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Sexual Energy and Moral Order in Middleton's The Changeling

by

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ABSTRACT

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The Renaissance in England can best be characterized as a period that was neither medieval nor modern, but during which the decaying and emerging modern world views existed side by side. The modern emphasis on individualism, social mobility, and the doctrine of progress can also be found in seventeenth-century England. At the same time, the belief in an ultimate moral order and a Christian cosmosgraphy remained firm until at least the middle of the eighteenth century. Moreover, men of the Renaissance firmly believed that the best earthly form of government, in the commonwealth, in the community, and in the family, corresponded to the order God imposed on his creation as a whole.

The great tragedies written during the English Renaissance were, I believe, at least partially the result of the tension that existed between these different world views. On the one hand, Renaissance protagonists possessed a large store of individual energy which made them heroic if not always good men. On the other hand, when they overstepped the bounds established for all men by moral law, whether that law was manifested in
an earthly order or known through the revelation of God's will, they had to be destroyed. Thus, an audience could appreciate the hero and at the same time understand the necessity of his destruction.

In Thomas Middleton's *The Changeling* energy takes the form of sexual desire. What Beatrice calls her "love" for Alsemero is really the same thing as De Flores's lust for her. As a result, murder seems to both of them an insignificant price to pay for sensual gratification. Beatrice and De Flores dominate the play's main action; while they are morally repugnant, they have a fascination for their audience. Everyday virtue seems pale beside their sins.

But Beatrice must fall since she has severed all connection with the proper moral order, in this case the family structure, by murdering her fiance. Each of her evil actions necessitates the next, until finally the sins themselves cause her discovery. After she and De Flores have been destroyed, order is restored and a new family structure is built.

While the forms energy and order take in Middleton's play are unique, their interaction and the resolution of the tension between them is perfectly in keeping with other Renaissance tragedies and with the beliefs of the age itself. At least in *The Changeling*, Thomas Middleton appears very much a man of his own age.
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THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY BACKGROUND

I

Through their successful analyses of certain works, the so-called "new critics" taught us a great deal about some structural principles operative in works of literary art; through their failures, they taught us that literature, because it is created by flesh-and-blood human beings bounded by time and space, cannot be treated as if it existed in a vacuum. A piece of literature may tell us a great deal about the mood and temper, the beliefs and attitudes, of its age; more important to the student of literature, what we know about the age may tell us much about its art. To understand and properly evaluate a work of literary art, we should get as close as possible to the forces and events that influenced its author. Such an approach is especially interesting when we are analyzing Thomas Middleton's greatest tragedy, *The Changeling*.¹

Since Middleton's historical period is the English Renaissance, understanding his age is no simple task. On the basis of the literature, some scholarly detectives find evidence to support extreme positions on the nature of the period. With understandable enthusiasm, some modernists accentuate only the roots of our own age; they forget the staying power of much that is medieval well into the eighteenth
century. According to this view, Addison's and Pope's reflections on the Principle of Plenitude and the Chain of Being must be ignored or explained away. Some medievalists, on the other hand, would have us believe that there are few significant differences between the men of the Middle Ages and those of the Renaissance. To them, "the wheel is come full circle" would have almost the same meaning to Shakespeare as to Chaucer. Certainly, in the period, there are some works that seem more medieval, others more modern. But there are very few that would fit unobtrusively into a later or an earlier period. In fact, the abundance and validity of the evidence presented by both medievalists and modernists should make us chary of accepting either extreme position.

Events and publically embraced ideologies, instead of metaphors and actions carefully selected from the literature, give us the clearest picture of the period. This is true because they reveal that the seventeenth century in England cannot be accurately characterized by either extreme view; it was an age in which men were moving from one world view to another.

In 1600 the educated Englishman's mind and world were more than half medieval; by 1660 they were more than half modern. The character and causes for such a transformation are far too complex to be summed up in a formula, but something of its breadth and scope may be suggested by such labels as democracy and imperialism, industrialism and capitalism, the advance of pure and applied science
and the gospel of progress, the spread of the scientific, secular, and anti-authoritarian spirit through other domains of thought and action.  

From the defeat of the Invincible Armada, through the founding of the East India Company, Essex's rebellion, the Gunpowder Plot, the settlement of the New World, the "Long Parliament," the Civil War, the Commonwealth, and the Protectorate, down to the Restoration, the special concerns of Englishmen changed as rapidly as in any other comparable period, including our own age of -isms and the bomb. Thus, from our vantage-point, it may seem an age in turmoil. The direction and the speed of the changes occurring during Middleton's time may appear the most important characteristic of the seventeenth century. How it appeared to the individual artist then living is another matter.

On a contemporary day-to-day basis, the seventeenth century can best be described as a period of overlap, in which the decaying medieval and emerging modern world views existed side by side. By this I mean that the large characteristics of both world views can be found in the period, but that the forms they took were dynamic, just as human life and the history of nations are dynamic. Metaphysical systems agreed, with few exceptions, on the hierarchical nature of the universe and its "kinds" throughout the seventeenth century. The concept of degree, the Doctrine of Correspondences, and
the Cosmic Dance remained important. But the earthly equivalent to the hierarchy of the Upper Air, to be realized in the religio-political union of all Christendom, broke down completely. In place of this dream of the later Middle Ages, the new nationalism was born. In place of the vision of Europe as one fold under one shepherd, the Reformation brought many folds and many shepherds, each of which accused the others of being heretical or, worse, in league with the devil. And, while Burckhardt's influential picture of the Renaissance man is now considered idealized, men, in numbers undreamed of in medieval times, did find an opportunity to cross class lines, to learn though members of the laity, to move from poverty to wealth. We need only remember the parentage of some of the "university wits" to understand the new possibilities. What do these contrasted "ideas" and politico-sociological "facts" mean? They mean simply that man cannot live by either metaphysical abstractions or daily realities alone. They mean that in the eyes of Englishmen of the Renaissance, the abiding metaphysics and the changing pattern of daily existence affected and in some sense altered each other, and that a simple discovery of one element or the other in a work of art is not enough.

The changes the Renaissance brought to the old ideals are more easily demonstrated than explained. An abiding
dream of man's is the idea of and sometimes the belief in a previous golden age, and the possibility that it may some-
day return. While Christian thinkers must emphasize the difference between this world and the next, they too have often written of an ideal earthly community before the second coming. In medieval times this state would be realized when all the inhabitants of Christendom performed perfectly and performed only the functions assigned them according to their station. One twelfth-century analogy, made by John of Salisbury, compares the commonwealth to the human body. The priests are the soul, and "since the soul is ... the prince of the body, and has rulership over the whole thereof, so those whom our author calls the prefects of religion preside over the entire body." The prince is the head; he is subject only to God and to the priests, "even as in the human body the head is quickened and governed by the soul."

The place of the heart is filled by the senate, from which proceeds the initiation of good works and ill. The duties of eyes, ears, and tongue are claimed by the judges and the governors of provinces. Officials and soldiers correspond to the hands. Those who always attend upon the prince are likened to the sides. Financial officers and keepers ... may be compared with the stomach and intestines ... The husbandmen correspond to the feet, which always cleave to the soil, and need the more especially the care and foresight of the head, since while they walk upon the earth doing service with their bodies, they meet the more often with stones of stumbling, and therefore deserve the aid of protection all
the more justly since it is they who raise, sustain, and move forward the weight of the entire body....

Then and then only will the health of the commonwealth be sound and flourishing, when the higher members shield the lower, and the lower respond faithfully and fully in like measure to the just demands of their superiors, so that each and all are as it were members one of another by a sort of reciprocity, and each regards his own interest as best served by that which he knows to be most advantageous for the others.6

The ideal order was, of course, that which most closely resembled the heavenly order. In medieval terms that meant a harmony by function through the concept of degrees. Disorder, dissonance was the result of the foot wanting to be the head, or the head the soul. In the Renaissance, these unseemly aspirations became realities, and a new resolution had to be justified as the real pattern of divinely inspired harmony.

In 1517 Erasmus of Rotterdam, intoxicated with the rediscovery of ancient knowledge, declared that he saw the "near approach of a golden age." In the near future man would have three of the chief blessings of humanity restored: true Christian piety, learning of the best sort, and, familiarly, the public and lasting concord of all Christendom.7 Erasmus, like his friends Colet and More, did not want a new order, only a perfection of the old. Their attacks against obscurantist monks, the worship of images and relics, the extortion of the ecclesiastical courts, and the worldliness
of the clergy were remarkably like the preachments of the
Wycliffites a hundred years before. But conditions in
England had changed greatly during those hundred years. As
a result, the "head" rather than the "soul" became the effec-
tive leader of the Christian commonwealth. And Erasmus's
golden age became a time of increased discord throughout
Christendom, on the basis of national rather than class
strife.

How well the old analogies could be transformed to meet
the new situation can be seen in the works of Elizabethan
historians, moralists, and artists. Thomas Norton hoped
that Grafton's *Chronicle at Large* (1569) might teach the
meddling clergy to refrain from political activities, that
the ecclesiastical state may learn to abhor
traitorous practices and indignities done
against kings by the popish usurping clergy.

The Book of Homilies of the English Church was even more
adamantly in favor of a head-dominated society, and a re-
pudiation of the medieval soul domination. For kings, even
bad kings, received their office from God:

> as it is written of God in the Book of Proverbs
> "Through me kings do reign; through me counsellors
> make just laws; through me do princes bear rule
> and all judges of the earth execute judgment."

All those who resisted the will of the prince were eligible
for damnation, unless the prince ordered actions expressly
against God's commandments: "forasmuch as they resist not man but God; not man's device and invention but God's wisdom, God's order, power and authority." The worst of all sinners, according to this doctrine, was the Roman hierarchy, John of Salisbury's soul of the commonwealth, for

the bishop of Rome teacheth that they that are under him are free from all burdens and charges of the commonwealth and obedience towards their prince, most clearly against Christ's doctrine and St. Peter's.®

The new order was celebrated extravagantly in the literature of the period. In George Peele's The Arraignment of Paris (1584?), Elizabeth received the golden ball, intended for the fairest of the fair, over the claims of Venus, Juno, and Pallas Athene. She combined all the heavenly virtues:

Ven. So, fair Eliza, Venus does resign
The honour of this honour to be thine.

Juno. So is the Queen of Heaven content likewise
To yield to thee her title in the prize.

Pal. So Pallas yields the praise hereof to thee,
For wisdom, princely state, and peerless beauty. V,i,164-69.

In John Lyly's Endymion (1588), she was depicted as Cynthia, the goddess of the moon. In Sir John Davies's poem Orchestra or A Poeme of Dauncing (1596), Elizabeth was the object of an even more elaborate compliment. In its dramatic context the poem is a debate between Penelope and her most gentlemanly suitor, Antonius, over whether or not she should dance. He
contends that by doing so she would be in harmony with the ruling pattern in the universe.

Learne then to daunce, you that are Princes borne,  
And lawfull lords of earthly creatures all;  
Imitate them, and thereof take no scorne,  
For this new art to them is naturall—-  
And imitate the starres coelestiall:  
For when pale Death your vital twist shall sever,  
Your better parts must daunce, with them for ever. stan. 60

As a final argument Antonius shows Penelope a magic glass in which she can see Queen Elizabeth, as the mortal moon, presiding over the dancing of all her courtiers, and ultimately all her people. Spatially, this picture conforms to the celestial order in the best tradition of the old analogy.

Practically, the Tudor era meant an end to the civil wars fought between the houses of Lancaster and York that had divided the country for so long. On a more exalted temporal level, however, it also spelled the union of Saxon and Celt: because of his Welsh ancestry Henry VII could encourage the belief that he and his line were the descendants of Arthur, that Arthur was, in fact, reincarnated as the old myths had prophesied he would be. Many Elizabethans considered theirs the predicted age of gold that was to be initiated by the ancient hero's return. Others saw the times as corresponding to the Platonic Annus Magnus, some going so far as to predict that a specific year, 1604, would be the Great Year. Thus, without reflecting on such undignified matters as flattery and
political complicity, we can see that the old orders in human affairs were quite easily replaced with a new national, monarchy-dominated order without any severe damage to the accepted cosmography; the commonwealth, the tides of history, even the earthly equivalent of the Cosmic Dance were simply interpreted in a different way.

What the English had done during Elizabethan times, and what they did to repudiate it during the seventeenth century, can be seen in the political pamphlets of John Milton. In *Eikonoklastes* (1649-50), he declared that

> the people, exorbitant and excessive in all their motions, are prone oftentimes not to a religious only, but to a civil kind of idolatry in idolizing their kings.11

While this statement may appear humorous to us, proving that others' excesses are always more deplorable than our own, it is applicable to Tudor times. After the Pope's sway over Englishmen had ended, the question arose whether a king, on the basis of conditions or character, could be justifiably deposed. Under Elizabeth, most thinkers agreed that only a tyrant should be overthrown; even then, since tyranny might be a matter of opinion, living under a bad king seemed better to many than civil war. This doctrine of forbearance was strained by the Stuart kings' assumption of divine right; they accepted literally the figurative positions in the
universal hierarchy granted their predecessors. The Stuarts were probably no more egocentric than the Tudors. But they lacked the sensitivity and political skills that made the Henrys and Elizabeth beloved at home and successful abroad. Finally, enough people became disenchanted, a civil war was fought, a new form of government was established, and Charles I was executed. Another shift in the earthly order of things had to be justified.

In the best tradition of the old beliefs, Charles I was initially called a tyrant by those who deposed him. A second justification is, however, more interesting for our purposes, since it repudiates the Elizabethan conception of the commonwealth, it rejects a head-dominated society, and it establishes a revolutionary new form of government all on the basis of the most reputable and ancient authorities. In his pamphlet, The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates (1649?), John Milton explained his and his fellows' version of the social contract. First, all kings and magistrates were originally elected officials, since

no man who knows aught, can be so stupid to deny that all men naturally were born free, being the image and resemblance of God himself, and were, by priviledge above all the creatures, born to command, and not to obey.

Contrary to the statements of James I, then, kingdom and magistracy, whether supreme or subordinate, is without difference called "a human ordinance."
It follows, therefore, that since

the king or magistrate holds his authority of the people, both originally and naturally for their good in the first place, and not his own, then may the people, as oft as they shall judge it for the best, either choose him or reject him, retain him or depose him, though no tyrant, merely by the liberty and right of freeborn men to be governed as seems to them best.13

(italics mine)

Milton and his friends were not true democrats, but they did propose a government not too different from that in some modern republics. If the foot did not replace the head, it did have a part in selecting its rulers. To return to John of Salisbury's analogy, Milton's ideal government was heart- or parliament-controlled. Aristotle's "rulership by the best men" seemed to Milton the earthly order closest to God's will.

The poet provided authority to prove this the best political system in his pamphlet *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660). First, as I have already indicated, he felt that such a commonwealth followed the laws of nature, "the only law of laws truly and properly to all mankind fundamental." Secondly, such a government was analogous to the best ancient systems developed by the Greeks and Romans. Finally, it was in accordance with Christ's commandments:

all protestants hold that Christ in his church has left no vicegerent of his power; but himself, without
deputy, is the only head thereof, governing it from heaven: how then can any Christian man derive his kingship from Christ, but with worse usurpation than the pope his headship over the church, since Christ not only hath not left the least shadow of a command for any such vicegerence from him in the state ... but hath expressly declared that such regal dominion is from the gentiles, not from him, and hath strictly charged us not to imitate them therein?^ 

Men should go, then, to the ant; (royalists claimed that humans were more analogous to bees): 15

"Go to the ant, thou sluggard," saith solomon; "consider her ways, and be wise; which having no prince, ruler, or lord, provides her meat in the summer and gathers her food in the harvest:" which evidently shows us that they who think the nation undone without a king, though they look grave or haughty, have not so much true spirit and understanding in them as a pismire: neither are these diligent creatures hence concluded to live in lawless anarchy, or that commended, but art set the examples to imprudent and ungoverned men of a frugal and self-governing democracy or commonwealth, safer and more thriving in the joint providence and counsel of many industrious equals than under the single domination of one imperious lord.16

Neither Milton or his fellow republicans were successful in preventing the return of the monarchy. But the later victories of the parliament over the royal prerogative, overt and otherwise, received some of their impetus from the republican ideals expressed during the Interregnum.

It is no exaggeration to claim that medieval, Renaissance, and even eighteenth-century poets shared a common set of beliefs and a common mythology with their audience, and, in a larger
sense, with each other. The Christian God remained in his heaven. The overall pattern of history remained linear, moving from the creation, through the incarnation, to the last judgment. The ultimate plea for any action or any social, political, or religious structure was that it was in accordance with God's will. But, important as these shared beliefs were, they can be a means of deception rather than illumination when we use them to understand daily seventeenth-century life, or, for that matter, the period's most popular art form, the public drama. The supporters of the medieval, Renaissance, and Interregnum commonwealths all claimed God's plan for Christian government as their own; each claimed a golden age around the corner if only men would conform to their particular political system. Despite these claims, the differences between them were profound and obvious. We should expect the same abundance of moral norms and deviations lurking under conventional and, therefore, often inaccurate titles in the drama.

The Renaissance evolution in political systems can teach us much more, however, than that descriptive terms should be used cautiously. Each of the three systems we have examined attempted to provide an order in which men's actions could be used to benefit rather than destroy the whole social structure. The ideal system should provide a dynamic stasis, in which
energy and order can be reconciled. Rhetorically, "dynamic stasis" is a case of oxymoron; practically, we have found it as difficult to embody in any really long-term institutions as the opposed meanings of the words imply. Truly, if such a structure, based on economics or religion or a constitution, could be erected, we would have our millennium, our golden age.

How does this desired and seemingly impossible balance apply to the drama generally, and to Middleton's tragedy specifically? First, in general terms, the drama is built around conflict. To analyze the nature of the conflict in a specific dramatic genre, or, finally, a given play, we must discover what has been the author's "world-view." To do so means an identification of the large forces common to a genre, and their specific embodiment in individual plays. If we are speaking of comedy per se, for instance, we usually discover two opposed systems, one restrictive and established, the other permissive and struggling to be born. Northrop Frye, in his essay on the structure of comedy, explains that the comic dramatist's view of an ideal world is essentially social rather than moral. According to such a vision

the movement from pistis to gnosis, from a society controlled by habit, ritual bondage, arbitrary law and the older characters to a society controlled by youth and pragmatic freedom is fundamentally, as the Greek words suggest, a movement from
illusion to reality. Illusion is whatever is fixed or definable, and reality is best understood as its negation: whatever reality is, it's not that.17

We do not necessarily believe that the "happy ending" to a comedy is true; but it is desirable. As a result, the comic ending represents the return of the golden age in which love, youth, and energy emerge victorious. Further, after the "bad characters" have been exposed and castigated, they too are usually allowed to join the happy, free society at the end of the play.

The appearance of this new society is frequently signalized by some kind of party or festive ritual, which either appears at the end of the play or is assumed to take place immediately afterward. Weddings, dances, and banquets are the most common .... The tendency of comedy is to include as many people as possible in its final society: the blocking characters are more often reconciled or converted than simply repudiated. Comedy often includes a scapegoat ritual of expulsion which gets rid of some irreconcilable character, but exposure and disgrace make for pathos, or even tragedy.... 18

The new society, and what life will be like within it, is purposefully as vague as "they lived happily ever after."

The hopes of political theorists for the happy future under their systems and the comic resolutions have much in common. But comedies, since they refuse to enumerate the ingredients in their ideal formulas, can remain perennially satisfying to their audiences; political systems must finally be ritualized
and arbitrary, taking on the restrictive aspect of the old as soon as they are established.

Tragedy is concerned with a very different matter. If comedies record a successful and lenient revolution, tragedies record failure and its necessarily harsh consequences. There are a number of ways in which a tragic protagonist can rebel against or be victimized by the prevailing order. He can be an Oedipus, heroically trying to avoid his fate, only to find that those efforts were part of the divine plan of retribution. He can be an Othello, whose failure to distinguish between appearance and reality causes murder in the name of justice. Or he can be a Willy Loman, whose natural abilities simply are not in step with twentieth-century American demands, and whose efforts to provide a synthetic credo for himself and his sons cause his own destruction. That each of these was trying to perform a noble action, and instead performed a disastrous one is fairly typical of the tragic protagonist's plight. In comedy, heroes and heroines are often left vaguely defined; they are typical good people. Comedy usually focuses on the blocking characters, who are depicted as corrupt or sterile or ridiculous. Cakes and ale can triumph because virtuous characters under the old order are really only cross-gartered fools. In tragedy the focus is on the hero; the order which he is in conflict with and which will eventually
defeat him is too basic to need much definition. Until our own times it had the same validity as the natural laws that govern the universe. In comedy, as Frye noted, the reversal is often achieved by some trick or discovery of concealed identity, proving that the rule of the blocking characters was based on illusion. In tragedy, the hero's downfall is implied throughout the action, not by a direct confrontation between the protagonist's energy and the ruling order, but rather by a foreboding tone usually established at the very beginning of the play, and, often, a poetic indication during the play that the times are out of joint. The witches in Macbeth, the ghost in Hamlet, the plague in Oedipus Rex, and the gangsters skulking beneath an enormous bridge-span in Maxwell Anderson's Winterset are all examples of the first. The "wonders" recorded after Duncan's murder are an example of the second:

Rosse. And Duncan's horses (a thing most strange and certain)
Boneste and swift, the minions of their race,
Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,
Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would make
War with mankind.

Old M. 'Tis said, they eat each other.

Rosse. They did so; to th' amazement of mine eyes,
That look'd upon 't. II,iv,14-20

The resolution in comedy is a kind of wish-fulfillment; until the happy ending, there is little evidence that the nice young
lovers will be extricated from their difficult situation. At the last possible moment evil dukes are improbably converted and retire to monastaries, so that the play may end as the audience likes it. In tragedy, on the other hand, the inexorable march of events follows a logical pattern, given the protagonist's nature and circumstances, and the inflexible order of things. In this sense it is realistic; if comedy makes us happy by granting our wishes, tragedy provides a certain satisfaction by proving our beliefs about the human condition correct.

No practical political system has been able to give men the final comic society. The withering away of law-making and law-enforcing bodies has its only existence in pastoral poetry, comic endings, utopian novels, and the theoretical future of countries which now find a "dictatorship of the proletariat" necessary. Instead, political systems attempt a balance between energy and order that provides some of the comforts of the final comic society while preventing the excesses and their unfortunate results that characterize tragedy. Each of the three systems we examined called themselves commonwealths; none of them offered their members ecstatic bliss, but all offered reasonable contentment if men would accept certain bounds. Political thinkers, comedians, and tragedians are not in disagreement about the nature of man
and his needs both as an individual and as a communal animal; they are simply performing their tasks from different points of view. The political thinker tries to discover a proper balance between man's energy and his need for order; the comedian shows an excessively harsh order, then overthrows it in favor of youthful energy; the tragedian demonstrates excessive energy destroyed by basic order. How similar these three are in their view of the essential human condition and how much they rely on the same contemporary conditions and attitudes can be seen in modern literature, especially modern tragedy.

Despite inaugural prayers for divine guidance and the contentions of super-patriots, few educated men now equate any single form of government with God's revealed plan. The separation between earthly and divine hierarchies, begun during the Renaissance, is now largely complete. If we return in the future to a kind of medieval world-community, it will be because of increasing individual specialization and the fear of a nuclear holocaust rather than belief in divine inspiration. This increasing relativism has had an interesting effect on modern literature. No matter how much we admire Lear's or Othello's or Macbeth's vitality, we accept the necessity of their destruction because it is in accordance with some larger and less fallible system of justice than man's. When man, on
the other hand, is the measure of all things, as he is today, his systems, his justice, his moral codes may appear as arbitrary as the rule of the worst penny-pinching father in the New Comedy. In modern tragedy such a view completely reverses the traditional set of dramatic values. The prevailing order is now harsh and unjust; energy is the good, and if it is misused, the order that perverted it is to blame. In Ibsen's *Ghosts*, for instance, the dead Captain Alving was a man who "seemed to radiate light and warmth--he was filled with a turbulent joyous vitality." But the narrow, hypocritically pious rules of his society, represented by the teachings of Pastor Manders, drove this energy underground, turning him into a debauched alcoholic who eventually fathered a syphilitic son. This represents a curious inversion: since the social order is corrupt, we should expect a comic ending, possibly the establishment of the bohemian order enjoyed by Osvald's friends in Paris. Instead, the ending is tragic. While Manders is ridiculed by Ibsen, in the best comic tradition, he and the evil Engstrand are allowed to prosper. Osvald goes mad, and Mrs. Alving must either destroy her only son or live with constant horror. *Ghosts* is by no means atypical. In a majority of modern tragedies, the protagonist is the victim of a perverted society. A whole army of disengaged, disenchanted, frustrated, persecuted, and incompetent "heroes"
march across the stages and pages of contemporary literature.

On the surface, such "modern" tragedy seems to be a form of propaganda. If only the pietists could be driven from the church, the corrupt politicians from office, and the big businessmen from Wall Street, all men could be happy. The utopian quality of such solutions is obvious. No doubt this is the reason that happy endings, or alternate happy endings to essentially tragic stories, deny completely the world we live in. For instance, Faulkner's novels The Sound and the Fury and Light in August, like E. M. Forster's Howard's End, suggest a return to a kind of agrarianism. Though the Compsons and Joe Christmas lose their furious race with time, Dilsey and Lena Grove "endure" because they live in accordance with the natural order. Theirs is a kind of sensitive primitivism. In the twenties and the thirties, when the capitalist system seemed either hopelessly vulgar or about to collapse, the solutions provided by the visionaries were equally revolutionary. We need only remember the appeal Marxism had for a large number of intellectuals who hoped to see the establishment of a classless society during their lifetime. The solutions offered by Faulkner and Forster artistically, and by the Marxists politically, are all in the tradition of the comic ending; and comedy, as we have noted, is essentially a wish-fulfillment. At least in the near future, we do not expect
the adoption of one of these extremely simple systems. In fact, the "comic endings," like the complaints against the ruling order in most contemporary tragedies, are more a definition of the twentieth-century malaise than a blueprint of some future ideal society. For each of these answers tries to solve the problem by demanding more of the same thing, in the form of returning to a freer past. The most common theme in modern literature is a search for self-identity; as curious as it may seem, the more freedom and mobility and self-sufficiency men are granted, the more difficult it becomes for them to define themselves and establish a meaningful set of controlling beliefs and attitudes. Thus, the continual insistence in modern literature that the system is somehow wrong really stems from our inability to find a system that is right. To most of us, this is an extremely gloomy picture, since it would seem to prove Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor right; still, our literature seems to verify it. The individualist's political dream of an order that allows, as much as possible, the exercise of untrammelled energy brings with it a curse of its own; since some order is necessary, it must then be man-made, temporary, arbitrary, and, it would seem, unsatisfactory. As a result, in modern democracies, tragedy most often takes the curious inverted form that we have noted. It is not surprising that
the author of *The Wasteland* finally found his own answer in orthodox Christianity.

As in modern literature, the great dramatic works of the Renaissance reflect men's opinions of the contemporary balance achieved between energy and order; unlike modern literature, however, Elizabethan-Jacobean tragedies do not leave their audiences with a feeling of frustration after the play's action has been resolved. Both men's energies and the order that limited them were approved by the people living during the Renaissance. This tension between force and restraint, both of which were acceptable within broad limits during the period, provides the basis for their tragic view just as the approval of energy and the dissatisfaction with man-made order provides ours. In John of Salisbury's description of the social body men were quite rigidly defined by their social and occupational positions in the hierarchy. Excellence was defined as performing one's duties well; to be the best and most devout tinker was an admirable thing, but tinkers should not aspire to knighthood. The three estates, and their many divisions, should remain separate. In the Renaissance, social mobility and all that it meant was common rather than exceptional. L. C. Knights points out that Middleton's comic merchants who are about to become landowners, and thereby members of the gentry, are typical rather than
unique. In *Michaelmas Term* the merchant Quomodo reflects on his foreseeable future:

Now shall I be divulged a landed man
Throughout the livery: one points, another whispers, A third frets inwardly; let him fret and hang!

...Now come my golden days in. Whither is the worshipful Master Quomodo and his fair bedfellow rid forth? To his land in Essex. Whence come those goodly loads of logs? From his land in Essex. Where grows this pleasant fruit, says one citizen's wife in the Row? At Master Quomodo's orchard in Essex. O, O, does it so? I thank you for the good news, i' faith.

Under James I, burghers-become-knights were so common that they were a standing joke among dramatists and their audiences.

Another aspect of this new individualism can be seen in what may be the greatest single accomplishment of Elizabethan-Jacobean drama, the magnificent language given the characters by their authors. It is difficult to accept the assertions of the medievalists who would make Renaissance protagonists the same kind of iconographic figures who populate the art of the Middle Ages after we have read the soliloquies that characterize the period's drama. After he begins to speak, Hamlet can only be Hamlet, and not some mere type of the contemplative man or the revenger. In this respect, the Renaissance is like our own psychologically-oriented times with its heavy emphasis on the uniqueness of each man. The movement toward parliamentary rule and the wide acceptance of individualistic puritanism among the middle classes go hand
in hand with the "real" characters created by the dramatists.

We would be mistaken, however, if we did not also see a strong dose of medievalism in the period. For the same people who applauded the display of individual energy also accepted an ultimate moral order revealed by the Christian God, which defined the universe and their positions in it. It is easy for us to notice in the governmental changes that occurred between medieval and modern times the destruction of rigid and elaborate hierarchies. But it should not be forgotten that this movement toward a more egalitarian system was justified by a correspondence with the one permanent system--God's order as revealed by revelation and reason. To the Elizabethans and the Jacobean, this order constituted ultimate reality.

It is this combination of the modern and the medieval, I believe, that made possible much of the great tragedy of the period. And, if we are willing to accept the strong individualism and the belief in moral order that characterized the age, we will find Renaissance tragedy drawing a more complex response from us and also providing a conclusion that is more satisfying morally than either modern or ancient tragedy. As we have noted, modern tragedy is too much a lament against an arbitrary social order; all the cards are stacked in favor of the hero-victim so that at the end of the play we can only shake
our fists at the corrupt system that still remains. The great Greek tragedies, on their part, have an austerity that no other age has been able to recapture. In one sense, it may seem more realistic to our own age than the moral Elizabethan-Jacobean tragedy; fate or the gods, which are forces beyond man's comprehension, strike the protagonist down. But it smacks too much of the Old Testament Jehovah "visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of those that hate me" to satisfy us about the human condition. Men can defy the gods or simply accept; but they can have little faith in an ultimate justice that conforms with their own best reasoning. There is a terrible clarity, and a fierce, hopeless courage in all the ancient heroic systems, be it the Greek tragic world-view or the old Nordic conception of an eventual Gotterdammerung. Perhaps centuries of civilization have made us soft; in any case, few moderns can derive any comfort from these views of reality.

In Elizabethan-Jacobean tragedy, on the other hand, we can appreciate the expression of energy, and we can approve the order that is restored by the play's conclusion. The most common form of tragedy during the period, for instance, has for its protagonist an "overreacher," a hero who goes beyond the bounds set for men. Such characters fascinate us; they are an expression of human energy released from the usual
restrictions, and they explore human potentialities. But we know that their overextension will bring about their own destruction; and it gives us a sense of security and of justice to see it happen. Further, the order that they have spurned is a good order, an understandable order that God has spelled out for us. Thus, the protagonist's death is placed in a reasonable perspective. In Elizabethan-Jacobean tragedy, if you will, we can have our cake and eat it too. At least in terms of the main characters, there are few senseless deaths (from the audience's point of view) in Renaissance tragedy. Hamlet must die in effecting his revenge, but in the process he destroys the corruption in the Danish court. A new society can now be built, in accordance with the proper order, by young Fortinbras. The Duchess of Malfi must die, but her suffering turns Bosola on his former employers, the evil Duke and Cardinal, and causes their and his own destruction. Those who are left unite behind her young son:

Delio .... Let us make noble use
Of this great ruin; and join all our force
To establish this young hopeful gentleman
In's mother's right. V,v,113-16.

The chief elements in the tragedy, then, correspond to the characteristics of the age: the individualism and energy that found expression in the language and complexity of the tragic heroes and heroines corresponded to the energy that animated
the age itself. It is this element in the drama that corresponds to our own modern view of man, and no doubt makes the plays continually popular with large contemporary audiences. On the other hand, the resolutions that restore order are in accordance with an earlier Christian view of society and the universe. Like the age, the drama was both medieval and modern; the balance achieved between the two was certainly an important reason for the perfection that so many plays achieved. If we wish to do them justice, we must be aware of both elements and attempt to understand their relationship. With such a general plan in mind, we can begin an examination of The Changeling and discover the specific forms energy and order took to make it Middleton's greatest play.
Although Middleton's plays are usually produced only on college campuses,\(^1\) they have gained a major reputation with a number of modern scholars and critics. As a master of the ironic, the poet would no doubt appreciate this late recognition. While it is not possible to accept Ben Jonson's now famous judgment that Middleton "was not of the number of the Faithfull" and "but a base fellow\(^2\) as the definitive contemporary opinion, the poet's supporters were either not very numerous or very vocal. He was quoted in John Cotgrave's *English Treasury of Wit and Language* (1655) and praised by an anonymous author of an epigram in *Wit's Recreations* (1640), but, as Richard Hindry Barker has noted, we have no elegies written at his death, and the publishers did not consider him popular enough to risk the expense of a folio edition.\(^3\) Although he collaborated with the most popular authors and seemed to have no trouble selling his own work, written tributes from his fellows are remarkably scarce. Furthermore, at least at the present time, we must consider him careless of his own fame. When his first works were published, a prefatory note, supposedly written by Middleton, indicated ignorance of any plan of publication until the plays were actually in the press.\(^4\) When *The Roaring Girl* was published in 1611, its author recommended it
to readers not for its literary value, but because it supplied "venery and laughter." It was, he said

good to keep you in an afternoon from dice at home in your chambers; and for venery, you shall find enough for sixpence ....5

The poet seemed to consider himself not as an artist striving for eternal fame, but as a work-a-day dramatist with mouths to feed and an immediate audience to satisfy.

The credit for Middleton's discovery must go to certain nineteenth-century critics and editors. In the early part of that century, he received attention from Sir Walter Scott, Charles Lamb, and Leigh Hunt. In 1840 Alexander Dyce edited the first complete edition of his works. By the time of Bullen's edition in 1885, and Swinburne's appreciative introduction to the two-volume Mermaid edition in 1887, the poet had earned his place as one of the best in the second rank of English dramatists:

the rough and rapid work which absorbed too much of this poet's time and toil seems almost incongruous with the impression made by the noble and thoughtful face, so full of gentle dignity and earnest composure, in which we recognize the graver and loftier genius of a man worthy to hold his own beside all but the greatest of his age. And that age was the age of Shakespeare.6

In our own century, it was no doubt T. S. Eliot's essay that made Middleton something more than reading for scholars and antiquarians; it is nearly impossible to find a recent study
without some mention of Eliot's 1927 essay. According to him, The Changeling "more than any other play except those of Shakespeare has a profound and permanent moral value and horror." In two recent book-length studies of Middleton's work, Eliot's appreciation has been amplified. Samuel Schoenbaum, in his book on the tragedies, declared that for all their defects, these five tragedies have, I feel, sufficient merit to entitle Middleton to the foremost place after Shakespeare in the hierarchy of Jacobean writers of tragedy—a place superior to that of Ford and Chapman, and also of Webster, the author of two great plays.

(Schoenbaum also discussed Women Beware Women, Hengist, King of Kent, and two plays of disputed authorship, The Revenger's Tragedy and The Second Maiden's Tragedy.) Finally, in his book discussing the whole Middleton canon, Richard Hindry Barker states that he is not indeed another Shakespeare or another Jonson, but he stands above his other contemporaries. He is the third great dramatist of the Jacobean stage.

It could, of course, be argued that the judgments of these last two critics are somewhat affected by their stake in the poet. If so, the most recent comparative studies of all the great Jacobians support them. Both Robert Ornstein and Irving Ribner recognize the comparative greatness of both The Changeling and Women Beware Women. In the latest study of Elizabethan-Jacobean tragedy, T. B. Tomlinson, in a
rather eccentric but interesting essay goes a step further. According to him, only Shakespeare, Tourneur, and Middleton should be called dominating figures during this great age of tragedy, since their works, when taken together, provide a "controlling insight into what we now find of value in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama." Only these three possessed really commanding vitality. Middleton's plays are great because they have "firm contact with a world ... of coarse but substantial middle-class living." Since Tomlinson is as much interested in the decadence of the drama as in analyzing given plays, Middleton receives special congratulations. In the 1620's when his fellows were either attempting to copy the vitality of Shakespeare, which was no longer possible, or, like Beaumont and Fletcher, pandering to a debased public taste, Middleton was finding new energy in the rapidly changing world around him. It is unfortunate, according to Tomlinson, that "the tremendous possibilities for a fresh conception of comedy and tragedy that he outlined are nowhere taken up." It would seem, then, that Middleton is well-established as a major artist, and that The Changeling is widely accepted as one of the chief ornaments of Jacobean drama. But when we examine the various critical essays on the play, we are surprised that their authors can approve the work so
enthusiastically. For, according to some of the play's most ardent supporters, the poet is simply cynical with no profound moral vision. He is capable of deep insights into the workings of depraved or amoral personalities, but he has no controlling world view to put these insights in perspective. Even the editor of the excellent Revels Plays edition of The Changeling sees the poet in these terms: "the dramatist's interest, in other words, is psychological rather than philosophical." Second, the play is a failure structurally. The play's subplot, which is attributed to Middleton's collaborator William Rowley, is not suited to the main plot; in fact, according to some critics, it is arrant nonsense, and we the audience are irritated every time it interrupts. Also the first and last scenes in the play are tedious when compared to the rest of the main plot. (Most critics solve this problem by attributing them to Rowley.) What Middleton we have left after these damming attacks hardly seems to fit the role of "second only to Shakespeare among the Jacobean tragedians." Instead, if these critics are correct, the poet could better be spoken of as a talented journalist with a penchant for abnormal psychology, whose powers of observation and lean verse style make him a creator of great scenes and characters, but whose works as unified wholes do not conform to the best standards of artistic structure and do not possess
a logically developed moral theme. Unless the rest of Jacobean drama is very bad, which it certainly is not, Middleton's rank and his work are not compatible. The answer to this problem lies with the critics themselves; for in attempting to understand Middleton's world view, they have been so impressed with one element in his plays, namely his "modern" psychological abilities, that they have thrown away or dismissed as insignificant the ordering principles that form the background and provide the basis for a satisfactory resolution. More than any other dramatist, Middleton's ability to appeal to modern tastes has betrayed him artistically. This truth can be easily demonstrated if we look closely at the most famous single essay on the poet.

Our first problem according to T. S. Eliot, and, it turns out, a rather important problem, is our lack of knowledge about the poet's life. Other dramatists come alive for us through our knowledge of their table talk, or their drinking habits, or their sexual lives. (Consider the picture we get of the elusive Shakespeare through Joyce's clever pun on his forced marriage to an older woman: if others have their will, Ann hath a way.) With each of these others we can associate opinions and attitudes and interests. With Middleton, we get no picture at all. Born in 1580, he attended Queen's College, Oxford, acquired a wife and eventually a son by his early
twenties, and despite the enormous, if short-lived success of *A Game at Chess*, he died a poor man. His burial is recorded on July 4, 1627, at the parish church of Newington Butts. Aside from some legal squabbles over money between his mother and stepfather, in which the young Middleton may or may not have been deeply involved, his domestic life seems to have been quiet. Aside from the "entertainments" he wrote for the city of London, his career as a dramatist was equally ordinary. His name first appears in Henslowe's diary under the date 1602; between that date and 1606 he wrote primarily for the children's companies, and from sometime between 1606 and 1608 until the end of his life, he wrote exclusively for adult companies, notably the King's Men, the Prince's, and the Lady Elizabeth's. Many of his plays were written in collaboration with other dramatists; others, either by him or one of his contemporaries, have come to us unsigned—thus, even some important items in the so-called "Middleton canon" have not been established as his beyond doubt. Until Mark Eccles's important discoveries, published in 1931, a completely different Thomas Middleton, born ten years before him, was thought to be the poet.

Still, our lack of biographical knowledge is only one reason for the poet's seeming anonymity; other authors have left an equally slim personal record behind them, but they
revealed themselves at least in their collected works, if not in their individual works. According to Eliot, this is not true with Middleton. There is such diversity among the plays he wrote, and there is so little of himself in his characters, that he "remains merely a collective name for a number of plays---some of which, like The Spanish Gipsie, are patently by other people."\(^{19}\) Eliot sums up the poet with characteristic succinctness:

...Middleton in the end ... is a great example of great English drama .... The man ... remains inscrutable, solitary, unadmired; welcoming collaboration, indifferent to fame; dying no one knows when and no one knows how; attracting, in three hundred years, no personal admiration. Yet he wrote one tragedy which more than any play except those of Shakespeare has a profound and permanent moral value and horror; and one comedy which more than any Elizabethan comedy realizes a free and noble womanhood.\(^{20}\)

Why, in Eliot's opinion, is this "one tragedy," The Changeling, so impressive? Because, beneath a series of Elizabethan conventions that Eliot believes modern minds will find absurd, "there is the stratum of truth permanent in human nature."

The tragedy of The Changeling is an eternal tragedy... it is the tragedy of the not naturally bad but irresponsible and undeveloped nature, caught in the consequences of its own action. In every age and in every civilization there are instances of the same thing: the unmoral nature, suddenly trapped in the inexorable toils of morality--of morality not made by man but by Nature--and forced to take the consequences of an act which it had planned
light-heartedly. Beatrice is not a moral creature; she becomes moral only by becoming damned.21

....

But what constitutes the essence of the tragedy is something which has not been sufficiently remarked; it is the habituation of Beatrice to her sin; it becomes no longer sin but merely custom .... And in the end Beatrice, having been so long the enforced conspirator of De Flores, becomes (and this is permanently true to human nature) more his partner, his mate, than the mate and partner of the man for the love of whom she consented to the crime.22

....

The tragedy of Beatrice is not that she has lost Alsemoro, for whose possession she played; it is that she won De Flores. Such tragedies are not limited to Elizabethan times: they happen every day and perpetually.23

Eliot goes on to find the main characters consistent throughout the play, and Middleton's verse equal to his theme. He feels that De Flores's speech to Beatrice, when he demands her honor for his deed,

Can you weep Fate from its determined purpose? So soon may you weep me,

contains lines that Shakespeare or Sophocles would have been proud to write.

In one sense, it is unfair to use Eliot as a straw man since his essay contains some brilliant insights into the play and since it brought Middleton more attention than any other single piece of criticism. But it is also typical, and therefore
serves our purposes better than any other single piece. In
Eliot's hands, The Changeling could just as well be a modern
play by, say, Ibsen. It is a naturalistic study of a particu-
lar type of personality: Beatrice is cheerfully amoral until
her own actions damn her. As Eliot tells us, there are
always such people around, perhaps a large number of them.
The play's universal application comes through Beatrice's
attitude toward her own actions after she has become De Flores's
mistress: she becomes habituated to her sin, so that her
actions now seem only a necessity rather than actually evil.
This is a tendency that all men share. Eliot's analysis is
certainly correct, as far as it goes, and his supporting
evidence, including Middleton's style of verse, is well chosen.
Unfortunately, it leaves out a great deal of the play, and
therefore focuses on only a part of the total dramatic struc-
ture. If Eliot is correct, he and other similar-minded critics
are right in dismissing the subplot as tedious and irrelevant.
In fact, the long closing scene in which all those who have
been "changelings" are unmasked and in which Alsemero comforts
Vermandero by promising to replace Beatrice in his household
are also unnecessary. The play might just as well end with
Beatrice's and De Flores's deaths as most modern writers would
probably end it.

But as we have noticed, the Elizabethans and the Jacobean
did not end their works on so negative a note; order must be restored, and some explanation of the preceding action must be given. In order to make the resolution meaningful, and to show the relationship between the sub and main plots, the play must have a larger purpose than Eliot has seen fit to give it. Middleton has provided it in the conflict between what amounts to sexual energy and the moral order. "Blood" is the word in the play most often associated with this energy; it is irrational and, it would seem, uncontrollable. It is in conflict with reason or "judgment" and until the end of the play, it is usually triumphant. Not only are Alsemero's "scientific proofs" no match for Beatrice's cunning, but the normal terrors of murder and ghosts have no effect on De Flores. Much of the irony in the play comes when characters mistake sexual desires, often objectified as "will," for judgment. Thus Beatrice, when she falls in "love" with Alsemero congratulates herself on her newfound judgment:

Methinks I love now with the eyes of judgment,  
And see the way to merit, clearly see it.  
A true deserver like a diamond sparkles,  
In darkness you may see him, that's in absence,  
Which is the greatest darkness falls on love;  
Yet he is best discerned then  
With intellectual eyesight.25 II,i,13-19

By the end of this speech, she is already speaking of her new relationship in terms of "new comforts," and plotting some way to get rid of her old fiance, Piracquo. While De Flores
and Beatrice exhibit most clearly the nature and power of sexual desire, many of the other characters are also dominated by it, rather than reason. The subplot is a comic treatment of the same kind of theme, set, fittingly enough, in a madhouse. Finally, at the end of the play, false appearances are stripped away; Alsemero describes not only his wife and her lover, but the power and subtlety of lust itself:

> oh cunning devils!
> How should blind men know you from fair-fac'd saints?

_V,iii,108-9_

In terms of themselves, as well as each other, the majority of characters have been blind men faced with their own internal "cunning devils." After De Flores kills Beatrice and himself, the parade of "changelings" explain how lust got the better of their reason to make them into asses and madmen, just as it made Beatrice into a murderer and adulterer. They are now sadder but wiser men. Justice has been satisfied, an insight into the nature of man's "blood" has been gained, and the proper relationships between Alsemero, Tomazo (the first fiance's brother), and Vermandero has been established. Only when we see and understand this whole complex structure can we appreciate the full extent of Middleton's artistry; his play is "second only to those of Shakespeare" if we see it in its totality.
ENERGY IN THE CHANGELING

III

Middleton's view of the human condition as portrayed in The Changeling is often described as dark and pessimistic. Such a description is accurate, but it needs a closer definition. As Alsemero notes, after Beatrice's and De Flores's deaths, there is an ultimate moral order that asserts itself in human affairs.

justice hath so right
The guilty hit, that innocence is quit
By proclamation, and may joy again. V,iii,185-87.

Thus, the author is not pessimistic in the largest sense; he does not see the universe as chaotic or human life as a kind of rat-race in which the most unscrupulous are finally the most successful. Within this universal frame, however, individual lives can end tragically, and every man has within himself forces that can cause his own destruction. As we have seen, the poet is hardly unique among Renaissance tragedians by reason of this view of reality. What makes The Changeling outstanding, and, consequently, the poet's world view pessimistic, is the strength he accords the destructive forces in the human personality and his assertion that intelligent, moral human beings are largely incapable of discerning the difference between good and evil as it appears around them.
The Changeling "proves" two things about human nature: first, that there is in men a powerful impulse contrary to the moral scheme of values that reason devises, and secondly, that men of good will are often incapable of recognizing the distinction between actions motivated by that corrupt impulse and those motivated by the moral sense. There are two actions in The Changeling which could be called tragic: the first, as every critic has noted, is Beatrice's "fall"; the second is Alsemero's continuing obtuseness. In Aristotelian terminology, tragedy is about the fall of a great man. In The Changeling what is tragic is the revelation of moral ugliness beneath the surface of human beauty, and the failure of man's moral perceptiveness.

On the simplest level, Middleton's play achieves its effects by exploiting the differences between appearance and reality. Beatrice, who appears fair and virtuous, is not; Diaphanta, who enjoys sexual punning, is a maid; Antonio and Franciscus, who purposely appear as harmless madmen, are really lusty courtiers intent on making Alibius a cuckold. The list goes on and on. Such a technique is basic to tragedy from Oedipus Rex on; one appearance after another is discarded until the ultimate, horrible reality is revealed. What makes Middleton's play unique is that even the failure to see beneath appearances is treated ironically. De Flores is exactly what
he appears to be; he is an ugly, hard-visaged man who, in the morality play, would be recognized as the Vice. Ironically, those who have authentic claim to reason and judgment in the play disregard reality when it is presented to them without any deceptive covering and call it appearance! This reaction is reminiscent of the treatment Iago receives in Othello. In De Flores's case, however, physical appearance rather than any recorded conversation with the other characters convinces those around him that he must be good; any man so ugly, as Iago is so blunt, must be honest, for we all know that a book cannot be judged by its cover. It is through De Flores that Middleton presents the larger, symbolic meaning of his play; he is both the "hard-visaged" murderer who pants for Beatrice's maidenhead, and he is the symbol of the irrational sexual impulses that exist in all men and in The Changeling overpower "judgment" to cause the tragedy.

De Flores has received very little critical attention. When he has been analyzed it has usually been in passing, and then only as the agent of Beatrice's destruction. Most often he is treated simply as a naturalistic character. Leigh Hunt stated that "there is one character of his (De Flores in The Changeling) which, for effect at once tragical, probable, and poetical, surpasses anything I know of in the drama of domestic life." Barker compares him to another Middleton character,
Horsus, in Hengist, King of Kent. Schoenbaum says he is "clearly a pathological type, a study in abnormal sexuality." On a symbolic level, Ribner sees him as a symbol of evil. Miss Bradbrook suggests that his continual association with "poison" implies "the natural antipathy which the good people in the play feel for him, marking him out as opposed to the healthful and life-giving associations of food and feasts." (Miss Bradbrook is commenting on the way the good people should feel rather than the way they do, since De Flores is not rejected by Alsemero and Vermandero until the last scene of the play; in fact both characters ironically promise to reward him for murdering Diaphanta.) To understand the destructive forces that shape the tragedy, we must examine De Flores much more fully than has been done, both as a natural character and as a symbol of sexual energy.

We can find a number of sources in Jacobean literature for De Flores's character, but none of them adequately explain Middleton's final product. In John Reynolds's The Triumph of Gods Revenge against The Crying and Execrable Sinne of Wilfull and Premeditated Murther (1621), the work from which Middleton got his plot, De Flores is simply a "Gallant young Gentleman" in attendance on Beatrice's father. No physical description of him is given. Out of love for Beatrice, he kills Piracquo in much the same manner described in the play; for his pains
he receives a few kisses. A few months later Beatrice begins
an adulterous affair with him because she is angry with her
husband. Eventually Alsemoro catches the two in the act and
murders them with a gun and a sword. That is all that
Reynolds has to say about the monster that walks the stage
in Middleton's play. De Flores's social position is like
that of the traditional Jacobean malcontent; but his bent
is not social criticism. His overpowering lust is reminiscent
of that of the depraved courtiers who appeared in the Italianate
melodramas of the period; but he is more fully realized than
any of them. He also bears a family resemblance to some of
the "Machiavels," especially Iago. He is "honest De Flores,"
"a wondrous, necessary man," and "good on all occasions." Both
he and Iago see lust as the driving force in a woman's personal-
ity. Because Beatrice loves Alsemoro while engaged to
Piracquo, De Flores reasons that he might also succeed with
her:

for if a woman
Fly from one point, from him she makes a husband,
She spreads and mounts then like arithmetic,
One, ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand
Proves in time sutler to an army royal. II,ii,60-64

Iago reflects on Desdemona's "unnatural" love for the black
Othello; De Flores tries to understand Beatrice's sudden attach-
ment to him:
Hunger and pleasure, they'll commend sometimes
Slovenly dishes, and feed heartily on 'em,
Nay, which is stranger, refuse daintier for 'em.
Some women are odd feeders. II, ii, 150-53

But De Flores's malignancy is hardly motiveless; he has a
very good reason for all of his actions. Finally, as Ornstein
suggests, the character De Flores, like the play itself, can
be seen as an ironic reversal of Petrarchanism. Middleton
would then owe a specific debt to Beaumont's play, *The Maid's
Tragedy*. But even if Ornstein is correct, and he certainly
is convincing, De Flores is finally only Middleton's creature
just as Macbeth belongs to Shakespeare rather than to Holinshed.

De Flores grows out of the very special concerns that
shaped all the rest of Middleton's dramatic work rather than
out of any special outside source. As Barker pointed out,
he is specifically like one earlier Middleton character; he
is also the objectification of the poet's findings, gained over
the entire span of his life as a dramatist, about the sexual
nature of man. The specific character, Horsus, lives only
for the enjoyment of his mistress, Roxena. He willingly shares
her with another man; he performs, without a qualm, a kidnapping
to advance her; he believes the sole cause for her actions is
her lustful nature:

'tis her cunning,
The love of her own lust, which makes a woman
Gallop down hill as fearless as a drunkard.
There's no true loadstone in the world but that;
It draws them through all storms by sea or shame;
Life's loss is thought too small to pay that game.
II,iii,147-52

Even when he is dying, Horsus has one last satisfaction: He has cuckolded his slayer and tells him so.

T. S. Eliot, to the contrary, there is a way of connecting all the Middleton plays; there is probably more unadulterated lust page for page in the Middleton canon than in any other body of Jacobean literature. In the comedies rakes, prostitutes, cuckold, wittols, adulterers, and old lechers are the most common characters. In Women Beware Women every major character is engaged in some kind of illicit sexual activity, from rape to incest. Even the church does not escape: Jonson satirized the puritans in The Alchemist by making them greedy and self-righteous; in The Family of Love Middleton makes a darkened puritan meeting hall a convenient place for sexual activity among the faithful. Moreover, even when sex is treated humorously (as it often is) Middleton delights in the unnatural. As an example, compare the activities of his characters in a play called The Witch with those of the witches in Macbeth:

Firestone. ...Mother, I pray, give me leave to ramble abroad tonight with the Nightmare, for I have a great mind to overlay a fat parson's daughter.

Hecate. And who shall lie with me, then?
Firestone, The great cat
For one night, mother; 'tis but a night:
Make shift with him for once.

Hecate. You're a kind son!
But 'tis the nature of you all, I see that;
You had rather hunt after strange women still
Than lie with your own mothers. I,ii,90-98

The poet wrote no romantic comedies; even his comic endings are much harsher than we usually expect them to be. Frye told us that weddings at the end of comedies usually signalized the coming of a new, happy society. In Middleton they are most often a means of making the punishment fit the crime; often they are between a gallant and his whore; if a rake tries to pawn off his used woman on some unsuspecting gull at a profit, his reward is her hand in marriage. Much of Middleton's reputation as a great realist comes from his concentration on man's sexual nature. He deserves the praise, since few dramatists can match his accuracy of detail and his insight into this one phase of the human personality. But his concentration reveals more than mere interest and a particular kind of ability. It also tells us something about his personality.

Middleton's moral view was obviously pessimistic. Man, for him, was very much fallen. Evil actions, especially in the tragedies, are not so much the results of conscious decisions as they are the consequences of man's "will" or "blood." This accounts for the amoral quality that we notice in so many of
the dramatist's best characters. They are simply acting out their impulses rather than their thoughts. We notice two qualities about this part of man: first, it is extremely powerful and, secondly, it seems to have a kind of intelligence of its own. When Beatrice decides that she "wants" Alsemero, Piracquo's murder has no particular significance for her. It is simply the removal of an obstacle which stands in the way of her desires. After she has fallen to her desires, she demonstrates a kind of cunning; Alsemero's scientific knowledge is no match for her. We also notice that there is little hope for those who once succumb to their "blood." In Women Beware Women Bianca is raped; afterwards she cannot remain virtuous, even though she did not initiate her fall. To the Duke's man who conducted her to his master's forceful embraces she says

I'm made bold now,
I thank thy treachery; sin and I'm acquainted,
No couple greater; and I'm like that great one,
Who, making politic use of a base villain,
He likes the treason well, but hates the traitor;
So I hate thee, slave! II,i,444-49

As Ribner tells us, "Middleton's plays are conditioned by a Calvinistic bias which leaves little room for the redemption of sinners." This is Middleton's view of man's nature.

That he saw men in these terms is not the only reason, however, for his concentration on human sexuality. Like many stern moralists who see man's depravity as his most characteristic
feature, Middleton was fascinated as well as repelled by what he saw. De Flores's face reveals his personality and it is meant to show all that is ugly in human nature. But in many ways he is the most attractive figure in the play. He is the man who can do things and, beside him, Alsemero, the play's most moral character, seems insignificant. When Beatrice needs someone to commit a murder, she rejects Alsemero after one look at his face:

Blood-guiltiness becomes a fouler visage,
(Aside)—And now I think on one:
...the ugliest creature
Creation fram'd for some use, yet to see
I could not mark so much where it should be! II,ii,40-45

Beatrice means it ironically, but she is describing a quality that Alsemero does not demonstrate when she praises De Flores's face:

Hardness becomes the visage of a man well,
It argues service, resolution, manhood,
If cause were of employment. II,ii,92-94

Men of action have an appeal for all of us; in the case of De Flores our admiration goes hand in hand with our disgust. At the end of the play both responses are evoked by De Flores's death speech. Admitting himself a murderer, he says of Beatrice

her honour's prize
Was my reward; I thank life for nothing
But that pleasure: it was so sweet to me
That I have drunk up all, left none behind
For any man to pledge me. V,iii,168-71
Middleton does not let us forget that De Flores is speaking of murder and of taking Beatrice's virginity; at the same time, De Flores did get the girl that both Piracquo and Alsemero wanted, and he does not repent of any of his actions or ask forgiveness. The other characters pale beside him.

If we look at De Flores as a naturalistic character we can discover what Middleton knew of a personality dominated by its sexual impulses. De Flores himself cannot understand his compulsion to see Beatrice since all he gets for his pains is the rough side of her tongue.

Why, am not I an ass to devise ways
Thus to be rail'd at? I must see her still!
I shall have a mad qualm within this hour again,
I know't, and like a common Garden-bull,
I do but take breath to be lugg'd again.
What this may bode I know not. II,i,79-82

As we have noted, lust is not reasonable; in fact, it often goes against reason. Long before he calls his feeling for Beatrice anything but love, its real nature has been revealed to us through his actions and the imagery he employs. Early in the play, in an extremely suggestive exchange that looks forward to De Flores's later success, Beatrice throws her glove at him. His speech is mildly obscene:

Here's a favour come, with a mischief! Now 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 ... I,i,231-34

In the same way, De Flores's lust which he calls love provides
a commentary on Beatrice's "love" for Alsemero. Middleton uses, with nice irony, the courtly love convention that love somehow strikes through and is contained in the eye. De Flores's says of Beatrice "She turns her blessed eye upon me now, / And I'll endure all storms before I part with't." Later, when Alsemero is admitted to Beatrice's closet, she says "I have within mine eyes all my desires." Similarly, when Beatrice is congratulating herself on the wisdom of her new love for Alsemero ("Methinks I love now with the eyes of judgment"), De Flores, who is standing just out of her view, mutters his own version of female perception. He has an ugly face; yet others who look even worse are doted on. Beatrice cannot abide his sight; others with pick-haired faces and wrinkles like troughs are luckier:

...such a one pluck'd sweets without restraint,
   And has the grace of beauty to his sweet.  II,i,46-47

If this was all, a confusion about the nature of one's feelings or an inability to understand their source, lust would be simply comic, as it is, for instance, in so many bedroom farces. The extremes that desire for sexual gratification will go to, to gain its ends, make for tragedy. As a result, these early speeches by De Flores and Beatrice are already ominously weighted, since they prove in a grimly humorous way that reason and judgment are in no way related to lust and
largely helpless before it.

Robert Ornstein notes that the scene between Beatrice and De Flores in which he receives his commission to murder Piracquo is a grim parody of the romantic love convention in which a knight promises service to his lady. Beatrice wishes that she were a man so that she might get rid of Piracquo.

De F. Oh blest occasion!—
Without change to your sex, you have your wishes. Claim so much man in me.

Bea. In thee, De Flores? There's small cause for that.

De F. Put it not from me, it's a service that I kneel for to you. (Kneels)

Bea. You are too violent to mean faithfully; There's horror in my service, blood and danger, Can those be things to sue for?

De F. If you knew How sweet it were to me to be employed In any act of yours, you would say then I fail'd, and us'd not reverence enough When I receive the charge on't. II,ii,114-23

This parody is especially effective because of the participating character's motivations: Beatrice commissions the murder out of "love" for Alsemero; De Flores wishes to perform it out of "love" for Beatrice. The same confusion between the terms employed and the character's real response to their "love" objects that characterized the first scenes of the play exists here. It is the action proposed, murder, that makes a mockery
of the kneeling and the desire for "service." Murder defines this love as simple lust.

The closeness of the relationship between murder and lust can be seen in the similar images used to describe De Flores's "reward" and his intended act. The thought of the reward "ravishes" him, he "thirsts" for Piracquo; Middleton's traditional reliance on sexual puns is used to relate the murder and the sex act itself: Beatrice advises De Flores to "take" Piracquo "to thy fury"; De Flores tells Beatrice that her fears of becoming Piracquo's wife "ne'er shall rise to hurt you." De Flores will buy pleasure for his "blood" by spilling Piracquo's.

Oh my blood!
Methinks I feel her in mine arms already,
Her wanton fingers combing out this beard,
And being pleased, praising this bad face. II,ii,147-49

In the scene in which De Flores claims his reward the same connection can be noticed. He is "so warm yet" in his service, the "act put him into spirit," he was greedy on it "as the parch'd earth of moisture, when the clouds weep." De Flores tells Beatrice "I have eas'd you/Of your trouble, think on't,
I'm in pain,/And must be eas'd of you." Sexual coupling itself is suggested when De Flores declares that he and Beatrice are now one by reason of their shared guilt in the murder; the shed blood binds their blood together. Beatrice protests
De Flores's importunity by pointing to the difference in their stations:

Think but upon the distance that creation
Set 'twixt thy blood and mine, and keep thee there.

De Flores's answer defines their new relationship:

Look but into your conscience, read me there,
'Tis a true book, you'll find me there your equal:
Push, fly not to your birth, but settle you
In what the act has made you, y'are no more now;
You must forget your parentage to me:
Y'are the deed's creature; by that name
You lost your first condition, and I challenge you,
As peace and innocency has turn'd you out,
And made you one with me. III,iv,132-39

As if establishing a relationship between De Flores's kind of "love" and murder were not enough, Middleton has his character declare that he would have considered himself only half-paid if Beatrice was not a virgin.

Once a character submits to the lower drives, whether by choice or because forced, there is no hope for the reassertion of reason or morality. When Beatrice submits, De Flores shelters her blushes in his bosom; he is correct when he informs her that she will not find sexual union so unpleasant.

'Las, how the turtle pants! Thou'lt love anon
What thou so fear'st and faint'st to venture on. III,iv,170-71

Like Bianca in Women Beware Women, Beatrice finds that once she is acquainted, sex can be fun. From her false statements made to Piracquo and later to Alsemero about her virgin shyness, we
may take it that, even if ludicrously romantic, such an attitude was expected from and much admired in young maids. After her experience with De Flores, however, she resents Diaphanta spending part of the wedding night with Alsemero, her maid "makes havoc of my right." Diaphanta also illustrates the finality of a single fall from grace; her action runs parallel with her mistress's. Beatrice hires her for a thousand ducats to lose her virginity to Alsemero, so that he will think he married a maid. But Diaphanta, who had agreed to leave Alsemero's bed at midnight remains until the house is roused by a cry of fire at three o'clock; although De Flores's description of waiting women is too general to be accurate, it seems to be true in Diaphanta's case:

Push, they are termagants,
Especially when they fall upon their masters,
And have their ladies' first-fruits; th'are mad whelps,
You cannot stave 'em off from game royal... V,i,16-19

Diaphanta admits the pleasure this illicit experience gave her turned her head:

Pardon frailty, madam;
In troth I was so well, I ev'n forgot myself. V,i,79-80

It costs her her life.

De Flores can act while the rational characters can only blunder from one romantic assertion to another because his submission to his own impulses gives him a certain insight into the forces that exist in others; not only does he understand
Diaphanta's nature, but he sees into Beatrice's character more clearly and sooner than any other character in the play. He is a man without illusions; and if he does not understand or at least does not appreciate the nobler potentialities of the human mind, neither is he deceived by the romantic posturing used to cloak human drives. De Flores can and does perform actions that will provide him with sexual gratification, and he can mask his actions by appealing to the best and the worst in the other characters. This is the kind of self-preserving intelligence that Middleton accords instinctual human energies. As a naturalistic character, De Flores's "knowledge" makes the action of the play possible. Shakespeare wrote that lust is "perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,./Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust." It is also capable of achieving its ends, and until the play's resolution, the good characters are helpless in the face of De Flores's desires.

De Flores's physical appearance is, as we have noted, an obvious attempt on Middleton's part to make him a symbol of man's uncontrolled sexual nature. How he functions as a symbol can best be seen through Beatrice's reaction to him at various stages in the play's development. Middleton's method of presenting his characters, Irving Ribner tells us, is more of a stripping away process than a development.11 At the
beginning of the play, Beatrice is allowed a virtuous appearance; by the end of the play, her real nature has been revealed. The first indication we have that Beatrice is something besides rationally motivated is her unreasoning aversion to De Flores. It is a correct response, for he is an evil, "ominous" man, but it sets her apart from Alsemero and Vermandero, Miss Bradbrook's "good" people. Only two characters comment to any extent on De Flores's ugliness and the same two link him with poison. In a soliloquy, Tomazo describes the "monster" as

so foul,
One would scarce touch him with a sword he loved
And made account of; so most deadly venomous,
He would go near to poison any weapon
That should draw blood on him; one must resolve
Never to use that sword again in flight,
In way of honest manhood, that strikes him;
Some river must devour't, 'twere not fit
That any man should find it. V,ii,15-23

The scene is laid late at night, and Tomazo has been brooding on his brother's unsolved murder, so that he is not thinking very clearly. Only a short time before he called De Flores "honest" and felt, if any man could or would, De Flores would find Piracquo's murderer. Tomazo's transformation is understandable--at least to De Flores:

--Why this from him, that yesterday appear'd
So strangely loving to me?
Oh, but instinct is of a subtler strain,
Guilt must not walk so near his lodge again;
He came near me now. V,ii,38-42
The equally instinctive nature of Beatrice's reaction can be seen when we compare her speech to Alsemero's, which follows it. All people, she says, have

some particular thing
They must abandon as a deadly poison,
Which to a thousand other tastes were wholesome;
Such to mine eyes is that same fellow there,
The same that report speaks of the basilisk. I,i,109-15

Alsemero answers with a long, tedious list of items that some people find pleasant, others unpleasant! Both Beatrice and Tomazo recognize the truth about De Flores that reason could not teach them.

What Beatrice is responding to is a face that mirrors a part of her own personality. Much of the irony in Middleton's treatment of her results from the difference between her stated motives and feelings and her actual ones. In the opening scene of the play she tells Alsemero that "our eyes are sentinels unto our judgments," and then admits in an aside one speech later that her own eyes betrayed her in recommending Piracquo for a husband ("Sure, mine eyes were mistaken,/This was the man was meant me"). Later, in a speech I have quoted, she declared that her love for Alsemero was based on judgment rather than blind passion. But her immediate passion for Alsemero is not a reasoned thing; if anything it reminds us of De Flores's passion for her. She finds, she tells us, "a giddy turning in me." In other words, whatever name Beatrice gives
it, she is motivated by the same force that in De Flores would be called simple lust. De Flores is correct when he later calls her a whore even though she is a virgin.

Though thou writ'st maid, thou whore in they affection! 'Twas chang'd from thy first love, and that's a kind of whoredom in thy heart; and he's chang'd now, To bring thy second on, thy Alsemero ... III, iv, 142-45

It is, of course, the murder that Beatrice plans out for her "love" for Alsemero that proves that she and De Flores have exactly the same kind of nature. We know from the play's first scene that before Alsemero appeared, Beatrice was satisfied at the thought of being Piracquo's wife; her "eyes" approved him. Yet, when she finds a new love, she speaks of Piracquo in almost the same language that she uses for De Flores. After Alsemero kisses her in the closet scene, she says

This poor kiss,
It has an enemy, a hateful one,
That wishes poison to't: how well were I now
If there were none such name known as Piracquo. II, ii, 14-19

When she reveals to Alsemero at the end of the play that she is a murderer, he finally understands the nature of her passion while she, incongruously, continues to lie about her faithfulness to his bed. If it is not a mark of honor to kill one man so that you may have another, it is at least an indication of deep love.

Bea. Forget not, sir
It for your sake was done; shall greater dangers
Make less welcome?
Als.
Oh, thou shouldst have gone
A thousand leagues about to have avoided
This dangerous bridge of blood; here we are lost.

Bea. Remember I am true unto your bed. V,iii,78-82

But now Alsemero too sees a connection between "love" and murder, and it is exactly opposite Beatrice's contention:

The bed itself's a charnel, the sheets shrouds
For murdered carcasses. V,iii,83-84

Their respective attitudes toward the murder define and place the three most important characters: De Flores connects the murder with the gratification of his desires; Alsemero knows that love and murder do not mix; Beatrice, who appeared to have a love like Alsemero's is really like De Flores.

Beatrice is in love with two men, Alsemero and, after he has made her his mistress, De Flores. What makes her seem more complex than De Flores is not any difference in their characters, but some confusion on her part about her own feelings. Both she and De Flores are ruled by their passions, but Beatrice believes that she loves in Alsemero's sense of the word, and that her actions are motivated by her "judgment." We can see this confusion in her complaints about Piracquo's "forwardness." Alsemero gives her gentle kisses and pays her courtly compliments; he is the romantic lover that she thinks she desires. Her reasons, however, are more social than personal. As the daughter of her father, as a beautiful girl, as
a woman quite proud of her own judgment, Alsempero is her match. Compared to his courtliness, Piracquo's manners seem boorish, and De Flores is, of course, impossible. Until the very end of the play Beatrice deludes herself about her own nature, about her feelings for Alsempero, and about her resemblance to De Flores. It is, I think her own inability to understand herself, rather than any extreme personal complexity that has confused so many commentators. Eliot calls her an amoral nature and he is right; but so is De Flores's. Eliot tells us that she planned her act light-heartedly and was then caught in the consequences. Actually, there is nothing lighthearted about her plan or her means of achieving it. Beatrice's and De Flores's conversation after he has accepted her commission rises to a savage pitch that reveals her true nature more adequately than all the words she had spent before. "Take him to thy fury," she tells De Flores, and in a sudden burst of what we must take as sincerity she exclaims "How lovely now/Dost thou appear to me!" This is the real Beatrice, and all her other self-revelations are posturings meant to convince herself that she wants the things she should want according to her station, and that her looks are a fair indication of her personality.

When Alsempero knows the truth about her he sees her nature as all deformed. But long before the final scene it is clear
to the audience that Beatrice's nature is a match for De Flores's face. As we have seen, there is an exact correspondence between De Flores's appearance and his nature. Thus, when Beatrice admires his actions, she is admiring his face and revealing that beneath her appearance they are alike. He is lovely to her when he agrees to murder Piracquo. When he plans Diaphanta's murder, she tells him "I'm forc'd to love thee now." When he performs it with dispatch "the east is not more beauteous than his service." Vermandero and Alsemero do not realize it but she forces them to reward De Flores for committing murder.

We noticed the verbal connections between lust and murder in the two great scenes between Beatrice and De Flores; another favorite double-edged word that is extremely important in Women Beware Women and in The Changeling is "service." Before the very-much-in-love Beatrice sees Alsemero in her closet, she declares "I'm ready now for that fair service." Hardness in a man's visage argues service and manhood. Employing his usual use of double-entendre De Flores tells Beatrice "I would but wish the honour of a service/So happy as that mounts to." He kneels for service, and when he receives it, it implies both the murder he is to commit and the reward he will receive. What are we to think, then, when the fallen Beatrice calls De Flores's service lovelier than the east? It seems
clear that Middleton means us to think of both meanings even though Beatrice only consciously means the murder he is about to commit. Beatrice's love, even though it is directed consciously towards Alsemero, is more fit for De Flores. He is like herself, and through her language she reveals an instinctive response toward him that suggests at least an unconscious acknowledgement of the fact. When at the end of the play De Flores asks permission to go to her in Alsemero's closet, Alsemero recognizes his right, for it is De Flores who is her real husband. In one of the best poetic passages in the play (copied by Eliot in "Gerontion") Beatrice accepts her relationship with De Flores as the real one in her life and her formal ties to her father and husband as only on the surface:

Oh come not near me, sir, I shall defile you;  
I am that of your blood was taken from you  
For your better health; look no more upon't,  
But cast it to the ground regardlessly:  
Let the common sewer take it from distinction.  
Beneath the stars, upon yon meteor  
Ever hung my fate, 'mongst things corruptible;  
I nè'er could pluck it from him: my loathing  
Was prophet to the rest, but ne'er believ'd;  
Mine honour fell with him, and now my life. V,iii,148-58

In a naturalistic sense, it is the man De Flores who did not prove to be an easy tool who helped cause her destruction and who became her proper mate. Symbolically, it is the De Flores within herself that was always her true nature. The play is a
stripping away of her outward appearance to reveal this reality; she had no choice because her own nature could not be defeated.

I have purposely refrained from using a single term to describe the internal energy that dominates Beatrice and De Flores. In this play, Middleton calls it the "blood"; when the blood receives satisfaction, he calls it "having one's will." In our own times, it would probably be called the libido or some such quasi-scientific term; in other ages it was called the "flesh" or the "old man" or even the "devil." Whatever its name, all ages have recognized it as an important part of the human make-up. Since it is amoral and contrary to reason, it is most often seen as evil and to be controlled at all costs. In Middleton's work it is the single most important force; the power he accords to this internal energy and the kind of cunning it imparts to its owner make his works great psychological studies of a certain type and make his world view, as we have noted, pessimistic.

How do we respond to Beatrice and De Flores—or, at least, De Flores—as the symbol of this energy? In a moral sense I think most people would agree with Eliot that *The Changeling* has a "profound and permanent moral value and horror." In terms of psychological response, the answer is more difficult. For a modern audience, De Flores and Beatrice
would have a certain appeal; but, then, sexual energy has been removed from the scriptures and put on the analyst's couch. D. H. Lawrence became a saint to F. R. Leavis by advocating a return of a more natural, sexually-oriented world. To the Jacobeans De Flores probably appeared a greater criminal than he does today; we know at least that under no circumstances would he be approved or even partially pardoned. Finally, we must turn to the text of the play itself, and assume that he would at least fascinate his audience, as he fascinated Middleton. Like Macbeth, it is good that he is destroyed. But since his and Beatrice's is the best poetry, and since they dominate the action, and since the other characters almost fade from view after the first few scenes, Middleton obviously felt that his audience would find them the most interesting and not simply the most repellant.  

13
Until the recent studies of the moral order in Jacobean tragedy appeared, not much attention was paid to The Changeling's resolution. For quite understandable reasons, most critics were more interested in discussing the character of Beatrice or Middleton's "power" as demonstrated in the two great scenes between her and De Flores. What commentary we do have is generally unfavorable, charging that the play's ending at best seems dull when compared with the middle scenes and at worst is completely inappropriate. Before turning to the play itself we should pay some attention to the reasoning behind these attacks since, in at least some cases, a certain amount of prejudice has crept in under the guise of scholarship. First, and probably most pervasive, is the old belief that Middleton was a great psychologist with little interest in a total world view. If this is the case, the play loses most of its holding power after the death of Beatrice and De Flores. Critics of this school like to divide the play into pieces and then judge it according to a scale: this scene or this character is "excellent" while that one is "deficient." As we have seen, the characters of Beatrice and De Flores are much more than studies of certain pathological types; therefore
the system that brings about their destruction and that provides the basis for the new order that Alsemero, Vermandero, and Tomazo are going to build is a significant part of the play.

A second prejudice, and I believe the most disreputable, rejects the play's resolution because it was probably written by Rowley. Most scholars are agreed that the subplot and the first and last scenes of the play belong to Rowley and the rest to Middleton. The rejection on this basis is particularly difficult to refute since it is usually presented only in passing. Even Barker, who is generally fair, rejects the resolution without explaining its inappropriateness:

The very last scene, written by Rowley, adds nothing to the play but a little pointless violence, and the comic story, also by Rowley, adds even less. It would be nice, in fact, if we could forget that the play has a comic story at all...

The final defense of the play's last scene, and therefore the whole order that triumphs, must, of course, be based on a demonstration of its relationship to the rest of the play. In the meantime, however, this method of attack should at least be met by the good things that can be said about Rowley. T. S. Eliot thought Beatrice's speech in the last scene one of the high points in English poetry ("Oh come not near me, sir, I shall defile you..."); if Rowley is a discredit to Middleton, as some Middleton enthusiasts claim, he at least
could rise to some occasions, and should not therefore be rejected out of hand.

The third complaint against the play's resolution has already been presented in the passage quoted from Barker. To some critics, the last scene adds nothing to the play but a little pointless violence and a tedious parade of "change-lings." This opinion again is based on a matter of personal taste and can finally only be answered by a careful investigation of the earlier elements in the play that make this particular ending appropriate. Still, there is a certain quality about this judgment that is offensive and it should be answered. In *Death of A Salesman* one man commits suicide; in most other modern tragedies the emphasis is so much on a single individual, or two people at the most, that their deaths are enough to provide a cathartic experience. Renaissance dramatists were more extravagant; their love of what is essentially spectacle and their appreciation of rhetoric made them spendthrifts in their resolutions.\(^5\) Death on a larger scale is so common in the Renaissance drama that it is surprising that critics should stick on a simple murder and suicide as a reason for discrediting a scene. We must wonder at readers who apply such different standards to plays on the basis of their author's names.

Shakespeare is rightly recognized as the greatest poet in the English language; as a result, the ending of *Hamlet* is accepted
even though it is as bloody and as extravagant as anything Middleton wrote. To be fair, we must accord the other dramatists of the period the same historical considerations we grant Shakespeare. If we are willing to do so, the ending of *The Changeling* can be proved logical rather than absurd, and the play's essential unity rather than its "excellences" and "deficiencies" will be recognized.

An extended polemic may not be the best means of introducing a section in search of moral order, but it is necessary in this case, if only to clear the air of all the nonsense that has been written about *The Changeling'*s failure to provide a coherent world view. When we leave the critics and turn to the play itself, we notice that Middleton, like other men of the Renaissance, recognized two orders, the earthly and the heavenly. Ideally, the two should be in harmony with each other; in *The Changeling*, unfortunately, no harmony is achieved until the last scene. Beatrice and De Flores are, of course, the chief sinners, but Middleton complicates what might have been a simple rebellion by making them successful as a result of at least the temporary imperceptiveness of the earthly order's champions. Just as De Flores is both a naturalistic character and a symbol of the irrational passions present in all men, so beneath and above the moral structures fallible human beings attempt to administer there are the eternal
moral principles that demand and receive justice. While *The Changeling* may seem, at first sight, a very modern play, closer in tone to Ibsen than Shakespeare, it is the pervasive presence of this higher order that dates the play, and, in terms of artistic unity, makes the resolution a coherent result of the main action.

To understand the play's logical development we must begin with the earthly rather than the heavenly order that ultimately reveals the sinners' actions to the other characters. In *The Changeling* the earthly order depends on family and community relationships and a formal code of behavior between the various members of each of these groups. Disorder is the result of overstepping any of these bounds. There are in Middleton's work, however, sins of omission as well as commission. Three characters in the play are representatives of the earthly order and each of them is in some way deficient. Vermandero, as the father and as the prince, is at the top of the earthly hierarchy; it is his duty to rule wisely and to enforce the laws that provide proper order among his subjects and his children. But he is willful, arbitrary, and more concerned with his honor than with justice. Alsemoro, as the husband and the intellectual, is duty-bound to provide reason and understanding to balance and govern Beatrice's feminine emotions. But he is betrayed by his own emotional involvement
and, as a result, cannot perceive the difference between what he would like to believe and what is. Tomazo, who demonstrated such perceptiveness early in the play by recognizing Beatrice's coldness toward his brother, is the official revenger whose duty it is to destroy the murderers in the best tradition of the revenge tragedy. (One difference between Shakespeare and Middleton that I think interesting is apparent in their respective treatments of the revenge tradition: in *Hamlet* the ghost appears to a contemplative revenger, initiating within him a whole series of reflections on the meaning of life and horror at men's treatment of each other; in *The Changeling* the ghost appears to De Flores who dismisses him, and not to Tomazo who would willingly become the man of action if only he knew where to act. Shakespeare's method is to show one aspect of the human condition as perceived and reflected on by a single, highly intelligent individual; Middleton's method is to show just men helpless in the face of evil; both are clearly more profound than the older "tragedies of blood" with their delight in violence for its own sake.) When the guardians of public order and morality are so sadly lacking as these three, it is not surprising that Beatrice and De Flores are successful.

In the case of Vermandero, first of all, the conflict is again one between "will" and "judgment." Piracquo, he
decides, would make an ideal son-in-law, and therefore he shall be bound to me,
As fast as this tie can hold him; I'll want My will else. I, i, 218-19

Beatrice's answering aside, "I shall want mine if you do it," clearly links father and daughter. Later, Vermandero's chief concern, after Piracquo has disappeared, is his "honor":

I tell thee, knave, mine honor is in question,
A thing till now free from suspicion,
Nor ever was there cause. IV, ii, 1-3

When suspects for the murder are offered him, he accepts them without any formal proof; his windy speech to Tomazo on that occasion, meant to show his love of justice, demonstrates only his relief at ridding himself of an embarrassing problem. Finally, when Beatrice is revealed as a murderess and adulteress he is more concerned with the stain on his name than with his daughter's sins and death. She asks forgiveness and dies; Vermandero responds to her plea with

Oh, my name is enter'd now in that record
Where till this fatal hour 'twas never read. V, iii, 180-81

Throughout the play this "head" of family and state illustrates this same inability to perceive the difference between will and judgment, sham honor and justice, appearance and reality.

Morally, Alsemero is the best man in the play; along with his high standards, he possesses a keen mind. Beatrice fears her wedding night because she realizes her husband's
The more I think upon th'ensuing night, 
And whom I am to cope with in embraces, 
One that's ennobled both in blood and mind, 
So clear in understanding (that's my plague now), 
Before whose judgment will my fault appear 
Like malefactors' crimes before tribunals-- 
There is no hiding on't ... \[IV, i, 3-7\]

At the end of the play it is Alsemero rather than Vermandero who provides comfort for his fellow sufferers; the new order is established by his direction. He takes the place of Beatrice in Vermandero's family and a friendship is established between him and Tomazo. Since Vermandero lacks perception, his son-in-law must define all the new relationships to be established.

Unfortunately for the peace of the community, Alsemero is blinded by his love, that "tame madness," throughout most of the play. We can see the difference between the "real" world and the world he thinks exists after succumbing to Beatrice's charms by examining the romanticism in his speeches. At the very beginning of the play, for instance, Alsemero sounds like a secondary-school boy when he declares that De Flores had best keep his irritating self away from Beatrice if he knows what is good for him. In light of the later murders and the sexual activity between these two, Alsemero's speech can only sound incongruous. The later deceptions practiced on him are perfectly in keeping with his early
imperceptiveness. In one of the few scenes in the middle section of the play in which he plays a prominent part, Beatrice tricks him into believing she is a virgin. Whether or not this scene is ludicrous, as some critics claim, it clearly demonstrates the difficulties a rational, moral intelligence faces when pitted against evil in a loved one. The man who delighted in scientific experiments turned suddenly to reading "omens" when he saw Beatrice's face; because he met her in a temple he believes they are destined to be married:

I love her beauties to the holy purpose,  
And that, methinks, admits comparison  
With man's first creation, the place blest,  
And is his right home back, if he achieve it. I,i,5-8

Curiously, this omen is correct, but the purity the church suggests is not analogous to Beatrice's nature and their marriage will be achieved through murder. Just as Piracquo is warned by his brother, so Alsemoro is warned by his friend Jasperino that Beatrice is untrue. Neither lover can believe that anyone so fair can be unfaithful. Probably the most dramatic demonstration of Alsemoro's blindness is presented in the popular Elizabethan trick of switching bed-partners. On his wedding night he shares his bed for several hours with Diaphanta rather than his lady and never notices the switch; this device is more often used in comedy than in tragedy, and Alsemoro becomes almost a comic character in his bumbling
faith in his love.

Tomazo, too, approaches the comic in his role as the revenger. Instead of plotting his actions and waiting for the right moment to strike in the tradition of Kyd's Hieronimo, he can only resolve never to speak to another man since he might be inadvertently exchanging a word with his brother's murderer.

All league with mankind I renounce for ever,
Till I find this murderer; not so much
As common courtesy but I'll lock up:
For in the state of ignorance I live in,
A brother may salute his brother's murderer,
And wish good speed to th'villain in a greeting.  

Ironically, he has just been talking to the murderer before his speech. When Vermandero approaches Tomazo shortly afterwards with news of two murder suspects, the "revenger's"
"I have nothing to say to you ..." sounds petulantly comic rather than dark and profound.

Thus, all three of the characters who ordinarily would be expected to administer justice are unable to do so. In every case, it is a kind of obtuseness in the face of evil that makes it impossible for them to be effective. Robert Ornstein points out that Alcemero and Tomazo view their positions romantically and that they therefore are of little value against the kind of realism that informs the actions of De Flores and Beatrice. 8 Middleton, besides presenting his view of the
relationship between the forces and disorder, is parodying the conventions established in previous dramatic literature.

Because the usual administrators of justice are incapable of performing their function, punishment for De Flores and Beatrice must come from another source. The poet's stern moral bias is apparent in the method he chooses; for he makes the sinners reveal themselves and ultimately take their own lives. Such an approach is hardly unique in the Jacobean drama, but Middleton's is worked out in an unusually logical way. As we noticed in the previous section, Beatrice is conscious of her position in the social structure but not of the obligations that go with it. She feels that Alsemero would make a better husband than Piracquo, and therefore she is willing to perform any action that will bring about such a wedding. To gain her ends, she repudiates her "duties," those obligations that bind people in their relationships to each other and to society in general, and that provide the basis for any ordered earthly structure. Vermandero intends his daughter for Piracquo; if he gets his "will" she will "want her will." To her betrothed she owes love and faithfulness; instead she falls in "love" with Alsemero and has Piracquo murdered. The price of that murder is her virginity, which she rightfully owes to her future husband, Alsemero. To keep from paying him something she no longer possesses, she
is forced to send her maid to occupy her rightful place. To keep this trick a secret, she must have the maid destroyed. Meanwhile, through Diaphanta's proper relationship with Jasperino (rather than her improper one with Alsemero), Beatrice's relationship with De Flores is discovered. To save her name when charged with adultery, Beatrice admits to murder. Alsemero uses his knowledge to force De Flores into admitting that both murder and adultery had been committed by the two of them. Because of that murder and that adultery, Beatrice has no official relationship with either her father or her husband; instead, her only relationship is with De Flores, her partner in crime. The two of them die together, and if we accept the rather lurid conjectures of Tomazo, they suffer together "wraths" deeper than mere human ones.

As we have noted, the earthly system of order in the play is built entirely on familial and social relationships. What has happened to Beatrice is made clear in her confrontation with De Flores after the murder has been committed. She is astonished that he dare suggest sexual union with her considering the difference in their stations; she is her father's daughter while he is only a penniless gentleman:

> Think but upon the distance that creation
> Set 'twixt thy blood and mine, and keep thee there.  
> III, iv, 130-31

Before he makes his answering statement, the token he brings
from the man he murdered at her bidding gives the lie to her logic. The ring, so forcefully removed, was the first symbol of love Beatrice's father made her send her betrothed. Its removal, as an indication that the murder had been performed, ends any relationship she formerly had with her parent or with the normal world of giving and taking in marriage. Now she is only related to De Flores:

Look into your conscience, read me there,
'Tis a true book, you'll find me there your equal:
Push, fly not to your birth, but settle you
In what the act has made you, y'are no more now;
You must forget your parentage to me:
Y'are the deed's creature; by that name
You lost your first condition, and I challenge you,
As peace and innocency has turn'd you out,
And made you one with me. III,iv,132-39

As the "deed's creature" she is legitimately De Flores's wife, and he is only asking for his rights when he demands sexual congress.

This new "order" Beatrice belongs to after the murder is described poetically in the play. We have already quoted the most effective passage, but it is worth a closer look, since it demonstrates the kind of correspondence between the earthly and heavenly orders so dear to the medieval and Renaissance mind:

Oh come not near me, sir, I shall defile you:
I am that of your blood was taken from you
For your better health; look no more upon't,
But cast it to the ground regardlessly:
Let the common sewer take it from distinction
Beneath the stars, upon yon meteor
Ever hung my fate, 'mongst things corruptible.

V,iii,149-55

The first metaphor is, of course, medical. In order to make Vermandero, both as father and as head of the community, well again, the "bad blood" had to be drained from him. Beatrice's death should be forgotten completely by Vermandero, just as corrupt blood is forgotten after it has been purged. The second metaphor works on a larger scale; it reminds us of the relationships politicians, philosophers, historians, and theologians accepted between this seen world and the unseen world above. To the men of the Renaissance, stars were pure, fixed, and eternal. They were elements in God's divine and unchangeable hierarchy and a perfect system of order among men would correspond to them. Meteors, on the other hand, belonged to this world of decay and change, since they were beneath the moon. Further, meteors were usually thought of as an evil omen or as the result or indication of decay. The body social of which Vermandero is the head is pictured here as permanent like the stars; Beatrice as his daughter has a relationship to everyone in that order. But she is an "unnatural" woman; her uncontrolled behavior places her in De Flores's orbit rather than her father's. According to the meteor image then, her actions and their consequences were, in a sense, foreordained. (As we have seen, this image also fits nicely with the
psychological cause of her actions by demonstrating her likeness to De Flores, the symbol of the "blood."\)

Each of these metaphors is meant to be suggestive of Beatrice's state rather than an accurate description, since she is finally in no order at all after her fall. By falling out of one order, the earthly equivalent to the divine, she has fallen into chaos. As De Flores exclaims, "Now we are left in hell." Since the murder was committed, they have been in hell; Alsemero accurately describes the actions they will perform in the next world, and they are the same as their activities in this world since Piracquo's death:

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.

V,iii,114-17

When they are not in order they are out of all order.

Until the murderers are cast out, Vermandero's whole structure is also corrupt. When Beatrice confesses the murder to Alsememo, he immediately realizes that rectification will have to be made, that revenge is called for:

Oh, the place itself e'er since
Has crying been for vengeance, the temple
Where blood and beauty first unlawfully
Fir'd their devotion, and quench'd the right one:
'Twas in my fears at first, 'twill have it now:
Oh, thou art all deformed!

V,iii,73-77

Because Beatrice committed a murder to marry Alsememo, the
wedding bed, symbol of their marriage, is a "charnel, the sheets shrouds/For murdered carcasses." To De Flores's statement that he and Beatrice are in hell when the murder is discovered, Vermandero answers that all of them are in hell, that it is all around them. The offenders must die; only then, after justice has been served, can order be restored and all the characters allowed to live a life properly defined by their relationships to each other. It is as if Beatrice and De Flores had never lived after they are dead. Vermandero worries that his name has been dishonored, but Alsemero answers

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Let it be blotted out, let your heart lose it,
And it can never look you in the face,
Nor tell a tale behind the back of life
To your dishonour; justice hath so right
The guilty hit, that innocence is quit
By proclamation and may joy again. V,iii,182-87
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Vermandero will again be titular head of the communal hierarchy. Tomazo, as a kind of surrogate for his murdered brother, who should have been Vermandero's son-in-law, and Alsemero, who is his son-in-law and an orphan to boot, will replace Beatrice in the family and social hierarchy. The characters left at the end of the play have lived in hell as a result of De Flores's and Beatrice's deeds, but now it is time for a new beginning.

We need say little more about the subplot than that it follows roughly the same pattern as the main plot, and that energy and order take forms similar to those in the tragic
action. There is a rather interesting body of literature that has grown up around the merits of Rowley's contribution to *The Changeling* through his comic scenes. William Empson, M. C. Bradbrook, and Karl Holzknecht support him wholeheartedly. More recently, Irving Ribner and T. B. Tomlinson defend his work as at least thematically consistent with the rest of the play. Much of the controversy between the subplot's supporters and its detractors is, I believe, the result of critical confusion about what is being judged. The subplot is certainly not as accomplished a work as the main plot; at least in this play, Rowley was not as great a comedian as Middleton was a tragedian. Even its most fervent supporters would probably have to admit that the comic action could not stand alone. On the other hand, it does make a contribution to the play which we can discover by comparing the two actions and by reading only *The Changeling*’s tragic story. In the first case, we will notice that Rowley's characters and situations are a kind of parody of Beatrice and De Flores, Alsemero, Piracquo, and Vermandero. Their responses to the same situations found in the main plot and the eventual resolution to their story serve as a commentary on the main action. In the second case, reading only the tragic story will show us how intense and single-minded, and as a result thin, Middleton's tragedy is. The subplot serves, at the very least, to broaden
the main action and to provide, if not great comic relief, at least a wider perspective from which to view the fall of De Flores and Beatrice.

There are a number of verbal connections between the two actions that are interesting but not usually very important. Changes, shadows, shapes, even sexual puns like "service" appear also in the comic plot. De Flores means a sexual experience when he speaks of "plucking sweets"; Antonio, in hard pursuit of Isabella, declares

Shall I alone
Walk through the orchard of the Hesperides,
And cowardly not dare to pull an apple? III,iii,173-75

The language used to express the power of love to change people is the most common verbal link between the two plots. Antonio's first extended speech to Isabella reminds us of some of the characters in the main action:

This shape of folly shrouds your dearest love,
The truest servant to your powerful beauties,
Whose magic had this force thus to transform me.
III,iii,119-21

Still, verbal similarities are a tenuous means of linking two such very different stories. More impressive is the use of the madhouse in the subplot as a metaphor to define the nature of "love." In the main action, Tomazo calls his brother's love "tame madness." In the subplot Antônio and Franciscus disguise themselves as madmen to get near Isabella, the madhouse
keeper's wife. They represent a curious combination of De Flores and Alsemero, for their speeches to Isabella contain all the flowery conceits one expects of a lover; at the same time, their "love" is really lust, their object simple seduction. Lollio is a kind of comic De Flores in that he puts in for a "share" of his mistress after he learns that these two new madmen are really lovers:

One thing I must tell you, mistress: you perceive that I am privy to your skill; if I find you minister once and set up the trade, I put in for my thirds, I shall be mad or fool else. IV,iii,34-36

Isabella could "cure" Antonio and Franciscus of their madness, according to Lollio's speech, if she would let them seduce her. The language is again reminiscent of the main plot when De Flores tells Beatrice he has eased her of her burden, now she must do the same for him. Isabella, on the other hand, is no Beatrice; since she has no intention of succumbing to the flowery speeches of her two admirers, she can promise Lollio first place if she is ever unfaithful. Of all the characters in the play, Isabella most clearly understands the nature of this so-called "love." Finally, in the resolution, the two false lovers also understand that they had been fools in earnest when they let their lust transform them into these mad shapes:

Ant. ...I was chang'd too, from a little ass as I was, to a great fool as I am, and had like to ha' been chang'd to the gallows...
In the main action Beatrice's "love" for Alseméro changed her into a murderess and a whore.

William Empson and Miss Bradbrook have worked out in some detail the exact connection between Isabella's and Beatrice's situations; in terms of the play's moral frame, the women's respective positions at the end of the play are more interesting. As Empson notes, both of the women are surrounded by a group of would-be lovers; both of them experience a conflict between "love" and duty, Isabella's duty being to her husband and Beatrice's to her father and to her betrothed. Miss Bradbrook suggests that Beatrice could have learned much from Isabella's handling of Lollio. Like De Flores, Lollio overhears a conference between his mistress and one of her hopeful lovers; unless he also has a share in her favors, he tells Isabella, he will report the scene to her husband. She answers, as Miss Bradbrook thinks Beatrice should have, by threatening to turn Antonio on him:

... be silent, mute,
Mute as a statue, or his injunction
For me enjoying, shall be to cut thy throat. III,i,240-42

The scene certainly closely parallels the action in the main plot, but Miss Bradbrook misses the point by comparing what is comic with what is tragic. Isabella has no intention of submitting to either of her lovers, while Beatrice is intent on
having Alsemero. What the similarity between the two really shows us is that there is a difference between the characters of the two women. Isabella can test her lovers' perceptive abilities, she can threaten, she can cajole—all because she has no intention of going any further than verbal exchanges. As a result, at the end of the play she is able to reshape society more to her liking in the comic world; her husband has been as arbitrary as Vermandero, but, because she remained virtuous and heeded his "will," she can demand greater freedom at the end of the play. Beatrice, by following her own will has lost, as we have seen, all connection with her proper order. The resolutions of the two actions in this way do provide a commentary on each other. In terms of the moral frame, Isabella's action was the right one; it teaches us that even a foolish husband of father should be obeyed if tragedy is to be avoided. This is a cheerful answer when applied to comedy, since obedient Isabella can point to the folly of her husband's demands:

...would a woman stray,
She need not gad abroad to seek her sin,
It would be brought home one ways or other. III,iii,213-15

Since she has no intention of sinning, this arbitrary rule is no great hindrance to her, but only makes her husband look foolish. In the main action, on the other hand, Beatrice must submit to a much more distasteful command. We cannot make the
world Beatrice inhabits conform finally to the world of
Isabella since one is comic and the other is tragic; the best
that the subplot offers is good advice to the characters in
the main plot, but if they followed it, it would hardly give
the same results.

The particular forms energy and order take in The
Changeling are uniquely Middleton's, but in a general sense
the balance between them and the final destruction of excessive
energy by the ruling order conform to the other tragedies
written during the period. The world the poet inhabited is
obvious in his work: the new vitality that characterized the
Renaissance eventually carried all before it; the old concept
of degree among men gradually broke down and was replaced
by the modern ideal which allows men to rise and fall accord¬
ing to their abilities. Still, the Renaissance men recognized
a permanent order that accorded with God's will and that,
ideally, had an earthly equivalent in men's families, communi-
ties, and national governments. The tension between this
energy and the ultimate order provides the conflict that
characterizes most of the great Renaissance drama. A Jacobean
audience could appreciate the "heroic" qualities of those who
broke the bounds of accepted order, and at the same time could
believe in a moral, teleological universe that would curb and,
if necessary, destroy those who stepped too far beyond the
pale. Middleton, as we have seen, is very much a man of his period. And when we examine his play according to the beliefs and conventions of his age, we find that it is a successful artistic whole. Eliot's summation is finally correct—*The Changeling* has a "profound and permanent moral value and horror"—and that effect is achieved through the play's logical development which is carried all the way into the resolution.
NOTES

I. The Seventeenth-Century Background

1. The Changeling is usually considered superior to Women Beware Women. I accept the traditional allocation of The Revenger's Tragedy to Cyril Tourneur, since the matter still seems very much in doubt. The Changeling, like Women Beware Women, was written towards the end of the poet's career; Middleton and William Rowley probably wrote it in 1622, since the source for the main plot appeared in 1621 and, according to a note in Malone's copy of the 1653 quarto, it was "licensed to be acted by the Lady Elizabeth's Servants at the Phoenix, May 7, 1622." It was also performed at Whitehall before Prince Charles January 4, 1623-24. See W. J. Lawrence, Speeding Up Shakespeare (London, 1933), p. 166.

2. See Pope's An Essay on Man and Joseph Addison's The Spectator, No. 120 (Wednesday, July 18, 1711). The classic study of these metaphysical systems is, of course, Arthur O. Lovejoy's, The Great Chain of Being (Cambridge, Mass., 1936).


4. Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (1860); this work is now available in the illustrated Phaidon edition, 1950.


8. For much of this information, I am indebted to E. M. W. Tillyard's Shakespeare's History Plays (London, 1944). Thomas Norton was part author of Gorboduc and a translator of Calvin. The quotation is from a second preface to the Chronicle.
entitled "Thomas N. to the Reader." The homiletic passages are from Against Disobedience and wilful Rebellion, added to The Book of Homilies in 1574.


10 See Robert Ashley's 1594 translation of Louis LeRoy, Of the Interchangeable Course or Variety of Things in the Whole World, University Microfilms 15890 (Case 44, Carton 262).

11 John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1957), p. 784. All quotations are from this edition, which will hereafter be cited as Hughes.


13 Hughes, pp. 754-58.

14 Hughes, p. 387.

15 See Godfrey Goodman, The Fall of Man (London, 1616), p. 100: any candid observer "will easily confesse that the greatest temporal happiness of man, which consists in a good government ..., is much more eminently discerned amongst beasts, than amongst men. I ... insist on the Bee, who seemes to teach us a platforme and precedent of perfect Monarchie; it is long since agreed and concluded in philosophie." (Quoted by Hughes, p. 886, note 45.)

16 Hughes, p. 886.


18 Frye, pp. 461-62.

19 The relationship between the golden age society in pastoral poetry and proletarian literature is brilliantly analyzed in the first chapter of William Empson's Some Versions of Pastoral (London, 1935).
The alliance between the top and bottom levels of society is common in modern tragedy; the implication seems to be that there is no difference between businessmen, judges, politicians and gangsters.

After the "Great War" those artists and intellectuals who left America for Paris claimed that life in America was perfectly captured in the various novels of Sinclair Lewis; during the thirties many thinkers believed that capitalism as a system was dead.


All quotations, except in the case of The Changeling, are from Works, ed. A. H. Bullen (London, 1885), 8 vols.

The classic "overreachers" are, of course, Marlowe's protagonists. For an interesting treatment of this type of hero see Harry Levin's work on Dr. Faustus, The Overreacher (Cambridge, Mass., 1952).

II. Middleton and the Critics

The Changeling was recently performed at the Lincoln Center of Performing Arts under the direction of Elia Kazan. The results were disastrous, but I do not know if it was the fault of the production, the audience, or the play. One respectable critic, Robert Brustein, said the play's failure demonstrated "how inadequate was the realistic acting of our stage."


Barker, p. 12.


9 Barker, p. 153.


14 Tomlinson, p. 212.


17 See R. C. Bald, "Middleton's Civic Employments," Modern Philology, XXXI (August, 1933), 65-78 and Robert Withington,

18 Eccles "Middleton's Birth and Education" is probably the single most important biographical article on the poet since it gave us an entirely new Thomas Middleton. Middleton's early satirical works and his dreadful poem The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased are much more acceptable if they were written by a very young man than if they were written by a man of thirty.


20 Eliot, pp. 94-95.

21 Eliot, p. 86.

22 Eliot, p. 87.

23 Eliot, p. 88.

24 M. C. Bradbrook, in her book Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy (Cambridge, Eng., 1935), pp. 213-24, has pointed out Middleton's continual use of "will" and "judgment." She defines "will" as "instinctive desire, often ... sensual desire" (p. 214). Actually, as Bawcutt tells us (p. xlvi, note 1), the word the poet uses for sensual desire is "blood." "Will" means the gratification of desire: "I shall have my will."

25 All quotations from The Changeling are from the Bawcutt-edited Revels Plays Edition (see note 15).

III. Energy in The Changeling


2 Barker, p. 124. Barker goes on to call De Flores more complex than Beatrice, and to state that he, like Horsus, has "a remarkably penetrating intelligence." It is this intelligence, he claims, "rather than his ugliness that makes him so terrifying in his encounters with the heroine."

3 Schoenbaum, p. 140.
It will be apparent as I proceed in my analysis that I owe a great deal to Ribner and to Robert Omstein; while their approaches to The Changeling are quite different, they are not incompatible. Their respective essays seem to me the most intelligent ones that have been written on the play.


There is general agreement among scholars that Reynold's work is the source for most of The Changeling's main plot; Reynold's story can be found in Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy: An Anthology, ed. Robert Ornstein and Hazelton Spencer (Boston, 1964), pp. 295-308 and in the Bawcutt edition, pp. 113-27. For a different view on Middleton's source see C. R. Baskervill's note in Modern Philology, XIV (December, 1916), 488; Baskervill argues that "some old drama, probably in English," was the play's source. Since this play unfortunately has been lost, it is difficult to accept Baskervill's argument.


play through the soliloquies, which, he says, not only reveal the character's personalities but also show men as isolated from each other. This approach seems to me valid; if Jump is correct, a valuable comparison could be made between The Changeling and Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard.


13 I find it difficult to believe that men in any age are not at least partially interested in criminals, sexually-depraved persons, and so-called "amoral" men of action without any reference to their eventual punishment. During the Elizabethan period, for instance, books about criminals, often called "cony-catching" pamphlets, had a great vogue. As examples see Robert Greene's A Notable Discovery of Cosenage (1591) and Thomas Dekker's The Bellman of London (1608). For a full treatment of Elizabethan-Jacobean literary interests see Louis B. Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1935).

IV. Order in The Changeling

Recent studies generally accept the play's resolution as a successful conclusion, artistically, to the main action. Omstein's analysis is particularly interesting; he feels that the poet purposely underplays his resolution to heighten the effect of the tragedy (pp. 187-91).

2 Almost all scholars would divide the play in this manner:

I, i; I, ii—Rowley
II, i; II, ii—Middleton
III, i; III, ii—Middleton
III, iii—Rowley
III, iv—Middleton
IV, i; IV, ii—Middleton
IV, iii—Rowley
V, i; V, ii—Middleton
V, iii—Rowley

G. W. Stork expresses some doubt about Middleton's authorship of V, ii in his edition of William Rowley: his All's Lost by
Lust and A Shoemaker a Gentleman (1910), p. 44 and E. H. O. Oliphant finds some touches of Middleton in I, i which he discusses in Shakespeare and his Fellow Dramatists, II (1929), 907, 931. Otherwise, there is no controversy about the two authors' parts in The Changeling.

3 Barker, p. 129.

4 Eliot paid this speech the supreme compliment of imitation in Gerontion; his version:

I that was near your heart was removed therefrom
To lose Beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.
I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it
Since what is kept must be adulterated?
I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch;
How should I use them for your closer contact? 56-61

5 For the Renaissance attitude toward rhetorical eloquence see Madeleine Doran, Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama (Madison, Wis., 1954)—especially her chapter "Eloquence and 'Copy,'" pp. 24-52.

6 The most famous example of a domestic order out of joint is, of course, Shakespeare's Hamlet; in the closet scene between Hamlet and Gertrude Hamlet defines the impropriety of the "new order" by calling his mother her "husband's brother's wife."

7 Again, the best-known examples of bed-switching occur in Shakespeare; see All's Well that Ends Well and Measure for Measure.

8 Omstein sees The Changeling as an ironic reversal of the Petrarchan view of love; he discusses Middleton's treatment of Alsemero as the lover on pp. 182-83 and of Tomazo as the revenger on pp. 188-89.

9 Empson, pp. 48ff; Bradbrook, pp. 221ff; and Karl Holzknecht, "The Dramatic Structure of The Changeling," Renaissance Papers, ed. A. H. Gilbert (Columbia, S. C., 1954), pp. 77-87. The most hostile yet intelligent dismissal of the subplot is Una M. Ellis-Fermor's; she claims that the play would be better off without the comic action in Jacobean Drama (London, 1936), p. 144.
Ribner repeats the arguments made by Empson, Bradbrook and Holzknecht; Tomlinson sees Vermandero's castle as the connecting link between the two plots. The castle is the symbol of Vermandero's society which is attractive on the surface but which contains madness as the bottom and most basic level. We should picture the castle as a kind of citadel with the madhouse below stairs; see Tomlinson, pp. 192-96.

1. Empson, p. 50.

2. Bradbrook, p. 221.


