual psychology.

33 A.A. Bromham and Zara Bruzzi argue that the play's "innocent surface" conceals "a secret picture of the nation" in which is encoded comment on the conflict between the King and Parliament. The madhouse, they say, could be seen as a "comic version of the police state"—a reference to the arrest of dissidents and the suppression of free speech.
Bedlam scenes were popular in Jacobean plays and their significance, like the concept of madness itself, is complex. Bedlam, or Bethlehem, the hospital for the insane which had been established in the 15th century, had signified madness at least since Sir Thomas More's time. Plays clearly sought to exploit the theatricality of these Bedlam scenes. The idea of madness fascinated people in this period, and it was the subject of several treatises, the object of expert treatment or fraud by physicians and divines, and the matter of numerous plays. It was, as Carol Neeley says, "a concept in transition" from its medieval association with the supernatural or the transcendent to more specific secular constructions, (317). Staging madness helped in this process of change. I believe that this secularisation comes about in The Changeling's representation of the madhouse, where the moral notion of madness as sin is used in a specific Jacobean social and political context. This context is the attempt by authority to regulate and manage society through the use of what Foucault called "dividing practices," practices intended to separate the subject from other people, turning them into objects to be considered, manipulated, or observed. The bedlam scenes are, I believe, part of an emerging secular discourse where the madhouse functions as a locus of potentially dangerous disorder in need of control by authority. Far from being adumbrations of the modern lunatic asylum, they draw on the audience's awareness of contemporary corrective institutions designed to

---

34 For Foucault, this change from the sovereign's power of life and death to a power that administers and fosters life began in the 17th century. This "administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" is the basis of the development of "bio-power". (History of Sexuality, 139-40).

Foucault discusses "dividing practices" in Dreyfus and Rabinow, Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, (208).
separate out and contain the growing numbers of the socially unacceptable and potentially
dangerous in Jacobean society— the vagrant, the mad, the whore, the beggar. These
people had lost or forfeited their place in traditional society. They had become the
objects of correction and discipline by authority and of the scrutiny of respectable people
who viewed them with a combination of fascination and distaste. This process was part
of an increasing polarisation which was transforming the traditional society of degree into
one that was divided into "the better sort" and the poor.35 It was part of the preoccupation
with order and stability in this period of economic change and social dislocation.

The institutions for the insane which Foucault describes in his account of the
"great confinement" had not yet been established, but their forerunners in England were
already familiar in the various houses of correction which existed all over the country,
(Beier 164). In these were confined and disciplined the socially unacceptable, especially
the growing numbers of the vagrant poor. These people were viewed with alarm, as a
potential threat to the stability of the nation. A. L. Beier calls them the "product of
profound social dislocations," (3). The incidence of madness, suicide and various forms
of mental disturbance had increased significantly from the end of the 16th century and
became the subject of religious and medical writing and of literature. Michael McDonald
suggests that this increase was connected with "the increasing size and complexity of
English society," (3). Families and communities found it difficult to cope with economic
and social change. The concept of madness in this period was extremely complex and

35 This differentiation in society was made possible, according to Ian Archer, by the consensus of the various elites over what had to be done to ensure social stability. (17).
was full of contradictions, drawing as it did on several different classical authorities on
the subject. The drama itself is testimony to this plurality of meaning. Yet basic to all
the varied configurations of madness was the idea of a disorder or disease of the body,
involving a humoral imbalance and a failure of the authority of reason to control the
passions. Since the body was a metaphor for the natural and political order, madness
could signify disruption in the commonwealth, (MacDonald 183). Increasingly, Salkeld
writes in *Madness and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, madness was used to mean the
subversion of traditional authority. Stuart masques contrasted the madness of the
grotesque anti-masques with the rationality of the monarch. The animal attributes of the
madmen in Jacobean madhouse scenes also signify disorder at this moral level of reason
and passion.

Although mental disturbance had increasingly been represented on the stage since
the 1580's, Bedlam scenes and allusions to madhouses were a particular feature of Stuart
theatre. The first play to stage such a scene was Dekker and Middleton's *The Honest
Whore* in 1604. Various critics have pointed out the theatrical potential of the lunatic
asylum, especially for dance, at a time when the masque was popular at court, (Farr 67).
*The Changeling* was performed at court in 1623. Babb writes that mad scenes were
included "for the entertainment of audiences which were always delighted by the antics of
demented persons," (126). In the case of *The Changeling* at least, this claim seems to
have been justified. Later references to the play show that for many, the antics of the
comedian who played "Tony", the changeling, made the play, and in 1652 it was licensed
as a comedy. \textsuperscript{36} Middleton and Rowley's popular \textit{The Spanish Gypsy} of 1623 refers to the earlier play. Pretiosa, (a girl's role perhaps played by the same actor who played Tony) wants to disguise herself as a gypsy but her father admonishes her, "be to thyself Thyself / and not a changeling." She rejects his advice in a speech apparently recalling the virtuoso performance of this popular actor in \textit{The Changeling}.

"Yes, Father, I will play the changeling.

I'll change myself into a thousand shapes

To court our brave Spectators; I'll change my postures

Into a thousand different variations,

To draw even ladies' eyes to follow mine;"

The precise meaning of the references to change and changelings in the play is a much debated topos in its criticism. The received wisdom of the time was that dissimulation was morally wrong because it was "a metamorphosis of nature" an attempt to hide one's real self, "so we may flourish and get our desire in this cursed world," (Gervase Babington 232). Here, this perception is countered by a tribute to the protean abilities of the actor and his power to entertain. In several Jacobean plays, the madhouse functions, like the theatre, as a place of shifting identities and make believe, paradoxically offering freedom as well as confinement. Like the green world in \textit{A Midsummer Night's Dream}, it is a place for trickery as it is in \textit{The Honest Whore}, Fletcher's \textit{The Pilgrim}, and

\footnote{\textsuperscript{36} "I'd rather see him leap, laugh or cry, 
Then hear the gravest Speech in all the Play, 
I never see Rheade peeping thru' the Curtain, 
But ravishing joy enter'd into my heart."
From the praeludium to Goffe's \textit{The Careless Shepherdess} 1656 quoted in G.E. Bentley, (2:541).}
Dekker's *Northward Ho!*. It is a rendezvous for disguised lovers in *The Honest Whore* and *The Changeling*. Like the forest it is full of wild beasts—the inmates—and is outside the ordered rational world. *The Changeling's* madhouse, with its role-playing lovers and its masque of madmen also exploits the allure of the theatre both as spectacle and as a place of shape-changing, license, and festive misrule.

Like the slaves' rebellion in *The Bondman*, however, the madhouse scenes have a darker side. There is a tension between its representation as a place of comic misrule and its deterrent function as an emblem of a hell for sinners or as a repository for the socially marginalised. The madhouse is the locus of comic reversals of status as was the slaves' revolt, but in this play, too, such changes can endanger order. Disguised as a fool, Antonio forfeits his proper social identity. Though Pedro implies that his "cousin" is a gentleman and the heir of a great family, Lollio's reply hints at the power of the madhouse to change all that. "At first sight I knew him for a gentleman, he looks no other yet," (1.2.112). He offers to raise Antonio's wit to the height of a "constable's," a village dignitary who was frequently a comic butt like Dogberry. In this upside down world, Isabella, the imprisoned wife, is able to use disguise to take control of her sexuality and unmask the designs of her fashionably lovesick gentlemen suitors, and save her old husband from being cuckolded. However, the comedy of misrule quickly turns dark: Isabella threatens her keeper with murder; disguise is shown to be a form of deceit. Reversals of status are more dangerous than festive. To wear clothes that repudiated one's social status indicated irrationality, as was the case with Malvolio and his yellow cross-gartering. When the disguised Antonio declares his love: "Take no acquaintance /
Of these outward follies; there is within / A gentleman that loves you," Isabella scornfully rejects him: "When I see him / I'll speak with him . . . You become not your tongue when you speak from your clothes." She objects to the fact that he is not what he seems. Her own attempt at shape-changing play revealed that her lover was too blind to see her real self. All her beauty was in her "garments." Her concern over deceptive appearances, a concern reiterated in writing throughout the period, gives the comedy of the madhouse a moralising cast which shuts down the misrule. Finally, in the main plot, Beatrice Joanna's apparent virtue and beauty turn out to conceal her inner evil, an "ugly whoredom" and her status is changed from lady to whore, (5.3.97). As for Deflores, his "servant obedience" hid his "master sin, imperious murder." At the end of the play the dangers attendant upon dissimulation are pointed out in a bizarre mixture of comic and tragic moods. Antonio and Fransiscus, the role-playing suitors, perkily own up to their deceits as part of a wholesale public revelation of "changes" played out against the grisly tableau of the corpses of Beatrice Joanna and Deflores. In A Midsummer Night's Dream, the festive other world of disguise and transformation is recuperated by rational society and harmony is magically restored. In The Changeling, the festive pleasure is repudiated by that society as immoral, a danger to order, but it remains nevertheless as part of the madhouse's function as voyeuristic spectacle, an exemplary but titillating show, like the Bedlam it perhaps parodies.38

---

37 Michael MacDonald writes that clothes were believed to suggest psychological states as well as rank— the melancholy wore dark, dishevelled dress. (131).

38 Robert Reed claims that in this period, Bethlehem Hospital admitted visitors for the payment of a fee, and that it was a tourist attraction. His source is a note in O'Donoghue's The (continued...)
Dr Alibius's establishment had its paying audience who "came to view the lunatics" like Bethlehem monastery in *The Honest Whore* and the madhouse in *Northward Ho!. He calls them, "The daily visitants that come to see / My brainsick patients," (1.2. 53). Dr Alibius describes them as people of the better sort: "rich in habits, / Of stature and proportion very comely," the same sort of people, perhaps, who had come to see Mrs Turner make her pious end, or paid extortionate prices for seats to hear the Overbury trial, also spectacles which offered "frightful pleasure." Lollio's whip and Tony's dancing anticipate similar scenes in real life at Bicetre in the Paris of the late 18th century. Foucault in *Madness and Civilization* quotes Mirabeau's description:

"Certain attendants were well known for their ability to make the mad perform dances and acrobatics, with a few flicks of the whip," (69). Yet, apart from Bethlehem hospital, which Allderidge describes as "an ancient monastic slum in Bishopsgate" housing about twenty inmates, the mad were not yet segregated or confined in institutions. In 1621, the hospital, a charitable foundation, was being investigated because its director, the King's physician, Dr Helkiah Crooke, was suspected of financial mismanagement. There may be an allusion here, but to see the madhouse as a version of Bethlehem Hospital, as Robert Reed does, is to oversimplify it. The play exploits, as the drama had always done, the inherent theatricality of madness and its imitations, but at the same time the madhouse

---

38 (...continued)

*Story of Bethlehem Hospital*: 6th February 1609-1610 in Hist. MSS Report VI pt i. Lord Percy with Lady Penelope and her two sisters "saw the lions, the show of Bethlem, the place where the prince was created, and the fireworks at the Artillery Gardens," (405).

Patricia Allderidge, the archivist of the hospital, on the other hand, says that there is little evidence that sightseeing at Bedlam developed before the 18th century.
draws on a broader contemporary awareness of corrective institutions like bridewells, which by the 1620's had become little different from prisons. They too had their theatrical aspect: "in London it became fashionable to attend the whippings of prostitutes at Bridewell, (Beier 168).

Because of the play's connection with crime in high places, the notion of the social and moral descent of the unruly woman and her exposure to the public is basic to the conception of the play. The idea is implicit in the play's relationship to the popular crime story genre and in its conception of the madhouse. The madhouse represents both an ethical and a secular notion of theatre. At the murder trial of Frances Howard, Lord Chief Justice Coke had referred to her crime as having been "acted in the vault, and since upon the stage... for that which hath been upon the stage [i.e. the public court], which is the theatre of God's justice," (Cobbett 955). It was believed that Providence ensures that sin is brought to light (as if in the theatre, Coke suggests here), and punished. Chamberlain, in a letter about the same trial, revealed another kind of theatricality when he remarked on the unparalleled public interest in the event and the high price being paid for "places," (Lindley 159). The madhouse stands partly within Coke's traditional moral discourse of sin and divine judgement. Because sin is madness, the madhouse is a place for sinners, an emblem of the hell for which they are destined. But it is also part of an emerging, secular discourse where the madhouse is the locus of disorder and irrationality in need of control by authority. The nature of its theatricality changes. No longer is it part of the theatrum mundi in which God observes his sinful people, but an institution for the disorderly, viewed by the better sort of people with a mixture of distaste and fascination.
Some writers have suggested that the madmen in *The Changeling* function as an anti-masque, a burlesque of the main plot (Farr 68), but on the whole, critics are reticent about the madmen themselves. It is easy to underestimate their effect since it is usually the sane who speak. Yet the mad have a very strong theatrical presence in the claustrophobic air of Dr Alibius' "pinfold." Their cries and broken fragments of their talk from "within" form a counterpoint to the theme of dissimulation and counter-dissimulation played by the three men as they tread the mazes of the madhouse in their pursuit of the doctor's wife. All the madmen appear together, above the stage, with what might have been a crescendo of animal cries, just as Lollio has observed Antonio offering illicit love to Isabella. They reinforce his contemptuous comment, "Cuckoo, cuckoo," with their howling and braying. Later, as Lollio plays the two lovers off against each other and there is talk of murder, the madmen perform their dance, rehearsing the masque which will celebrate the wedding of a murderess. Because the animal aspect of madness indicated the ascendancy of the sensual, non-rational part of man, this scene at one level would have functioned as a moral comment on the sinful desires of the protagonists. Sin deformed men into beasts and each animal represented a particular sin. Nashe, writing in *Christ's Tears Over Jerusalem* of the brothels of London— institutions which the authorities constantly tried to regulate— said, "as we apparraile ourselves in the Beastes skinnes in selfe same sorte we clothe our soules in theyr sinnes," (113). With its crew of braying, barking lunatics, the madhouse seems to show us the traditional Christian world of sin and punishment, where the madness of sin changes men from the image of God into beasts.
Yet there is something fascinating in the spectacle of this animality that goes beyond an interest in its exemplary function. There is evidence of this other kind of interest in, for example, the doctor’s attempts to treat Ferdinand’s lycanthropy in Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*, or Friar Anselmo’s description of his dangerous patients in *The Honest Whore*: “Others we have agen like hungry Lions, / Fierce as wild Bulls, untameable as flies,” (5.2.163). Burton writes at length in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, which appeared in 1621, of the animal hallucinations of madmen, (1:462). In these examples, madness is viewed in a secular way, not as part of the moral universe which we all inhabit, but as something separate, an object of interest, a phenomenon which could be observed or manipulated. In some plays, these changing notions of madness allowed its exploitation as entertainment even as it was being presented as a moral deterrent. The dance of the madmen from the "common hospital" in *The Duchess of Malfi* is presented as a theatrical amusement—"full of change and sport," featuring various butts of social satire. Yet it is also full of horror and the presence of the howling lunatics in the Duchess' room is part of Ferdinand's elaborate plan to "bring her to despair." This juxtaposition of the horrible and the entertaining is what makes for the theatrical allure of the madhouse, and the "frightful pleasure" that Dr Alibius promises the audience from his masque of madmen.

Several critics point out that the conception of the madhouse owes much to the emblematic tradition. Clearly it is the castle’s opposite. Middleton had used castles in an emblematic way in his other work, for example in *Hengist King of Kent*, and in his

39 Ann Lancashire, "The Emblematic Castle in Shakespeare and Middleton."
Lord Mayor's shows. In *The Changeling* the castle seems to stand both for a fortress of virtue and social order and the chastity of Vermandero's daughter. The madmen and their keeper also have something in common with the older dramatic tradition, that of the medieval mystery play's image of a group of sinners in hell—a dungeon or pit in a castle—presided over by the gate-keeper. The "devil-porter" scene in *Macbeth* in which various professions are satirised, as they sometimes are in madhouse scenes, has been connected by Glynn Wickham with the mystery play. *The Changeling's* madhouse, too, is a place of disorder and sin where, it is implied at the end, the lady Beatrice Joanna and her lover belong as sinners and outcasts from decent society. Alsemero's actions when he discovers the truth about his wife recall the emblematic tradition. He locks her in his closet, calling himself her "keeper". He sends Deflores in after her, saying "I'll be your pander now; rehearse again / Your scene of lust, that you may be perfect / When you shall come to act it to the black audience / Where howls and gnashings shall be music to you,"

(5.3.114-17). Perhaps he sees Beatrice Joanna's punishment in hell as a truly endless undoing by the horrible servant. Again, Deflores tells Alsemero that he "coupled with your mate / At barley-break," the game the madmen are heard playing in the asylum. Beatrice Joanna's cries from the closet, "O, O, O," are not only responses of an indeterminate sexual nature, as Marjorie Garber suggests, but they represent the howling of madmen or souls in hell, (27). This scene in the play is reminiscent of the image of hell-as-Bedlam, the "dark chamber" which Thomas Adams, in his sermon, had said God had prepared for sinners. It is, I believe, an analogy of the madhouse. As a place of confinement for immoral women like Beatrice Joanna it also would have had a
contemporary meaning for the Jacobean audience, drawn as they were for the most part from the upper or upwardly mobile section of an increasingly polarised society. As the castle's other, the madhouse represented the dark underside of Jacobean society which so alarmed the respectable citizen and troubled the government. Though Beatrice Joanna is not mad in one sense, her repudiation of the natural bonds of the family would have been considered a sign of irrationality; the contemporary physician and divine, Thomas Napier, treated such symptoms in his female patients as irrational, (MacDonald 142). Besides, her husband considers her a whore. Whores were confined in houses of correction, bridewells, in Jacobean England along with the other detritus of a society divided between the respectable and the failures— the vagrant poor, the lunatic beggars, the prostitutes.

The madhouse, then, is much more than a version of Bedlam. The interplay of fiction and contemporary experience is more complex and contradictory than this interpretation allows. *The Changeling* endorses the ethical convictions that equated sin with madness, and at the same time, the play is embedded in the contemporary political reality of the actions taken by the state to separate the socially unacceptable from the respectable part of the population. The same governing body oversaw both the London bridewell and Bedlam hospital and the inmates of both were referred to as prisoners. In this classification of the socially unacceptable, madness, immorality, poverty and vagrancy overlapped. In a cosmology based on correspondences, madness, like vagrancy or whoredom, implied disorder. All such people seemed to have repudiated traditional social structures. In a society where clothes meant status, the beggar's rags and the
madman's outlandish garb set them apart from other people. The mad spoke gibberish and many of the vagrant had a dialect of their own. The mad, like the army of the displaced and unemployed were feared by respectable people as alien, and they were often treated in the same way by the authorities. The lunatic beggars, the Toms o' Bedlam or Abram men were, like vagabonds, sometimes committed to bridewells, (Beier, 116). Whores, who threatened the order of the family and therefore of the whole commonwealth, were treated by the law as madmen, (Leinwand 142). Because the lady Beatrice Joanna in The Changeling is revealed as a whore and murderess, she belongs morally to this world of mad sinners confined in institutions and subjected to the public gaze. The madhouse is the huit clos at the end of her moral and social degradation.

If the stage representation of the madhouse contributed to contemporary thinking about the exclusion of the dangerous and disorderly, Carol Neely suggests that it also gave the excluded a voice. Although the madmen in The Changeling have almost no dialogue, those in 1 The Honest Whore have much more to say. Here is no great central figure like Lear whose madness threatens the stability of the state, yet the combined effect of these social outcasts also had the potential for dangerous disorder. Some are sinners—bawds and lawyers and the usual caterpillars of the commonwealth. Some are simply comic butts, like the Welsh. But many of them are middling folk—merchant, farmer, citizen, scholar— driven out of their wits by disaster or misfortune. They are, like Middleton's expropriated tenant farmers, part of society's downwardly mobile whose madness springs from adverse circumstance rather than from a moral failing in themselves. Yet the accepted wisdom of the successful middling sort explained social
mobility by attributing it to the moral qualities of the individual, not to external conditions. The same kind of thinking identified madness with sin where a breakdown of the sovereignty of reason was caused by a failure in self-mastery of the individual. Though the idea of madness as sin still informs the Jacobean mad scenes, there are newer elements which reveal a different kind of awareness of social problems. In Dekker and Middleton's *The Honest Whore*, one of the madmen protests, "Whip me? what justice is this, to whip me because I'm a beggar?—Alas? I am a poore man: a very poore man,"

(5.2. 233). In *The Changeling*, one madman says, "Put's head in the pillory, the bread's too little." Scraps of dialogue like these, what Carol Neely calls "quotation"—culturally resonant fragments—suggest that the madhouse is grounded in the desperate conditions of contemporary society.

Though these elements in the plays may have opened up, as Neely suggests, a space for the interrogation of the discourse of social exclusion, we must remember, however, that an important function of the representation of the madhouse was to afford theatrical pleasure. The pleasure offered to the audience could be compared to the pleasure derived from reading the "improving" stories of shocking crime or the pleasure felt by the respectable part of society when they contemplated the segregation of social misfits. Like the bridewell, the stage madhouse is a place for the confinement of the disorderly, of those who were outside society. Apart from her degradation, Beatrice Joanna's punishment is to be the one her husband Alsemero imagined for her,

40 Richard Halpern writes of the way the conception of social mobility in this period was reduced to the essence of the individual, and it was this which determined success or failure in the struggle up the ladder. He calls this "the discourse of capacities." It was, he says, an ideological narrative interpreted through the prejudice of the rising classes, (88).
confinement in a medieval hell with "a black audience / Where howls and gnashings shall be music to you." For the audience in the Phoenix, Dr Alibius' establishment invoked more realistic, but equally frightening contemporary images of the confinement that should be the fate of irresponsibly sinful ladies like Beatrice Joanna. Though the madhouse functioned in an exemplary way, it also offered a theatrical pleasure, which, like the spectacle of the sinner's degradation, was an erotic one, because it was the spectacle of a woman's fall into sin. An essential part of the audience's pleasure lay in the satisfaction of seeing the madness of sin as Other, a separate world in which they could be assured they had no part, because they were on the side of morality, law and order, and upward social mobility.
Epilogue.

In 1992 Brad Fraser's play *The Ugly Man*, based on *The Changeling*, had its U.K. premiere in the Battersea Arts Centre. Fraser, perhaps as Middleton did, enjoys notoriety and courts controversy. Because his plays feature brutal violence and deviant sexuality, they provoke opposition in some quarters, but this "usually dissolves into healthy box-office receipts."¹ He deliberately writes in the idiom of popular culture to engage a wider audience and he uses the images and icons of that culture from movies and TV shows in his plays. Though *The Ugly Man* is a psychological re-working of *The Changeling*, it grotesquely parallels the older play in many ways. It remains faithful to the powerful central relationship of wayward rich girl and repulsive underling in the characters of the spoilt southern belle, Veronica, and the ranch hand, Forest, whose face is scarred with burns. Instead of a father determined to control his daughter's marriage, Sabina, the rich, widowed matriarch, propels her daughter into an arranged match with the heir to a prominent family. In a 17th century play, an advantageous marriage was assumed to be a matter of social significance, whatever the dramatically interesting resistance to it might be. In Fraser's play, attention is shifted away from the social dimension of the match to the individual psychological problems which it implies. Sabina's belief that marriage should be a practical alliance for financial and social advantage rather than a relationship based on mutual attraction is not based on dynastic interests, as was Vermandero's, but is

---

explained by her abhorrence of sex, originating in her unpleasant experiences with Veronica's father. The audience learns of this through Fraser's clever manipulation of the virginity test, one of several devices he takes from Middleton. He also uses the bedtrick and includes a rather persistent ghost. The assassin keeps, not the finger, but the bloody skull of his victim. Phallic imagery is unnecessary when intercourse is simulated onstage, though there is a stage direction for Forest to polish a piece of metal pipe in a marked manner. Fraser's writing is not without humor.

He trumps Middleton's play in a number of ways. There are two ugly men, two people seeking revenge, and his proliferation of diverse sexual relationships recalls the complex plot of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. The play has more murders than *The Changeling*, and the shocking violence of Deflores' onstage killing of the unprotected Piracquo pales before the mayhem and sadistic butchery of Fraser's play. The real ugly man in this play, Leslie, the gay brother of Veronica's betrothed, uses a mustache to hide the scar left by surgery for a cleft palate, a strategy which indicates his initial acceptance of society's view of his sexuality. He is the ex-lover of the Alsemero figure and has a masochistic sexual relationship, like Veronica, with the Ugly Man, Forest. At the end of *The Changeling*, the wicked get their just deserts, the father resumes control of his citadel with the help of his son-in-law, and Tomazo's desire for revenge is satisfied. Leslie, the Tomazo figure, also wants revenge for the mysterious death of his brother, but wants to punish Forest for using him sexually when Forest really loved Veronica. Surrounded by corpses at the end of the play, Leslie is unable to say with Tomazo, "I am satisfied, my injuries / Lie dead before me. I can exact no more." Leslie plans further cruelties and the
curtain goes down as he prepares to cut off Forest's shattered legs. The play ends, not, like *The Changeling*, with the restoration of authority, but with the triumph of the truly "strong" man, who turns out to be not the physically powerful Forest, but the weak, rejected homosexual. He is the upstart, the "ugly freak" with the cleft palate whom the matriarch had patronised. As he assumes power over his ex-lover and the ranch, it is clear that he, like Deflores, has in mind "our pleasure and continuance;" no "mist of conscience," however, will be allowed to interfere with his designs.

The play, like the first three plays in this discussion, demonstrates the triumph of the outsider. *The Ugly Man* could be *The Changeling* seen from the perspective of the upstart— as Deflores' success story. The differences are a matter of the deployment of sexuality. Deflores is a socially marginal figure like the malcontent and, although his aspiration is not for status like the malcontent but for sexual pleasure, Beatrice Joanna's rank is a crucial element in his obsession. For the protagonists in *All's Well That Ends Well* and *The Bondman*, desire was inextricably involved in the representation of social ambition. It was used to make a case for a more inclusive, reformed elite. In *The Ugly Man*, Leslie's desire has nothing to do with the politics of status or the problems of fitness to rule; it belongs to the politics of sexual identity. At the end of the play, Leslie has shaved off the moustache that hid his deformity. In this gesture of mock "decoding," the play signals that it had a political agenda after all. *The Ugly Man* seems merely to be a camped-up free for all, parodying the cliches of a sexualised mass culture, but it turns out that the sex is the politics. As in Middleton's play, the men are left together at the end; the corrupting presence of women has been banished. But this does not signify the
restoration of the traditional order. In *The Ugly Man* the representatives of order are
dead: it seems that the revolution is at hand— the sexual freedom that Deflores briefly
hinted at in his hope of "our pleasure and continuance" before Providence got the better
of him. In *The Changeling*, the madhouse, the dark other of the castle, stood as an
emblem for the separation of the mad from the rational, the marginalised from the
respectable. There can be no madhouse in *The Ugly Man* because it is not the
maintenance of order which is at stake but its transgression. In Fraser's play, the binary
oppositions that beset the thinking of Middleton's society have vanished; castle and
madhouse are one. The sight of the stage piled with bloody corpses at the end is
reminiscent of a baroque vision of hell. In place of the deterrent message of Middleton's
play the audience is offered for its frightful pleasure the bogus "liberation" which
Foucault sees as part of the continuing deployment of sexuality, mockingly served up in
the images of mass culture to an audience sated with titillating spectacle.

In the thinking of the 17th century, the erotic belonged at the low end of an ethical
system founded on a God-given rational order, and sexual desire was something to be
controlled. In these Jacobean plays, its control is treated as the touchstone of moral
deserving and therefore of acceptance into the elite. At the same time, however, the
representation of desire functions in a much more positive and productive way. It
becomes, in Foucault's words, "a transfer point for relations of power . . . it is capable of
serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies," (*History of
Sexuality* 103). One of the strategies it supports in these plays is the attempt to persuade
the audience to envisage an elite reformed by the inclusion of people of merit from
outside it. The corollary of this is the exclusion and separation of those who fail to measure up to certain moral standards. Helena, Camiola and Marullo are moved by ambitious love to aspire to noble marriages. The transformation of their desire which follows from their focus on themselves as "ethical subjects" is a strategic move undertaken in the interests of power. It enables Helena to be received into the nobility and Marullo to earn patrician status. It allows Camiola to withhold her gifts in order to teach the elite a lesson. While the acceptance of these protagonists helps to restore and sustain traditional order, it also entails a change in that order to accommodate or respond to these newcomers. In The Changeling, the lady is also moved to action by desire, but her action creates havoc in the patriarchal order. There is no transformation of the self; instead, her punishment is a sexual and social degradation which exposes the cleavage between the morally superior and those who are outside rational society.

The theatrical deployment of sexual desire which I have described was, I believe, an element in what Foucault called the "the moving substrate of force relations" which constantly engender states of power, (History of Sexuality 93). This deployment played its part in the slow transformation of the way society was perceived: from the traditional belief that the body politic was an organic whole in which everyone played his or her part to the acceptance of a society divided into gentry and gentrified and the laboring poor; into patrician and plebeian cultures. An effect of this theatrical deployment of desire in the struggle to deserve status was the production of a secular sexual discourse which was

---

2 This account of gradual social change is, of necessity, simplistic. Changes in the traditional concept of order took place over centuries. In the period I am dealing with, the historians whom I have quoted notice a trend towards polarization.
separate from the common ethical roots by which social aspiration and sexual desire were bound together as aberrations of the will in pursuit of the world and the flesh. This discourse became part of the theatrical entertainment provided by a commercial theatre which was increasingly responsive to the tastes of the upwardly mobile, sophisticated audiences of the private theaters. Dramatists were able to appropriate the forms of sexual discourse which were already to hand in the theatre—popular bawdy, satire, the discourse of courtly love, and make of these materials something new, something which was neither vulgar nor elitist but could incorporate elements of both.

The use to which the erotic was put in these Jacobean plays, then, helped to change the way society was perceived, and at the same time sex was exploited as a commodity in the commercial theatre. In his parody of The Changeling, Fraser has dramatised the acquisition of power by the marginalised "freak" and has used the images and language of pop culture to make his play accessible to a wider audience. He, like his Jacobean predecessors, makes strategic use of the erotic; however, he draws not on an ethical system advocating the control of passion by reason, but on much later notions which tie individual freedom to the knowledge and expression of one's sexual identity. He too, has a political agenda, though its area of advocacy is not the individual's place in the public sphere, as was the case in the early plays, but the domain of private experience—sex, an entity which, Foucault claims, has, over the centuries been constructed in the deployment of sexuality by power. Beneath the bizarre campiness of Fraser's play is an ideology which proclaims the overwhelming importance of the individual's sexual identity. In the Jacobean plays, the theatrical deployment of the erotic
in the representation of social mobility produced a sexual discourse which was an
important part of the entertainment offered by the commercial theatre. In *The Ugly Man*,
the wholesale exploitation of sex for theatrical effect which is part of the marketing of
Fraser's plays overwhelms and even appropriates the sexual ideology so that the force of
the ideas is lost. Everything has indeed become "grist to the theatrical mill." Ideology is
absorbed into commodity. It is not surprising to read that Fraser has been taken on by
Disney, that Master of the world's Revels. Fraser hopes for a mass audience to
disseminate his ideas; the Jacobean writers were looking to one whose tastes were
increasingly differentiated. For both, the representation of sexual desire was the linchpin
of their strategies, and sexual discourse the theatrical commodity.
WORKS CITED.


Bible. King James Version.


Neely, Carol Thomas. "Documents in Madness: Reading Madness and Gender in Shakespeare's Tragedies and Early Modern Culture" ShQ. 42.3 (Fall 1991): 315-337.


