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Author(s): Sara Eaton

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Beatrice-Joanna and the Rhetoric of Love in *The Changeling*

Sara Eaton

Forsooth, if we are to hear of no wickedness,
history must be done away with. So those comedies
should be prized which condemn the vices which they
bring to our ears, especially when the life of impure
women ends in an unhappy death.
— Scaliger

Scaliger's prized deaths of "impure women" suggest the seriousness of Renaissance attitudes toward femininity. Conventionalized in Courtly Love literature and under scrutiny in Puritan sermons and the popular press, femininity was considered especially in terms of modes of appearance, whether physical or theatrical. As Tuke explained in his *A Treatise against Painting*, "It is not enough to be good, but she that is good, must seem good: she that is chaste, must seem chaste."¹ This distinction between feminine being and seeming pervaded dominant Renaissance ideologies concerning and defining the wickedness of women. Implicit in the Courtly Love and edenic ideologies, for instance, is the assumption that women may be what they are, but that their gender does not allow them to seem so. Such logic allowed for a woman who failed to seem pure to be thought impure.

Complicating these Renaissance notions of feminine "seeming" is the fact that their source was male. Edenic and Courtly Love representations of women focus on female figures whose apparent purity is undercut by their failure to fulfill male expectations of their behavior. These notions of femininity subjected woman to a double-bind of either being pure but not seeming so or seeming so but not according to male conventions. Middleton and Rowley, I will suggest, locate the "frightful pleasure" of *The Changeling* in this double-bind. By linking the male problem of knowing women, the

Sara Eaton teaches in the Department of English at the University of Minnesota.

¹T. Tuke, *A Treatise Against Painting* (London, 1616), p. 10, as quoted by Sandra Clark, *The English Pamphleteers* (East Brunswick, N.J.: Farleigh Dickinson Press, 1983), p. 178.

confusion of being and seeming, to the rhetoric of Courtly Love and edenic longing, the play displays its linguistic exchanges as a drama of sexual revenge leaving the deaths of impure women to be "prized."

Throughout *The Changeling*, Beatrice-Joanna succeeds all too well in her attempts to be as she is perceived. On one side of Courtly Love's polarities, she portrays Alsemero's idealization of her. On the other side, she personifies DeFlores's view of self-degradation. Her rhetoric merely reproducing theirs, Beatrice-Joanna becomes an apparently harmonious representation of their conflicting desires. As a woman capable of seeming to be as they perceive her, she comes to perceive herself as an image of both idealized and degraded femininity — as a fallen Eve. Not autonomous in her actions, Beatrice-Joanna internalizes and reflects the inherent contradictions in male perceptions of women, especially as couched in the rhetoric of Courtly Love. Through Beatrice-Joanna's representation of the effects of Courtly Love, *The Changeling* indicts courtly rhetoric in its historical personification as unhappy death.

If it is not surprising that Middleton and Rowley use Courtly Love rhetoric to expose its contradictions, it is surprising how many critics, like Scaliger, argue that Beatrice-Joanna is morally culpable in how she is perceived.² Such critical arguments repeat the characters' expectations for feminine behavior, that women should be as they seem. From this point of view, Alsemero or DeFlores is seen as the hero of the play, and Beatrice-Joanna, who has concealed her ethical vacuity and fooled the male characters into believing romantic notions about women, gets exactly what she deserves. This perspective does not account for the play's action, which forms in reaction to Beatrice-Joanna's attempts to be equal to the male characters' perceptions. If the critical endeavor accepts the notion that female characters should be merely the vehicles for other characters' moral and aesthetic "pleasures," Beatrice-Joanna's fate is trivialized, the male characters' views are valorized, and the main thrust of Middleton and Rowley's drama is lost.

The question the play asks, then, is what kind of pleasures women can offer. It shifts attention from the revenge tragedy motifs, heroic concerns, to psychological and linguistic ones that can reflect the mechanics of sexual revenge. Although one of *The Changeling's* most obvious dramatic constructs is a tragic exploration of "the lunatic, the lover, and the poet," contemporary expectations for Senecan conventions are distinctive in this play's dramatic structure primarily because they matter so little. For example, Alonzo's ghost, instead of either terrorizing the guilty DeFlores and Beatrice-Joanna or urging his brother toward revenge, becomes "some ill thing that haunts the house."³ His brother, the justified avenger, is frustrated; DeFlores enacts a

²Fredson Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 1587-1642* (Gloucester, Mass.: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 204; Christopher Ricks's important study, "The Moral and Poetic Structure of *The Changeling*," *Essays in Criticism*, 10 (1960), 295; Roger Stilling, *Love and Death in Renaissance Tragedy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), p. 250-56; Lenora Leet Brodwin, *Elizabethan Love Tragedy* (New York: New York University Press, 1971); and Robert Jordan, "Myth and Psychology in *The Changeling*," *Renaissance Drama*, NS 3 (1970), p. 165.

³Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Changeling*, in *Drama of the English Renaissance*, Vol. II, ed. Russell A. Fraser and Norman Rabkin (New York: Macmillan, 1976), V. i. 62. All subsequent references from this edition are included in the text.

sexual revenge. Traditional Senecan conventions are trivialized so that the audience must focus on characters who appear in a tragic “moonlight madness,” slowly turning into a nightmare that explores the possession of women through the language of Courtly Love.

The dialogue in the first four acts presents polite, courtier-like statements, full of the customary wit and neoplatonic conceits common to wooing in Renaissance drama. But the characters puncture these dialogues with frequent asides that reveal to what extent the public, idealized language masks the characters’ other assessments of situations. For example, in Act II, scene i, approximately two-thirds of the first ninety lines are spoken in either soliloquies or asides. Regardless of how this display of “private” language is staged, the audience is aware of these shifts in the play’s language. Indeed, most of the dialogue between Beatrice-Joanna and DeFlores is directed toward the audience through asides:

Bea. [Aside] Again!
– This ominous ill-faced fellow more disturbs me
Than all my other passions.

DeF. [Aside] Now’t begins again;
I’ll stand this storm of hail though the stones
pelt me.

[II. i. 52–54]

Her passionate revulsion and his physical determination are forcefully articulated – to the audience. The content and tone of the asides in themselves introduce a second level of signification in addition to that of the play’s public language.⁴

The public and private languages demonstrate both sides of the rhetoric of Courtly Love, the idealized language appropriate to wooing, and the private language reflecting physical corruption. Beatrice-Joanna lives in a world where expectations of “transformations” in love are expressed in one version of Courtly Love rhetoric while the characters’ private assessments of their world and each other are expressed in another. In a sense, then, the public dialogues, both in the plot and subplot, are merely a veneer covering other meanings in the play. By Act V, moreover, the asides of the first four acts disappear, as their reflections on the nature of love’s transformations prevail and become the primary language. Although *The Changeling* here moves toward a rhetorical unity, I will suggest that this unity is essentially repressive: both the public and private languages hinge on the possession of females. In fact, Beatrice-Joanna’s death at the end of the play means the end of her attempts to be rhetorically effective in her own world. The rhetorical unity of the play, then, amounts to the silencing of Beatrice-Joanna.⁵

⁴M. C. Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), p. 124.

⁵The *OED* sheds light on both the title of the play and what I have been describing. Contemporary usages of “changeling” suggest: 1) One given to change, fickle or inconsistent person (the most cited explanation of the title); and 2) A person or thing (surreptitiously) put in exchange for another. Besides referring to the bed-switch and nearly every characters’ shift in position in the play, the second meaning also would apply to a rhetorical exchange. The *OED* refers, moreover, to Puttenham’s description of the rhetorical figure, hypallage, as a “changeling.” Etymology suggests, then, that the meanings of the word are variations on exchanges or what one might call metonymic transfers.

Beatrice-Joanna's body is the referent of the play's rhetoric; the male characters discuss her as an object to be claimed and possessed. Alsemero views her as the ideal lady in a Courtly Love scheme in which he wants to believe; his language is the most obvious example of *The Changeling's* public discourse. His talk of magic potions and his constant observations of omens reflect his doubts about love while reinforcing his idealized perceptions of Beatrice-Joanna as the perfect woman. His opening declaration, "With man's first creation, the place blest, / And is his right home back, if he achieve it" (I. i. 8-9), closes off Beatrice-Joanna's actual sexual identity by linking it to Eden and the temple where he first sees her. His perception of her sacred sexuality is verified and, from his point of view, realized, in his physician's closet. There he keeps his "Book of Experiments Call'd Secrets in Nature" (IV. i. 24-25), the "key that will lead to a pretty secret" (IV. ii. 111) — the secrets of chastity and feminine sexuality. Declaring that she is "Chaste as the breath of heaven, or morning's womb, / That brings the day forth, thus my love encloses thee" (IV. ii. 149-150), he perceives Beatrice-Joanna as a way back to a sacred and enclosed world through his possession of her. His exalted perception is ironically revealed as an obsessive possessiveness when, in the last act, he forces her into the closet with the macabre threat, "enter my closet; / I'll be your keeper yet" (V. iii. 86-87).

But from the beginning of the play, when Alsemero tells her that "there is scarce a thing but is loved and loathed" (I. i. 126), we are aware that his view includes the underside of the Courtly Love tradition: the woman-as-monster, the Duessa. Alsemero "cannot be too sure" (IV. ii. 126) as he tests her virginity; he is disturbed and uncertain about his role as a courtly lover and distrusts his own judgment (an attitude that Jasperino, his man, aids and abets). Beatrice-Joanna argues that Alsemero is as implicated as she is in the murders, because she has become a "cruel murd'ress" (V. iii. 65) to insure their marriage. He is not affected by this reiteration of the argument used so successfully with Beatrice-Joanna by DeFlores. He ignores any logic or psychological truth in her argument, and instead pronounces his sense of her static, inherently flawed sexuality. Saying "Twas in my fears at first, 'twill have it now: / Oh, thou art all deformed" (V. iii. 76-77), he thinks of the marriage-bed in a crypt, "itself's a charnel, the sheets shrouds" (V. iii. 83), even though the marriage has not been consummated. Conflating sex and death, ignorant of how Beatrice-Joanna, DeFlores, and even Diaphanta have allied to insure his marriage, "this dangerous bridge of blood" (V. iii. 81), Alsemero expects Beatrice-Joanna to be a chimerical representation of female sexuality. She functions as a vaginal pathway back to an edenic world that he would also test in this one.

Alsemero begins the play as a frustrated revenger, and manages to continue in that role as he constantly suspects the "murderer" of his illusions to be one of the characters around him. Beatrice-Joanna becomes the vehicle for his return to a perfect world at the same time that she represents that impossibility. This dream requires a passive Beatrice-Joanna who does not murder, who will remain in the closet of "sweet secrets" as an imagined but frustrated version of female sexuality. When Alsemero forces her into the closet in Act V, his language again stresses love's dual nature: "I'll be your pander now; rehearse again / Your scene of lust, that you may be perfect" (V. iii. 114-115).

Alsemero's actions after this reveal the extent to which he has strengthened his allegiance to Vermandero, Beatrice-Joanna's father, in reaction to his own perceptions of love. His consolation to Vermandero as they view the bodies – "Sir, you have yet a son's duty living" (V. iii. 216) – suggests that "his right home back," the edenic world he has searched for since the opening of the play, is organized around a father who is still living. Alsemero sees himself as replacing Beatrice-Joanna in her father's eyes; he would maintain both his perception of female sexuality, and his identity as a would-be revenger, by acting in an essentially adolescent role that grants him the "father's son" position he has filled throughout the play. But, implicated by his marriage and Beatrice-Joanna's death, his place in this patrilineal system is based on ambivalence: his idealization and denial of Beatrice-Joanna's actions and what they mean.

Alsemero desperately needs to maintain the closet of "sweet secrets," although he never really recognizes the fears and desires projected on the "fallen Eve" locked up in it. He avoids meaningful action, when, for example, he thinks on his marriage: "The bed itself's a charnel, the sheets shrouds / For murdered carcasses; it must ask pause / What I must do in this" (V. iii. 83–85). And he counsels repression when he recommends to Vermandero: "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" (V. iii. 182–184). Implied by his language, Alsemero's ambivalence is revealed in his actions – other than bedding Diaphanta and locking first Beatrice-Joanna and then DeFlores in the closet, he does nothing to initiate dramatic action. In the final analysis, Alsemero finds his "right home back" by locking his psyche in a closet of secrets.⁶

The other important male character, DeFlores, speaking in the corrupted private language of the asides, the underside of Courtly Love rhetoric, views Beatrice-Joanna as an "odd feeder" (II. ii. 153). His language and gestures characterize him as driven toward a violent, deadly possession of Beatrice-Joanna, and his view of her character, like Alsemero's, is a projection of his own desires. He would "thrust [his] fingers / Into her sockets" (I. i. 236–237), confusing a vaginal metaphor with, perhaps, a visual reference to her gloves. Anticipating fulfillment of *his* projected erotic intentions, he presents her dead Alonzo's finger, with her betrothal ring still on it. Representations of death and sexual possession are further conflated when, after killing the proxy-bride, Diaphanta, he brings her charred body back for Beatrice-Joanna to see. In these incidents, DeFlores implicates Beatrice-Joanna in the murders through her perceptions. That is, he would have her see what he has seen and done for her favors. Description will not suffice. Distrusting the idealized metaphors of Courtly Love – the public language that Beatrice-Joanna espouses – he consistently produces the content, the bodies, that result from her usage of the play's public language. It is thus DeFlores who interprets and reproduces her metaphoric intentions in the flesh, enacting these connections between language and actions. When Beatrice-Joanna and DeFlores are locked into the closet together, Alsemero assumes fornication; instead, in an attempt

⁶For further discussion, see Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works, 1946–1963* (New York: Dell, 1975), p. 217. Klein's description of the common male pre-Oedipal movement between the love-object and the authority figure (the mother and father) seems to provide an explanation for Alsemero's psychological realignment with Vermandero.

at ultimate consummation, DeFlores stabs her with his penknife. Finally, stabbing himself and presenting his own body "as a token," he tells the dying Beatrice-Joanna to "make haste"; he would "not go to leave [her] far behind" (V. iii. 175, 177).

In his death speech, DeFlores tells Alsemero of his greedy obsession with Beatrice-Joanna; the taking of her virginity "was so sweet to me / That I have drunk up all, left none behind / For any man to pledge me" (V. iii. 169-171).⁷ This is wishful thinking. DeFlores's actions can only be seen as an endless pursuit of absolute consummation, a continuous circling around a deflowered Beatrice-Joanna who by his own definition has been rendered nothing. For this reason, quite literally, he cannot get enough of her. Throughout the play, DeFlores signifies his intentions toward Beatrice-Joanna through violent oral and anal metaphors. He wants to "drink her up," and produces pieces of his murdered victims for her approval.⁸ His metaphors indicate an intense egotism that he projects back on Beatrice-Joanna, anticipating that "peace and innocence has turned [her] out / And made [her] one with [him]" (III. iv. 139-140). To DeFlores, as with Alsemero, Beatrice-Joanna is still primarily the imagistic locus for an active psychological exchange of introjected and projected male sexual desires. But if Alsemero creates Courtly Love's version of idealized feminine sexuality, DeFlores designs one for his digestive tract. Beatrice-Joanna's identity remains elusive except in terms of the sexual excitement she generates, one that promises a reunion with Alsemero's and DeFlores's version of the "Other" that is "I."

What Alsemero locks away, DeFlores greedily drinks up. These two male characters would seem to be the play's actual "twins of mischief" (V. iii. 142). Their projections of desire onto Beatrice-Joanna seem to shape the play's rhetoric. Together Alsemero and DeFlores enact two psychological motions involved in the production of Courtly Love rhetoric. In a romance or a single poet's inspirational mode, Alsemero's idealization of Beatrice-Joanna would be complementary to DeFlores's ingestion or internalizing of what she represents as an idealized figure. Split, the two men act out variants of Courtly Love's tragic potential occurring when the source of poetic inspiration may not be as she appears. Frederick Goldin explains that in a harmonious Courtly Love relationship, the lover seeks the "guiding image of his completeness":

first, that image coincides with the self-image of his class, so that the more he pursues his own desires, the more he is at one with his equal, the more he is part of a community; second, that personal image of his perfection, because it is embodied in the person of the lady, is now capable of responding to him, of loving him and making it possible for him to be at one with the image that guides him. This joy is worth the renunciation of every other joy,

⁷This assertion reflects ironically on Alsemero's assumptions that the potion Beatrice-Joanna drank was a "pledge" of her virginity. Alsemero's and DeFlores's perceptions converge metaphorically, leaving Beatrice-Joanna at their center.

⁸Melanie Klein, "The Emotional Life of the Infant," *Envy and Gratitude*. Klein's description of the infant's libidinal responses, fixated on oral and anal functions, is useful in understanding DeFlores's preoccupation with drinking and dead bodies. The infant's sense of producing feces for the mother is both a pleasurable and a frequently conflicted psychological response. According to Klein, cathexis with a death-wish towards the self or mother often occurs.

for it gives inner peace and certainty. Here now is the perfect dream of love: all the aspects of the Courtly man become harmonious and one.⁹

Alsemero constructs a "self-image of his class" which DeFlores would locate inside the psychological boundaries of his body. Like their characteristic languages, these men are psychological doubles, enacting the implications of their rhetoric.

Alsemero fears Beatrice-Joanna's unworthiness to the same degree that DeFlores defines her as such; conversely, DeFlores fears sharing Beatrice-Joanna with the "community" formed through her idealization to the same extent that Alsemero desires access to it. These characters could find completion in each other, and Beatrice-Joanna would still be the vehicle for expressing their desires. Instead, both characters act as though "knowing" Beatrice-Joanna as the "Other" includes seeing a corruption which must be enclosed, termed nothing, and rendered silent. The metaphors which reveal this knowledge deny her an autonomous identity while disclaiming any responsibility for her murder. What does she do to trigger the violent insistence that she has failed to reflect adequately their expectations of harmonious completeness?

In a play where the men see what they want to see, Beatrice-Joanna says: "Would creation — / . . . had formed me man . . . / Oh, tis the soul of freedom . / . . . I should have power / Then to oppose my loathings, nay, remove 'em / For ever from my sight" (II. ii. 107–109, 111–113). Beatrice-Joanna enlists DeFlores as her "man" primarily to dispose of Alonzo, upon whom her "eyes were mistaken" (I. i. 85). Her father is determined to see her married; whether to Alonzo or Alsemero seems to be of little importance so long as the marriage amounts to "the addition of a son" (II. i. 99). She would marry Alsemero, whom she sees "now with the eyes of judgment / And see the way to merit, clearly see it" (II. i. 13–14). In this world, it does not occur to her to act alone; she defines herself through others' perceptions of her, and she is, consequently, powerless "to oppose [her] loathings." She would "see" as the male characters do, but unlike them, she needs an accomplice to turn her dreams into the play's "reality." Accordingly, she always assumes that DeFlores will respond as a courtier to her request for service. The "merit" she sees in Alsemero is his embodiment of the idealized Courtly Love rhetoric; ironically, he becomes her frustrated chivalric lover.

More importantly, she begins to perceive the world around her through male eyes. She becomes the Eve around whom Paradise will collapse. She is initially horrified at DeFlores's serpent-like interpretation of her complicity in Alonzo's murder — she says, "Thy language is so bold and vicious" (III. iv. 123) — but she finally is seduced by her own perceptions of what Alsemero and DeFlores represent. While before her defloration she asks, "Was my creation in the womb so cursed / It must engender with a viper first?" (III. iv. 165–166), she later declaims that "the east [the sunrise] is not more beauteous than [DeFlores's] service" (V. i. 72). She shares with Alsemero the public language that characterizes her perceptions of her world at the same time that she

⁹Frederick Goldin, "The Array of Perspectives in the Early Courtly Love Lyric," *In Pursuit of Perfection: Courtly Love in Medieval Literature*, eds. Joan Farrant, George D. Economus, Frederick Goldin, Esther Quinn, Renata Karlin, Saul N. Brody (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1975), p. 56. For a discussion of narcissism in Courtly Love, see Goldin's *The Mirror of Narcissus in the Courtly Love Lyric* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 50ff.

inures herself to the growing heap of bodies around her. Personifying Alsemero's ambivalence, she incorporates the debased concept of self that DeFlores offers.

Beatrice-Joanna's anger and disappointment with Diaphanta's lust in the marriage bed that should be hers, and her insistence to the end that she has been sexually honorable, do not necessarily indicate her villainy, or even her guilt. Rather, she refuses to relinquish what she perceives as her prerogative in the Courtly Love scenario. As DeFlores works out the details for Diaphanta's death, Beatrice-Joanna declares that she is "forced to love [him] now, / 'Cause [he] provid'st so carefully for my honor" (V. i. 47–48). Here, sex, death, love, and honor become equational terms, and the play's meanings behind the private and public languages converge. Still, she relies on DeFlores to implement those meanings, since she "must trust somebody" (V. i. 15) to sustain her power in a patriarchy. Beatrice-Joanna allows DeFlores to realize her dreams, to act on, and thereby define, her perceptions of what constitutes powerful behavior. For Beatrice-Joanna, DeFlores becomes the active equivalent of the asides in the first four acts; he is the agent of her desire to be as she appears.

Thus, Beatrice-Joanna accepts her role as the "fallen Eve" for the male characters. She voices, manipulates, and incorporates the public and private languages of the play, the languages of male projection that comprise the rhetoric of Courtly Love. Her allegiance to their rhetoric is evidenced not only by her refusal to admit adultery, but also by her insistence that DeFlores has done her only "service," as her "honor fell with him," and then her life (V. iii. 158). By perceiving her world as if, by extension, she could have been "formed a man," she has invested in her own destruction.

The transformation in love that Beatrice-Joanna accomplishes is, finally, one of reflection – she sees herself as a mirror reflecting male desires, as a vehicle for their pleasures. She reflects back upon Alsemero and DeFlores their language through her own; she adheres to the Courtly Love discourse whose underside is enacted for her by DeFlores. In this sense, she embodies the language that characterizes her world, and she unifies in one figure what in the previous acts has been rhetorically split. The asides of the first four acts disappear in the fifth because by then Beatrice-Joanna embodies all the possibilities of Courtly Love that the rhetoric of the play can offer.

Yet, we should not be too quick to argue only for patriarchal harmony in *The Changeling*. Beatrice-Joanna is perceived by the others as being "both of sport and wit, / Always a woman striving for the last hit" (V. i. 126–127). Her "sport" and "wit" are enough to reproduce the play's private and public languages, and to disturb the perfectly narcissistic image both Alsemero and DeFlores want to have mirrored back to them. Her dream of acquiring male prerogative is expressed, as Stilling suggests, in "the language of female rebellion, shown as an impulse toward evil."¹⁰ Because she insists that she speaks the language of Courtly Love and that both Alsemero's and DeFlores's views of her are equivalent to her own perceptions (for which she has "kissed poison . . . stroked a serpent" [V. iii. 66]), her "sporting" discourse becomes the distorted reason for her destruction.

¹⁰ Stilling, p. 254.

Beatrice-Joanna dies for the “truth within her,” the power of the language she speaks and embodies. Even though she thinks her language includes her in the males’ world, her rhetoric becomes the ultimate declaration of “Otherness” that DeFlores and Alsemero would close off in their possession of her. As a screen, as a vehicle of exchange in Courtly Love rhetoric, she actually reflects the opposite of what Alsemero and DeFlores *would* see. She personifies Alsemero’s fears that her sexuality will disrupt his tenuous union with Vermandero, his community. To DeFlores she performs his inability to “fill himself up” with another human being, his sense of being alone in his physicality and not part of the male community he serves.¹¹ Both men define their community, then, in terms of other men: for Alsemero, it is Vermandero, for DeFlores, the men who cannot “pledge” him. Whereas Beatrice-Joanna mirrors what these characters would not see, she is like her counterpart in the subplot, Isabella, who reveals her suitors’ folly in pursuing her love by reflecting back to them the roles they have presented to her. But Beatrice-Joanna assumes that her ability to mime, to speak the play’s language of love, includes choosing how she will be perceived and possessed.

She does not “see,” as Nancy Chodorow puts it, that

feminine roles are less public or “social,” that they exhibit less linguistic and institutional differentiation. . . . Women’s roles are thus based on what are seen as personal rather than “social” or “cultural” ties. The corollary to this is that women’s roles typically tend to involve the exercise of influence in face-to-face, personal contexts rather than legitimized power in contexts which are categorical and defined by authority. Finally, women’s roles, and the biological symbolism attached to them, share a concern with the crossing of boundaries: Women mediate between the social and cultural concerns which men have defined; they bridge the gap and make transitions – especially in their role as socializer and mother – between nature and culture.¹²

Beatrice-Joanna mimes the rhetoric’s failure to make the connection between “nature” and “culture,” between DeFlores and Alsemero in these terms. But for the male characters, as an image of corrupted nature and failed culture, she also demonstrates the deadly possibilities of their conjunction that must be denied.

Such disintegration and disorder, moreover, threaten *The Changeling* from its first act; the characters are preoccupied with their world’s outward symbols of stability –

¹¹ Lacan’s “Le Stade du miroir” underlies my discussion here. Without attempting to paraphrase the subtleties of his argument, I would expand it to include the psychodynamics of speech at work in the play. More suggestive, perhaps, is D. W. Winnicott’s argument in “Mirror-role of Mother and Family in Child Development,” *Playing and Reality* (New York: Basic Books, 1971). Responding to Lacan, Winnicott argues that “the precursor of the mirror is the mother’s face” (p. 111), and expressions mediate “the discovery of meaning in a world of seen things” (p. 113). For Winnicott, as for Lacan, infants’ assumptions of union with the mother are necessarily disrupted by their autonomous responses to beliefs that they are identical to, and linked with, her. Healthy development depends on these autonomous disruptions of the sense of doubling. In a tragedy like *The Changeling*, where language, plots, and characters double, and “seeing” becomes problematic, the characters might be experiencing “unhealthy” disruptions of the sort Winnicott describes that result in pathological behavior. To the other characters, Beatrice-Joanna may represent the mother’s face.

¹² Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 180.

Vermadero's castle and Alibius's madhouse. Guarded against strangers, Vermadero explains that "our citadels / Are placed conspicuous to outward view, / On promonts' tops, but within are secrets" (I. i. 167-169). The bridegroom Alonzo's obvious curiosity and his pleasure at finally seeing the "most spacious and impregnable fort" (III. i. 4) the day before his wedding ironically leads him to his death. Nicholas Brooke comments that:

The Castle and the House are derived from their medieval and renaissance significance as emblems of both the world and the human body. The peculiar imaginative power of DeFlores' leading Alonzo through the dark passages is that the suggestive language long established for him is sustained there; it is also a journey through the organs of a female body to an anal death, *and* a descent into hell.¹³

Vermadero supports this analysis when he says: "An host of enemies entered my citadel / Could not amaze like this: Joanna! Beatrice-Joanna!" (V. iii. 147-148), followed by "We are all there, [hell] circumscribes us here" (V. iii. 164). The analogies between Vermadero's castle and Beatrice-Joanna's body are further reinforced by Beatrice-Joanna's last assertion that her blood is Vermadero's, and that the "common sewer take it from distinction" (V. iii. 153), as though she is merely waste. Seen as the source of their language, Beatrice-Joanna has been kept "secret" as a body to be found out, defended against, and purged – in her father's castle, in Alsemero's physician's closet, and in DeFlores's body – just as Isabella has been locked in her husband's madhouse to save him from cuckoldry. But where Isabella articulates the illusions in the male characters' perceptions ("I have no beauty now, / Nor never had, but what was in my garments" [IV. iii. 135-136]), Beatrice-Joanna is deluded into believing that her language, her garment of speech, corresponds to what the male characters perceive her to be in the flesh.

Beatrice-Joanna's persistent belief in the power of her rhetoric exposes Courtly Love as a linguistic system that must deny women a voice. When the play opens, Beatrice-Joanna's mother is already dead, in "heaven . . . married to joys eternal" (III. iv. 5), and Beatrice-Joanna and Diaphanta join her in deathly silence by the end of the play. In the comic subplot, Alibius, Isabella's husband, interprets Isabella's actions as a reason to "never keep / Scholars . . . wiser than myself" (V. iii. 214-215), not as reason enough to free her from the madhouse. The female characters are consistently forced to the boundaries of the dramatic action, and reduced to what is signified by the male characters. The male characters define the terms of what Chodorow calls social and cultural concerns – language, marriage, and the metaphors that connect them with sexual revenge and death. Beatrice-Joanna particularly disturbs these terms because she doubles, or reproduces and articulates, the pathological connections between Courtly Love and the action of the play. She mediates between those "secrets" of nature and culture which the male characters would not perceive as articulated in their linguistic community. She becomes what Caren Greenberg describes as "the point of intersection between masculine power and pleasure A sexual battleground important not because of her own intrinsic power, but rather as a mark of the father's power. In this sense, the wife/mother's body fulfills the first requirement

¹³Nicholas Brooke, *Horrid Laughter in Jacobean Tragedy* (London: Open Books, 1979), p. 85.

of a language system: it marks something other than itself."¹⁴ As the projection of the male characters' illusions, as the "mark" of a language system, Beatrice-Joanna is what she says – a "prophet to the rest" of her world in her destruction (V. iii. 157).

The last scene of the play reenacts a psychological stasis that characterizes the entire play and reveals the extent to which Beatrice-Joanna marks something other than herself. Alsemero pledges a "son's duty" to Vermandero, who has wanted all along "the addition of a son." Beatrice-Joanna, reinforcing this patriarchal system, tells her father that she "was blood taken from [him] / For [his] better health; look no more upon't, / But cast it to the ground regardlessly" (V. iii. 150–152). DeFlores presents her with a last dead "token" – himself. None of the characters change psychologically as a result of the dramatic action. The audience senses that this scene replicates previous ones – the death scenes of Beatrice-Joanna's mother before the play opens, and Diaphanta's during it – death scenes vigorously denied as meaningful to the participants. The male characters' language, shaped by the "truth" of Beatrice-Joanna's self-affirmation as "Other" in her discourse, reveals the extent of their emotional investments in their perceptions, not only of her, but of their world. Their language, to quote D. W. Winnicott, is "organized to defend against a repetition of 'unthinkable anxiety' or a return to the acute confusional state that belongs to disintegration."¹⁵ The characters employ Courtly Love as a language of power to defend against internal psychological disorder.

Beatrice-Joanna is as "blind" as the other characters. She becomes the "point of intersection" for locating meanings in the play because she represents a dramatic and rhetorical unity that is split in its practice. The asides, which originally were directed towards the audience, become lodged inside the dramatic action – inside Beatrice-Joanna, as her name implies. As Beatrice, she is Courtly Love's Lady; as Joanna, she is a pun, perhaps, on Gehenna, hell.¹⁶ Her name symbolizes the play's rhetorical intentions to signify a spiritual hell. She becomes the focus of the dramatic action, organized to get her off the stage, because she is designated this hell's source.

The transformation in the language of love that does occur, the movement of the asides from the outside to the inside of the play's action, reveals the extent to which Beatrice-Joanna is both outside and inside of her own world. She marks the limits of the play's rhetoric as she embodies it. The tragedy occurs, not because Middleton and Rowley want to point out the depravity inherent in beautiful women, but because Beatrice-Joanna cannot successfully "mediate between the social and cultural categories which men have defined" as inward and outward symbolic experiences; she cannot "bridge the gap and make transitions" between being and seeming in relation to

¹⁴Caren Greenberg, "Reading Reading: Echo's Abduction of Language," *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, ed. Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Borker, Nelly Furman (New York: Praeger, 1980), p. 302.

¹⁵Winnicott, "The Location of Cultural Experience," *Playing and Reality*, p. 97. Winnicott's description of an infant's creation and use of a transitional object, and the emotional investment in it, has influenced my argument here; in the way Beatrice-Joanna mediates between language and culture, she seems to function as a transitional object for the other characters.

¹⁶My thanks to Parker Johnson for suggesting this possibility.

her appearance. Possessing no voice, she marks off the cultural boundaries. Her body is defined as a fortress and her language exposes the "gap," the locus of a societal "hell," that a cultural psychology has built upon the "secrets" of the female body, and then used as the referent for its language of love.

Middleton and Rowley point toward this interpretation through Alibius's description of the *danse macabre* his madmen will present to Beatrice-Joanna on her wedding night:

Only an unexpected passage over
 To make a frightful pleasure, that is all,
 But not the all I aim at; could we so act it,
 To teach it in a wild distracted measure,
 Though out of form and figure, breaking time's head,
 It were no matter, 'twould be healed again
 In one age or other, if not in this.

[III. iii. 270-276]

As a "frightful pleasure," Beatrice-Joanna (and Isabella to a greater extent than I have argued here) shapes the dramatic action of the play, and incorporates its meanings in her embodiment of its split rhetoric. Beatrice-Joanna's "unexpected passage" initiates Alsemero's and the other characters' movements toward a "right home back." They all participate in love's blind transformations. Beatrice-Joanna exposes to the audience the gaps in the drama's language even as she embodies its psychological coherence. She functions as an illusory body of text in which the male characters read the "wild distracted measure" of love's dreams turned nightmares, as though she were both the vehicle for dreaming and the origin of its hells.¹⁷ For the audience, Beatrice-Joanna functions as an image which embodies in her designation as "Other" all the possibilities and limitations of the play's tragic language. She shapes everything and, finally, nothing, worth articulating about love's possessive power. Whether a "frightful pleasure" or an "impure woman," Beatrice-Joanna embodies the site of the interpretation of tragedy.

¹⁷ Greenberg argues that a "mediating text is female – and dead" (p. 303).