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## Folly and Madness in *The Changeling*

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THE CHALLENGE OF *The Changeling* is, to put it bluntly, to discover what it is 'about', and if despite much recent activity critics have not been able to provide us with a satisfactory answer that is because they have failed to grasp how the sub-plot relates to the main plot.<sup>1</sup> It is certainly much harder than in most comparable instances of Renaissance plays to see what the two plots have to do with each other, and it is not surprising that earlier critics concentrated on the main plot, in effect giving up the sub-plot in despair, and blaming its author Rowley, not only for writing less well than Middleton, but also for not relating his material to the main plot. Since William Empson made some comments on the play in *Some Versions of Pastoral*, it has been understood in a vague and general way that the plots must somehow be related, and that the relationship is one of irony, but nevertheless the sub-plot continues to be seen as some sort of adjunct to the play — possibly not irrelevant, but not essential. I believe that, on the contrary, we can only understand the main plot if we understand the sub-plot, and that the relationship is vital.

*The Changeling* is above all a study, in dramatic form, of folly and madness. It is interested in making us aware of what is 'abnormal' in the workings of the human mind. It is the sub-plot which sets up the most basic distinction between folly and madness, and develops the concept of madness which helps us to grasp its nature in the main plot.

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Folly, or idiocy, is a good starting point from which to classify various kinds of mental abnormality, and so it is to the dramatists. The sub-plot first of all (I.ii) presents to us Alibius, 'a jealous doctor' according to the list of *Dramatis Personae*,<sup>2</sup> and Lollio, 'his man'. Alibius is in charge of a place (no doubt something like Bedlam) where 'brainsick patients' (1.53) are kept. As Alibius cannot always be at home and is afraid that his wife may prove adulterous, he gives Lollio control over her, which means that she is to be kept as a prisoner in the asylum. Lollio cannot see whom his master might have cause to be jealous of, explaining:

We have but two sorts of people in the house, and both under the whip, that's fools and madmen; the one has not wit enough to be knaves, and the other not knavery enough to be fools. (44 – 47)

Fools, according to Lollio, are people lacking in 'wit' (intelligence, understanding). As they are intellectually deficient, they are incapable of being 'knaves' on that score. Madmen, however, cannot be knaves because they suffer from a different kind of brainsickness; therefore they would not be foolish enough to embark on a sexual relationship with Alibius's wife, Isabella.

The sub-plot offers us both a counterfeit fool and someone who pretends to be a madman. The fact that both characters put on roles gives us a clear notion of what the authors mean by 'fools' and 'madmen'. Antonio is the 'fool', Franciscus the 'madman'. Both are interested in Isabella (which implies, according to Lollio's concept of things, that neither is a real fool or madman); she, however, is neither foolish nor mad in any sense.

Antonio demonstrates to us, in his role as a fool, what such a person is like by answering certain questions correctly, on a simple principle, without realizing that the same simple principle cannot be applied to a somewhat different situation. Thus, in III.iii, Lollio asks him 'how many is five times six', to which he replies: 'six times five'. When he is to state 'how many is one hundred and seven', he logically but inadequately answers: 'seven hundred and one' (cf. 11. 155-61).

One reason why this answer must look like making some sort of sense is that it enables us to understand that madness is in all respects a much more serious condition than folly. Those who are mad, according to Lollio's understanding, may not be dangerous, but they disturb us by the illogicality – indeed, the incomprehensibility – of what they say. For example, Franciscus accosts Isabella thus:

Hail, bright Titania!  
 Why stand'st thou idle on these flow'ry banks?  
 Oberon is dancing with his Dryades;  
 I'll gather daisies, primrose, violets,  
 And bind them in a verse of poesie. (48 – 52)

As Bawcutt explains in his edition, this speech is no doubt intended by Franciscus as an invitation to Isabella (Titania) to solace herself with him in the absence of Alibius (Oberon), who, he insinuates, is enjoying himself with other women. At the same time, however, the speech is characteristic of the 'thinking' of a madman. The speech is mad, not because it is stupid (as Antonio was when he equated 'one hundred and seven' with 'seven hundred and one'), but because it shows – at least if we take his act at face value – that the speaker is out of touch with reality. The speaker, acting on his fantasy rather than on reason and observation of evidence, claims, and truly believes, that something is fact which we know not to exist. It is this propensity which enables us to distinguish between those whom the play sees as mad, and those who are merely foolish. In such individuals as Franciscus, society recognizes madness readily, and that is why they end up in lunatic asylums. Much of the play is dedicated to exploring more subtle, less immediately identifiable kinds of madness which are also, in the final analysis, the product of confusion between fantasy and an accurate grasp of reality.

In fact, the sub-plot gives us an excellent example of a superficially sane but actually mad person in the case of Alibius. In I.ii. Alibius explains to Lollio that because he is old while his wife is young, he fears the possibility of a rival's 'thrusting' (1.31) into a ring which he would wear on his own finger.<sup>3</sup> This kind of sick fantasy – unjustified, indirect yet in

a sense very detailed and precise — is similar to that of Iago and Othello when their minds dwell on sexual matters. As Lollo points out, Alibius in fact has nothing to fear from the inmates of Alibius's institution; but Alibius, who is intent on making his fantasy come true in reality, expresses his fear of those who come to visit his patients. Lollo answers this fear quite pertinently by saying that the visitors come to see the fools and madmen — not Isabella, who is 'of neither sort' (1.60). Significantly, Lollo's healthy appreciation of Isabella's character is used to throw into relief the diseased nature of Alibius's mind, and the accuracy of Lollo's view is borne out by Isabella's behaviour throughout the play. In other words, Alibius is someone whom we should now normally call 'paranoid'.

That form of madness can certainly be recognized, but it is not of the gravest kind. It does lead to serious discomfort for Isabella, who is locked up as though she were insane while it is really the person who is in charge of the insane, Alibius himself, who should more appropriately take her place. She is subjected to a degree of sexual harassment from Antonio, Franciscus, and indeed Lollo, but Alibius's action, however misguided, does not place her in serious danger. In the main plot, his paranoia is matched by that of Alsemero, who, having just married Beatrice, at once wants to discover whether by some ill chance she is already pregnant, or no longer a virgin (see IV.i). The fact that we know that his wife deserves his suspicion, because of her intercourse with De Flores, does not diminish the irrationality of Alsemero's conduct. Unlike us, he has absolutely no ground for mistrusting her, and it is clear that his fear, like Alibius's, is merely the result of his own imagination. Both men, too, show their insanity in the extraordinary methods they choose for attempting to lay their fear at rest. A sane person would not entertain unjustified jealousy in the first place; but, if his fantasy did prompt him to be jealous, he would confront his wife about his feelings rather than engage in a further flight of fancy which, in the event, takes neither Alibius nor Alsemero any closer to reality.

The madness of Alibius and Alsemero may not be of the gravest kind but it is not harmless. For one thing, if Beatrice had not discovered her husband's plan to test her virginity,

she would not have been tempted to ask her maid Diaphanta to take her place on her wedding night, and thus Diaphanta would have stayed alive instead of being killed by De Flores at the end of the play. For another, one reason why such seemingly normal people as these paranoid husbands are dangerous is that their madness is not readily apparent to others. The consequences of Alsemero's paranoia in the main plot are much more calamitous than those of Alibius in the sub-plot because in the madhouse little harm can be done; it is in the 'real' world of 'normal' people that even comparatively mild forms of madness lead to disaster.

The seriousness of madness in a person is not to be measured by the ease with which it can be identified. The play appears to suggest that most of us are too inclined to judge madness in shallow terms. We do not, to begin with, pay much attention to the distinction between folly and madness. Lollo recognizes that there is a difference between the two, but he does not consider lunatics more dangerous than fools — a point which has some validity in Alibius's institution. If someone thinks that Isabella is Titania, that person is obviously mad, and will be seen to be so by others. That means that he will be locked up and thus cannot do harm, and that in any case the nature of his delusion is probably such as will not hurt others. The mad, in Alibius's institution, are invariably innocuous: Lollo is right to think that they 'have not knavery enough to be fools'. But Lollo's concept of madness is too limited. Because the mad, in contrast to the foolish, confuse what is real and what is unreal, they can, in principle, be much more dangerous. If he showed any real understanding of the evidence in front of him, Lollo would thus have come to the conclusion that Alibius is not sane. But, although he fully realizes that Isabella is not mad (I.ii.65), and in general questions the wisdom of Alibius's judgement, he does not grasp that Alibius is paranoid. This indicates to us that those whose madness is not obvious, though it is at the same time potentially dangerous to others, are not likely to be prevented from doing harm. Yet, in their subtle way, the dramatists leave us in no doubt that *they* consider Alibius mad. We all know that it is common amongst the mad to think that they are normal while others are insane. Alibius significantly

cannot or will not recognize his wife's sanity when he says that 'she's no fool' (I.ii.64); and it is equally significant that he, while crazy himself, is in charge of the 'madmen's ward'.

There is one other important fact about madness which the subplot enables us to see and which we must observe if we are to understand the play as a whole. Fools, clearly, are intellectually deficient from birth, while those who are mad become so at a later stage. The dramatists make a distinction which was officially accepted by their society:

For the purposes of the Court of Wards and Liveries the difference between idiots (natural fools) and lunatics (*non compos mentis*) rested simply on the congenital nature of the condition; natural fools were those 'mentally subnormal from birth' and lunatics were those 'whose intellect and memory [failed] sometime after birth'.<sup>4</sup>

The legal distinction does not, however, concern itself with the way in which a person becomes a lunatic – a question that is naturally of paramount interest to the dramatists. The subplot gives us a hint:

There's no hope of recovery of that Welsh madman,  
was undone by a mouse, that spoil'd him a permasant;  
lost his wits for't. (I.ii.206 – 8)

The fondness of the Welsh for cheese was proverbial in Elizabethan England. However, the fact that the dramatists make a joke at the expense of the Welsh does not preclude their being serious at the same time. The Welshman referred to must obviously have had an inclination towards madness anyway, or else the incident in question would not have affected him so grievously. What we are to understand is that someone who has a propensity towards madness may remain sane under propitious circumstances, but will indeed become mad if some particular event brings on the condition. In that case, such a person loses his 'wits'; that is, he does not become stupid, but will no longer think rationally and coherently.

The sub-plot helps us to understand what madness in the world outside the lunatic asylum will be like, but, with the exception of the outsiders (Alibius, Lollo, Isabella, Antonio and Franciscus), the people who are presented to us are middle-of-the-road fools and madmen who are neither sane enough (like Isabella) to be kept outside, nor mentally deranged in a way which goes unrecognized by most people (as Alibius is). It is one of the major ironies of the play that the average mental patient is harmless. Although Alibius is wrong to lock up Isabella, she is in fact in a safe place so long as she is surrounded by those declared fools or madmen by society. Such danger as she is subjected to comes from outsiders: Alibius, Lollo, Antonio and Franciscus. Whether compared with the insiders or the outsiders, she is the picture of good mental health. One function of the sub-plot is to show to us how a woman pushed into a madhouse remains eminently sane despite her environment: contact with the supposedly foolish or mad inmates does not affect her. Furthermore, she is neither led astray by the real folly and madness of the keepers Lollo and Alibius, nor tempted by the counterfeits Antonio and Franciscus.

The relationship between the sub-plot and the main plot is one of carefully wrought irony. Compared with the people around her, Beatrice is mad. She stands out most against Isabella, however, not only because Isabella is the chief woman in the sub-plot as Beatrice is in the main plot, but also because if we compare Beatrice with other people in the main plot the contrast is not so glaring. Ostensibly, all those people are normal, and it would have been easy for the dramatists to give us a sub-plot with a sane woman surrounded by real idiots and lunatics which reverses a main plot containing an insane woman in a sane world. That comparatively simple model, however, is not that of *The Changeling*. It is certainly one which the dramatists have in mind, in that Isabella is sane and Beatrice insane, while each woman appears to inhabit a world contrasted with her. However, appearances are deceptive: although the people in Alibius's institution are indeed fools and madmen, they may in the end strike us as on a profound level less insane than the seemingly 'normal' people of Beatrice's Alicante.

The paranoia of the supposedly sane Alibius and Alsemero

has already been discussed, but there is further evidence that Alsemero confuses fact and fantasy. Reflecting on the time he first saw Beatrice, he says:

'Twas in the temple where I first beheld her,  
 And now again the same; what omen yet  
 Follows of that? None but imaginary;  
 Why should my hopes or fate be timorous? (I.i.1 — 4)

In modern terms, one would say that Alsemero's fear is instinctive, or in part produced by the unconscious. What the dramatists show, in the play as a whole, is that such fear is not to be dismissed. Alsemero calls it 'imaginary', but his foreboding of disaster is clearly based on something real. There is a frightening quality about Beatrice which those who trust the sane part of their mind can see. Later in the play, Tomazo De Piracquo, to whose brother Alonzo Beatrice is to be married, reacts to her in a way no one else does. While Alonzo himself dotes on Beatrice without question, and her father, Vermandero, has absolutely no sense of her true feelings, Tomazo warns his brother that he sees 'small welcome in her eye' (II.i.106), and expresses his conviction that she is in love with someone else. If we took the same view of things as Alsemero does, we should have to call Tomazo's feelings purely 'imaginary', but Alsemero (or for that matter Alonzo) is wrong. In his conscious mind, he suppresses his deeper sense of the truth: surely, thus he argues, he has no hard evidence for his fear. But it is the conscious part of his mind which is wrong in its rationalization, and the more grievously so because he allows himself to be guided by one sentiment in his unconscious, and not by another. That is, he rejects his fear but yields to his lust, which, in its turn, he rationalizes by converting it, consciously, into something far more noble (in his eye) than it is. Since he cannot admit to himself that he is propelled by sex, he has to convince himself that his devotion to Beatrice is religious and pure: 'The place is holy, so is my intent' (1.5). That Alsemero's response to Beatrice is indeed sexual, and that he is not aware of that fact, is shown by his own words towards the end of the play where he speaks of 'the temple/Where blood and beauty first unlawfully/Tir'd their



devotion, and quench'd the right one' (V.iii.73 — 75). At the beginning, Alsemero is not conscious of the role of 'blood and beauty'; if he had been, no doubt lawful devotion would have been triumphant, or if not he would at least have acted on sexual impulse with some understanding of its nature.

What is harmful, the dramatists suggest, is not so much the sexual impulse in itself as our suppression of it, or allowing ourselves to be led by it without knowing that we are. Thus one important function of this first speech in a play which is intensely preoccupied with what people do *not* know about their deepest feelings is that it will help us to understand the workings of Beatrice's psyche.

At first Beatrice seems almost sensible. When Alsemero declares his love for her, she pontificates:

Be better advis'd, sir:

Our eyes are sentinels unto our judgments,  
And should give certain judgment what they see;  
But they are rash sometimes, and tell us wonders  
Of common things, which when our judgments find,  
They can then check the eyes, and call them blind.

(I.i.71— 76)

Beatrice comes from 'a good family', and knows what sort of thing she ought to say. But her words are hollow in that they are at odds with her own inclination, which is to follow what her eyes tell her, and then to persuade herself that she is not led by them, but by sound judgement. Thus, in an aside a little later, she expresses regret about the fact that she allowed herself to be engaged to Alonzo five days before, saying: 'Sure mine eyes were mistaken,/This was the man was meant me' (11.84 — 85). But the thoughtful reader realizes that there is no reason for believing that her eyes have any more judgement this time than before. Beatrice is driven by a sexual impulse which she has even more trouble in recognizing than Alsemero, and which is stronger.

Having shifted from Alonzo to Alsemero, her impulse moves quite easily to the ugly De Flores, her father's servant. Most readers accept Beatrice's vehement criticism of him at face value. Yet De Flores undoubtedly has a good point when he thinks that 'She knows no cause for't' (1.107). Beatrice

indeed knows no cause for detesting De Flores, as (unbeknown to him and to herself) she is sexually attracted to him; her protestations of revulsion, in their very intensity, are actually manifestations of the emotion which she is dangerously unaware of. Her eroticism is obvious to us, though, when at the end of the scene she says to herself 'Not this serpent gone yet?' and then drops a glove (1.225). The serpent, De Flores, is of course associated with the Garden of Eden (which Alsemero thinks of at the beginning). In her conscious mind, Beatrice rejects him as evil. Yet, unconsciously, she is drawn to him, and she shows this by taking off a piece of clothing which tempts him, just as, on an unconscious level, he tempts her. The image of the serpent is particularly appropriate because a serpent can lose its skin, and this process is matched by Beatrice when she peels off her glove. It is clear that she is not aware of what she has done because her father has to alert her to the fact that the glove has fallen. Significantly (to us, though not to him), Vermandero instructs De Flores to pick it up for her. This incites Beatrice to rail against De Flores, but she takes off her other glove as well, and throws that down too, urging him: 'Take'em and draw thine own skin off with'em' (1.230). Having responded to the serpent by stripping, Beatrice now urges De Flores to engage in a similar act and thus to reinvigorate himself, to establish as a reality the potential to which she had reacted.

De Flores in part grasps what she is about:

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 ... (231 – 34)

Although he misinterprets Beatrice's unconscious attitude to him, he is right to see a relationship between the gloves and Beatrice's sexuality. He fails to understand that Beatrice actually does want him to thrust into her, but he nevertheless realizes that her actions are sexually symbolic. The word 'thrust' will be used in a similarly sexual sense later, when in the next scene (I.ii) Alibius and Lollo agree that it would be undesirable if another lover were to thrust into the ring which

Alibius wears at present on his own finger (i.e. Isabella). Here, again, the image of the finger is phallic, as it will be later in the play (with the ring once again representing the vagina) when De Flores kills Alonzo, and gives Beatrice the finger which he has cut off, having the ring on it which she had sent to Alonzo as a first token (cf. III.iv).

In general, critics have by now come to see this network of symbolism for what it is, in sexual terms.<sup>5</sup> What they have not understood, however, is how the dramatists use this symbolism to bring out the fact that a person may feel and/or do something which he/she is not conscious of, and that that way madness lies. In this respect, De Flores is more aware than Beatrice, but certainly not completely so. Thus he sees his own fingers as phallic in relation to Beatrice's 'sockets', but later he does not comprehend that Alonzo's finger and the ring on it are also sexually symbolic, let alone work out the consequent implications. If he did, he would understand that he cuts off Alonzo's finger because the latter is his sexual rival, and that he offers the finger and the ring to Beatrice in order to assert his male supremacy over her as well as Alonzo. He would also see that in his own mind violence and sex are closely related. He is notably less mad than Beatrice because he knows better what drives him, but he does not know enough.

Still, it is Beatrice who is especially lacking in insight, who lives most in a fantasy world and who is thus, to use the modern word, more clearly 'psychotic'.

By the end of I.ii, Beatrice has revealed her unconscious sexual drive towards De Flores. In her conscious mind, however, she remains attracted to Alsemero, and this leads her to invite De Flores to kill Alonzo — her official fiancé — on her behalf. We thus find her flattering De Flores in II.ii. This has an unfortunate effect upon De Flores of which she is totally unaware: De Flores understands that he himself is a sexual creature, but misinterprets Beatrice's attitude towards him as showing that she too is consciously aroused. It may well be, of course, that Beatrice genuinely finds it easier to flirt with De Flores because of the unconscious passion which she has been developing towards him. But such knowledge is not in her conscious mind, which still rejects De Flores, and the latter is dangerously deluded

in supposing that she seeks his help in killing Alonzo because she wishes to seek a union with him. In fact, at the end of this scene, both characters are revealed as living in a fantasy world. Beatrice thinks that she will be able to rid herself of Alonzo and De Flores 'at one time' — the former by his death, the latter by being bribed to live elsewhere. De Flores imagines her in his arms already. Even so, this flight of fancy is more firmly rooted in reality than Beatrice's notion that she can expect him to kill Alonzo for her and that she can flatter him without intensifying his longing for her, which she had known of all along. De Flores engages in some wishful thinking when interpreting her actions, but it is understandable that he takes seriously such things as her statement that he looks much better than he used to, her touching him, her calling him 'my De Flores', and so on. Although his view of Beatrice is onesided, De Flores does make an effort to interpret her words and actions; Beatrice herself, by contrast, is so exclusively absorbed by her own preoccupations that she altogether fails to understand what goes on inside De Flores. She is more drastically divorced from the reality outside her than he.

To her, murder is merely something one thinks out in the abstract, not something which exists in reality, and when De Flores shows her the finger with the ring upon it in III.iv, she exclaims: 'Bless me! What hast thou done?', to which De Flores replies: 'Why, is that more/Than killing the whole man?' (11.29 — 30). Beatrice's conventional 'Bless me' is typical, not only in being ironically inappropriate but in being unconsciously so. Her sense of shock is not unfittingly dealt with by De Flores. He makes her aware, in this scene, that she cannot claim to be any less guilty of the murder than he is, though she would sooner forget the fact of her involvement. I do not mean, of course, that De Flores's line of reasoning towards her is altogether sound. Contrary to what he suggests, we may resist his implication that because she is 'dipp'd in blood' she should not 'talk of sexual modesty' (1.126). Although he is right to insist that she has been a whore in her affection towards Alonzo (1.142), it does not follow that she must now have intercourse with him. Even so, there is a more compelling kind of logic in these utterings than in Beatrice's feeble reactions to them. For

example, there is – given the fact that she is an accomplice in the murder – very little sanity in her argument that De Flores should keep his distance because of the difference in class between them (cf. 1.130 ff.).

However, Beatrice's yielding to De Flores at the end of the scene comes easily less because of De Flores's arguments *per se* than because she had shared her sexual intensity and violence with him well before the scene, albeit unknowingly. Even if her sexual feeling had been only for Alsemero, the fact that she is prepared to engage in murder to satisfy it would have made her like De Flores, who kills Alonzo because he believes that that will enable him to satisfy his lust for her. But it is not only the similarity of sentiment which is important: De Flores and Beatrice have become obvious partners because, unconsciously, Beatrice has reciprocated his feeling for her when throwing down her gloves. If we insist on misreading the play as though Beatrice is conscious of what she is doing, her surrender to De Flores will continue to strike us as 'unrealistic'. The scene makes perfect sense, however, if we understand that De Flores's arguments merely bring into action a deep current of sexual feeling for him of which Beatrice had not been aware. At the end of this scene, her sexual enjoyment is obvious from De Flores's famous remark, 'Las, how the turtle pants!'

All this does not mean that Beatrice has now reached an adequate understanding of herself. The fact that she engages in sexual action and enjoys it does not produce in her any greater consciousness of her psychological make-up. To protect her position she thinks up the absurd scheme of letting her maid Diaphanta substitute for her on her wedding night. Eventually, an action like this is of course certain to be unsuccessful because it is incompatible with what reality will normally allow to happen. As it is, the plan fails even if not in the way one expects: Alsemero does not recognize his 'bride', but Diaphanta is in her turn carried away by her lust, and stays with Alsemero beyond midnight, when she is meant to leave him so that Beatrice can replace her. What is more important than the potency of Diaphanta's sexuality, however, is the state of Beatrice's mind.

When Beatrice initially thought up this scheme, she did so because she did not want Alsemero to detect that she had lost

her virginity. In her conscious mind, she continues yet more emphatically to do what she thinks society demands even now that she has followed the true inclination of her 'blood'. She is still not willing to admit that inclination to herself. What she makes herself believe is that she is an honest, respectable person, and this comes particularly to the fore in Act V which starts with the following speech by Beatrice:

One struck, and yet she lies by't! — Oh my fears!  
 This strumpet serves her own ends, 'tis apparent now,  
 Devours the pleasure with a greedy appetite,  
 And never minds my honour or my peace,  
 Makes havoc of my right; but she pays dearly for't:  
 No trusting of her life with such a secret,  
 That cannot rule her blood to keep her promise.  
 Beside, I have some suspicion of her faith to me  
 Because I was suspected of my lord,  
 And it must come from her, — hark, by my horrors,  
 Another clock strikes two.

The measure of Beatrice's insanity here lies in the extent to which she deludes herself about feelings and actions which she imputes to Diaphanta when she should recognize them as her own. Diaphanta has no status as a 'strumpet', but Beatrice had shown herself a whore in her affection, as De Flores puts it (III.iv.142), by switching from Alonzo to Alsemero. Now that she has a sexual relationship with De Flores, begun even before her marriage to Alsemero, there can be no doubt that the word 'strumpet' is more applicable to her than to Diaphanta. She accuses Diaphanta of a 'greedy appetite' because that is what she has herself, though significantly she will not admit that to her conscious mind. Her talk about Diaphanta not minding her 'honour' shows just how confused she is about what she is doing. A 'normal' person might try to keep up appearances while aware of her own sin; Beatrice, by contrast, has persuaded herself that it is Diaphanta who is sinning while there is nothing wrong with her own actions. Again, it is Beatrice herself rather than Diaphanta who 'cannot rule her blood to keep her promise', first to Alonzo, then to Alsemero. She even appears to believe that Diaphanta may have had a prior sexual relationship with Alsemero

because the latter tests her chastity in IV. ii. Her staggering ability to avoid seeing the truth about herself can only be explained on the assumption that she is insane. Indeed, she is insane exactly because she cannot see the truth about herself, and thus comes to invent a 'reality' which does not exist.

De Flores's grasp on reality is not perfect either. The lustful relationship between him and Beatrice has now become habitual, and, to protect what he calls 'Our pleasure and continuance' (1.50), he proposes to set fire to part of Diaphanta's chamber, in order to wake up the household (which then presumably would create such chaos that none would realize that Diaphanta had been in Alsemero's bed). As even Beatrice realizes, this may 'endanger the whole house' (1.33). It seems likely that the dramatists wish us to see the fire as symbolic of the sexual passion of the lovers, which De Flores is more dominated by than he knows. Although he does at least acknowledge that his relationship with Beatrice gives him 'pleasure', he appears to be unaware that it is clouding his judgement. In fact, he now appears to be influenced by Beatrice's psychology, for he counters her fear that he may endanger the whole house with the statement: 'You talk of danger when your fame's on fire?'

The reference to her 'fame' immediately and tellingly distracts Beatrice's mind from the possibility that the whole house may get burnt, and her reaction is simply: 'That's true; do what thou wilt now'. De Flores explains to her that either the others will think that Diaphanta has escaped from her room because of the fire, or, if she hastens back towards her own lodging, he will shoot her there. This solicitude for her welfare prompts Beatrice to say:

I'm forc'd to love thee now,  
 'Cause thou provid'st so carefully for my honour.  
(47—48)

Such a statement, in such a situation, does not proceed from a 'normal' person who is merely lying; it shows the confusion and self-deceit of a sick mind. One of the many interesting implications here is that Beatrice is now beginning to seek a rationalization for her love for De Flores rather than

Alsemero. Similarly when the fire has been discovered, Beatrice exclaims:

Already? How rare is that man's speed!  
 How heartily he serves me! His face loathes one,  
 But look upon his care, who would not love him?  
 The east is not more beautiful than his service.

(69—72)

And, in fact, De Flores's plot works, so that for the time being she can continue to live in her fantasy world. But Jasperino, Alsemero's servant who in IV.ii had already informed his master of the illicit relationship between De Flores and Beatrice, now produces the proof which had then been lacking. Thus V.iii opens with Jasperino's statement:

Your confidence, I'm sure, is now of proof.  
 The prospect from the garden has show'd Enough  
 for deep suspicion.

When Alsemero, acting on what he has seen, accuses Beatrice of being a whore, she replies:

What a horrid sound it hath!  
 It blasts a beauty to deformity;  
 Upon what face soever that breath falls,  
 It strikes it ugly: oh, you have ruin'd  
 What you can ne'er repair again. (31 — 35)

Typically, and madly, Beatrice is preoccupied with the 'sound' of the word 'whore', not with the content as it applies to her — indeed, she makes out that it is Alsemero who is doing her harm by using such an ugly word, and her words are those of a person who is lying to herself rather than to him. She tries to evade the reality which lies behind the word, as though the two can be separated.

Even when the truth comes closer to her, she still tries to turn it away and into something different. Amazingly, she comes to boast of the murder of Alonzo as something caused by her love for Alsemero; and she sees similar virtue in her having 'kiss'd poison for't, strok'd a serpent' (1.66).



Strikingly, she now begins once again to deny her feelings for De Flores, and indeed it does not take her long to persuade herself that she has been loyal to Alsemero all along. In her conception of things, that loyalty is compatible with the sexual relationship which she has just confessed to having, and thus she no doubt believes her own falsehood when she says to Alsemero:

Remember I am true unto your bed. (82)

Shortly afterwards, however, she experiences a rare moment of insight, and then admits:

Alsemero, I am a stranger to your bed. (159)

By this time, De Flores has spoken openly about their misdeeds to Alsemero, who has locked up the pair in his closet. What happens here appears to be hinted at quite plainly in the text. Tomazo, Alonzo's brother, comes to seek recompense for 'murder and adultery' (1.138). What he refers to, of course, is Alonzo's murder, and the adultery which he supposes Alsemero has committed by marrying Beatrice. But exactly as the words 'murder and adultery' are spoken, Beatrice, in the closet, is heard to utter 'Oh, oh, oh!', and Alsemero comments 'Hark, 'tis coming to you'. What he means, surely, is that at this very moment adultery is coming to Tomazo because De Flores and Beatrice are having intercourse, while at the same time De Flores is killing her. Again, sex and violence are combined.

Bizarre though the episode is, it shocks Beatrice into recognition of reality, and she is thus able to say to her father:

Oh come not near me, sir, I shall defile you:  
I am that of your blood was taken from you  
For your better health ... (149 — 51)

At last, Beatrice herself confirms to us what, at a deep level, has been plain throughout the play: that *she* is the changeling, not Antonio, to whom that role is assigned in the *Dramatis Personae*. Antonio is no more than a counterfeit fool, and that must mean that, as the sub-plot and the main

plot are ironically related, the real changeling is a person who is genuinely mad. That person, as the text abundantly illustrates, is Beatrice. A changeling in the seventeenth century was an ugly or mentally deficient child which the fairies left in the place of a normal child which they stole, but this meaning is given an ironic twist by the dramatists. What the fairies had taken away from Beatrice's father when she was born was bad blood. If his daughter had not been born to become insane, no doubt he would have become so. Put differently: the price for his own normality is Beatrice's madness, with which he is now painfully confronted. His apparently angelic daughter turns out to be an ugly, insane changeling.

Is there some structure of contemporary thought — to be found in treatises on madness and the like — to which the play appears to correspond? Such an approach always has its dangers, since literature — particularly good literature — is a good deal more exploratory than any system which may be part of it, which it seeks to modify, or even to undermine. But an approach through 'background' is particularly unhelpful in the case of *The Changeling*. The more familiar medieval and Renaissance ways of thinking with respect to manifestations of abnormality are really not much to the point. The humoral theory is altogether too physical in its emphasis. According to this view, there would be an imbalance in the four humours (fluids) in Beatrice's body, and normality could be restored by the removal of the imbalance. While there is the odd reference to the humoral theory in the play, there is no indication that the dramatists believe that Beatrice could be successfully treated by this method. The dramatists clearly see the development of her madness in mental rather than physical terms.

The fascination with 'melancholy' as madness, best known to most of us through Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (which appeared in 1621, just before *The Changeling* was licensed in 1622), is not one which Middleton and Rowley seem to share. A study of that book, and of earlier ones dealing with melancholy, does not give us much insight into what these dramatists are doing. It does help us to understand certain characters in Renaissance literature, of course, such as Hamlet (partly) or those who adopted a

melancholy pose as a matter of fashion, such as the melancholy Jaques. Admittedly the term 'melancholy' could be very far stretched by those who used it, and certain analysts saw a tendency to false imaginings as a characteristic of melancholy. Nevertheless, the typical melancholic is more conspicuously mad than Beatrice, and in quite a different way — her mood is not the sombre, despairing one of the melancholic.

Many writers saw madness of a fiercer and more passionate kind than melancholy (as well as melancholy itself) in religious terms: a mad person was 'possessed' by the devil. Although our dramatists certainly see madness as evil, and although the image of the serpent is of course associated with the devil, they obviously do not view Beatrice as just another witch.

The early seventeenth century was a time of great change, and many of the older beliefs were beginning to crack. The many contemporary tracts which deal in some way with madness do not offer any simple picture of what madness was held to be, how it was supposed to originate, or how it could be treated. A good comprehensive book on the subject still remains to be written, but it would certainly show that there were people who believed that madness could not be satisfactorily explained in terms of humoral theory, melancholy, or witchcraft. No treatise that I have seen, however, comes even remotely close to presenting a view so complex, coherent, profound and persuasive as that which is embodied in *The Changeling*. One must add that there were other literary writers, notably dramatists — Shakespeare, and particularly Webster and Ford come to mind — who appear to have made a remarkable contribution to the understanding of madness, well ahead of the 'professionals' such as members of the clergy and medical men. But *The Changeling*, in my view, is a more crucial play in this regard than any of the others, and this is one reason why it is so necessary for us to see clearly what it is about.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The following selection of recent discussions is particularly pertinent to my approach; Christopher Ricks, 'The Moral and Poetic Structure of *The Changeling*', *Essays in Criticism*, 10 (1960), 290 – 306; Normand Berlin, 'The "Finger" Image and Relationship of Character in *The Changeling*', *English Studies in Africa*, 12 (1969), 162 – 66; Robert Jordan, 'Myth and Psychology in *The Changeling*', *Renaissance Drama* n.s. III (1970), 157 – 65; S. Gorley Putt, 'The Tormented World of Middleton', *Times Literary Supplement* (August 2, 1974), 833 – 34; Penelope B. R. Doob, 'A Reading of *The Changeling*', *English Literary Renaissance* III (1973), 183 – 206; Joseph M. Duffy, 'Madhouse Optics: *The Changeling*', *Comparative Drama*, 8 (1974), 184 – 97; Emil Roy, 'Sexual Paradox in *The Changeling*', *Literature and Psychology*, XXX (1975), 124 – 32; J. L. Simmons, 'Diabolical Realism in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*', *Renaissance Drama* n.s. XI (1980), 135 – 70; Peter Morrison, 'A Cangoun in Zombieland: Middleton's Tetralogical *Changeling*', in Kenneth Friedenreich, *Accompaning the players' – Essays Celebrating Thomas Middleton, 1580–1980* (New York, 1983), 219 – 41; Ann Pasternak Slater, 'Hypallage, Barley-Break, and *The Changeling*', *The Review of English Studies*, n.s. XXXIV (1983), 429 – 40; Charles W. Crupi, 'The Transformation of De Flores in *The Changeling*', *Neophilologus* 68 (1984), 142 – 49.

<sup>2</sup> All references are to the edition of *The Changeling* by N. W. Bawcutt (1958), which from a scholarly point of view remains the best. Critically, Bawcutt is less satisfying. Thus he begins to move in the direction that he should when considering the relationship between the sub-plot and the main plot, but, like other critics, abandons his search exactly when he needs to press on with it (cf. particularly p. lxvii of his Introduction). Other editors fare no better – see e.g. Kenneth Muir in his *Thomas Middleton, Three Plays* (1975), p. xii.

<sup>3</sup> 'Ring' in the sense of 'female pudenda' was common – see Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* 8th ed., rev. Paul Beale (1984).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the unpublished thesis by James Knight (supervised by

Dr Francis Brooks), 'Images of Madness in England in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries' (Flinders University of South Australia, 1982), p. 34, with quotations from another thesis, by R. Neugebauer, 'Mental Illness and Government Policy in 16th Century and 17th Century England' (Columbia University, 1976), p. 13. The latter contains a detailed examination of the workings of the Court of Wards and Liveries. References to many of the tracts in the Renaissance which concerned themselves with questions of madness can be found in such books as R. Hunter and I. MacAlpine, *300 Years of Psychiatry 1535 — 1860: A History Presented in Selected English Texts* (1963); Bridget Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy: Studies in Literary Treatments of Melancholy in Renaissance England* (1971); Robert Shenk, *The Sinner's Progress: A Study of Madness in English Renaissance Drama* (1978); V. Skultans, *English Madness: Ideas on Insanity, 1580-1890* (1979).

<sup>5</sup> See notably Berlin's excellent article, although some of his successors, too, comment on the issue here and there.