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HYPALLAGE, BARLEY-BREAK, AND THE CHANGELING

By ANN PASTERNAK SLATER

THE *Oxford English Dictionary* glosses five senses for the noun 'changeling', four of which are directly relevant to Middleton and Rowley's play of that name. It is perhaps a little ironic that William Empson should favour the least obviously relevant sense in his analysis of the play. For him, Beatrice is 'morally a child such as the fairies can steal, and fearing De Flores as a goblin'. Isabella is dragged by the madmen into a lunatic world, like a changeling stolen into a fairy world. Even De Flores can be fitted into this capacious context: "The real changeling from which the play "derives its title" is De Flores."¹ Yet there is no unequivocally identifiable reference to this sense (*OED* sb. 3) in *The Changeling*.

It is, however, obvious enough that the play contains a number of characters given to fickleness and change (*OED* sb. 1), whose interconnections and ramifications have been traced in detail by the play's commentators.² The relevance of 'changeling' in the sense of idiot or half-wit (*OED* sb. 4) is also amply accounted for in analyses of the play's two plots—neither last nor least by Empson himself.³ 'Changeling' in the sense of a surreptitious substitute (*OED* sb. 2) has been less remarked on.⁴ Yet it is raised theoretically, early in the play, when Tomazo warns his brother Alonzo against marrying a woman like Beatrice, who has patently lost interest in him. For the husband may be ousted by an imaginary surreptitious substitute:

Tomazo Think what a torment 'tis to marry one
Whose heart is leap'd into another's bosom:
If ever pleasure she receive from thee,
It comes not in thy name or of thy gift;
She lies but with another in thine arms,
He the half father unto all thy children. (II. i. 130 ff.)

¹ W. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London, 1968), pp. 52, 50. See also R. Levin, *The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago and London, 1971), p. 45 n. 19.

² Well summarized by G. W. Williams in the introduction to his edition of *The Changeling* (London, 1966), pp. xv ff., whose text is used here.

³ See Empson, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-52; M. C. Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1935), pp. 213-24; K. Holzknecht, 'The Dramatic Structure of *The Changeling*', *Renaissance Papers 1954* (Columbia, SC, 1955), pp. 77-87; P. B. R. Doob, 'A Reading of *The Changeling*', *English Literary Renaissance*, 3 (1973), 183-206; B. Nauer, *Thomas Middleton: A Study of the Narrative Structures* (Zurich, 1977).

⁴ Noted by Williams, *ed. cit.*, p. xv, and Nauer, *op. cit.*, p. 85, *en passant*.

In Yeats's words: 'Maybe the bride-bed brings despair, / For each an imagined image brings / And finds a real image there' ('Solomon and the Witch'). This sense of 'changeling' (*OED* sb. 2) at least partially validates two of the less satisfactory plot elements at the play's latter end—the virginity test, with Diaphanta's consequent impersonation of Beatrice on her wedding-night, and the suspicions thrown on the innocent Antonio and Franciscus as Alonzo's murderers. Diaphanta is a changeling in the sense that she becomes Beatrice's surreptitious substitute as a bride; Franciscus and Antonio are changelings in the sense that they are De Flores's substitutes, unwilling culprits for a crime he committed. Thus Beatrice and De Flores, arch changelings in its primary sense, force others into being changelings (*OED* sb. 2) on their behalf.

We are left with the *OED*'s universally neglected sense 5, 'The rhetorical figure *Hypallage*. *Obs.*' Perhaps obsolescence is the reason why it has been left in obscurity. Yet it is strikingly relevant to the play. It is a rhetorical trope somewhat similar to the modern spoonerism, except that whole words, rather than their initial letters, change places. In *The Arte of English Poesie* Puttenham calls it '*Hipallage*. or the Changeling', and describes it as a 'sort of exchange' of words in their entirety,

changing their true construction and application, whereby the sence is quite peruerted and made very absurd: as, he that should say, for *tell me troth and lie not, lie me troth and tell not.* (III. xv)

Puttenham gives a number of other examples, but his first is the best for our purposes, since it epitomizes the moral muddle lying at the heart of *The Changeling* with such uncanny aptness.

The central concern of *The Changeling* is the ease with which anti-theoretical qualities can cross over and combine, to create a sense of moral confusion exactly like 'lie me troth'. This is seen on a number of levels, above all the moral and the emotional. It is also deployed with equal sharpness in verbal imagery, and its concrete corollary, stage symbol.

Hypallage in its emotional manifestation is the easiest to follow. Instead of 'lie me troth' we have, in effect, 'love me hate'. The contrareity of appetite is continually stressed. At the beginning of the play Alsemero glosses Beatrice's aversion to De Flores with generous understanding, but ironically prophetic accuracy: 'There's scarce a thing but is both lov'd and loath'd' (I. i. 121). True enough, Beatrice's overmastering physical abhorrence for De Flores is to turn into physical dependence. Love and loathing unite equally closely in his attraction to her ('I know she hates me, yet cannot choose but love her', I. i. 231). It is one of the play's many psychological truths that

De Flores should be perversely attracted by Beatrice's scorn, just as she finds a kind of haven in his mastery. The paradoxes of appetite are vividly and convincingly embodied in their relationship, and continually stressed in the dialogue:

De Flores As children cry themselves asleep, I ha' seen
Women have chid themselves abed to men. (II. i. 87-8)

Abhorrence and attraction unite, and the loathsome becomes lovely:

De Flores Hunger and pleasure, they'll commend sometimes
Slovenly dishes and feed heartily on 'em . . .
Some women are odd feeders. (II. ii. 152 ff.)

This, the emotional embodiment of hypallage in the play, is striking enough. What is even more disturbing is the play's exploitation of what might be called moral hypallage, whereby vice and virtue exchange places, so that vices are committed in the name of virtue, and virtues themselves become vicious.

At first the characters appear to use moral positives in their straightforward sense:

Beatrice Oh, sir, I'm ready now for that fair *service* . . .
Methinks I love now with the eyes of judgement
And see the way to *merit* . . . (II. i. 1 ff.)

De Flores True *service merits mercy* . . . (II. i. 63)

Christopher Ricks has pointed out the sexual connotations that soon begin to corrupt words like 'service'.⁵ He concentrates on the widespread punning which links the crime of murder with lust (in recurrent words like *blood, will, act, and deed*). The cross-over he identifies could be seen as another form of hypallage, in which sin is allied with sin and their senses alternate and superimpose. But hypallage in its most disturbing manifestation operates on an *antithetical* moral axis where vice and virtue create a dramatic criss-cross. By III. iv, the central scene between Beatrice and De Flores, all moral positives are prostituted to abhorrent ends. And yet the play's supreme irony lies in the fact that they do not entirely lose their positive force. Beatrice and De Flores both believe in the virtues they invoke; the tone of high moral indignation is natural to them both. De Flores refuses Beatrice's money as the wage for Alonzo's murder with reverberant unworldliness:

Do you place me in the rank of verminous fellows
To destroy things for wages? Offer gold?

⁵ C. Ricks, 'The Moral and Poetic Structure of *The Changeling*', *Essays in Criticism*, x (1960), 290-306.

The lifeblood of man! Is anything
Valued too precious for my recompense? (III. iv. 65 ff.)

The uncomfortable coexistence of the vicious and the virtuous, the perverted absurdity (to use Puttenham's terms) of 'lie me troth', are sustained in De Flores's later speech, where adultery becomes 'charity', and infidelity is 'justice':

I have eas'd
 You of your trouble, think on't; I'm in pain
 And must be eas'd of you; tis a *charity*.
Justice invites your blood to understand me. (III. iv. 98 ff.)

Beatrice invokes comparable moral absolutes in her indignation at his demand, until the couple seem to be competing with each other in their ethical high-mindedness:

Beatrice Why, 'tis impossible thou canst be so wicked . . .
 To make his death the murderer of my honor.
 Thy language is so bold and vicious
 I cannot see which way I can forgive it
 With any modesty.

De Flores Push, you forget yourself;
 A woman dipp'd in blood and talk of modesty!
 (III. iv. 121 ff.)

The ironies of such misplaced moral positives intensify as the play progresses. By the wedding-night on which Diaphanta takes Beatrice's place, there is a painful irony in Beatrice's naïve talk of an honour lost long ago. Diaphanta extends the night's pleasures, 'And never minds my honor or my peace'. De Flores is her worthy protector: 'I'm forc'd to love thee now, / 'Cause thou provid'st so carefully for my honor' (v. i. 4, 47-8). Even by the fourth act, the moral terms used so innocently at the start have become corrupted. So the other characters' terms for De Flores, 'honest', 'kind', and 'true' (iv. ii. 38, 43, 58) are as ironically misplaced as their praise of Beatrice, 'modesty's shrine . . . The dove's not meeker . . . Chaste as the breath of heaven' (iv. ii. 126, 129, 150).

To recognize—as of course we must—the vicious nature of Beatrice and De Flores, is to take only one half of the play's total vision, and to nullify its power altogether. *The Changeling's* unforgettable intensity lies precisely in its fusion of the vicious and the virtuous. Our understanding has to accommodate both our objective knowledge and the characters' subjective misconceptions. This kind of critical double-think operates more obviously with Beatrice than

De Flores. In Beatrice, vices are committed in the name of virtue, and her passionate certitude of her own virtue overlays her vice so completely, that it takes her a whole play to recognize what we can see clearly. De Flores has a much sharper moral vision. But in him, virtues become vicious. As Beatrice says, he is a devoted servant, 'The east is not more beauteous than his service' (v. i. 72). His service, though, is murder, hardly a beautiful function. It is only by the very end of the play that the moral confusion of 'lie me troth' is disentangled, as Beatrice continues to defend her ultimately justifying virtue, her love for Alsemero, and is answered by him:

Beatrice Remember I am true unto your bed.
Alsemero The bed itself's a charnel, the sheets shrouds
 For murdered carcasses. (v. iii. 83-5)

The tone of the play, then, is one in which antithetical values continually change places, to create a kind of moral alternating current from negative to positive and back again. Such a tone is further sustained in the dialogue, from startling incidental juxtapositions, like 'Is this violence? 'Tis but idleness' (I. i. 43), to extended surprises, like Beatrice's lines on Alsemero: 'One that's ennobled both in blood and mind, / So clear in understanding (that's my plague now)' (iv. i. 5-6). Often the fluctuations are so fast they are hard to follow, like Beatrice's response to the murder of her fiancé: '*De Flores*: Piracquo is no more. *Beatrice*: My joys start at mine eyes; our sweet'st delights / Are evermore born weeping' (III. iv. 24-6).

Such swift alternations are further deployed in a series of images closely linking main and sub-plots, such as the recurrent antitheses of sanity-madness, service and mastery, beauty and ugliness, food and poison (as images of sexual appetite, in Middleton's habitual mode), and the fluctuations between blessings and curse.

To take only the last of these. Beatrice declines from being blessed (both by her innocence, and her father's indulgence) to one accursed. Her fall from grace comes from her wilfulness, and is ironically heralded in the antithetical lines:

What's Piracquo
 My father spends his breath for? And his *blessing*
 Is only mine as I regard his name;
 Else it goes from me and turns head against me,
 Transform'd into a *curse*. (II. i. 19 ff.)

The speech is echoed as Beatrice begins to slide downwards, contemplating the murder of Alonzo de Piracquo:

How well were I now
 If there were none such name known as Piracquo?
 Nor no such tie as the command of parents?
 I should be but too much *blessed*. (II. ii. 18 ff.)

Alsemero's answer, offering his 'service' in a duel, raises the word we are later to connect with De Flores. The dubious blessing of De Flores's services will certainly free Beatrice of her filial bonds, delivering her into a dreadful independence. It is only in this sense that she can be thought of as a changeling in Empsonian fairy terms (*OED* sb. 3), because she turns from her father and a state of primal innocence, to a hellish other-world where she is fathered by her own vice. As De Flores says:

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 . . . (III. iv. 135 ff.)

As Beatrice sinks deeper into damnation, her four-times-repeated invocation, 'Bless me!', becomes increasingly ironic. Like her claims to her honour, it is tragically misplaced. It is also pointedly linked with each stage of her fall. Vainly, she tries to bless herself when De Flores shows her Alonzo's severed finger, as a sign of the murder done; when De Flores claims her as his mistress; when she discovers Alsemero's pregnancy and virginity tests; and when Alonzo's ghost slides past (III. iv. 30, 76; IV. i. 20; V. i. 62). The last two are particularly interesting. Most critics either frankly dismiss the latter part of the play, finding a sad falling-off with the business of the virginity test, or they try, generally with little conviction, to justify it.⁶ However, this new twist to the plot surely takes Beatrice a significant step further downhill. In commissioning the death of Alonzo she caused the death of an innocent man. But with the discovery of the virginity test intended for her by her husband, she is driven first to use, and then to kill, Diaphanta. In an attempt to preserve her own 'honour', she prostitutes Diaphanta's virginity, blasts her innocence,⁷ and then has her killed. So she ensures Diaphanta's damnation. Alonzo's body is destroyed; with Diaphanta, Beatrice and De Flores destroy body and soul. The increased imminence of hell for both criminals may be suggested by the appearance of Alonzo's ghost at just this point.

⁶ Doob, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-201, is most convincing. See also Nauer, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

⁷ The fact that Diaphanta is a willing sensualist simply complicates our moral judgement of her, as of the play's other characters, in the manner characteristic of the play. See p. 440 below.

Thereafter, Beatrice's vain invocation is taken up by her father, as her damnation is completed, his house fired ('Oh, bless my house and me', v. i. 87), and Diaphanta's charred corpse displayed ('Bless us! What's that?', v. i. 107). At each point it is as perverted in sense as 'lie me troth'—the blessing is a curse.

Beatrice's slide into damnation, so ironically marked by these invocations, brings us to the play's stage imagery, and in particular to the game of barley-break. Before considering this ingenious and significant stage symbol, the relationship of the play's other stage imagery to its central theme should be made clear.

The point is simple enough. Just as the play illustrates a metaphysical hypallage, in which love and loathing, vice and virtue, and other dominant antitheses cross over and become confused, so the play's stage imagery demonstrates the same antithetical force. Traditional stage symbols are reversed to mean the opposite of what a Jacobean audience would expect—and yet they retain some (now surprising) shred of their original significance. For instance, Beatrice's first significant stage act is to drop her glove—the traditional come-on to a shy suitor. In this case, though, it has the opposite function. She turns it into a way of insulting De Flores,⁸ as his response makes clear—in the play's characteristic antithetical mode:

Beatrice Mischief on your officious forwardness;
Who bade you stoop? They touch my hand no more;
There, for t'other's sake I part with this;
Take 'em and draw thine own skin off with 'em. *Exeunt.*

De Flores Here's a favor come with a mischief now. (I. i. 223 ff.)

But, as we know, the act is also ironically prophetic: De Flores will become her *cavaliere servente*. Similarly, later De Flores kneels in the traditional manner to offer Beatrice his service, and receives the commission to murder Alonzo. He rises, though, to serve her by mastering her. As Alsemero says in the final summing-up, in De Flores 'servant obedience' is turned to 'master sin, imperious murder' (v. iii. 199–200). De Flores's service turns into Beatrice's subservience, and the mistress services the servant's lust. Contrary to general editorial practice, it is surely more dramatic to make De Flores rise on the line that presses this irony home:⁹

Beatrice Then I throw all my fears upon thy service.
De Flores They ne'er shall rise to hurt you. (II. ii. 141–2)

⁸ For R. Jordan, 'Myth and Psychology in *The Changeling*', *Renaissance Drama* (1970), p. 160, this is a 'degradation of the romantic image'.

⁹ Both N. W. Bawcutt, in her edition of *The Changeling* (London, 1958), p. 39, and Williams, ed. cit., p. 35, make him rise seven lines earlier, on 'His end's upon him'. There is no stage direction in the original text.

Thus the traditional image is fulfilled and undermined simultaneously once again: De Flores rises not to 'hurt' Beatrice, but to be the factor for her crimes, her lover, and her worst hurt. The point is emphatically repeated later, in an apparent stage reversal, when Beatrice in her turn kneels to De Flores, begging him to let her off sleeping with him. Once again we have a traditional stage symbol, this time of the suppliant kneeling for mercy, and once again the stage symbol is ostensibly fulfilled, and undermined, simultaneously. De Flores raises her up, but his mercy to her contains no grace. This is the beginning of their union (as his powerfully sexual image makes clear). And, reversing all traditional expectations of the symbolic connotations of rise and fall, Beatrice rises to her utter damnation:

De Flores Come, rise and shroud your blushes in my bosom . . .
 Thy peace is wrought forever in this yielding.
 'Las, how the turtle pants! Thou'lt love anon
 What thou so fear'st and faint'st to venture on.
 (III. iv. 167 ff.)

Damnation brings us back to barley-break. This barely evoked image is a potent symbol for the entire play, epitomizing its narrative plot throughout, and triumphantly embodying the infernal implications of its final denouement.

Barley-break was a pastoral game generally played by three couples, one pair at either end of the pitch, the third 'in hell' between them. The two free couples have to try and change partners, the couple in hell must intercept them without losing hold of each other. If they succeed, they get out of hell and their place is taken by another combination of players. The game is used lucidly in one of Suckling's lyrics, which makes this progression of partners clear:

Love, Reason, Hate, did once bespeak
 Three mates to play at barley-break;
 Love Folly took; and Reason, Fancy;
 And Hate consorts with Pride; so dance they.
 Love coupled last, and so it fell,
 That Love and Folly were in Hell.
 They break, and Love would Reason meet,
 But Hate was nimbler on her feet;
 Fancy looks for Pride, and thither
 Hies, and they two hug together:
 Yet this new coupling still doth tell,
 That Love and Folly were in hell.

The rest do break again, and Pride
 Hath now got Reason on her side;
 Hate and Fancy meet, and stand
 Untouched by Love in Folly's hand;
 Folly was dull, but Love ran well:
 So Love and Folly were in hell.

Thus in the first bout the partners are Reason-Fancy; Hate-Pride; Love-Folly in hell. In the second, Reason-Hate; Fancy-Pride; Love-Folly in hell. In the third, Pride-Reason; Hate-Fancy; Love-Folly in hell. As Suckling's lyric shows, rather flatly, the game was a neat metaphor of the changing partners, the fickleness and folly of love. In Sidney's long account of the same game,¹⁰ its metaphorical connotations are spelt out even more clearly:

Then couples three be streight allotted there,
 They of both ends the middle two doe flie,
 The two that in mid place, Hell called were,
 Must strive with waiting foot, and watching eye
 To catch of them, and them to hell to beare,
 That they, aswell as they, Hell may supplie:
 Like some which seeke to salve their blotted name
 With others blott, till all do tast of shame.
 There may you see, soone as the middle two
 Do coupled towards either couple make,
 They false and fearfull doe their hands undoe,
 Brother his brother, frend doth frend forsake,
 Heeding himselfe, cares not how fellow doe,
 But of a straunger mutuall help doth take:
 As perjur'd cowards in aduersity
 With sight of feare from frends to fremb'd do flie.

These lines are uncannily appropriate to the two plots of *The Changeling*. One can only assume that poem and play independently draw on the game's natural connotations. Isabella and Beatrice both turn (or seem to turn, in Isabella's case) from one partner to the next, ignorant of who is friend or foe. Both are infected 'with others blott'. Beatrice is morally poisoned (to use the play's terminology) by contact with De Flores, while Isabella merely seems to be infected by her lunatic suitors, appearing in a lunatic disguise like them, in iv. iii. 100. Moreover, the play can be seen to go through three bouts, like a game of barley-break, in each of which three sets of lovers exchange partners, as in Suckling's and Sidney's poems (and it should be added

¹⁰ Lamon's Song, *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. W. A. Ringler (Oxford, 1962), pp. 247-52, ll. 208-416. The quoted lines are 225-40.

that in Sidney's version a new player enters the game, just as several do in the play). So *The Changeling* begins with the following couples: Beatrice-Alonzo; Isabella-Alibius; Jasperino-Diaphanta. In the second bout we find Beatrice-Alsemero (and Alonzo out); Isabella-Antonio, closely pursued by Lollo (and Isabella's encouragement of Antonio is pointedly marked by the madmen's off-stage cry, 'Catch there, catch the last couple in hell', III. iii. 162). Jasperino-Diaphanta remain as before. In the third bout it is Isabella-Franciscus; Diaphanta-Alsemero; Beatrice-De Flores. The game ends when Isabella rejects all three of her pursuers; Diaphanta, like Alonzo, is out; and Beatrice-De Flores are left as the last couple in hell.

The little hell of barley-break swells into the ultimate embodiment of the play's central theme. We have already watched Beatrice slide from a state of grace to damnation in the course of the play. At the end hell is identified with the discovery-space, the 'closet' into which Alsemero shoves Beatrice and De Flores when he finds out their crimes. What they then do there together is left ambiguous. Alsemero drives De Flores in to Beatrice with the ominous words, 'Take your prey to you' (v. iii. 114). In the play's recurrent mode, his words have dual and antithetical connotations: either De Flores will kill her, or make her his sexual prey. The connotations of violence give way to those of sex in Alsemero's next lines:

I'll be your pander now; rehearse again
 Your scene of lust, that you may be perfect
 When you shall come to act it to the black audience
 Where howls and gnashings shall be music to you.
 Clip your adulteress freely; 'tis the pilot
 Will guide you to the *Mare Mortuum*
 Where you shall sink to fathoms bottomless. (v. iii. 115 ff.)

Beatrice and De Flores are left in the closet off-stage while Vermandero and the rest explain past events to each other. The audience cannot but wonder what is going on in there. Eighteen lines later, their curiosity is intensified by the wholly ambiguous cry:

Beatrice (within) Oh, oh, oh. (v. iii. 140)

Her cries break in on Tomazo's last words, 'A recompense for murder and adultery'. Is it murder they can hear, or adultery? The next lines intensify the ambiguity, strengthening the sexual overtones:

De Flores (within) Nay, I'll along for company.¹¹

Beatrice (within) Oh, oh. (v. iii. 141)

When Vermandero asks 'What horrid sounds are these?' the answer is, clearly, the howls and gnashings of hell. But the ambiguities are only resolved when Alsemero brings the bloody couple out, and their act is identified as murder and suicide. Thus this final, ambiguous off-stage tableau epitomizes the hypallage on which the play is founded in exact, violent terms. Love becomes murder; the cry of consummation is the cry of destruction; extreme antitheses become one.

Such a union of paradox is a favourite staple of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, a popular dramatization of a Petrarchan cliché. The ambiguous off-stage union or destruction of Beatrice and De Flores can be compared to the tableau ending *Romeo and Juliet*. Here the dead lovers lie in each other's arms on a tomb decked with flowers, visually indistinguishable from a pair of lovers entwined on their flower-strewn wedding-bed—but sleeping, alas, in the consummation of death. Shakespeare repeated a grimmer version of the paradox in the death of Othello, where 'kiss' and 'kill' unite so tragically ('I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee. No way but this— / Killing my self, to die upon a kiss'). The difference is that in *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Othello*, we recognize and mourn an act of death, which should have been an act of love. But in *The Changeling* the act of love turns into an act of death. In this game of barley-break, love and service are partnered with adultery and murder, and left in hell together.

It might be asked what this reading adds to previous criticism of the play, apart from introducing hypallage and expanding on barley-break. There has been much discussion of the relative merits and demerits of the main characters. Is Beatrice hypocritical, selfish, and stupid? Or does she also have the 'essential innocence' of a spoilt child, an 'artless and ingenuous sincerity', with 'perfect simplicity of expression' and 'perfect innocence of . . . surprise'?¹² Is De Flores an embodiment of evil, ugly in face as he is corrupt in nature, or is his ugliness an antithetical 'symbol of his "wondrous" honesty, his badge of authority as a moral spokesman'?¹³ Is De Flores the

¹¹ For the sexual connotations, compare the song from Dryden's *Marriage A-la-Mode*, iv. ii. 47 ff., e.g. 'She cry'd, Oh my dear, I am robb'd of my bliss; / 'Tis unkind to your Love, and unfaithfully done, / To leave me behind you, and die all alone. // The Youth, though in haste, / And breathing his last, / In pity dy'd slowly, while she dy'd more fast', etc.

¹² U. Ellis-Fermor, *The Jacobean Drama* (London, 1958), p. 147; A. C. Swinburne, *The Age of Shakespeare* (London, 1908), pp. 180-1. Both authors stress the characters' moral ambivalence, e.g. in Swinburne's apt paradox for De Flores, with his 'simple-hearted brutality of devotion' (p. 178).

¹³ D. M. Holmes, *The Art of Thomas Middleton* (Oxford, 1970), p. 180.

deflowerer of Beatrice's innocence, or is it Beatrice who tempts him into crime?¹⁴ Is De Flores contrasted with 'the outwardly attractive, hypocritical Alsemero',¹⁵ or is Alsemero the innocent foil to De Flores? Is Isabella the chaste contrast to Beatrice, or is there the suggestion that she is ready to succumb to Antonio's overtures?¹⁶ The present reading would place all such genuine ambiguities within the central theme, for in this play vice and virtue are not only difficult for the characters to identify and adhere to—the audience and the reader are encouraged to share some of their uncertainty as the play progresses.¹⁷

Similarly, a number of stimulating recent readings have taken up non-psychological aspects of the play's exploitation of unexpected reversals. R. Levin points out, for instance, that the play inverts traditional expectations of a double-plot play, by putting the corrupt heroine in the main plot, and her virtuous foil in the sub-plot.¹⁸ The natural expectations of a comic sub-plot, in which a young and attractive heroine is confined by an old, jealous, and foolish husband, are that she will enjoy her illicit suitors and justifiably cuckold her husband. Rowley quite clearly titillates such expectations, in Isabella's apparent encouragement of all three suitors, before startling (if not disappointing) us by Isabella's chastity. R. Ornstein and R. Jordan in turn discuss the play in terms of reversed Petrarchan traditions, Jordan in particular cogently stressing the play's surprise inversion of the 'beauty and the beast' myth, in which

The fairy-tale ending is subject to a bitter reversal. Instead of the beast being revealed as the prince, the progress of the story is to reveal that the princess is in fact a beast.¹⁹

Such readings all draw on the play's simultaneous exploitation and disappointment of traditional expectations, the flickering alternation between antithetically opposed quantities, which is the play's sustained embodiment of Puttenham's '*Hipallage*. or the Changeling'.

¹⁴ For the latter view, see Doob, op. cit., p. 193.

¹⁵ Holmes, op. cit., p. 178.

¹⁶ For the latter view, see Holzknecht, op. cit., p. 82.

¹⁷ Such ambiguities would have multiplied for the original audiences, if the play attacks commonly accepted social standards as they are assumed by Beatrice—the argument of L. Salinger, '*The Changeling* and the Drama of Domestic Life', *Essays and Studies* (1979), pp. 80–96, and, more obliquely, of R. Ornstein, *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy* (Madison, 1960), p. 188.

¹⁸ Levin, op. cit., pp. 34, 37.

¹⁹ Jordan, op. cit., p. 165, and see also Ornstein, op. cit., pp. 179 ff.