"THE PROSPECT FROM THE GARDEN"

WOMEN IN THE PLAYS OF THOMAS MIDDLETON

A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

IN THE

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

BY

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UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

1988
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my personal gratitude to those people who helped to produce this thesis. To Don, Terry and Tim for their help with proofreading. Special thanks to Judith for her invaluable assistance with typing.

I would like to particularly thank my supervisor, Prof. David Gunby. Without his constructive criticism and unfailing support this thesis would not have been possible.
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My principal concern in this thesis is the presentation of women in the plays of Thomas Middleton. As considerations of space necessitate a selective approach, I limit my examination to nine of his more important plays, representing his comic, tragicomic and tragic output.

Reading Middleton as a strict moralist adhering to the tenets and techniques of the morality play tradition, I use the religious and social assumptions espoused by that tradition as reference points from which to attempt a comparative gender evaluation of his work.

An examination of the distribution of characteristics such as intelligence, awareness, insight and moral integrity reveals a marked androcentric bias. Reinforcing the religious and social institutions and assumptions which function to ensure the submission of women, Middleton's treatment of women emerges as savagely Pauline.
INTRODUCTION

Thomas Middleton wrote about women with an interest and intensity which appears to have increased during his career.\(^1\) In this he was consistent with the wider trend which saw his contemporaries, such as Webster and Ford, giving the leading roles in their plays to heroines.\(^2\)

Middleton's treatment of women, however, differs from that of his fellow dramatists in that it often appears to be contradictory, not only between plays, but even within them. Hence we tend to find the misogyny expressed by his villains at once undercut by their lack of dramatic status and by the implications of the dramatic action, yet reinforced by Middleton's moral spokesmen. Equally, while the playwright's tragicomic and tragic portrayals of women are more often than not cruelly ironic, we can find, as with the bawdy and unconventional Moll Cutpurse, a woman portrayed with great sympathy and power.

This seeming inconsistency is reflected in critical opinion, which differs widely in its interpretation of Middleton's women. Earlier critics frequently reacted to the negative aspects of his female portrayals by proclaiming the

Footnotes

1 This interest is indicated in the bias of his titles, which include *The Roaring Girl*, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, The *Witch*, *More Dissemblers Beside Women*, *No Wit, No Help Like a Womans*, *The Widow* and *Women Beware Women*.

playwright an amoral and cynical misogynist. More recent criticism however, tends to concentrate on the positive aspects in his portrayals of women, arguing that the anti-
feminist elements of his plays are a byproduct of a defining realism, constituting objective reflections of the anti-
feminist attitudes of Jacobean society. Cherry, for example, whose central thesis is that Middleton was a "sympathetic defender of women," bases her argument on such an interpretation:

Middleton was a realist, perhaps the most acute observer of the surface of London life. This quality makes him eminently useful for a study of the theory and actuality of the status of women. His works faithfully reproduce what was said and thought about women, the various occupants and courses of action open to them, and some of the forces governing these choices.

Footnotes


4 In this thesis I use "feminism" to cover two related concepts. On the one hand, it denotes affirmative attitudes toward women, their generic right to equal societal rights, and the abstract concept of femininity. (OED defines feminism as the "Advocacy of the rights of women [based on the theory of the equality of the sexes]" Supplement, Ed. R.W. Burchfield (Vol I Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p.1050). On the other, it involves condemnatory attitudes towards men, male appropriation of power and exploitation of women, and towards the abstract concept of masculinity.

5 Cherry, p.216.

6 Cherry, p.iv. Baines (although not an adherent of Middleton's realism) adopts a similar attitude: Anti-feminist sentiment pervades Middleton's plays but does not express the artist's ultimate evaluation of women. It is, instead, a reflection of the common attitudes of the society that Middleton knew. What at first might appear to be the artist's anti-feminist statement becomes, with the development of the action, part of the satire against the character who
Such a reading of Middleton does not, however, satisfactorily come to terms with the playwright's markedly androcentric gender presentations. Moreover, it fails to account for the manifestly unrealistic elements of his plays, such as their emblematic elements, their often stereotypical characters, and above all the didacticism which characterises his entire output.

If we read Middleton as a Christian moralist, writing in the morality play tradition, however, these inconsistencies are removed. Such a reading, as Arthur Kirsch points out, does not negate Middleton's realism, but rather sets this realism in the context of a play's wider didactic purpose:

Middleton's tragedies are hardly allegories, of course, and their characters . . . are, even more than those in his comedies, "men and women of the time". There is thus reason to stress their psychology and insight, as most critics have done, as long as we do not allow an emphasis on modern psychology and personality to falsify Middleton's dramaturgy. The judgement made upon Quomodo, as upon all the other characters in Middleton's plays, "Thou art thine own affliction", is indeed a striking statement of a basic premise of Freudian psychology, but it is also, one must remember, an assumption of the Bible, and the Bible has assumptions and values which Freud does not have. Though the morality plays demonstrate great insight into human behaviour, their psychological insight is moral, not naturalistic, and their method is allegorical, not realistic, and a failure to appreciate how these distinctions may apply to Middleton's plays can lead to distortions and misinterpretations.

Footnotes
voices the anti-feminist statement.
The Lust Motif in the Plays of Thomas Middleton,
7 My principal concern in this thesis is Middleton's presentation of women. In order, however, to avoid identifying a characteristic as female when it is in fact common to both sexes, I need to make my analysis of the playwright's women a comparative gender analysis.
Rather than constituting an accurate reflection of Jacobean society, or the women who inhabit it, then, Middleton's realism presents images which have passed through the distorting mirror of Christian didacticism. Indeed, his realism is subordinated to one of the major tools of the morality tradition, satire: 9

the raison d’etre of naturalistic characterisation in Middleton's drama [is that] . . . it affords the author a means of rendering his moral judgement on the characters implicitly. In short, the more "solid" and "real" a character is, the more sharply he will call attention . . . to the dangerous unreality of his own attitude toward life . . . . Just as Middleton pits reality against unreality in his characterisation using naturalistically drawn figures to establish by contrast the unreality of their moral postures or the moral unreality of their world, so in organising his plays he juxtaposes actuality and convention . . . . Put another way, the naturalism grounds the action in reality while the conventions give the action moral significance and thus prevent it from having merely a psychological or sociological value.10

When Middleton's plays are read within the context of the

Footnotes

9 Spivack comments:
The comedy of the morality drama, in short, is entirely the comedy of evil. The farce, the satire, the direct titillation of the audience, the whole range of mirth from gross indecency to edged wit, proceeded from a traditional conception of vice and its characteristic behaviour that marks not only the morality plays but has its roots deep in the theology and psychology of the Middle Ages . . . . The world of virtue in these plays is solemn and ardent, and levity of any sort is its enemy.
10 John F. McElroy Parody and Burlesque in the Tragicomedies of Thomas Middleton (Salzburg: Universitat Salzburg, 1972), pp.70-73. He adds in a footnote:
His "realistic" style, with its reliance on plain, idiomatic language and speech patterns, may be regarded in the same light. As Alvin Kernan has said, "the claim [of satiric writers] to have no style at all is itself a trick of style employed by nearly every satirist, and his realistic touches are themselves satiric conventions." The Cankered Muse, p.4.
morality tradition, they can be seen to function on two co-existing levels, one psychological and realistic, and the other symbolic and profoundly moralistic. It should be remembered, however, that the former is in the service of the latter, so that the "reality" which they both reflect is a rigidly orthodox Christian universe.

The consistency of Middleton's moral outlook is reflected in repeated application of key images and themes to the concept at the heart of all his plays, "The irony of sin's self-retribution." Significantly, these themes and images make their first appearance in the playwright's staunchly didactic early work, The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased. The "Middletonian metaphors of hunting and fishing," for example, are consistently applied to the wicked in this poem, which also delineates their significance: "This fisher is the wicked, vice his bait/This fowler is the sinner, sin his net" (3.12).

More importantly, The Wisdom also involves what Shand describes as "a lengthy assault on idolatry," which is, predictably enough, linked specifically with avarice ("Golde was a God with them, a golden God"[13.22]), self-love and...
lust.\textsuperscript{14} This grouping of related and mutually defining vices—idolatry, avarice, self-love and lust—recurs not only in the tragedies,\textsuperscript{15} but also in Middleton's comic depictions of avaricious parents and usurers who, as Alexander Leggatt points out, are widely employed in citizen comedy as "symbolic figures of sterility" "obsessed with the barren breeding of gold."\textsuperscript{16}

Yet another persistently emphasised theme in The Wisdom is that of the blindness of sin, which is explored in lengthy passages which set the physical, and thus corrupt, eyes against the clear-sighted spiritual eyes of the soul. In addition, it is extensively applied to the wicked, as in 2.22:

\begin{quote}
They go, and yet they cannot see their feet,  
Like blinded pilgrims in an unknown way,  
Blind in perceiving things which are most meet,  
But need not sight nor guide to go astray.
\end{quote}

The relevance of this theme in connection with Middleton's plays is obvious; indeed, Barker suggests that it constitutes his distinguishing characteristic:

\begin{quote}
What is peculiar to Middleton is his persistent concern with the irony that invests the sinner's career. His thesis is that sin is blind. He wants to show that the sinner inevitably gropes in a dark world until he stumbles on the path that leads to inevitable disaster.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

\footnotesize
\textbf{Footnotes}

\textsuperscript{14} Shand says that the poem's treatment of idolatry involves: a pointed distaste for the worship of the worldly, the worship even of self (which is what idolatry comes down to) implied by his insertion of Narcissus at 13.7 . . . . Self-love is made specifically lustful," p.69.

\textsuperscript{15} As Shand points out:"This distaste for idolatry . . . surely looks ahead to the degrading self-love of mature creations like Beatrice-Joanna, the Black Knight, the Black Bishop, and his pawn," p.69.

\textsuperscript{16} Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973) p.24.
The central importance that Middleton grants these rigidly didactic themes throughout his dramatic career reflects a Christian morality informing not only the playwright's dramatic vision, but that also of the dramatic tradition he espoused. Since this morality accords the otherwise contradictory elements of Middleton's presentation of women both unity and consistency, it is of central importance for the purposes of this thesis.

The attitude of the Christian establishment toward women derived from the writings of St Paul, who advocated the total submission of women on the authority of the Book of Genesis. During the English Renaissance this doctrine was widely associated with the belief that women are inherently less intelligent than men. Thus Edmund Tilney's brief marriage guide, *A Brief and Pleasant Discourse of Duties in Mariage, Called the Flower of Friendsheppe* (1568) argues for the submission of women in a chapter entitled "The man both by reason, and law, hath the soveraignetie over his wyfe:"

For in deede both divine, and humaine lawes, in our religion giveth the man absolute authoritie, over the woman in all places. And, . . . reason doth confirme the same, the man being as he is, most apt for the soveraignetie being in government, not onely skill, and experience to be

Footnotes
18 For example:
  Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord. (Eph. 5:22)
  But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.
  For Adam was first formed, then Eve.
  And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. (1 Tim. 2:12-14) *(King James Version)*.
required, but also capacitie to comprehend, wisdom to understand, strength to execute, solicitude to prosecute, pacience to suffer, meanes to sustaine, and above all a great courage to accomplishe, all which are commonly in a man, but in a woman very rare. (my emphasis)

As this passage suggests, insight, judgement and moral awareness were widely regarded as a more or less exclusively masculine preserve. Indeed, women were considered inferior not just in mental capacity, but also in morality, since as Lawrence Stone points out, they were widely considered to be more prone to lust than their male counterparts:

 Throughout the middle ages and the Early Modern period, woman had been regarded as the temptress, taking after her ancestress Eve, and, by her fickleness and liability to sexual arousal, as a constant threat to the monogamous nuclear family. When in 1621 Robert Burton asked 'of woman's unnatural, insatiable lust, what country, what village doth not complain?' he was doing no more than repeating the conventional wisdom of the age.

Religious sanction for these attitudes\(^{21}\) ensured that they were prevalent in the morality plays, which accordingly satirised the "frailties" of the female sex with frequency and vehemence.

In analysing Middleton's women within an informing and

Footnotes
\(^{19}\) Cited by Suzanne Hull in Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books For Women 1475-1640 (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1982), p.50.
\(^{21}\) Stone points out:
  The Protestant preachers and moral theologians were as zealous as the laity in advocating the total subordination of wives . . . William Gouge in his popular manual Of Domesticall Duties (1622) . . . flatly declared that 'the extent of wives' subjection doth stretch itself very far, even to all things...' . There was, Gouge thought, good reason 'that she who first drew man into sin should now be subject to him, lest by the like womanish weakness she fall again' p.197.
governing morality tradition, I intend not only to assess relatively straightforward matters such as sexuality, but also more complex issues, such as the gender distribution of characteristics like insight, intelligence and moral and spiritual awareness. Finally, I intend to consider, as important elements in Middleton's gender presentation, the effects of the play's didacticism (both overt and covert), and its representation of the abstract concepts of masculinity and femininity.

Assessed in these terms, Middleton's presentation of women, whether in the early Wisdom or the final tragedies, will emerge as tightly and rigidly Pauline.
CHAPTER ONE

COMEDY

"LIGHT-COLOUR SUMMER STUFF"

In choosing three comedies with which to work, I was influenced by chronological as well as thematic relevance, requiring plays which not only focussed on marriage and women, but which also represented early, middle and late Middleton comedy. On these criteria, three plays suggested themselves immediately. The first of these was The Phoenix, by reason both of its position as one of the earliest comedies, and also its strongly didactic focus on marriage and its abuses.

The second is The Roaring Girl, since the unique figure of Moll Cutpurse makes this play central to any consideration of women in the comedies. It not only boasts a heroine whose portrayal is widely considered to be at once feminist, idealistic and realistic, but also, like The Phoenix, is one

Footnotes
2 Alexander Leggatt says, for example: The idea of chastity is embodied in a colourful, individual personality... With the breaking of the sexual stereotype comes a deeper exploration of one woman's reason for chastity." (p.110.)
of the few Middleton comedies widely credited with an obvious didactic intention, or explicit moral stance, focussing on the exploitation of female sexuality as well as marital and female morality. Moreover its probable date of 1608\(^3\) puts it at the end of the early comedies, or more or less half-way between \textit{The Phoenix} and the first of the tragicomedies.

\textit{A Chaste Maid in Cheapside}, as Middleton's last and greatest city comedy, is the obvious third choice. Its date of 1613 makes its relationship with \textit{The Roaring Girl} particularly interesting, as they appear to fall immediately on either side of the four-year interval that divides the playwright's dramatic output and style,\(^4\) and (in spite of this separation) share an emphasis on marital morality and the exploitation of women.

Before moving on to look at these plays in detail, however, it is instructive to look briefly at the gender presentation involved in Middleton's earliest work, \textit{The Wisdom of Solomon}

Footnotes


\(^{3}\) Lake says of this interval:

Bald emphasises the most important chronological fact about Middleton's oeuvre: that it falls into two very distinct halves, with a lacuna of perhaps four or five years between the early (pre-1608) comedies and the later (post-1612) comedies, tragicomedies and tragedies. Between the last of the early plays . . . and the first of the later plays . . . Middleton's style changed considerably. (p.34)
Paraphrased, since its approach in this area, like its treatment of themes and imagery and its rigid moral stance, can be seen as an exaggerated instance of an attitude which consistently, if more subtly informs his dramatic works.
CHAPTER 1.1

EARLY WORKS

1.1.1

THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON PARAPHRASED

Most of the sexual dichotomies presented in The Wisdom's allegorical battle between the forces of Good and Evil for the soul of mankind are highly traditional. The virtuous Sun/Phoebus and day, for example, are both masculine, and are ranged against the feminine Moon/Phoebe and night. Similarly God and Christ weight the side of good while the feminine Nature "Falls" on the other.

This traditional division becomes uneasy, however, when it comes to the warriors in the allegorical battle. Although its all-female cast reflects medieval psychomachic practice, where "the combatants on either side . . . [are] all personifications and all feminine,"5 Middleton's conflation of the virtues into the one feminine figure of Wisdom (aided by the classical Aestrea) represents a departure from the psychomachic tradition. Although it seems likely that this conflation was intended as a compliment to Queen Elizabeth, as G. B. Shand suggests,6 it unbalances the traditionally

Footnotes

5 Spivack, p.79.
6 Shand, pp.67-75.
indiscriminate war between two feminine armies into a contest between a lone feminine virtue and the multiply feminine "shock-troops of Satan," which include Vice, Sin, Wickedness, Malice, Idol-worship, Mischief and Dishonour.

This effect is considerably increased by the sudden inclusion of womankind (rather than abstract female personifications) on the side of evil, whose sexual degeneracy is contrasted with the "chaste love" of the lone Virtue, Wisdom:

The far-fet [sic] chastity of the female sex
Is nothing but allurement into lust,
Which will forswear and take, scorn and annex,
Deny and practise it, mistrust and trust:
Wisdom is chaste, and of another kind;
She loves, she likes, and yet not lustful blind.

(6.14)

Again this can be related to Elizabeth I, since praise of the female monarch inevitably emphasised the gulf between the Queen and the rest of the weak and degenerate sex, rather than using her as an example of womankind. This sudden inclusion of half of humanity into an otherwise exclusively allegorical battle, however, transforms the traditional prize of the psychomachia (Mankind in the generic sense) into the male sex, with the female sex relegated to the ranks of the feminine Vices. Women, it seems, are not only incapable of acquiring wisdom themselves (and here wisdom, it must be remembered, incorporates all the virtues) but are in fact actively engaged in preventing men from achieving it. This implication is developed in the stanza depicting Wisdom's doomed advances to

Footnotes

7 Spivack, p.79.
fallen men (again, the male sex rather than the genus):

She man-like woos, men women-like refuses;
She offers love, they offer'd love deny,
And hold her promises as love's abuses,
Because she pleads with an indifferent eye;
They think that she is light, vain and unjust,
When she doth plead for love, and not for lust. (6.17)

Wisdom's failure to win man is the consequence of her refusal to plead for "lust"; by implication, womankind, who are competing successfully with her for men, must be employing lustful eyes and pleadings. Moreover this image of sexually aggressive women impeding men's access to Wisdom involves the privileging of the concept of masculinity, since the virtuous, non-lustful wooing of Wisdom is "man-like", while the "woman-like" behaviour of the men involves choosing "lust" over "chaste love" due to their fallen nature.

Although this work's unbalanced gender presentation is in itself of minor interest, the consistency with which it recurs throughout Middleton's dramatic output makes this early and extreme instance of it highly significant. The image of sexually aggressive women soliciting passive men, for example, occurs with increasing regularity in the comedies and tragicomedies and becomes the norm in the last two tragedies. Similarly, the privileging of the concept of masculinity so that it is applied to virtuous behaviour even when it is exhibited by a woman, and contrasted with the lustful and hence "feminine" behaviour of fallen mankind, looks forward to The Roaring Girl's highly complex exploration of gender and behaviour.
Before turning to look at that play, however, it is useful to assess the gender presentation of *The Phoenix*, whose close relationship in both moral outlook and heavy didacticism with *The Wisdom* is more obvious.
The Phoenix's debt to the Estates morality tradition is, as Alan Dessen and Clifford Davidson point out, one of the most direct and obvious in the Middleton canon. In accordance with this tradition, the play dramatically depicts corruption in the kingdom of Ferrara by means of representative figures, each enacting the vice associated with his area of society. These areas include the social (the court, the nobility, the gentry and the citizenry) and two major institutions, the legal system (law and justice) and marriage. This (at least) equal prominence given to the domestic institution of marriage and the entire legal system marks the beginning of Middleton's continuing emphasis on the marital theme. In The Phoenix abuse of this institution is linked with every instance of corruption discovered and punished by the virtuous moral spokesman, Prince Phoenix. Thus Proditor, who is condemned for

Footnotes
3 Dessen, p.297.
4 Spivack points out that these abuses are satirised in the morality plays "with such frequency and vehemence that they have a prominence in the plays beyond all others," p.118.
treachery, is also guilty of "loathesomely" buying adultery while Falso, the dishonest country justice, is denounced not only as legal corruption personified, but also for attempting to prevent his niece's marriage to Fidelio out of incestuous and avaricious desire. Even Tangle, who in the final scene is presented as sick rather than evil, appears to have given the Captain advice on selling his wife "legally."

This wide-ranging concern with marital corruption is focussed particularly on the marriages of Castiza and the Jeweller's Wife, which give rise to Phoenix's two long homilies on the subject. Together these women can be seen as allegorical opposites, as Davidson points out:

the Jeweller's Wife is . . . the "mother of pride, and the daughter of lust" (V.i.213-4), as opposed to the saintly Castiza, who is the model of chastity, temperance, and patience.

In spite of this clear-cut opposition, and the moral condemnation directed at her villainous husband the Captain, both Castiza and her marriage are presented with an ambivalence suprising in view of her role as a "patient wife."

This ambivalence has two causes: the disparity in vigour and effectiveness between Castiza's speeches and those of her husband, and a more serious questioning of her reasons for marriage.

The first cause is a direct result of the discrepancy in dramatic appeal between Castiza's colourless behaviour as the embodiment of virtue, and her husband's vigorous and dynamic

Footnotes

5 Davidson, p.123.
role as a Vice figure. Hence John Brooks, for example, finds Castiza's speeches less than convincing due to their "tame, abstract language and hackneyed imagery," yet feels the Captain's "vigorous and effective" speeches, with their "bold, original and concrete imagery" and "rough and colloquial rhythm" lend him "a certain evil dignity." While this contrast in dramatic appeal does make this portrayal of marital virtue oppressed by vice somewhat uneasy, it should be remembered that it is an ambivalence rooted in the morality tradition:

For it is the paradox of the allegorical plays, anticipating the similar paradox of Paradise Lost, that their theatrical achievement was at the opposite pole to their ethical intention. Proclaiming the moral superiority of virtue, they uniformly demonstrated the dramatic superiority of vice. The personified virtues were verbose and wooden preachers, the personified vices trenchant and versatile actors.

The factor which makes this traditionally ambivalent portrayal of virtue disturbing, however, is a network of implication that further undercuts Castiza's moral validity by suggesting that she married the Captain out of physical (and hence degrading) desire. Her own admission to him that for love of him she neglected her state, "Chide better fortunes

Footnotes

6 The Captain's single-minded and self-professed villainy (I.i.i.85-6), disruptive energy, confusion of motive, inveterate misogynistic cynicism and "unnatural" behaviour are all traits he shares with Iago and Aaron, and are identified by Spivack as characteristics of the later Vice figure. Davidson specifically likens the Captain to Iago (p.126).


8 Spivack, p.123.
from me,/Gave the world talk, laid all my friends at waste"
(I.ii.77-79) is reinforced by the Niece's "Methinks she's much
disgraced herself"(I.i.159-60) and Fidelio's "Was this her
private choice? Did she neglect/The presence and opinion of
her friends/For this?"(I.iv.266-268). More damaging is what
seems to be a partial admission of guilt in her response to
the Captain's aggressive and crudely worded suggestion that
she married him for sexual gratification: "That which you
urge should rather give me cause/To repent than yourself"(I.
ii.90-91). Even if this is taken merely as a hypothetical
counter to his argument, its ambiguity is unsettling,
particularly as the Captain seizes on it for his next shot,
saying "Then to that end I do it"(I.ii.92).

Finally, there is something particularly damaging, given
his moral authority, in the ambivalent attitude of Phoenix
toward Castiza, an attitude suggested, for example, in the
stinging backhander that accompanies his rescue of the
distressed wife from her intolerable marriage: "Thus happily
prevented, you're set free,/Or else made over to adultery"
(II.ii.312-313). Moreover, it is consistent with his earlier
pronouncement on her marriage: "Indeed, she was a beast/To
marry him, and so he makes of her"(I.iv.276-277). The
harshness of this description of Castiza as a "sex-driven
animal" brings Phoenix's attitude disturbingly close to the
Captain's inadmissible accusations. It can, however, be

Footnotes
9 Brooks, p.203n.
10 i.e if that were true it should make me, not you, regret the marriage.
related to his address to "Reverend Matrimony," which is described as

the only and the greatest form
That puts a difference between our desires
And the disordered appetites of beasts,
Making their mates those that stand next to their lusts.
(II.ii.167-170).

By basing her choice of the Captain on physical attraction, Castiza has, it seems, abused marriage and ranged herself with "beasts."\(^1\)

In the final analysis, any consideration of Castiza is faced with the question that other characters continue to ask; why did the virtuous Castiza marry the outrageously crude and aggressive Captain?\(^2\) As the only answer provided by the play seems to be that of Phoenix, her virtue must remain slightly undercut, or imperfect. This undercutting is

Footnotes

11 Again, even if this were stretched so that "or else" referred to the consequence if she had not been set free, the ambiguity is unsettling.
12 Brooks, p.239n.
13 Phoenix's conversation with the Groom can be seen to revolve around the same issue; Phoenix, in reprimanding the Groom's denomination of women as "beasts" ("for your worship /knows that those that are under men are beasts"[I.iv.9-11]) reminds him that his mother was "under" his father yet was not a beast—presumably due to the sanctifying effect of marriage: "How does your Mother, sir?" Groom "Very well in health, I thank you heartily, sir." Phoenix "And so is my mare, i'faith" (I.iv.12-14). The Groom wins this verbal contest by accepting that all mothers are beasts, and answering Phoenix as if he is referring to his own mother. This comic assertion that even married mothers can be "beasts" is followed later in the same scene by the serious assertion that Fidelio's married mother is a "beast."
14 While her marriage is to some extent a donné, the repeated presentation of her reasons for marriage as dubious makes this question one of the play's central issues.
compounded by the way the play's criticism of Castiza's "private choice" functions as an unsettling counterpoint to the overt misogynistic cynicism of the Captain, so that what appears to be a straightforward opposition between the virtuous "patient wife" and the Vice, her husband, slips into uneasy ambivalence.

Phoenix's unsympathetic attitude toward Castiza is, moreover, entirely consistent with that revealed in his soliloquy on marriage, inspired by her sale to the villainous Proditor:

Reverend and honorable matrimony,
Mother of lawful sweets, unshamed mornings,
Dangerless pleasures, thou that mak'st the bed
Both pleasant and legitimately fruitful;
Without thee,
All the whole world were soiled bastardy.
Thou are the only and the greatest form
That put'st a difference between our desires
And the disordered appetites of beasts,
Making their mates those that stand next their lusts. . .
With what base injury is thy goodness paid!
First, rare to have a bride commence a maid,
But does beguile joy of the purity,
And is made strict by power of drugs and art,
An artificial maid, a doctor'd virgin,
And so deceives the glory of his bed;
A foul contempt against the spotless power
Of sacred wedlock. But if chaste and honest,
There is another devil haunts marriage--
None fondly loves but knows it--jealousy,
That wedlock's yellow sickness . . .
And thus the curse takes his effect or progress.
The most of men in their first sudden furies
Rail at the narrow bounds of marriage,
And call't a prison; then it is most just
That the disease o' th' prison, jealousy,
Should still affect 'em. But oh! Here I am fix'd
To make sale of a wife, monstrous and foul,
An act abhor'd in nature, cold in soul.
Who that has man in him could so resign
To make his shame the posy to the coin? (I.ii.161-193)

The brief eulogy with which Phoenix begins his speech is
begins his speech is based on one of the major tenets of Protestant doctrine: that of marriage as an acceptable outlet for an otherwise sinful sexuality, a "warrant that they [the married couple] may lawfully do this action [sexual intercourse], because whatsoever is not done of faith . . . is a sin."\(^{17}\) This emphasis on the preventative or saving aspect of marriage is followed with an outline, by Prince Phoenix, of the two greatest dangers that threaten the institution.

The first, and greater of these, is an unchaste wife, or the "foul contempt" of an "artificial maid" deceiving the "glory of his [the husband's] bed." In the "rare" event of the husband acquiring a "chaste and honest" wife, the couple then run the risk of the second "base injury" to marriage, the (necessarily groundless) jealousy of the husband.\(^ {18}\) Note that

Footnotes

16 This brevity is pointed out by Brooks through a comparison with Milton:

[there is] a major difference between this set speech on marriage and the one in *Paradise Lost*. . . . Milton devotes 20.5 lines to praising married love and only 5.5 to condemning illicit affairs, but Middleton gives only 10 lines to ideal married love and 23 to satire of contemporary marriage. Milton ends his passage with Adam and Eve sleeping in each other's arms, Middleton with Phoenix's denunciation of the Captain's sale of his wife. Two writers could hardly have had more different points of view. p.272n.

17 *William Perkins The Work of William Perkins* Ed. Ian Breward (Appleford: The Sutton Courtney Press, 1970), p.424. This however, does not invalidate the play's criticism of Castiza, as any suggestion, in this era, that a marriage was sexually motivated invoked widespread condemnation; Stone, for example, says

Evidence of hostility to sexual desire as a basis for choice of a marriage partner can be found in every commentator of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it would be merely wearisome to stack up a pile of quotations to prove so uncontested and unchanging a point, p.281.
both of these dangers are grounded in the sexual morality of the wife; the first and most common problem, an unchaste wife, is followed by that of a husband who cannot believe that he is one of the few men to have avoided that problem. Indeed, Phoenix implies that this disbelief is understandable when he adds "None fondly loves but knows it" (181).

His return to the matter at hand, the Captain's transaction, suggests that what he finds most appalling about this deed is the Captain's deliberate courting of shame, rather than the suffering it causes Castiza. Yet this is the logical corollary of this speech. If the two greatest threats to marriage are associated with an unchaste wife, then in selling Castiza into adultery the Captain is deliberately experiencing both of them. Significantly, this comment on the Captain's behaviour reveals the real danger that is associated with both these threats--the shame and dishonour accruing to the husband.¹⁹ When the major dangers of marriage are real and imagined dishonour to the husband, to court that dishonour as the Captain does becomes the ultimate folly.

The two marriages in the play can in fact be seen as examples of these two marital dangers. The Captain's wife is

Footnotes

¹⁸ That it is masculine jealousy he refers to becomes clear in lines 185-189.
¹⁹ This is reinforced by the substance of Castiza's speech on credit, which ends in "oh, believe it!/The money you receive for my good name/Will not be half enough to pay your shame" (II.i.31-33), and the denunciation of the Lords Lussurioso and Infesto ("the disease of honor"), which ends with "they most adulterously train out young ladies to midnight banquets, to the utter defamation of their own honors and ridiculous abuse of their husbands" (V.i.95-98, my emphasis).
"chaste and honest," and he both "Rail[s] at the narrow bounds of marriage" and suffers from jealousy, so he can be seen to fall into the second category. Equally as the Jeweller's Wife is the embodiment of marital vice, she is defined by her adulterous behaviour. In spite of the comic tone of her portrayal, which Barker finds "so disarming" that "one forgets to think ill of her," her denunciation is one of the harshest in the play.

It is worth noting, too, that Phoenix's denunciation of her unchastity involves a specific attack on the dissimulation associated with her behaviour: "Thou worse than common—private, subtle harlot" (V.i.230). This is consistent with the emphasis on dissimulation in Phoenix's earlier speech; the unchaste brides there had been "doctor'd" to "deceive" their husbands. The primary threat to marriage, female infidelity, is more dangerous when concealed.

Consequently Phoenix's attitude toward women and marriage is consistent not only throughout his own speeches, but also with the action of the play, which presents (whether real or imaginary) female infidelity as the major threat to marriage, since it results in shame and dishonour for the husband. Moreover Phoenix's emphasis on the primacy of this threat, and the groundless jealousy which occurs in its absence, is to some extent corroborated by the play's many suggestions of the widespread and almost universal immorality of women.

Two of the most obvious and most damaging of these suggestions are expressed by the Jeweller's wife and the
Niece. For while the latter expressly distinguishes her own chaste behaviour from that usual in her sex ("In this alone most women I'll excell/I'll rather yield to beggary than to hell" [II.iii.85]), the Jeweller's Wife universalises her lust, implying that it is the female norm:

I'll peach 'em all, all the close women that are; and upon my knowledge there's above five thousand within the walls and the liberties" (V.i.247-249).

A particularly interesting aspect of the Jeweller's Wife's behaviour, given her exemplary significance, is the sexual aggression involved in her behaviour, which is also described by her Knight as if it were the female norm: "A man so resolute in valor as a woman in desire were an absolute leader!" (I.v.32). This aspect of her behaviour is also to the fore in the episode in which she accosts Phoenix in a darkened room. Here her dominance of the conversation and the kiss she forces on him invert the traditional sex roles, anticipating not only Beatrice-Joanna's interview with Alsemero, but also the sexually aggressive and dominant behaviour evinced by all of Middleton's unchaste women.

The basic elements of The Phoenix's gender presentation, then, include traditional and negative attitudes to female morality, with emphasis on aggressive and sexually initiatory

Footnotes

20 This can be seen as a modified version of what Spivack calls "the stock sequence of amorous byplay between the strayed human hero and the meretrix," p.118.

21 This parallel is particularly obvious, since the Jeweller's Wife's maid's warning ("I must not stay with you; my mistress would be jealous. You must do nothing to me; my mistress would find it quickly" [IV.ii.2-4]) parallels that of Diaphanta (CH II.ii.3-5) as both servants lead the "lovers" to the place of their tryst.
behaviour, on dissimulation, and on the male dishonour that is its result. These elements are highlighted not only in the speeches of Prince Phoenix as moral spokesman, but also in the play's focus on female adultery, (adultery, that is, consisting entirely of liaisons between married women and unmarried men). Moreover the play's two virtuous female roles of "patient wife" and "chaste virgin" are compromised dramatically by their colourless depictions, while the former is also morally compromised, and the latter is expressly distinguished from the rest of her unchaste sex.

Although this negative attitude is to some extent mitigated by the play's strong condemnation of the exploitative attitude to women evinced by the Captain, Proditor and Falso, any attempt to see this condemnation as a defence of women is undercut by Phoenix's assertion that Castiza has brought this exploitation on herself by allowing lust to dictate her marital choice. At best, it can be seen to indicate the dangers attendant upon women who allow their lust to influence their behaviour, and constitutes an attack on vice rather than a defence of women.

Ultimately, then, Middleton's presentation of women in The Phoenix reflects the more reactionary of the traditional religious and social attitudes to women of his era.
Although *The Roaring Girl*, like *The Phoenix*, is widely credited with an obvious didactic intention, or moral stance, its relationship to the morality tradition is less obvious. For while it shares, and indeed increases the earlier play's emphasis on marriage, its central character, Moll Cutpurse, is on first analysis almost the antithesis of the morality's moral spokesman, or prime mover. Rather than being aristocratic, male and given to rhetoric as formal as his virtue, like her predecessor Prince Phoenix, Moll is of humble origins, female and possessed of a virtue as wildly unconventional as her colloquial and frequently bawdy language. Yet despite this apparent lack of decorum and increase in realism, her dominant role as promoter of marital harmony and her successful defeat of the play's agents of marital division (Laxton and Sir Alexander) make Moll an

Footnotes

1 For example Andor Gomme ed. *The Roaring Girl* (New Mermaids) London: Ernest Benn (1976), pp.xxxi·xxxiv, and Holmes, pp.100·110.
2 Cheney points out the thematic centrality of marriage in the play:

> The primary aim of the main plot, then, is to reunite the two lovers, despite the father's attempts to separate them . . . the primary aim of the sub-plot is to reunite the wives with their husbands, p.128.

3 Holmes suggests that Middleton gives Moll "a dramatic position similar to that of his hero presenters in *The Phoenix* and *Your Five Gallants*," p.110.
infinitely more successful embodiment of dramatic didacticism than her wooden predecessor, Phoenix.\(^4\)

Since she not only flouts the conventions of her age in demonstrating the female capacity for strength and independence, but also successfully defeats the sexually exploitative Laxton on his own terms, many commentators find Moll's portrayal (and hence The Roaring Girl) to be feminist.\(^5\)

In making such an assessment, however, it is dangerous to consider the realistic aspects of Moll's portrayal in isolation while ignoring the consistent allegorical significance of her role, since the latter is dictated by a Biblical morality involving assumptions which are frequently antithetical to feminist doctrine.\(^6\)

The very androgyny which bespeaks Moll's freedom from restrictive sexual stereotyping, for example, also reflects her significance as a symbol of the union of souls, or Holy Matrimony,\(^7\) while her "feminist" militancy is similarly informed by her role as the personification of Chastity.

Footnotes

\(^4\) Gomme "[the play's] didactic force is embodied in Moll . . . . Moll is the moral force of the play", p.xxxiv. Similarly Cheney sees Moll as didactically central, p.130.

\(^5\) For example Heineman, pp.99-100, Cherry, pp.103-105 and Leggatt, pp.109-110. For a definition of feminism, see above, p.4n.

\(^6\) Here I am paraphrasing the sentiment of Kirsch's warning concerning a purely psychological reading of Middleton (pp.83-84).

\(^7\) Cheney points out that the figure of a hermaphrodite was traditionally used to represent (among other things) the marital union of souls. (p.129).
(traditionally a female figure). In this context Moll's victory over the miserly Sir Alexander represents the triumph of holy matrimony over Avarice, and Laxton's rout at the point of her sword the defeat of Lust by Chastity. Although the latter is the most interesting conflict in terms of gender presentation, it is important to begin an assessment of Moll's portrayal with a brief look at her interaction with Sir Alexander, in order to grasp the allegorical aspect of her role.

In order to thwart his son's marriage, Sir Alexander attempts to use his wealth to lure Moll to sin by thieving, in order to have her hanged. Instead, however, Moll organises and carries out the elaborate marriage "trick", gulling Sir Alexander into welcoming his son's marriage to Mary Fitz-Allard with religious fervour, a sudden access of financial generosity and moral insight which suggest that he has experienced a genuine conversion. This suggestion is reinforced by Sir Alexander's intense joy at the marriage; although his "repentance" originated in fear (of his son's

Footnotes
8 In a different context Cheney points out the similarity between Moll and Spenser's Britomart in The Faerie Queen (p.125); the latter's militancy also reflected her role as Chastity.
9 Since both these vices are presented as maritally divisive, and (as Cheney suggests [p.129]) Moll's defeat of the lecher bears indirectly on Mistress Gallipot's subsequent rejection of him, it seems likely that Moll's role as Chastity is part of her wider significance as Holy Matrimony.
10 His confusion over the identity of the Mary his son is marrying is part of the wider parallel between the two Marys, which reflects both their common intention and Moll's allegorical significance as Marriage personified.
marriage to Moll) it resembles true contrition in that it ultimately arises from his sincere love of the positive option.  

When Alexander's own attempt to trick Moll into the vice of avarice, the sin of theft and onto the scaffold is compared with this victory, it is evident that she has inverted his strategy and used it against him, effectively gulling him into virtue, financial generosity and eternal life. This aspect of Moll's victory over Alexander may even be seen reflected in Moll's surname, since in addition to tricking him into giving Sebastian money, she has severed his previous religious and moral attachment to his purse.

Allegorically, this conflict neatly parallels Sir Alexander's response to his son's marriage. His assumption that Moll will steal from him, for example, parallels his fear that the marriage will draw gold from him (I.i.79-80), and his attempt to destroy her by making her into a thief likewise reflects his acquisitive attitude to his son's marital future. Conversely, Moll's invincible virtue reflects the sanctity of

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Footnotes

11 She has organised, as well as carried out this trick; we know Sebastian asked her for help, and she takes responsibility for it when she says "Father and son, I ha' done you simple service here"(V ii 206) and (to Alexander) "Now are you gulled as you would be: thank me for't, I'd a forefinger in't"(169-170).

12 Unlike attrition, which involved a repentance motivated only by fear of Hell, true contrition although initially motivated by this fear had to arise from a genuine love of virtue and God's grace. Protestant doctrine specified true contrition as an essential prerequisite to eternal salvation.

13 His attempt to lure her into theft reflects his own avarice; similarly Laxton's subsequent attempt to lure her into bed reflects his own lechery.
the religious institution Sir Alexander attempts to subvert, and her final "tricking" of him into virtue represents the inevitable triumph of Sebastian and Mary's chaste marriage over his vice.

Consequently, the feminist implications involved in a realist reading of Moll's demonstration of superior insight and skill in order to defeat the misogynistic Sir Alexander are only part of the complex of theological and allegorical significance which climaxes with her victory.

This interaction between realist feminist presentation, theological implication and allegorical significance is even more evident in Moll's defeat of Laxton, which is clearly the incident in the play most readily labelled feminist.

The theological component of this interaction is emphasised by its imagery, which invests Moll with the role of an inquisitorial Star Chamber judge, using the rack on her victim before simultaneously making formal delivery of a process at law, and notifying him of his impending execution. As their duel continues, however, her role becomes that of executioner. These grimly comic metaphors serve to emphasise

Footnotes

14 His assertion to Trapdoor that "deep spendings/May draw her that's most chaste to a man's bosom" (1.ii.217-218) clearly presents his attitude to Moll as part of a more general misogyny.

15 Significantly, those critics reading Moll largely on the realist level find the ending disappointing. Bradbrook, for example, considers that here "the accent is no longer quite so noble, or her character quite so equivocal as it was" (The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy, p.160, cited in Gomme, p.xxvii.) and Gomme says "I think it a pity...and inconsistent with all we have seen of her...that in the last scene Moll should be twice made to draw attention to her part in the intrigue which brought about the happy finale," p.xxvii.
what is finally the contrast between Alexander and Laxton. For where Moll's victory over the former results in a religious awakening into clear-sighted virtue and eternal life, Laxton remains blind and asleep in "the bed of vice" despite Moll's dramatic demonstration of this blindness\textsuperscript{18} and grim introduction: "Then I must wake you, sir"(III i 48). As his failure\textsuperscript{19} becomes more evident, the warnings behind Moll's taunts of spiritual condemnation and death, like the reminders of the day of judgement and the need for repentance and confession, serve to underline Laxton's ultimate damnation.

**Footnotes**

16 The initial threat of her "pace" as if it were a torture:

\begin{quote}
There's the gold
With which you hired your hackney, here's her pace,
She racks hard, and perhaps your bones will feel it
\end{quote}

(III.i.63-4) is followed by that of death: "Draw, or I'll serve an execution on thee/Shall lay thee up till doomsday"(67-68). Gomme says "To serve an execution is to make formal delivery of a process at law," p.57n.

17 She deliberately misinterprets his repentance as a religious one ("You'll die the better Christian then" [115]), and his confession ("I do confess I have wronged thee, Moll"[116]) "in the sense of auricular confession . . . which would precede the shriving of a condemned man immediately before execution," Gomme, p.59n.

18 His blindness is indicated by his failure (like that of Alexander [V.ii.130-132]) to recognise Moll as she prepares to defeat him (III.i.40-50). These parallel failures ironically highlight their differing attitudes to her; although Sir Alexander objects to her masculine appearance, he fails to recognise her dressed as a woman. Conversely, Laxton, who is (I shall argue) primarily attracted to Moll's masculinity, fails to recognise her dressed as a man.

19 This failure is particularly obvious when in the next scene he reflects that Mistress Openwork's "wit" reflects the inherent corruption of all women, in spite of Moll's demonstration to the contrary:

\begin{quote}
That wile
By which the serpent did the first women beguile
Did ever since all women's bosoms fill;
Y'are apple-eaters all, deceivers still.
\end{quote}

(III.iii.252-255).
This grim irony is balanced by her joking with Alexander in the final scene, (V.i.ii.210-36) emphasising the contrast between her parallel victories over the two men. Although both effectively repent, and confess that they have wronged Moll, Laxton's "repentance" (unlike that of Alexander) can be compared with attrition, in that it is merely the result of his fear of Moll's sword.

The suggestion that Laxton's defeat represents an ironic version of his own strategy against Moll arises out of the complex interaction between Moll's masculinity and the homosexuality associated with Laxton's desire for her. Although clearly identified by Moll as a "lecher," the pun on Laxton's name, the associated jokes concerning his lack of desire for women, and his lack of interest in sex with Mistress Openwork all suggest that there is something unmasculine about his lechery. Indeed, the only woman he does evince sexual interest in is Moll, and this seems to be largely based on her masculinity.

Footnotes

20 Gomme (p.17n) points out that as "stone" was standard English for testicle, Laxton's name (lack-stone) implies eunuch.

21 For example "furnish Master Laxton/with what he wants, a stone--a stool I would say,/A stool." [Laxton] "I had rather stand, sir." [Alexander] "I know you had,/Good Master Laxton." (I ii 55-58), and "Here's Master Laxton, has he mind to a woman/As thou hast?" [Laxton] "No, not I, sir." [Alexander] "Sir, I know it." [Laxton] "Their good parts are so rare, their bad so common,/I will have naught to do with any woman."(153-156)

22 The implication that homosexuality is unmasculine, unnatural or deviant in any way is entirely a reflection of its presentation in the play; this is in no way a discussion of the relative morality of homosexual and heterosexual love.

23 His first excited enthusiasm for her implies "a suggestion of buggery"( Gomme, p.34n.), and he likens
When Laxton proposes Moll the "unnatural" aspect of his desire is highlighted by their contrasting use of equine metaphor. Moll begins this with a scornful assertion of her duelling competency (through analogy with another traditional male domain, riding): "do you think I cannot ride a/stone horse unless one lead him by th'snaffle?" (II.i.244-5). Laxton's interpretation of this as a sexual metaphor is consistent with his attraction toward her, since it involves casting Moll in the male sexual role; "'to ride a horse' was normally used of a man, meaning to mount a woman." Moll responds by implying that Laxton's desire is "obscene [or] sexually bestial" with an inversion of his equine image, since her idiom ("play the jade" or "act the whore") presents her in the conventional female role.

Footnotes

24 Stallions are notoriously difficult to ride.
25 Gomme, notes, p.38. Stone comments "any [sexual] position with the woman on top was condemned . . . since it inverted sex roles, making the female the dominant and active partner" (p.501). The previous punning on Laxton's name (see note 26) lends a further irony to his response; presumably he would not be a "stone·horse" in any case.
26 Gomme, p.38n.
27 MOLL

I thought 'twould be a beastly journey: you may leave out one well, three horses will serve if I play the jade myself. (II.i.257-8).
When Moll and Laxton meet, as planned, at Gray's Inn Fields, she begins by hurling the equine image at Laxton along with his money, saying

There's the gold
With which you hired your hackney, here's her pace,
She racks hard, and perhaps your bones will feel it.  

(III.i.62-5)

The equine image has come full circle, and now the racking pace of the horse once again refers to duelling. Just as Alexander's temptation to Moll to live up to her surname was answered in a way that he did not foresee, so Laxton has hired more than he bargained for. Moll's use of metaphors that refer at once to duelling and to intercourse mock Laxton's sexual expectations by ironically echoing the military metaphor he used in his earlier wooing:

I'll lay hard siege to her, money is that aqua fortis that eats into many a maidenhead; where the walls are flesh and blood, I'll ever pierce through with a golden auger.  

(II.i.176-9)

Rather than laying "hard siege," Laxton is now under attack.

Moll's angry commentary also reflects the homosexual nature of his desire for her; his earlier reference to the phallus as a golden weapon is inverted, so that her weapon becomes a phallus, making her as much of a "man" as Laxton. This is spelled out when Laxton's hopeful "What, wilt thou untruss a point, Moll?" (referring to the removal of "a tag of doublet or breeches" to expose the penis [presumably his] for sexual intercourse) is answered with a drawn sword and "Yes, here's the point that I untruss"(56-9). Moll, in the duel/sex act,

Footnotes
28 Gomme, p.57n.
takes the male role in a way that Laxton did not foresee. Her constant sexual punning, as she attacks and bests him in what is an exclusively masculine form of combat, beautifully inverts Laxton's previous understanding of their relationship, making her victory over him metaphorical rape: "Tell them 'twere base to yield, where I have conquered" (108). Not only does she "pierce" him, where he had expected to "pierce" her, but she also forces him to sell the "sexual" defeat that he cannot prevent, adding "Ten angels of mine own" to his previous payment before throwing it at him with "Win'em and wear'em" (66). This gesture makes his metaphorical rape the prostitution he had intended to inflict on her: "I scorn to prostitute myself to a man,/ I that can prostitute a man to me,/ And so I greet thee" (109-111). By inverting and dramatising Laxton's sexual metaphor, Moll has clearly beaten him with his own strategy, just as she triumphed over Sir Alexander.

Again, the interaction between Moll and Laxton is consistent with their allegorical roles. As the representative of Lust, Laxton embodies the sexually exploitative attitude toward the citizen marriages evinced by all the gallants, who "watch for quarrelling wedlocks". His failure to perceive Moll's chastity reflects his failure to comprehend or respect the institution of marriage, and Moll's fierce rejection of him parallels not merely Laxton's subsequent rejection by Mistress Gallipot, but indeed the rout of the gallants by the reunited citizen marriages. The feminism in Moll's portrayal,
then, is considerably diminished by her allegorical
significance not as "noble womanhood" but as marriage.

Even at a realistic level, however, Moll's feminism is
decidedly ambiguous. Its most evident manifestation, as I have
suggested, is her victory over Laxton, which is expressly
presented by Moll as an attempt to teach him (and through him
all men) to respect women:

[I mean]
To teach thy base thoughts manners . . . .
In thee I defy all men, their worst hates,
And their best flatteries, all their golden witchcrafts,
With which they entangle the poor spirits of fools,
Distressed needlewomen and trade-fallen wives,
Fish that must needs bite or themselves be bitten,
Such hungry things as these may soon be took
With a worm fastened on a golden hook:
Those are the lecher's food, his prey, he watches
For quarrelling wedlocks, and poor shifting sisters,
Tis the best fish he takes. (III.i.90-99)

This condemnation of the sexual exploitation of women is
reinforced by the overall action of the play, which
simultaneously endorses marriage and condemns the maritally
divisive gallants. It is a condemnation that is not, however,
accompanied by sympathy for the victims of such exploitation;
to her the "Distressed needlewomen and trade-fallen wives" are
"fools" with "poor spirits." Moreover, the basis of Moll's
fury is Laxton's assumption that she can be classed with such
women:

th'art one of those
That thinks each woman thy fond flexible whore:
If she but cast a liberal eye upon thee,
Turn back her head, she's thine: or, amongst company,
By chance drink first to thee, then she's quite gone,
There's no means to help her . . .

Footnotes
29 T.S. Eliot Elizabethan Dramatists (London: Faber and
Faber, 1963), p.93. (Cited in Cheney, p.120).
How many of our sex, by such as thou
Have their good thoughts paid with a blasted name
That never deserved loosely or did trip
In path of whoredom beyond cup and lip?

(III.i.70-82)

Here her anger is focused on the damage that men like Laxton can do to the reputation of a woman who like herself is in fact chaste. The real source of this anger erupts into her speech two lines further on: "—What durst move you, sir,/To think me whorish?—(84-5), and informs the climax of her speech:

but why, good fisherman,
Am I thought meat for you, that never yet
Had angling rod cast towards me? (III.i.97-101)

Moll's speech then, although involving a feminist attitude toward sexual exploitation by men, is more ambivalent in the area of affirmative attitudes to women. It is, however consistent with her role as the embodiment of chastity, since the consistent element of this speech is its attitude to sex. Her anger is at having been taken as sexually active, while Laxton's attitude is seen as damaging her (and all chaste women's) reputations by imputing them to be so, and Laxton's sexuality is presented as the ravening appetite of a beast. This traditional Jacobean attitude does not seem to be a strong defence of "wronged women." On the contrary, Moll's own militant chastity and fury at its misinterpretation reinforce the traditional concept of a woman's honour or honesty as an entirely sexual attribute, as does her

Footnotes

30 Britten considers she "eloquently takes the part of wronged women" Thomas Middleton (New York: Twayne, 1972), p. 78. I have taken this to mean wronged as in fallen; if he means wrongly accused, however, I agree with him.
relegation of sexually fallen women into the category of poor-spirited "fools."

Many of Moll's other statements reveal a similar attitude. In Act IV scene i, for example, she seems to fear that Sebastian might misinterpret her bawdy puns on gentlemen's "instruments," and responds to Sebastian's "it had been a shame for that gentleman then, that would have let it hung still and /ne'er offered thee it."(89-91) with a strong qualification of her earlier joke:

There it should have been still then for Moll, for though the world judge impudently of me, I ne'er came into that chamber yet where I took down the instrument myself. (92-94)

Significantly, Sebastian's reply suggests that he interprets Moll's speech as an assertion of chastity:

Pish, let 'em prate abroad, th'art here where thou art known and loved: there be a thousand close dames that will call the viol an unmannerly instrument for a woman, and therefore talk broadly of thee, when you shall have them sit wider to a worse quality.(95-99)

Again, Moll's militant and vigilant chastity is compared with the more common unchastity of other women, in this case, the hypocrisy of the "thousand close dames" who condemn Moll for the unladylike playing of the viol, while behaving themselves in a sexually loose manner.

Similarly, in Act II scene i Moll pauses to reflect (rather unkindly) on the apparent chastity of Mistress Tiltyard:

Footnotes

31 This section is framed on the one hand by Moll's assertion that she is only helping the lovers because of the rarity of Mary's chaste love, and on the other with Moll's songs about a light and an adulterous woman, the latter hypocritically slandering Moll.
The purity of your wench would I fain try, she seems like Kent, unconquered, and I believe as many wiles are in her—oh, the gallants of these times are shallow lechers, they put not their courtship home enough to a wench, 'tis impossible to know what woman is thoroughly honest, because she's never thoroughly tried: I am of that certain belief there are more queans in this town of their own making than of any man's provoking; where lies the slackness then? many a poor soul would down, and there's nobody will push 'em. (288-297)

The expansion of the probable sexual weakness of Mistress Tiltyard into a vision of a town full of sexually rapacious and untried women is hard to reconcile with the concept of Moll as a defender of the "weaker members of her sex."32 Indeed, this speech seems to undercut the image in her later speech of Laxton preying on foolish but needy women; here the women seem to be as ravenous as Laxton.

Moreover the citizen's wives to some extent bear out this harsh assessment of the female sex. Both are clearly "quarreling wedlocks," and Mistress Gallipot's obvious desire for Laxton is frustrated by his failure to satisfy her. Similarly, Mistress Openwork's complaints of sexual neglect33 and hints at a dubious sexual history34 suggest that she is also sexually rapacious and unsatisfied. This

Footnotes
32 Cherry, p.102.
33 Gomme says of her jealous tirade (II.1.206-8): "the burden, then, of Mistress Openwork's complaint is that by a trick (a shift) she is left to make what shift she can by handling her sexual parts (those next her shift) herself: a barren ("dead") activity, but she may as well stop offering herself, for when she opens up her "shop", nothing comes in,"p.36n.
34 "I was well beloved of the steward, I had my Latin tongue, and a spice of the French before I came to him." These phrases might suggest that Mistress Openwork had herself been loose before marriage, especially if 'French' is taken to hint at syphilis," Gomme, p.41n.
substantiation of Moll's sceptical attitude toward the chastity of the city women makes the feminism associated with her portrayal somewhat ambiguous.

This ambiguity is even more evident if Moll herself, or her portrayal rather than her opinion, is taken as evidence of a positive or feminist attitude to women. There can be no doubt of the immediate appeal of Moll's wit, vigour and virtue, which dominate the play. Furthermore this appeal is increased by the curiosity and shock value\(^{35}\) of her unconventional role-swapping, and her position as instigator of the dramatic action. In-as-much as this appeal invites the audience to identify with and admire an unconventionally vigorous, dominant and virtuous woman, it certainly makes her portrayal a feminist one.

Moll's "masculinity," however, makes any assessment of her as an embodiment or representative example of womanhood somewhat uneasy. The extent of this masculinity is indicated not only in her clothing, and the comments of the other characters, but also on the occasions when she imputes it to herself, saying for instance "I have no humour to marry, I love to lie o'both sides o' th'bed myself"(II.ii.36-7) and "I have the head now of myself, and am man enough for a woman" (II.ii. 42-3). Indeed, as intelligence, discernment, honesty, courage and strength were considered to be "masculine" virtues, Moll's behaviour is a constant reaffirmation of this.

Footnotes

35 This would be considerably more effective in the Jacobean era, where cross-dressing was both rare and disapproved of.
masculinity. Thus Moll's "feminist" virtue is symbolised by her "masculinity." 36

Moreover, Moll shares these virtues with the virtuous men in the play, rather than the women, whom she appears to view with a mixture of pity and contempt. Sebastian, Lord Noland, Sir Guy and even Master Openwork evince intelligence, discernment and strength to a greater or lesser extent. On the other hand, Mistress Gallipot's inability to perceive Laxton's exploitative and mercenary guile is matched by Mistress Openwork's groundless jealousy of Moll; both appear to be the sort of "fools" that lecherous gallants find easy meat. 37 Even Mary Fitz-Allard fails to demonstrate any indication of intelligence or discernment; indeed, she reveals that she has completely misjudged Moll's character when she says of her: "No poison, sir, but serves us for some use,/Which is confirmed in her" (IV.i.146-7). 38

Significantly, the men in the play who do not exhibit this awareness, or intelligent discernment, are the villains, Laxton and Alexander, and the "cotquean" or "apron-husband", Master Gallipot. It appears therefore, that the "masculine" virtues of intelligence, discernment and strength belong to the virtuous men in the play and the "man-like" Moll, while

Footnotes
36 Gomme points out (in a different context) "Her male clothes are . . . not a disguise but an expression of her masculine vigour and toughness", p.xxvi.
37 The foolishness of both women is also revealed in their difficulty with long words (Mistress Openwork's "suburbian" is matched with Mistress Gallipot's problems with Laxton's classical allusions and farcical behaviour when deceiving her husband) and in their snobbery.
38 This echo of Sir Davy Dapper's assessment of Moll is one of the only three statements Mary makes after I.i.
lack of discernment and dishonesty are associated with the other women in the play and the corrupt and/or "woman-like" men. Indeed, Moll's assessment of the men in the city as lacking the wherewithal to adequately "try" the city's women is substantiated not only by the effeminate Laxton and Master Gallipot, but also by the suggestions of unmanliness associated with Jack Dapper's obsession with feathers and association with "ningles" or "boy-favourites, catamites." Even Sebastian hints at an unmanly attraction to Mary when she is dressed in men's clothing (IV.i.46-56).

All in all, Moll's role resembles that of Wisdom in Middleton's early poem. Paradoxically both "man-like" and chaste in her behaviour, she is favourably contrasted with the other city women, and appears sceptical of the "far-fet" chastity of the untried city wives. Similarly, not only does she live in "times" when most of the men are more "woman-like" than she is, but she also comes in conflict with the "woman-like" Laxton who prefers lust to love.

This wide-ranging privileging of the concept of masculinity, so that it is used as an index of virtue, is most evident when Moll's chastity, traditionally a female virtue, is considered. She justifies this chastity after she has defeated Laxton:

Base is that mind that kneels unto her body,
As if a husband stood in awe on's wife;
My spirit shall be mistress of this house,
As long as I have time in't. (III.i.137-140)

Footnotes

39 Gomme, p.78n.
40 Not only by Sebastian (see above p.42), but also in the action of the play.
As Alexander Leggatt points out, here Moll is refusing to submit "not only to men, but to her own physical nature," which is the ultimate enemy of her chastity, and which she must always control. The implication of this is that her "masculinity" symbolises her chastity, since she has achieved both by rejecting her innately corrupt woman's body, the source of her womanhood. Consequently her appropriation of masculine virtues represents more than a mere rejection of the social role reserved for women (which could be seen as a "feminist" rejection); rather she rejects her gender altogether.

It is significant that Moll expresses this rejection through an allusion to Pauline doctrine, which suggests that the husband's relation to the wife resembles that of the head to the body:

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Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.
For the husband is the head of the wife, Even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.
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(Eph. v.22-24)

The context within which she uses this allusion, moreover, can be related to St. Paul's justification for his doctrine:

Footnotes

41 Leggatt, p.110.
42 On the allegorical level, when Moll is seen as the embodiment of matrimonial chastity, this speech implies that such chastity is only possible if the husband controls the innately more corrupt appetites of the wife.
43 As her rejection of her gender is also the rejection of her sexuality, the implication is that womanhood is synonymous with lust.
44 This allusion reflects her role as the embodiment of Holy Matrimony.
But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. (1 Tim. ii.12-14)

Moll is describing her rejection of sexuality as the rejection of her woman's body, or physical nature, through allusion to a doctrine which advocates the suppression of women on the grounds of their innate inferiority and consequent responsibility for the Fall.

The action of the sub-plot reinforces this Pauline attitude to marriage, in that both Master Gallipot and Master Openwork fail to control their wives until the end of the play, where, significantly, Mistress Gallipot is publicly chastised by a suddenly dictatorial Master Gallipot who thanks Laxton at her expense:

Then, sir, I am beholden to you—not to you, wife—But Master Laxton, to your want of doing ill, which it seems you have not . . . . Wife, brag no more Of holding out: who most brags is most whore. (IV.ii.320-22,325-6)

In this context Moll's masculinity, far from representing the "feminism" of her portrayal, is evidence of the fundamental difference between her and the rest of corrupt womankind. In rejecting her femaleness, Moll has removed the necessity for

Footnotes

45 Similarly Moll herself says to Sebastian "a wife you know ought to be obedient"(II.ii.38).
46 Again this sudden change disappoints some realist critics. George Price, for example, calls this episode an unimpressive pseudo-morality converting Mistress Gallipot and Mistress Openwork to rectitude and the delightfully foolish Master Gallipot into a surly wronged husband who finally invites his enemy to dinner.

masculine control of her corrupt physical nature by assuming that "masculine" control herself.

It seems, therefore, that a reading of The Roaring Girl as a play in the morality tradition, functioning allegorically as well as realistically, makes coherent sense of a gender presentation which is otherwise bewilderingly contradictory. Its uneven "feminism" is confined to two more or less realistic aspects of the central character's portrayal; her fierce condemnation and inversion of men's sexual exploitation of women and the immediate effect of Moll's positive portrayal. While the former of these stands up to examination, the "feminism" of her portrayal is undercut not only by the play's emphasis on her masculinity, which is used to explain and symbolise the uniqueness of her virtue, but also by her own traditionally pejorative comments on the female sex and their substantiation in the action.

In addition, the "masculinising" of the virtuous heroine and corresponding feminising of the lecherous villain associates femininity with lust and lack of discernment, and privileges the concept of masculinity. This privileging is reflected in the intelligence and discernment demonstrated by the virtuous men in the play, in the corresponding lack of discernment revealed by the play's "real" women, and in the suggestions of sexual rapacity associated with the citizen's wives.

The ambivalent presentation of women and femininity in The Phoenix, then, is even more in evidence in this play. Its
hymaphroditic heroine, in this context, can be seen to embody this ambivalence, since she is at once its most and least feminist portrayal. Although strong, virtuous and female, she exhibits masculine clothing, behaviour and virtue, and expresses some of the most traditional and negative views on women that occur in the play.
CHAPTER 1.3

A CHASTE MAID IN CHEAPSIDE

"THE FEAST OF MARRIAGE"

A Chaste Maid in Cheapside's relationship to the morality tradition is less obvious even than that of The Roaring Girl, and it represents the final point in Middleton's comic development away from the formal rhetoric and overt didacticism of the morality play. Parker's description of the play, however, points to what remains in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside a very real debt to the older tradition:

In A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, then, we get a culminatory illustration of the elements we have seen emerging in Middleton's previous comedies: a completely immoral society... an ingenious plot, kept briskly moving by ironic manipulation and inventiveness... ordinary language charged with double meanings by the situation in which it is used [and] characters whose viciousness is... wholeheartedly energetic and self-conscious.

If the overtly didactic and formally rhetorical virtuous characters are, as here, removed from a morality structure, what remains becomes just such a completely immoral society, inhabited by dramatically energetic characters whose self-conscious demonstrations of vicious behaviour are accompanied by instructive asides in frequently bawdy colloquial language—in short, what Spivack calls "the comedy of evil". A reading of A Chaste Maid as a development of

Footnotes
this aspect of the morality play is supported by David Bergeron, whose analysis of the close relationship between the play and Middleton's contemporaneous Pageant The Triumphs of Truth leads him to contend that the insubstantial pageant throws light on the comedy ... [or] in a sense allegorises what is incarnate in the comedy. Middleton has, perhaps unconsciously, fashioned an impressive Renaissance gold medal with one side depicting a large foreground of sin and corruption (the comedy) and the obverse with an equally large foreground of virtue (the pageant).

The didacticism of A Chaste Maid, although not overt, functions through the play's constant irony, which itself arises out of devices such as the grotesque over-inflation of vice, the juxtaposition of characters' attitudes not only with their situations but also with those of others and finally a series of allusions to Biblical authority and Protestant doctrine, which provide a moral framework against which the characters are to be judged by the audience.

Since the focus of this implicit didacticism is marriage, A Chaste Maid can be seen to inhabit the same moral landscape as The Roaring Girl. Like the consummate handling of the play's complex plots, however, its affirmation of marital unity is presented with more skill and control than in the

Footnotes

2 Spivack, pp.121-122 (see above p.6n.).
5 I have not considered it necessary to look at the plots in detail, which are clearly analysed in Richard Levin's "The four plots of A Chaste Maid in Cheapside" RES, ns XVI (1965) pp. 14-24. Both A Chaste Maid and The Roaring Girl contain serious romantic plots involving obstructive parental avarice juxtaposed with lighter more comic plots dealing with adultery.
earlier play; its ubiquitous quality being demonstrated by its occurrence in the cast list and extension into spectacle in the final scene, as R.B. Parker points out:

A Chaste Maid is built on four marriages which existed before the play began and two which are brought about during the course of the action. The very *dramatis personae* in the first edition are grouped according to marriage, instead of the more usual division into male and female categories, and the separate entrance of men and women in Act V scene iv, brought together visually by the lovers' funeral, seems to emblematize an action where all wedlocks are confirmed (albeit ironically) and only Whorehound is punished.⁶

As in the earlier plays, this marital focus involves the exposure of the exploitation of women, and indeed seems to inform the moral structure of *A Chaste Maid*, making its morality relative rather than absolute.⁷ This relativity distances the audience from the action, preventing both the unqualified approval that is aroused by Moll Cutpurse and the absolute moral authority wielded by figures such as Phoenix. Within this framework of moral relativity, however, the distribution of moral authority and audience sympathy can be closely related to that of *The Roaring Girl*. Moll's role seems to be divided between the Touchwood brothers,⁸ who between them successfully trick the exploitative parents, vanquish the lecherous villain in a duel, and directly or indirectly unite all the play's divided marriages. This ultimately positive role in the dramatic action is accompanied by superior

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Footnotes:


⁷ Parker points out this moral relativity, saying "With the exception of Moll (and even her chastity is looked at slightly askance) the characters are all morally ambivalent to a greater or lesser degree," CM, p.lxx.

⁸ Leggatt: "The most successful intriguers are the Touchwood brothers, who are acting out of motives with which the audience would normally sympathise in any case," p.140.
attitudes within the play's moral parameters, since both men are affirmative about marriage and both fail to evince the mercenary and sexually exploitative evaluation of women common to most of the other characters in the play. 9

A Chaste Maid's distribution of morality and sympathy between the oppressed offspring and oppressive parents, although proportionally equivalent to that of The Roaring Girl, is both more intense and more farcical. Sir Alexander's ineffective cruelty to his son becomes Maudlin's physical victimisation of the martyred and defenceless Moll, just as the earlier play's suggestions of spiritual death develop into the apparent death and funeral of the romantic couple. It is important to note, however, that although this parental relationship has shifted from father/son to mother/daughter, the importance of the Touchwood brothers (in lieu of Moll Cutpurse) and the sub-plot emphasis on the cuckold-cuckolder relationship rather than that between the adulterous wife and her lover, makes the general focus of this comedy more male than female. 10

The exceptions to this general focus, Moll and Maudlin, represent the play's most and least sympathetic women, a contrast reflecting their relative morality. Since Maudlin, who is both unchaste and shrewish, highlights the contrasting chastity of her daughter, the opposition between them epitomises the paradox presented in the play's title. Her

Footnotes
9 I shall discuss Touchwood Senior's sexual exploits and attitudes to women in more detail later in this section.
10 Again, Kix and Allwit can be seen as savage exaggerations of the foolish Gallipot and the cynical Openwork.
bawdy and foolish garrulity is as expressive of her loose morality as Moll's reticence is of her chastity, a verbal reflection of the stereotypical opposition between them as "chaste maid" and "shrew." However Middleton's redirection of Maudlin's "energies as scold" from her husband to her comparatively vulnerable daughter makes her behaviour more repellent than that of the shrew of morality tradition. This is particularly evident in the cruelty of Maudlin's recapture of her daughter, which repels even the watermen. Significantly, her accompanying comment, "I have brought your jewel by the hair" (IV.ii.64) links her behaviour to her purely mercenary interest in her daughter, as does Tim's foolish observation: "she's but half my sister now, as far as the flesh goes, the rest may be sold to fishwives" (68-9). Since Maudlin is attempting to sell her daughter in marriage, the harshness of her portrayal can be seen as a severe condemnation of her exploitation of her daughter. Such harshness, then, arises from a "feminist" attack on female exploitation.

It should also be noted, however, that although

Footnotes

11 This verbal index to feminine chastity is paralleled in the contrast between Mistress Touchwood's reticence and the vocal aggression of the Country Wench in Act II.i.  
12 Ruby Chatterji says "Maudlin Yellowhammer . . . is a proud descendant of Noah's wife in the miracle plays, her energies as scold being directed not to her husband but to her daughter." "Theme, Imagery, and Unity in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside," Renaissance Drama, 8 (1965), pp. 107-108.  
13 Their remonstrances with Maudlin, "Good mistress spare her" (IV.ii.56) and "You are a cruel mother" (58) are echoed in their later description of her behaviour: "Half drowned, she cruelly tugged her by the hair, forced her disgracefully, not like a mother" (IV.ii.96-7).
Yellowhammer is equally responsible for Moll's plight the condemnation inherent in his portrayal is downplayed, a contrast in their depiction which is highlighted in his lament at Moll's "death:" "All the whole street will hate us, and the world/Point me out cruel" (V. ii. 108-9, my emphasis). It is in fact Maudlin whose cruelty has been emphasized throughout.

Even the Yellowhammers' victimised daughter, Moll, although impeccably chaste, is subtly undercut in a number of ways, so that it is made difficult for the audience to identify with her. The most obvious example of undercutting is the juxtaposition of Moll's tragedy with the sordid behaviour of her family, which slips into farce, divesting Moll of dramatic validity. As both Chatterji and Gibbons suggest, this is particularly evident in Moll's "death" scene, where much of the humour arises out of a contrast between Moll's tragic accents and the Yellowhammers' baser financial preoccupations.

This farcical undercutting is even more obvious in Touchwood Senior's inflation of Moll's chastity in the final scene. The Marian allusions in his lament highlight the similarly inflating and deflating connotations of her Christian name,

Footnotes

14 Chatterji says "Maudlin's husband, though overshadowed, represents the reverse of the same coin," p. 108.
15 Chatterji: "Later when [Moll] appears to be dying (V. ii), her parents still wrangle in mutual fault-finding . . . . To ask a Jacobean theatre audience to restrain laughter at such provocation would be to ask the impossible. Surely Middleton knew what he was doing," p. 109-10. Gibbons interprets Moll's role as completely parodic: "When the chaste maid prepares to 'die' she sings a lament of sickly-sweet sentimentality, and her father responds with predictably 'noble' rhetoric," p. 128.
which as "Mary" symbolises purity, and as "Moll" denotes a prostitute. The use of the shortened form of her name throughout the play heightens the paradoxical nature of her virtue, contributing considerably to the comic undercutting arising (as in her death scene) from the contrast between this heightened virtue and the degradation of the context within which it is presented. In the final scene, this élévation becomes an inflation of her chastity to an extent no longer credible:

But for this maid, whom envy cannot hurt
With all her poisons, having left to ages
The true chaste monument of her living name,
Which not time can deface, I say of her
The full truth freely, without fear of censure;
What nature could there shine, that might redeem
Perfection home to woman, but in her
Was fully glorious; beauty set in goodness
Speaks what she was; that jewel so infixed,
There was no want of any thing of life
To make these virtuous precedents man and wife.
(V.iv.10-20)

The Marian implications of "The true chaste monument" of her living name become overt in Touchwood Senior's suggestion that

Footnotes

16 As R.B. Parker points out, CMB.lilin. This is highlighted in Allwit's grotesque commentary on the promoters, when he imagines them going home to "their Molls and Dolls" (II.ii.70).

17 This shortened name also constitutes a damaging comment on her parents financially exploitive attitude toward her (both vilify Moll as a "strumpet") The chaste/chased pun in the title, which R.B. Parker points out as proverbial ("since the usual women 'chased' in Cheapside were the prostitutes whipped through it at a cart's tail," p. xlviii) can be seen to function in the same way, particularly as the action presents Maudlin chasing Moll in order to facilitate the transaction that she and her husband have arranged. In addition as the name "Maudlin" is derived from "Magdalene", it can be seen as an allusion to both the virgin/whore opposition between Moll and her mother, and the oxymoronic implication of the name Mary.
only Moll could "bring back to women what was lost by the
Fall,"\textsuperscript{18} since typologically Mary was seen as helping redeem
mankind from the effects of the Fall (and consequently atoning
for Eve's sin) by giving birth to Christ. This excess,
however, must inevitably be deflating, particularly when
followed by an abrupt change in tone as Moll leaps out of the
coffin to the accompaniment of a suddenly prosaic Touchwood
Senior:

\begin{quote}
Nay do not hinder 'em now, stand from about 'em,
If she be caught again, and have this time,
I'll ne'er plot further for 'em. (V.iv.32-34)
\end{quote}

This wild exaggeration of Moll's chastity can however be
related to the titular paradox, since the distance between her
chastity and the debased world of Cheapside is presumably
comparable to that between the Virgin and the Fallen world.
Moreover this emphasis on the uniqueness of Moll's virtue ("but
in her/ Was fully glorious"[15-17, my emphasis]) is reinforced
by the action of the play, which although remarkable for the
number of its female roles\textsuperscript{19} presents women almost without
exception as immoral and degraded.\textsuperscript{20} Moll's chastity is thus
paradoxically undercut at the same time as it is emphasised at

Footnotes
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} Frost \textit{The Selected Plays of Thomas Middleton} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p.179n.
\item \textsuperscript{19} R.B. Parker \textit{SH}, pxxix.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Susan, the maid, shows no evidence of degradation, but then she is so insubstantial that she scarcely shows any evidence of character at all. Similarly, the unarguable virtue of Mistress Touchwood is praised (like that of Moll) by her husband at the expense of the morality of womankind. The dominant women in the play (with the obvious exception of Moll) are Maudlin, the adulterous Mistress Allwit, the incontinent Christening guests and the compromised Lady Kix (who was not "barren" when she was at court III.iii.54-56).
\end{itemize}
the expense of the rest of the female sex. Middleton's portrayal of the women in this play, then, although "feminist" in its condemnation of Maudlin's exploitative behaviour, cannot realistically be seen as particularly affirmative of womankind.

It should be noted, however, that Touchwood Senior's seemingly excessive praise of Moll can be related to the final scene's affirmation of marriage, particularly when its allusions to Eden are seen in the light of the frequent Protestant recourse to the authority of the First Marriage. Perkins, for example, when justifying the Protestant privileging of marriage over celibacy, says:

> [marriage] is a state in itself far more excellent than the condition of single life. For first, it was ordained of God in paradise, above and before all other states of life, in Adam's innocence before the fall. . . . the manner of this conjunction was excellent, for God joined our first parents, Adam and Eve, together immediately. 21

Significantly, Touchwood Senior begins and ends his lament by likening the "dead" lovers to the "virtuous precedents" of marriage, Adam and Eve:

> Never could death boast of a richer prize From the first parent, let the world bring forth A pair of truer hearts . . . . There was no want of any thing of life To make these virtuous precedents man and wife (V.iv.1-3,19-20)

Equally, his suggestion that Moll's virtue could restore to women what was lost by the fall can be related to the Puritan emphasis on the redemptive quality of marriage:

> Lombard, the master of Sentences saith . . . that marriage before the fall was only a duty, but now since the fall is

Footnotes

21 Perkins, p.419.
Like Sir Alexander's joyous rapture and Moll's doomsday jokes, Touchwood Senior's speech functions at more than one level, providing simultaneously the climax to the play's plot, its farcical "tragedy" and its serious affirmation of marriage. The distance between these levels, however, is infinitely greater than that in The Roaring Girl, where Sir Alexander's use of heavenly comforts to describe his future prospects appeared to reflect the likely consequences of a genuine contrition. This darkening of vision is also indicated by the substitution of the spiritually unconscious Touchwood Senior for Moll Cutpurse as moral spokesman.

In spite of his carnal security, the subject matter of Touchwood Senior's only two "moral" speeches indicate his moral authority within the parameters of the play, since both speeches affirm marriage and by implication condemn the mercenary evaluation of women common in the rest of the play.

As a conscious affirmation of marriage, Touchwood Senior's first speech can be usefully compared with that of his earlier counterpart, Phoenix. Although the contrast in style between the didactic and declamatory pronouncement of the Prince and Touchwood Senior's colloquial and intimate spontaneous burst

Footnotes

22 Perkins, p.420.
23 In this thesis I use "security" to denote a failure to fear the consequences of the Day of Judgement (OED "the culpable absence of anxiety, carelessness ... Shaks MacBeth 'Security is Mortal's Cheefest Enemie' [III.v.32]" Ed. J.A.H. Murray IX Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933). Carnal security denotes the total absence of any consideration of the after-life, while spiritual security involves a misplaced confidence or pride in certain salvation.
of gratitude and affection toward his wife is as extreme as that between the spokesmen themselves, the principles that they express are closely related.

Touchwood Senior's speech in response to his wife's agreement to separate (in order to avoid adding the financial burden of more children to the already strained family budget) falls into two halves. The first is addressed to his wife:

Honest wife I thank thee; I ne'er knew
The perfect treasure thou brought'st with thee more
Than at this instant minute. A man's happy
When he's at poorest that has matched his soul
As rightly as his body. Had I married
A sensual fool now, as 'tis hard to 'scape it
'Mongst gentlewomen of our time, she would ha' hanged
About my neck, and never left her hold
Till she had kissed me into wanton businesses,
Which at the waking of my better judgement
I should have cursed most bitterly,
And laid a thicker vengeance on my act
Than misery of the birth, which were enough
If it were born to greatness, whereas mine
Is sure of beggary, though it were got in wine.
Fulness of joy sheweth the goodness in thee,
Thou art a matchless wife; farewell my joy.
(II.i.21-37)

The most striking feature of this speech is the fact that Touchwood Senior evidently values his wife's sexual continence above her other virtues, since he has never appreciated her more than at this instant minute. His appreciation is

Footnotes
24 Similarly, his assertion that such virtue is infinitely more valuable than wealth is in direct contrast to the financially exploitative attitudes of Allwit, Whorehound and the Yellowhammers. This contrast is emphasised by the way that he uses financial metaphors (such as "perfect treasure") to underline the infinitely greater value of her virtue to him than wealth ("A man's happy/When he's at poorest that has matched his soul... rightly") like his later description of Moll's "goodness" as a "jewel." These financial metaphors are balanced by Whorehound's assessment of marriage to Moll.
heightened by his awareness of the rarity of such sexual continence in women; his wife is "matchless," and his consideration of the "sensual" alternative presents it as the norm: "as 'tis hard to 'scape it/'Mongst gentlewomen of our time." This damaging attitude to female morality is compounded by the implication of his "sensual fool" scenario, which in suggesting that Touchwood Senior would be unable to resist a sexually initiatory woman includes a reference to the penalty of Eve's sin, the "misery of birth." By providing this scenario with Biblical authority, Touchwood Senior also universalises it, implying not only that such behaviour is the common inheritance of all women, who are consequently responsible for the fall of the men they seduce, but also that his weakness, in resembling that of Adam, is common to all men.

The sentiment of the second half of Touchwood's speech,

Footnotes

25 The fact that she is "matchless" with regard to other women, and yet "rightly matched" with Touchwood Senior, need not be seen as unconscious irony on his part; as I shall suggest, he appears to be able to abstain if not provoked by his partner, which is what Mistress Touchwood is doing. Rather his two uses of "match" reflect his emphasis on the comparative rarity of such female morality.

26 David Frost says of this: "Man is born to sorrow and the agony of childbirth remains the penalty of Eve's sin," Selected Plays, p.111n. This contemplation of the physical penalty for the Fall highlights his failure to consider its spiritual equivalent.

27 Touchwood Junior's request to Moll ("Turn not to me till thou mayst lawfully, it but whets my/stomach, which is too sharp set already" [I.i.146-71]) reveals a similar attitude, reinforcing this implication.
delivered in soliloquy, closely resembles that of the first. Both begin with praise of his wife's "honesty" or sexual continence and continue with an affirmation of marriage distinctly Protestant in flavour: 28

This does not only make her honesty perfect
But her discretion, and approves her judgement.
Had her desires been wanton, they'd been blameless
In being lawful ever, but of all creatures
I hold that wife a most unmatched treasure
That can unto her fortunes fix her pleasure
And not unto her blood--this is like wedlock;
The feast of marriage is not lust but love,
And care of the estate. When I please blood,
Merely I sing, and suck out others'; then,
'Tis many a wise man's fault. (II.i.43-53)

Mistress Touchwood's ability to divorce her "pleasure" from her "blood," or sexual desire, not only makes her "unmatched," and informs her "honesty," "judgement" and "discretion," but is also presented as the true basis of a good marriage, involving "not lust but love." In contrast, Touchwood Senior diminishes both the importance of his own adultery, and his responsibility for it, further reinforcing the implication of his earlier scenario. This extreme weighting of female sexuality in marriage can be related to Prince Phoenix's presentation of real or imagined female infidelity as at the root of all marriage problems. Similarly, Touchwood Senior's distinction between "lust and love" resembles the earlier play's assertion of marriage as the only "form" capable of

Footnotes
28 In the address to his wife, his joy at their compatibility can be related to the Protestant emphasis on the paramount importance of spiritual compatibility when choosing a wife: "The first [consideration] is parity or equality in regard of Christian religion... The second note is parity in regard of age and condition," Perkins, p.422.
differentiating human love from bestial lust.\(^{29}\) Paradoxically, to twentieth century eyes at least, both speeches refer to marriage as a warrant for "lawful" sexual intercourse, and yet condemn those (women in both cases\(^{30}\)) who use this institution to satisfy "lust." However this apparent contradiction can also be related to Protestant doctrine, which prescribes a "right and holy manner" in which such intercourse is to be conducted:

The holy manner stands in these particulars. First, that it be done in moderation. For even in wedlock, excess in lusts is no better that plain adultery before God. This is the judgement of the ancient church, that intemperance, that is, immoderate desires even between man and wife are fornication.\(^{31}\) Secondly that it be used in an holy abstinence.

The Touchwood's separation, then, not only indicates their ability to restrain such "immoderate desires," but also constitutes an apparently unwitting fulfillment of the "holy abstinence" which was required during the Lenten period in which the play is set. As Touchwood Junior, Moll, the Allwits and the Kixes are also fulfilling this abstinence for one reason or another,\(^{32}\) the final scene's simultaneous affirmation of marriage and emblematic "resurrection" reflect

Footnotes

29 Obviously, this distinction is also unconsciously ironic on the personal level.
30 Phoenix's implied condemnation was of Castiza, whose choice of the Captain revealed such lustful motivation, and Touchwood Senior condemns his imaginary "sensual fool."
31 Perkins, p.424.
32 Touchwood Junior also regrets his separation from Moll, yet derives a similar satisfaction from it:
   For though she be locked up, her vow is fixed only to me;
   Then time shall never grieve me, for by that vow,
   E'en absent I'll enjoy her, assuredly confirmed that none else shall.
   (III.iii.3-6)
both the end of this Lenten requirement and its religious significance.

A Chaste Maid's continuing allusions to Biblical authority and Protestant doctrine underline the glaring flaw in Touchwood Senior's morality. Although his attitudes to marriage and women are affirmative, they are focussed entirely on this world. Unlike the Phoenix, who refers to "dangerless sweets," Touchwood Senior fails to consider the spiritual implications either of marriage or of his extra-marital "drinkings abroad." Characteristically, Touchwood Senior considers this adultery unfortunate solely because of its fruitful outcome. This failure is highlighted by Whorehound's spiritual panic in the face of death, and underlined by the earlier implication that Touchwood Senior continues to replay Adam's fall whenever he commits adultery. Although aware of the physical punishment for the Fall ("the misery of birth") he fails to consider that both marriage and Christ redeem mankind from its spiritual effects.33

Touchwood Senior's attitude to adultery, then, contrasts with Sir Walter's in that he appears to be incapable of resisting the sexual initiation of others, rather than allowing his own lust to drive him as it does Sir Walter.34 Equally his honest acknowledgement of his "fault" contrasts

Footnotes

33 In this context his subsequent allusions to marriage and Christ in his speech at Moll's "funeral" are highly personally ironic.

34 His response to Touchwood Junior's urging to "Get [Lady Kix] with child" reinforces this impression: "Prithee cease, I find a too much aptness in my blood/For such a business without provocation"(III.iii.14-15). See above, p.62.
with Sir Walter's hypocrisy at the christening. Significantly, this contrast emphasises the play's condemnation of a specifically financial exploitation of female sexuality, since Touchwood Senior's exploitation of the desire of women is not condemned as is Whorehound's behaviour.

In view of Touchwood Senior's position as the most "moral" man in a play with a male focus, it is important to consider the implications of his flawed morality in order to assess the impact of his attitudes and behaviour toward women. To do this successfully, we must view him in the light of the complex balancing between him and his moral foils, Whorehound and Kix. For just as his adulterous relationship with the Kixes balances him against Sir Walter, so his inability to maintain his own household and consequent adulterous "bargain" balance him against Allwit. As however the bases of Touchwood Senior's adultery with Lady Kix are her desire for a child and his urgent financial need, rather than the purchase of her sexual favours in order to gratify his lusts, his adultery is morally distinguished from Whorehound's. Equally, as his solution to his bankruptcy, although immoral, did not...

Footnotes

35 Parker points out: "Although we are expected to assess Sir Walter and Touchwood Senior differently, their careers are curiously alike. They are old acquaintances (II.i.45), and each has been in town seven years. Sir Walter's Welsh Mistress is paralleled by Touchwood Senior's Country Wench, and Sir Walter's children by Mistress Allwit... are matched by the seven Country Girls whom Touchwood Senior made lie in "last progress," CM, pp.xliv-xlv.

36 Again, Parker says: "Touchwood Senior's account of true married housekeeping (II.i), for instance, is balanced against Allwit's immediately preceding praise of wittoldry (II.i), each resigning his family duties for different but not unrelated reasons," CM, p.xlv.
involve the financial exploitation of his wife's sexuality, it is distinguished from that of Allwit. Moreover, his role in the re-unification of the Kixes, Allwits and his own marriage, and the arrangement of his brother's wedding is in stark contrast to the maritally divisive behaviour of Allwit and Sir Walter.

The reciprocal nature of this adulterous behaviour is underlined when Sir Walter's threat to marry (designed to prevent Allwit's sleeping with his wife) prompts Allwit to comment:

I'll stop that gap
Where e'er I find it open; I have poisoned
His hopes in marriage already--
Some rich old widows, and some landed virgins--
(I.ii,11-114)

Similarly, Allwit's amused contempt for Sir Walter's jealousy, and complacent belief in his "control" over Sir Walter ("'tis but observing a man's humour once, and he may ha' him by the nose all his life,"[I.ii.83-5]) are balanced by Sir Walter's correspondingly contemptuous confidence in his own ability to keep Allwit under control: "That wakes the slave, and keeps his flesh in awe" (I.ii.110). This conflation of the roles of cuckold and cuckoldeer can also be detected in their names; Walter is as much a phonetic acronym of wittol as Allwit is.

Footnotes

37 Campion's Epigram (published as an example of trochaic verse in 1602) presents a parallel to the Allwit scenario. Although "Barnzy's" wife "Matilda" "scorning him with Harvy plays the wanton," Barnzy's assertion that "he's no cuckold" is confirmed in the epigram, on the grounds that Harvy's assumption of complete financial control means that he "thus truly plays Matilda's husband," and consequently "Harvy bears the wrong, he proves the cuckold." (Gomme, p.101).
It is a conflation that can obviously be related to their mutual financial exploitation of Mistress Allwit's sexuality, and it is particularly evident in Act V scene i, where Whorehound's "moral" renunciation of adultery and his adulteress both echoes and inverts Touchwood Senior's "moral" celebration of his chaste wife and marriage.\(^{38}\)

Whorehound's speech begins with an inversion of his former attitude to Allwit's shame,\(^{39}\) an inversion which, since it was Sir Walter who earlier failed to inform Allwit of the shame he now comments on, constitutes an effective role reversal that not only ironically casts him in the role of Allwit, but also in that of "Hell's flattering angel:"

\[
\text{Thou know'\text{st} me to be wicked, for thy baseness} \\
\text{Kept the eyes open still on all my sins,} \\
\text{None knew the dear account my soul stood charged with} \\
\text{So well as thou, yet like Hell's flattering angel} \\
\text{Would'\text{st} never tell me on't, let'\text{st} me go on,} \\
\text{And join with death in sleep, that if I had not waked} \\
\text{Now by chance, even by a stranger's pity,} \\
\text{I had everlastingly slept out all hope} \\
\text{Of grace and mercy. (V.i.26-34)}
\]

This blurring of both roles into the satanic underlines their moral symmetry and associated responsibility, ironically undercutting Whorehound's abrogation of his share of this responsibility. The deflation of his moral validity is

\[\text{Footnotes}\]

\(^{38}\) Parker says "it is . . . these two seducers who are given the most "moral" speeches in A Chaste Maid, with Sir Walter's "legacy" to Mistress Allwit in Act V anticipated by Touchwood Senior's forecast about cursing the woman who has seduced one into lechery," CM, p.xlv.

\(^{39}\) Parker points out that "Without deliberate hypocrisy . . . he prides himself on having a more sensitive conscience than Allwit, whose "eyes of shame" are blurred by the "fat of ease" (II.ii.36-7). This lends extraordinary irony to his repentance . . . Reversing his former position, he now blames Allwit for seeing his damnation and not telling him of it," CM, p.lxiv.
reinforced by Allwit's failure to react to its substance. Ignoring its confrontational aspect and apparently impervious to its religious implications, he characteristically employs his most successful tool in pacifying Whorehound: "Wife, to him wife, thou wast wont to do good on him" (V.i.35). Sir Walter responds to her with with a vicious renunciation, which as Parker points out, merely confirms his blindness:

 Thou loathsome strumpet: some good pitying man Remove my sins out of my sight a little; I tremble to behold her, she keeps back All comfort while she stays; is this a time, Unconscionable woman, to see thee? Art thou so cruel to the peace of man, Not to give liberty now? The devil himself Shows far fairer reverence and respect To goodness than thyself; he dares not do this, But parts in time of penitence, hides his face . . . Hast thou less manners, and more impudence, Than thy instructor? (37-49)

This attempt to foist his guilt onto the woman whom he has effectively purchased must represent the supreme example of Sir Walter's exploitative attitude, and its occurrence in response to Allwit's cosy salesmanship constitutes a bitingly ironic comment on the exploitative parallel between Whorehound's refusal to accept responsibility for his sin, and Allwit's refusal to acknowledge the religious consequences of his. Moreover since it can be assumed that either Sir Walter or Allwit "instructed" Mistress Allwit in adultery, his ascription of that role to the devil continues his identification with the Prince of Darkness. Similarly, his

Footnotes

40 "The ignobility of Sir Walter's collapse, his repentance for reasons which merely confirm his blindness, is as searingly worded as any passage in Middleton," CM, p.lvii.
assertion that the devil "hides his face" in "time of penitence" functions at his expense less than thirty lines later, when he says "O my vengeance,/ Let me for ever hide my cursed face" (69-70). These unconscious suggestions of his satanic role in Mistress Touchwood's downfall function on a similar level (although at the opposite extreme) as Touchwood Senior's allusions to the redemptive aspects of marriage; each constitutes a thread of serious implication that at once ironcally undercuts the speaker's moral position in the play, and reinforces the thematic drive toward marital unity.

Whorehound's spiritual despair and the Allwits' relentless preoccupation with financial gain are mutually undercutting, in a manner related to that employed in Moll's death scene (which follows this one). For just as Moll's tragic suffering in the face of her parents' mercenary incomprehension both undercuts her tragic validity and constitutes a savage comment on their exploitative attitude toward her, so Whorehound's recognition of the spiritual consequences of his adulterous menage condemns the Allwits, while their mercenary pragmatism in the face of his anguish renders it disturbingly farcical. In each case, the bleak humour arises from this farcical contrast.

Footnotes

41 Whorehound's satanic allusions undercut any suggestion of true contrition. Like Laxton's more comic "repentance" in response to Moll's onslaught, Sir Walter's repentance is merely attrition, the consequence of his brush with death at the hands of Touchwood Junior.

42 The two layers of meaning beneath Mistress Allwit's "He is lost forever" (V.i.54) generate humour in much the
The full nature and extent of Sir Walter's immorality becomes clear when he is compared with Touchwood Senior. While Whorehound appears to be motivated almost entirely by selfish considerations, he ultimately reveals an awareness of the religious consequences of his behaviour, an awareness which is effectively the only morality demonstrated in his "repentance." Touchwood Senior on the other hand, has a well-developed secular morality; most of his actions are motivated by other than purely selfish considerations, his value system is not dominated by wealth, and he recognises his own sexual weakness as a fault. However his failure to comprehend the seriousness of this "fault" reflects the pragmatic focus of his moral vision; he appears to be totally uninterested in or unaware of the spiritual consequences of his behaviour.

This complementary, or inverse moral vision is particularly evident in the comparison between their respective "moral" speeches. Touchwood Senior's generous and affectionate praise of his wife's sexual forbearance contains the implication of a genuine inability to resist her, should she choose to provoke

Footnotes

same way as Maudlin's translation of the tragic implications of Moll's swan song into a complacent platitude: "O, I could die with music: well sung girl" (V.ii.49). More grimly, the irony behind Allwit's triumphant "For who e'er games, the box is sure a winner" (V.i.180) involves not only his conscious pun on the gambling box, the female pudendum, and the coffin, but also underlines his failure to consider what happens after the coffin.
him. Sir Walter, however, far from desiring Mistress Allwit's forbearance, has purchased her sexual favours for the adulterous gratification of his lust, and this invalidates his (parallel) attempts to attribute the sole responsibility for his sordid transaction to his purchase. Similarly, Touchwood Senior's "cursing" would be caused by his concern for a child he could not afford to keep, while Whorehound's cursing constitutes a craven desire to avoid his inevitable punishment by transferring his guilt onto the object and consequences of his sin.

Where Whorehound's renunciation of his liaison is motivated by his awareness of its spiritual consequences, that of Touchwood Senior arises purely from his desire to avoid children, the physical consequences of sex; his allusion to "the misery of the birth" suggests that this is the only punishment for the Fall that he considers. Indeed the ironic religious implications of the two speeches highlights the contrasting moralities and their focii. While Touchwood unconsciously casts himself as Adam, with Eve in a fallen world, Whorehound's corresponding Satanic identifications, and the tone and implications of his speech all suggest that he is already in Hell.

Footnotes

43 This implication, as I have suggested is borneout by the action of the play.
44 This suggestion is reinforced by his descriptions of his tendency to sire illegitimate children whenever he commits adultery through analogy to cards, as "unlucky."
45 While Touchwood Senior's final prospects must be in doubt, in view of his adultery, his unconscious allusions to redemption in the final scene perhaps indicate that he is, like mankind in general, not necessarily beyond hope.
The moral nuances arising from the complex balancing of Touchwood Senior against Whorehound and Allwit, then, constitute an even more damning indictment of the male financial exploitation of female sexuality than that found in The Roaring Girl. However Touchwood Senior's (expressed and implied) attitudes to women, while relatively positive (in being non-mercenary) reflect the highly traditional attitude to women that appears to inform The Phoenix and The Roaring Girl. Furthermore, his standing within the play's moral structure lends these attitudes authority.

These attitudes, moreover, are substantiated by the action. Touchwood's assertions of the extreme rarity of the sexual virtue found in Mistress Touchwood and Moll, for example, are borne out in the play by large numbers of unchaste female characters and by his own references to multiple sexual encounters with willing partners. Even more damaging is his suggestion that female sexual behaviour is in general provocative, (and consequently responsible for male sexual incontinence), since it is reinforced by his unconscious allusion to Biblical authority and his tendency to respond to the desire of "others," rather than actively pursue his own appetite. Here the moral complexities of his opposition to Whorehound contribute to this suggestion, since the principle behind Whorehound's renunciation of Mistress Allwit closely resembles that underlying Touchwood Senior's attitude, much as the Captain's rampant misogyny caricatures Prince Phoenix's condemnation of Castiza. The moral unease generated by this
parallel is increased by the fact that while Whorehound's attribution of responsibility to Mistress Allwit is invalidated, his assumption that she will be damned for her adultery is not. Again, this ambivalence arises from the play's simultaneous condemnation of those who sexually exploit women, and condemnation of sexually active (and frequently exploited) women.

Finally, Touchwood Senior's praise of the sexual morality of the two Touchwood wives at the expense of their other qualities is in keeping not only with Prince Phoenix's attitude to women, but also with that of Moll Cutpurse. It is also reinforced by the way in which the only two sympathetically portrayed women in the play are literally defined by their sexual virtue, and that they are married to the two most "moral" and sympathetically portrayed men. Significantly, the Touchwood brothers are the only men in the play whose wives are not sexually compromised, just as they are also the play's most successful and "honourable" men. Indeed, the implication that a wife's sexual morality is of central importance to her husband's honour is particularly evident in the contrast between Allwit's behaviour and Touchwood Senior's. While this contrast, as I have suggested, represents a damaging comment on Allwit's attitude towards his wife, his role, like that of the Captain in *The Phoenix*, represents a conscious embracing of the extreme dishonour associated with having an unchaste wife. Touchwood Senior's own adultery is presented far more kindly in that, although
presented as a fault, it is not associated with the sort of
dishonour inherent in Allwit's cuckoldry. On the contrary, it
is the means through which he reunites with his wife, and
unites his brother in marriage. His adultery has a further
significance in that it underlines the play's major
condemnation of the financial aspect of female sexual
exploitation. Touchwood Senior's interactions with women
suggest that responding to female temptation does not
constitute comparable exploitation.

The heavy emphasis on the "masculine" virtues of the
morally superior and ultimately successful Touchwoods, adds to
the traditional effect of the play's presentation of the
sexes. Their courage, intelligence and relative moral
awareness are presented as contributing to that success, and
their masculinity is nowhere more evident than in the parallel
between Touchwood Junior's unsurpassable duelling skills and
Touchwood Senior's superhuman potency. This is implied in the
dramatic action, as Touchwood Senior's impregnation of Lady
Kix "strike[s] at [Whorehound's] fortunes/ And lay[s] him
level with his bankrupt merit" (III.iii.8-9), just as
Touchwood Junior's duelling victory physically "lays him
level." It is also implied by Touchwood Senior's ironic
response to Oliver Kix's challenge to sire triplets ("Take
heed how you dare a man, while you live sir,/That has good
skill at his weapon"[V.iv.85-6]) which balances his deadly
serious warning to Whorehound of his brother's "skill with his
weapon":
Look after him and spare not; there he walks
That never yet received baffling; you're blessed
More than e'er I knew. Go take your rest.

(III.i.67-69)

Here the word-plays on Touchwood as the tinder in the musket's "touchhole" (which also denoted the vagina)\(^{46}\) can be seen to conflate these two aspects of masculine prowess.

While this parallel can be seen as a snide attack on the concept of male honour as dependant on duelling skills, its effect is far less damaging than the parodic undermining of Moll's chastity. Rather, its association with the two most successful and moral men in the play effectively privileges such masculinity as the physical equivalent of the masculine virtues of courage, intelligence and awareness, which are manifest in the play's virtuous men.

While the ironic complexity of *A Chaste Maid* is stylistically distinct from both the clumsy didacticism of *The Phoenix*, and the positive moral energy of *The Roaring Girl*, the twin thematic concerns of those earlier plays, marriage and the sexual exploitation of women, are if anything even more central to this play's action, as they appear to dictate its moral parameters. Conversely, the shift in focus from the subjects of this exploitation to the complex of responsibility carried by the exploiters, and what appears to be a parodic inflation of the only spotlessly virtuous woman in the play, with an accompanying degradation of the women that surround

Footnotes

\(^{46}\) Gomme, p.23n, and Frost *Selected Plays*, p.113n. In view of the Touchwoods' ultimate success at the "game" of the play's action, it seems likely that their names also allude to the practice of touching wood for luck.
her, increases the intensity of both the play's condemnation of female exploitation, and the harshly traditional attitude to female sexuality that accompanies it.

All three comedies reflect the same rigidly orthodox Christian morality. While all are "feminist" in their condemnation of the sexual and financial exploitation of women, their Biblical presentation of women as the weaker sex, less intelligent and more prone to lust than their male counterparts, is decidedly ambivalent. This attitude is associated (in all three plays) with a strong emphasis on the subjection of the female sex and the universal condemnation of those women who take the initiative sexually. Although the men in these comedies are usually undercut to a greater or lesser extent, the dramatic and moral standing of the women is more compromised than that of the men. Although Moll Cutpurse initially appears to be the only exception to this rule, her rejection of her gender as a corrupting influence, and the association of her masculinity with her virtue ultimately promote her as one of the most obvious examples of this general privileging of the male gender.

This negative presentation of women is compounded by the attitudes expressed by the plays' moral spokesmen, who uniformly allude to Biblical authority and Protestant doctrine when presenting female sexually initiatory behaviour as the norm and advocating the Pauline doctrine of the suppression of the female gender and its sexuality by its male counterpart—a harshly orthodox attitude which is frequently
underlined by the extreme misogyny articulated by the plays' Vice figures.

All three plays, then, are entirely consistent with the rigidly orthodox morality espoused by the morality tradition, and its Biblical and negative presentation of women.
CHAPTER TWO

TRAGICOMEDY

In testifying to his continuing adherence to the aims and techniques of the morality play, the didacticism and pervasive irony of Middleton's tragicomedies firmly place the playwright in an English, rather than an Italian tragicomic tradition. Consequently, tragicomic elements such as surprising reversals, sharp moral contrasts, arbitrary and ingenious endings and the dramatisation of Petrarchan conceits are subverted in Middleton's plays to become sharply pointed tools serving the ends of a Christian didacticism. Rather than promoting romantic ethics such as the duelling code of honour.

Footnotes

1 Ascribing the native tragicomedy to a fusion of the morality and romance traditions; and the Italian influence in England to the playwright Giambattista Guarini, Carolyn Asp summarises the distinctions between the two approaches:

The basic discrepancy between the two arose from their dramatic goals; Guarini emphasized the fact that drama is entertainment, while English dramatists, in practice if not in theory, emphasized the moral seriousness of drama. ... Guarini insisted that tragicomedy should follow the comic order ... native drama usually followed the order of tragedy averted. ... To preserve the comic effect of [the] denouement, Guarini said it was essential that the evil characters repent and be forgiven. ... English plays, on the other hand, often depicted the evil characters as unrepentant; as a moral lesson they are punished or cast out.


2 When referring to "romantic" in the sense of Petrarchan love, I shall use quotation marks around the word. Conversely, when using it to mean "that which is imaginary, that which deals with an unreal world or heroic love and adventure, with situations presupposing the suspension of disbelief" (Asp, p.55) I shall abandon
and Petrarchan love\(^3\) in the manner of John Fletcher and Samuel Daniel, Middleton exposes the fundamental immorality of these codes of behaviour by juxtaposing the romantic illusions of their adherents and the reality of their behaviour.\(^4\)

Since limitations of space force me to confine my discussion in this chapter to three of Middleton's four tragicomedies, I reluctantly abandoned A Fair Quarrel, on the grounds that, since it focuses on the duelling code, its principal emphasis is on the male rather than the female characters. Consequently the dilemmas of Lady Ager and Jane Russell serve primarily to highlight the unhealthy priorities of their legal guardians, Captain Ager and Russell, whose adherence to the codes of duelling and Mammon constitute mutually unflattering parallels.\(^5\)

Footnotes

3 M.H. Abrams defines Petrarchan or Courtly love:

A philosophy of love . . . . Love is regarded as the noblest passion this side of heaven. The courtly lover idealizes and idolizes his beloved, and subjects himself entirely to her every whim . . . . the origins of courtly love have been traced in part . . . . to the importation into amatory situations, by a kind of serious parody, of Christian feeling and ritual.


4 Here I agree with John F. McElroy (p71). While I am indebted to his excellent study Parody and Burlesque in the Tragicomedies of Thomas Middleton which I found most stimulating, I disagree with his contention that the sole aim of Middleton's tragicomedies is to parody those of Fletcher, as I consider the anti-romantic satire in these plays to be the consequence of Middleton's use of the tragi-comic form for his didactic purposes. I also differ substantially from him in his interpretation of individual plays.

5 For an excellent study of this play, see A.L. and M.K. Kirstner "Themes and Structures of A Fair Quarrel" Tennessee Studies in Literature 23 (1978) 31-46.
Of the three remaining plays, *More Dissemblers Besides Women* is particularly interesting, since its attack on the Petrarchan ethic is presented through the comparative gender evaluation suggested in its title.

Likewise, a predominantly female focus and comparable anti-Petrarchan satire makes *The Witch* my second tragicomedy, particularly since one of the central techniques with which it attacks the concept of "honourable" revenge is an ironic parallel between male and female revengers; in other words, like *More Dissemblers* it relies on a gender comparison.

Finally, the overt didacticism and presence of moral exemplars in *The Old Law* lead to a highly stylised presentation of male and female morality which lends itself to comparative analysis.
Rather than focusing on marriage in the manner of the city comedies, More Dissemblers Besides Women concentrates on the Petrarchan romantic code. There are no established marriages in the play, with the dramatic action revolving rather around the machinations of the six "romantic" characters as they intrigue and dissemble in order to achieve the desired partner. This emphasis on the manipulative and dishonest behaviour arising out of romantic ambition reflects the central tenet of the play's attack on the Petrarchan ethic: that it functions as a warrant, or licence, for the suspension of moral and ethical considerations in order to achieve the object of one's desire. The play's dominant metaphor equating love and war (through the ironic use of the Petrarchan conceit of the warfare of love) reflects this central tenet.\footnote{This metaphor is presented in the song of welcome to Andrugio; the first verse praising the conquering general is paralleled by the second presenting Cupid as a conqueror:}

\begin{verbatim}
Laurel is a victor's due . . .
Thy brow with bays
We circle round;
All men rejoice . . .
To see thee like a conqueror crown'd.
[Cupid descending]
I am a little conqueror too;
For wreaths of bays
There's arms of cross.
\end{verbatim}
while it propounds just such a romantic suspension of
morality, through allusion to the adage "All's fair in love
and war," it simultaneously highlights the fact that the most
successful "combatant" in both arenas, General Andrugio, is
an anti-Petrarchan hero who remains consistently morally aware
and is cynically bemused by the strength of his attachment to
Aurelia. In other words, this equation both ironically
advocates the Petrarchan suspension of morality and undercuts
it in emphasising its moral inadequacy and in presenting it as
a recipe for romantic failure. Unlike Andrugio, who achieves
his desired partner, an unwillingness to compromise morally,
the four "dissemblers" who practice this suspension of
morality fail not only to gain their wishes, but indeed to
make any progress at all, being forced back finally into the
positions they occupied at the beginning of the play.\(^2\) Since
the play's title emphasises this behaviour as a comparative
gender evaluation, it represents a good point from which to
analyse the play's presentation of men and women.

The four chief dissemblers, the Duchess, Aurelia, the
Cardinal and Lactantio can be seen as parallel pairs. Thus the
Duchess and the Cardinal begin the play in virtually identical
states of pride and spiritual security, only to fall when
faced with temptation. Relinquishing their previous moral

Footnotes

\(^{1}\) And that's my due.

(1.iii.74-86)

\(^2\) "Schoenbaum alone . . . notices that rather than moving
toward the kind of romantic reconciliation with reality
that Olley imposes on the last act, the play actually
runs in a circle and ends with the characters locked in
the same roles they had framed for themselves before the
action had begun," McElroy, p.113.
value systems, both dissemble in order to attain their "romantic" goals only to be thwarted at the moment (as they believe) of success. At this second major setback, both return not only to their original position, but also the spiritual security and pride associated with it. Their behaviour is balanced by that of the two younger dissemblers, Aurelia and Lactantio, whose frankly amoral pride is identified with carnal security, as they ruthlessly abandon and betray their earlier lovers only to be betrayed in turn. The contrast between their frank amorality and the specious religious justification of their elder counterparts is mutually unflattering, highlighting both the amorality of the Duchess and Cardinal and the younger couple's total failure to recognise, let alone consider, the religious implications of their behaviour.³

At her first appearance, Aurelia claims that in the event of Lactantio's death she would surpass the Duchess's fidelity by dying in sympathy with her husband, suggesting that the mere idea of Lactantio dying is enough to "make a ghost" of her. Satisfied, he responds:

I perceive then
Thou'dst go beyond the duchess in her vow,
Thou'dst die indeed. (I.i.34-6)

This comparison between the two women's capacity for constancy emphasises Aurelia's carnal pride and security, an attitude

Footnotes
³ McElroy says: "[The Duchess's] dissembling is more naive than that of Aurelia, whose frankly amoral reflections on the risk to honor involved in choosing an untrustworthy go-between in a love affair [II.iv.25-32] provide an amusing commentary on the Duchess's use of Lactantio", p.122.
associated with her belief in romantic love by her extravagant farewell, "The power of love commands me" (I.i.71).

At her first appearance, similarly, the Duchess contemplates her own constancy with a pride which is, if anything, even greater than Aurelia's. Not content to see it as a virtue which distinguishes her from the rest of womanhood, the Duchess appears to consider it a qualification for redemption-in-life, elevating her above fallen mankind:

\begin{quote}
\textit{is it so hard}
\end{quote}
\begin{quote}
\textit{For a woman to recover, with all diligence,}
\end{quote}
\begin{quote}
\textit{And a true fasting faith from sensual pleasure,}
\end{quote}
\begin{quote}
\textit{What many of her sex have so long lost? . . . .}
\end{quote}
\begin{quote}
\textit{I'll come forth}
\end{quote}
\begin{quote}
\textit{And shew myself to all; the world shall witness,}
\end{quote}
\begin{quote}
\textit{That, like the sun, my constancy can look}
\end{quote}
\begin{quote}
\textit{On earth's corruptions, and shine clear itself.}
\end{quote}
\begin{quote}
(I.iii.49-52,60-63)
\end{quote}

The only distinction between their attitudes, then, is that one is romantic and the other religious. For whereas Aurelia's pride arises out of her belief that she is elevated in moral status by her romantic constancy (a Petrarchan virtue), the Duchess's pride in the (spiritual) virtue accruing to her constancy (to her vow of abstinence) leads her to believe herself to be correspondingly elevated in religious terms.

The suggestion (implicit in this parallel) that Aurelia has substituted a romantic or Petrarchan code for a Christian one is also associated with the Duchess's failure to resist the first temptation she experiences. Although she now recognises her own fallen nature, and hence no longer suffers from spiritual pride, she refuses to acknowledge her own
responsibility for her fall, attributing it consecutively to her humanity, to Andrugio, and finally by implication to her femininity:

I confess I'm mortal;
There's no defending on't; 'tis cruel flattery
To make a lady believe otherwise.
Is not this flesh? can you drive heat from fire?
So may you love from this; for love and death
Are brothers in this kingdom, only death
Comes by the mother's side, and that's the surest.
That general is wondrous fortunate,
Has won another field since, and a victory
That credits all the rest; he may more boast on't
Than of a thousand conquests. I am lost,
Utterly lost! where are my women now?
Alas, what help's in them, what strength have they?
I call to a weak guard when I call them;
In rescuing they'd be themselves o'ercome:
When I, that professed war, am overthrown,
What hope's in them, then, that ne'er stirr'd from home?

(I.iii.115-131)

The Duchess's conflation of Andrugio's military and romantic prowess, and her reference to the mother of the brothers "love and death" echoes the song of Cupid which precedes her admission of failure:

I am a little conqueror too:
   For wreaths of bays
   There's arms of cross,
And that's my due:
I give the flaming heart,
   It is my crest;
And by the mother's side,
   The weeping eye,
   The sighing breast.
It is not power in you, fair beauties:
If I command love, 'tis your duties.

(I.iii.83-93)

The Duchess's failure to resist "love" (the brother of "death"), suggests that she has not power to resist Cupid's "command," and has surrendered her (earlier) prelapsarian pretensions to his "kingdom" of the flesh.
Moreover by suggesting that it is the general against whom she has been at war, and who has conquered her, the Duchess neatly sidesteps the fact that until now her "battle" has been propounded as a virtuous stand against sin:

Her resolute goodness
Shall as a rock stand firm, and send the sin
That beat[s] against it
Into the bosom of the owners weeping

(I.ii.56-9)

The sin that has successfully defeated the Duchess's constancy, far from emanating from Andrugio's bosom, has arisen in her own, and rather than attempting to resist it, she refuses even to acknowledge it as her responsibility, attributing it ultimately to "love." This failure clearly indicates that by embracing her desire for Andrugio, and with it a "romantic" value system the Duchess moves smoothly from spiritual into carnal security. At the same time her pride undergoes a similar change, as she moves from glorying in her prelapsarian virtue to asserting that her overthrow constitutes proof that no woman could withstand such temptation.

This movement from spiritual to carnal or worldly values is

Footnotes

4 As the Lord's commentary (immediately preceding the Duchess's speech) makes clear, Andrugio's disappointment at Aurelia's absence means that he failed to even notice the Duchess:

Alas, poor gentleman! I brought him news
That like a cloud spread over all his glories:
When he miss'd her whom his eye greedily sought for,
His welcome seem'd so poor, he took no joy in't

(I.iii.96-99)

5 After subverting her previous claim to prelapsarian virtue, to use its excess as an excuse for her failure, she blames it on the Cardinal by implication "'tis cruel flattery/To make a lady believe otherwise"(I.iii.115-7).
most clearly demonstrated in the two soliloquies which frame
the Duchess's attempt to manipulate the Cardinal. In the first
of these, she justifies her impending behaviour:

O, an ill cause had need of many helps,
Much art, and many friends, ay, and those mighty,
Or else it sets in shame! A faith once lost
Requires great cunning ere't be entertain'd
Into the breast of a belief again;
There's no condition so unfortunate,
Poor, miserable, to any creature given,
As hers that breaks in vow; she breaks with heaven.

(II.i.21-28)

The Duchess’s use of the terms "faith," "belief" and "shame"
to refer to the opinion of others, and her assertion that the
remedy for lost faith is "Much art" and "great cunning,"
underline her failure to consider a spiritual remedy for her
problem, as does the self-pitying flash of religious insight
at the end of her speech. Although apparently recognising the
consequences of her behaviour, she refuses to acknowledge her
responsibility to avert these consequences by altering it.
This shift from a religious to a worldly vision is even more
obvious in her second soliloquy, which, like the first, begins
with self-justification and ends in self-pity:

Now my condition's worse than e'er 'twas yet;
My cunning takes not with him; has broke through
The net that with all art was set for him,
And left the snarer here herself entangled
With her own toils. O, what are we poor souls,
When our dissembling fails us? surely creatures
As full of want as any nation can be,
That scarce have food to keep bare life about 'em. 6
Had this but took effect, what a fair way
Had I made for my love to th' general,
And cut off all suspect, all reprehension!
My hopes are kill'd i' th' blossom.

(II.i.155-166)

Footnotes

6 In this context it is difficult to agree with Cherry,
who sees this speech as a sympathetic appraisal of the
The condition that was previously "unfortunate" because she had "broke with heaven" is now (even) worse because her cunning has failed her. She is now a "poor soul" or "creature" not because of this heavenly rift, but because she cannot obtain the love of the general without losing her prestige, and her "hopes" are not merely worldly, but sinful.

From this point onwards, the attitude of the Duchess becomes indistinguishable from Aurelia's. This justification of her behaviour, for example, can be compared with Aurelia's baldly amoral and indeed complacent assessment of her dissembling skills:

where's this man now
That has took all this care and pains for nothing?
The use of him is at the last cast now,
Shall only bring me to my former face again,
And see me somewhat cleanlier at his cost,
And then farewell, Andrugio; when I'm handsome,
I'm for another straight . . . . What, not yet?
What will become of me in this shape then?
If I know where to go, I'm no dissembler;
And I'll not lose my part in woman so
For such a trifle, to forswear myself.
(IV.i.52-58,63-67)

Significantly, each woman sees her dissembling as specifically female, and each is proud of her skill. Indeed, each draws attention to this manipulation when bestowing herself on the unwilling object of her choice. Thus the Duchess's boast to Andrugio--

Footnotes

7 McElroy points out that the Duchess uses the same figure of speech to relish the cleverness with which she has manipulated Lactantio (III.i.125) as Aurelia uses here in describing the satisfaction she feels in gulling Andrugio.

effects of societal oppression of women, p.80.
I made your enemy
The instrument for all; there you may praise me,
And 'twill not be ill given (IV.ii.219-221)

--is almost identical in intention to Aurelia's triumphant
speech to Lactantio,

There, Lactantio,
Spread thy arms open wide, to welcome her
That has wrought all this means to rest in thee.
(V.ii.155-157)

Ironically, at the point where the Duchess's morality has
fallen to match that of Aurelia, she becomes aware that the
latter is her rival for Andrugio's love. In soliloquy, while
she waits for him to present and explain himself, she reveals
that her worldly pride, has if anything increased:

A wrong done to beauty
Is greater than an injury done to love,
And we'll less pardon it; for had it been
A creature whose perfection had outshin'd me,
It had been honourable judgement in him,
And to my peace a noble satisfaction;
But as it is, 'tis monstrous above folly.
Look he be mad indeed, and thoroughly gone,
Or he pays deadly for it; it is not
The ordinary madness of a gentleman
That shall excuse him here; had better lose
His wits eternally than lose my grace;
So strange is the condition of his fall
He's safe in nothing but in loss of all.
(V.ii.66-79)

While the Petrarchan value system in this speech is obvious, 8
it is important to recognise that at this point the Duchess
has seen that Andrugio's lover is indeed "ugly".

Consequently, her argument is effectively based on her
supreme confidence that he does not love a creature who can
"outshin[e]" her. In this respect her attitude is identical to

Footnotes
8 Beauty was one of the prime virtues required in the Petrarchan woman.
that expressed on her first appearance, where with equal confidence she contemplated her constancy shining "like the sun" above the fallen world. The parallel between these two failures to consider the possibility that she will not "outshine" other women (spiritually in the first speech and physically in the second) not only highlights the fact that the Duchess's extreme spiritual security and pride have been replaced by equally extreme carnal equivalents, but also reveals that this worldly pride is about to lead the Duchess to a second fall as dramatic as the first.\(^9\)

Moreover the Duchess's assumption of political authority over Andrugio, suggested in her use of the royal "we", and ominous threats of punishment ("or he pays dearly for it"), again functions on two levels, since the terminology she uses to express this worldly (and carnal in that it arises out of her desire for him) anger also carries religious significance. Consequently Andrugio's "fall," which she associates with eternity, loss of grace, and what can only be described as divine anger underlines the fact that once again the Duchess is unconsciously casting herself as God.\(^10\)

\(^9\) This overall parallel includes that between the Cardinal's earlier request:

\textit{Vouchsafe but you to give [Andrugio] the first grace, madam, of your so long-hid presence, he has then all honours that can bless victorious man [I.iii.70-2]}\)

and her assumption that the loss of her "grace" would not only be worse for him than the eternal loss of his wits, it is also implicitly equated with the loss of "all". The irony of both of these attitudes, obviously, is that as Andrugio is not interested in the Duchess, her "grace" (whether uplifting spiritual presence, as earlier, or love, as here) means very little to him.
her pride (which parallels Lucifer's desire for the Godhead) at once underlines her carnal security, her impending fall (in the final scene), and the reality of the divine judgement that awaits her.\textsuperscript{11}

When confronted with Aurelia, rather than acknowledging her pride, the Duchess once again adapts an earlier attitude (this time the justification for her anger with Andrugio) to avoid facing the moral reality of her situation.\textsuperscript{12} Her subsequent resolve\textsuperscript{13} to return to her original vow is accompanied by a parallel reversal from carnal back to religious security and pride, as her public announcement of intention reveals:

Return I humbly now from whence I fell.
All you bless'd powers that register the vows
Of virgins and chaste matrons, look on me
With eyes of mercy, seal forgiveness to me
By signs of inward peace! and to be surer
That I will never fail your good hopes of me,
I bind myself more strictly; all my riches
I'll speedily commend to holy uses,
This temple unto some religious sanctuary,

Footnotes

\textsuperscript{10} Her earlier contemplation of her constancy shining like the sun above the corruption of the world uses an analogy that is usually applied to God.

\textsuperscript{11} Andrugio's response, when she asks him how long he has been mad, emphasises her carnal security still further:

' Mad? a great time, lady;
Since I first knew I should not sin, yet sinn'd;
That's now some thirty years, bylady, upwards.'

(V.ii.92-94)

In spite of the Duchess's double fall, at no time in the play does she make a similar admission.

\textsuperscript{12} This adaptation closely resembles her earlier response when "fallen" in love—then she used her earlier assertion of immortality to excuse her lapse, arguing that such immortality is impossible.

\textsuperscript{13} I confess

'I have no wrong at all; she's younger, fairer;
He has not now dishonour'd me in choice;
I much commend his noble care and judgement:
'Twas a just cross led in by a temptation,
For offering but to part from my dear vow,
And I'll embrace it cheerfully.'

(V.ii.139-145)
Where all my time to come I will allow
For fruitful thoughts; so knit I up my vow.
(V.ii.219-229)

This terminology echoes that with which she originally
 glorified her vow. Her body is once again a "temple", and
 she seems unaware of the irony inherent in swearing by the
 vows of virgins and chaste matrons; moreover, the lack of a
 religious precedent for returning "from whence [she] fell"
evidently doesn't occur to her.

Aurelia's response to the thwarting of her carnal pride and
ambition (V.ii.169-176) is, as McElroy points out, near-
identical to that of the Duchess, and is followed by a resolve
in equally ironic terminology to return to her former vow.

The dissembling of the Duchess and Aurelia, then, is
associated in More Dissemblers with the replacement of an
orthodox morality by a Petrarchan value system which allows
them to indulge their pride and their lust, (presented in both
cases as sexually initiatory behaviour) without considering
the spiritual consequences of their behaviour. When confronted

Footnotes

14 McElroy points out that this image is used by Lactantius,
the Duchess and the Cardinal at the beginning of the
play.

15 "Both [asides] are . . . prompted by identical
situations: rejection by supposed lovers. Both begin
with a self-concerned stock-taking of the situation,
move on to a rationalisation of the loss, and conclude
with an escape into pious platitude, which both women
complacently confuse with truth", p.142.

16 Aurelia's vow of fidelity to Andrugio is by exactly the
same criteria as that of the earlier vow with which
she manipulated him ("By my hope of fruitfulness"
[II.i.60]):

But, by my hope of children, and all lawful,
I'll be as true for ever to your bed
As she in thought or deed that never err'd.

(V.ii.184-6)
with the disparity between their pride and the reality of their behaviour, each woman refuses to acknowledge this reality and reverts to the mental and spiritual condition that she experienced at the beginning of the play. Finally, this unflattering presentation is compounded by both women's explicit identification of this dissembling with their womanhood.

Before contrasting this female behaviour with that of the men, it is important to identify the ways in which the dissembling of the sexes corresponds. As I have suggested, the Cardinal and Lactantio are paralleled with the Duchess and Aurelia, since the Cardinal is given to justifying his behaviour in religious terms, while Lactantio is cynically and frankly amoral.¹⁸

Of the two it is the Cardinal's behaviour which most closely approximates to that of the women. Like the Duchess, he exhibits self-congratulatory pride combined with a spectacular lack of self-knowledge, and like her grounds his pride in her virtue—a virtue which, we are told, is his "hope," "credit," "religious triumph" (I.iii.56-57) and his "crown" (I.ii.45). There is also another element to the Cardinal's pride, however, and this concerns his nephew Lactantio, about whom he feels proprietorial and with whom he

Footnotes

¹⁷ Emblematically paralleled in their identical approaches to reluctant lovers (see pp.83-84).
¹⁸ These two men constitute the play's two exemplars of male dissemblance, since the Lords, although dissembling, are shadowy figures and while Andrugio disguises himself in order to rescue Aurelia, his behaviour does not involve moral compromise.
identifies:

I dare to venture him
To old men's goodnesse and gravities
For his strict manners, and win glory by him . . .
I'm proud of him,
Heaven be not angry for't; he's near of kin
In disposition to me. (I.ii.85-87, 95-97)

The Cardinal's pride, then, is spiritual, like that of the Duchess, but also vicarious since it is based on the virtue of his two protégés. The extent of the security it involves is emphasised by the way that the Cardinal can repeat the Duke's dying words, and the Duchess can hear them, without apparently recognising how aptly they could be applied to themselves:

You see, my lords, what all earth's glory is,
Rightly defined in me, uncertain breath;
A dream of threescore years to the long sleeper,
To most not half the time; beware ambition;
Heaven is not reached with pride, but with submission
(I.ii.58-62)

It is entirely consistent with the vicarious nature of the Cardinal's pride that the Duchess's temptation and fall are directly responsible for his, particularly since she appeals to his pride in his nephew in order to tempt him to condone her behaviour. Although, like her, he begins with a lament at the loss of prestige her fall has caused him, in his subsequent contemplation of her temptation he subsequently comes to terms with her fall:

Footnotes

19 Have I approv'd
Your constancy for this, call'd your faith noble,
Writ volumes of your victories and virtues?
I have undone my judgement, lost my praises,
Blemish'd the truth of my opinion.
(II.1.126-30)

McElroy points out that this list of possessive pronouns echoes the "My fame, my praise, my liberty, my peace" in the Duchess's parallel lament (p.121).
it appears
The hand of heaven, that only pick'd him out
To reward virtue in him by this fortune;
And through affection I'm half conquer'd now;
I love his good as dearly as her vow,
Yet there my credit lives in works and praises:
I never found a harder fight within me,
Since zeal first taught me war . . .
No, I will bear in pity to her heart,
The rest commend to fortune and my art.

(II.iii.14-21,29-30)

The Cardinal's resolve to employ his "art" highlights the fact that in aiding the Duchess to break her vow he is also flouting the Duke's dying request:

And you, Lord Cardinal, labour to perfect
Good purposes begun; be what you seem,
Steadfast and uncorrupt; your actions noble,
Your goodness simple, without gain or art,
And not in vesture holier than in heart.

(II.i.63-67)

Since the warring impulses within the Cardinal are between his desire to bask in the reflected glory of the Duchess's chastity, and his ambition to advance materially the nephew with whom he identifies, his actions will not only involve "art" but will also be motivated by a vicarious "gain." While his earlier pride in his nephew was spiritual, based on the belief that Lactantio (like the Duchess) was certain of salvation, the Cardinal's resolve to advance him through marriage to the Duchess mirrors the same shift from religious to worldly goals as marks the Duchess's fall. Yet if anything, however, his lack of self-knowledge is even greater than hers, since he fails to recognise that his decision involves a fall of any kind.20

Footnotes
20 This failure is highlighted by his self-deceptive conclusion--pity, a selfless emotion, has played no part in his decision--and his specious religious
Significantly, the Duchess likens the dissembling in the Cardinal's subsequent volte-face with the Lords\textsuperscript{21} to that of women:

\begin{verbatim}
O there's no art like a religious cunning,
It carries away all things smooth before it!
How subtly has his wit dealt with the lords,
To fetch in their persuasions to a business
That stands in need of none, yields of itself,
As most we women do, when we seem furthest.
\textit{(IV.ii.59-64)}
\end{verbatim}

When the Cardinal is at last forced to recognise the reality of Lactantio's behaviour, the fact that he uses "parricide" to describe his nephew's crime reveals that he sees it primarily as a crime against himself:

\begin{verbatim}
Dare hypocrisy,
For fear of vengeance, sit so close to virtue?
Steal'st thou a holy vestment from religion
To clothe forbidden lust with? . . .
I utterly disclaim all blood in thee;
I'll sooner make a parricide my heir
Than such a monster. \textit{(V.ii.251-260)}
\end{verbatim}

The irony here, though, is that the Cardinal has been hypocritically using his religious authority to further his ambitions for Lactantio, this being in direct contravention of the dead Duke's direction to be "\textit{not in vesture holier than heart}". Hence in renouncing "all blood" in Lactantio, he unconsciously reveals the reality of the kinship between them that he claimed in Act I scene ii (96-7). Moreover, this suggestion that the only real distinction between their hypocrisy is one of awareness is also indicated by a further

Footnotes

\textsuperscript{21} Not only is this unnecessary, as the Duchess points out, as it is after the fact, but it is also wasted effort with the Lords, who have consistently argued that the Duchess should marry in the hope that they may prove the lucky husband.
oblique parallel between them. When the Cardinal praises the Duchess at the beginning of the play, he consistently refers to her virtue as if it were a desirable woman, her constancy as if it were constancy to him, and his own reaction to them both as if it were sexual attraction. This is emphasised when he contrasts his response to her with his indifference to other women:

I have no power
To suffer virtue to go thinly clad.
I that have ever been in youth an old man
To pleasures and to women, and could never
Love, but pity 'em . . .
Here I stand up in admiration,
And bow to the chaste health of our great duchess,
Kissing her constant name.

(I.ii.7-15)

The Cardinal's unconscious sexual puns (such as standing up in admiration, and bowing), and his identification of her constancy with his honour suggest that his attitude to the Duchess's chastity resembles that of a man "in love". And this vicarious enjoyment of the Duchess, when considered in the light of his identification with Iactantio, both explains his readiness to accept their prospective union, and parallels his religious hypocrisy and the romantic hypocrisy of his nephew.

Just as the Duchess's spiritual pride and security were first

Footnotes

22 (I.ii.7·8)
23 I dare trust that daughter . . . I know she wears
   A constancy will not deceive my praises . . .
   (I.ii.7·18,47·49)
24 Oh my fair lords,
   When we find grace confirm'd, especially
   In a creature that's so doubtful as a woman,
   We're spirit ravished . . . O give me pardon!
   I've lost myself in her upon my friends . . .
   So dear her white fame is to my soul's love,
   'Tis an affliction to hear it questioned.
   (I.ii.15·18,61·65)
paralleled with their carnal equivalents in Aurelia, only to become equally carnal with the Duchess's fall, so the Cardinal's religious pride and security are parallel Lactantio's carnal pride and security before the Cardinal's lapse into the same state.\textsuperscript{25}

In spite of the parallels between these men and women (particularly strong in the case of the Duchess and the Cardinal) the play does make significant distinctions between male and female dissembling. The most interesting of these distinctions, in view of the assumptions underlying the play's title, is the suggestion that ultimately the women prove to be the most successful dissemblers in the play. Not only do they deceive themselves successfully by utilising romantic illusion in order to avoid anything approaching self-recognition, but they also manipulate successfully the men who desire them in order to obtain the partners of their choice. Moreover in the final scene the Duchess manages not only to deceive herself as to her behaviour and motivation, but indeed the majority of the other characters. By discovering Andrugio's love for Aurelia and abdicating her claim on him before the Cardinal, Lactantio and the Lords arrive, the Duchess manages to disguise the extent of her earlier lust and dissembling. And since the enhancement of her reputation was her original goal, displaced by her lust but remaining a

\textsuperscript{25} Not only is his desire for reflected spiritual glory presented as a form of spiritual lust, but his ambition ("a virtuous one;/I'd have nothing want to your perfection" [I.iii.47-8]) is almost exactly parallel to Lactantio's lustful ambition to marry first Aurelia and then the Duchess.
powerful second priority, the dissembling of the Duchess can be seen as remarkably successful. Indeed in this scene her skill reaches new heights. Rounding on the astonished Cardinal with righteous rage at his attempt to "Take all th'advantage" of her temptation, and then pretending that this temptation to marry Lactantio was thwarted by the latter's secret marriage to the Page,26 the Duchess successfully conceals her own dissimulative behaviour by utilising it to expose that of the men.27

As this public humiliation of the two male dissemblers at the hands of their most successful female counterpart suggests, the dissembling of the men fails completely, with both failing to achieve either of their aims.28 Moreover although the Cardinal fails to achieve self-recognition, Lactantio's cynical awareness of the reality of his

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26 A double deception, as she was not tempted to marry Lactantio in the first place. This triangular relationship, with the Duchess leading the Cardinal to believe he can paternally bestow her upon Lactantio, and Lactantio to believe he can have her, is paralleled by Aurelia's relationship with the gypsy Captain and Dondolo. In order to escape to Lactantio, Aurelia vows allegiance to Dondolo when she is paternally bestowed on him by the gypsy Captain; however she is merely using both as tools, which she successfully abandons as soon as they are no longer necessary. Similarly the Duchess manages to extricate herself from her own manipulative relationships with both the Cardinal and Lactantio without publicly compromising herself.

27 This is recognised by Lactantio, whose response to the revelation that he was secretly married implies that he recognises that he has been bested by a more successful dissembler: "I'm paid with mine own money".

28 The Cardinal's reflected spiritual glory from the virtue of his two proteges is stripped away from him as ruthlessly as reflected worldly glory from Lactantio's marriage, while Lactantio loses Aurelia, the Duchess, and his inheritance from the Cardinal.
situation\textsuperscript{29} paradoxically means that the play's arch-
dissembler, who "epitomises the moral failings of all the
characters in the play",\textsuperscript{30} becomes the final scene's most
sympathetic character, as McElroy suggests:

Having deprived the oaths of his ostensibly romantic
figures of all moral resonance, Middleton caps the irony by
suggesting that, in the world of the play, it is
Lactantio's utterly cynical attitude to vows which more
readily deserves our respect; for that attitude, he shows,
has at least the merit of being consciously self-serving
and perversely honest.

Ultimately, this play's presentation of male and female
hypocrisy suggests that although men also dissemble their
behaviour is merely the adoption of an essentially female
characteristic and is, in consequence, considerably less
successful than that of the women. This suggestion is
heightened by the fact that Andrugio, who alone among these
"ostensibly romantic figures" does not compromise himself
morally, is also the only man in the play to achieve the
partner he wishes.

In spite of this "romantic" hero status, Andrugio's cynical
attitude to Aurelia reflects the play's insistence that
dissembling is a female characteristic. When welcomed by her

Footnotes

\textsuperscript{29} It is an awareness which, like that of Allwit, is based
entirely in this world, reflecting his complete carnal
security.

\textsuperscript{30} McElroy, pp. 47-48.

\textsuperscript{31} p.149. Similarly, Kenneth Muir's comment reflects the
appeal of Lactantio's perverse honesty: "despite
Lactantio's character and behaviour, he arouses some
admiration for his skill at dissembling . . . . Like the
heroes of Restoration Comedy . . . his promiscuity is
not regarded as particularly deplorable", "Two Plays
Reconsidered: More Dissemblers Besides Women and No Wit,
No Help Like a Woman's", in Accompaniing the Players,
p.151.
in the Governor's fort as her "first love," he responds not with a romantic effusion of his own, but with "Why, have you more then?" (II.iv.44) and continues to doubt her protestations until she responds to his monosyllabic "Swear't"(59) with another vow of allegiance. Even then, rather than expressing joy, he pushes on to the business in hand: "I am confirm'd; and in requital on't,/Ere long expect your freedom"(62-3). His cynicism about Aurelia's sincerity continues, however, and he interrupts her romantic excesses with comments such as "['']Most virtuously delivered!['']/Spoke like the sister of a Puritan midwife!"(79-80), and "Fie, you overact your happiness;/You drive slight things to wonders"(85-6). His dogged constancy, it seems, is informed by a cynically accurate distrust of Aurelia which is most evident in his acceptance of her final vow:

I'll once believe a woman, be't but to strengthen
Weak faith in other men: I have a love
That covers all thy faults. (V.ii.188-190)

The implication that this is the only time that he has, or will believe a woman strongly reinforces the play's presentation of dissembling as an inherently female characteristic, in suggesting that his justified cynicism toward Aurelia is symptomatic of a wider cynicism toward her sex in general.

Indeed, Andrugio's portrayal also contributes to this presentation, as the obtrusive masculinity reflected in his name\footnote{Like "androgen", "Andrugio" is derived from the Greek word andro, which means male \cite{Concise Oxford Dictionary}} contrasts markedly with the femininity of the dissembling characters. In this context Andrugio's masculinity...
reflects the masculine virtues (such as courage, intelligence, constancy and honesty) which preserve him from moral compromise. Conversely, the Cardinal's admissions of sexual inadequacy and "feminine" raptures are balanced by Lactantio's foppish effeminacy. The latter quality is highlighted when the General refuses to grace Lactantio's malicious taunts with a direct response, complaining instead to the Duchess:

What pride
Of pamper'd blood has mounted up this puck-foist?
... chaste lady,
Out of the bounty of your grace, permit not
This perfumed parcel of curl'd powder'd hair
To cast me in the poor relish of his censure.

(IV.ii.133-143)

This emphasis on Lactantio's femininity receives oblique reinforcement when it is comically juxtaposed with the disguise of the Page, the third "romantic" woman in the play. The dancing master's astonishment as she goes into labour, for example, stresses the comic inversion: "A midwife? by this light, the boy's with child!/A miracle! some woman is the father" (V.i.252-3). Nor is this juxtaposition merely comic. For just as Andrugio's masculinity presents him as the most honest and constant man in the play (both with himself and toward others), so the Page's masculine disguise reflects her role as the least dissimulative and most constant woman. Indeed, since she, like Andrugio, marries the partner of her choice at the end of the play, this common status as the most "masculine" and virtuous examples of their sexes can be seen

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33 Dondolo, for example complains that Lactantio wears women's smocks rather than manly shirts (I.iv.68-70),
to arise out of their roles as Petrarchan anti-hero and heroine, with their portrayals and circumstances reflecting the same savage irony. The battered and cynically street-wise soldier is almost as far from a conventionally ardent and idealistic "romantic" hero (such as Shakespeare's Romeo) as the woebegone and tearfully pregnant Page is from a conventional "romantic" heroine, and their fulfilment of the traditional happy ending, marriage to a chosen partner, is tainted by the amorality of their partners and informed by a cynical and bitter awareness of that partner's failings. "Romantic" success, it seems, is only possible stripped of any accompanying romantic illusion.\footnote{Andrugio's arrest at the command of the Duchess, and subsequent enforced soliciting at her instigation is paralleled by his exploitation by Aurelia, which he ironically acknowledges before accepting her final vow: "Make me your property?". This shadowy parallel to the abundantly evident exploitation of the Page is strengthened by the fact that both Aurelia's servant (I.i.41-43) and the general (II.iv.10-16) have something wrong with their noses, and in both scenes these noses give rise to considerations of the correlation between honesty and healthy noses. Furthermore both men are used by Aurelia in each scene to further her relationship with Lactantio. While this perhaps underlines the fact that Aurelia is leading Andrugio "by the nose", it also emphasises the fact that his love for her has made him her servant, just as the Page has been actually forced to become Lactantio's servant. The implication seems to be that those people who espouse love, no matter how cynically, become vulnerable to being put in the role of servant of the object of their devotion, and perhaps to the romantic ethos as well.} 

As might be expected from the privileging of masculinity inherent in this ironic comment on the Petrarchan ethic, however, their portrayals are far from equal. While Andrugio is the play's most successful and morally attractive figure,
the Page lacks virtue, dignity and respect. Indeed, her advanced pregnancy, the indignity of her clowning scenes with Dondolo and the ignominious dancing lesson/labour scene divest her of serious impact, making her role exemplary rather. Her constant and lachrymose presence, her pregnancy, the reminders that she sleeps with Lactantio, and her eventual role as a punitive marriage partner make her walking evidence of his callousness; consequently the more pity or sympathy that she arouses in the audience, the more that villainy is emphasised.

As her role of anti-heroine suggests, moreover, the Page's exemplary function extends to the women in the play. Her condition is the result of her love for Lactantio, and her hope of marriage to him, as she points out:

When I left all my friends in Mantua,  
For your love's sake alone, then, with strange oaths,  
You promised present marriage. (III.i.15-17)

She can thus be seen as the play's sardonic example of the consequences of mistaking lust for love. Her romantic illusions concerning Lactantio constitute a crude parallel to those of Aurelia and the Duchess, whose relationships with Lactantio and Andrugio prove equally one-sided and self-delusory. Although her portrayal is sympathetic, her pregnancy, the fact that she is still sleeping with Lactantio, and the crudely provocative song that she is forced to repeat for Dondolo's benefit leave no doubt as to her sexual appetite. Consequently, her behaviour suggests, by

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35 Dondolo says to her "Well, go thy ways for as sweet a breasted page as ever lay at his master's feet in a in a truckle bed" (I.iv.107·108)
implication, that both Aurelia and the Duchess are themselves motivated by lust. In this context her pregnancy is particularly important, as it provides the ultimate physical example of the play's series of allusions linking women, love, dissembling, sin and mothers. It is highlighted by Dondolo's response to her assertion that she cannot sing, a response more apt than he realises:

"Cannot you sing, say you? O that a boy should so keep cut with his mother, and be given to dissembling . . . . why should not singing be as well got without skill as the getting of children? (I.iv.40-42,45-46)"

As a woman, the page reinforces the mildly misogynistic implication of Dondolo's comment, since she "keeps cut" with her mother in more than dissemblance, and indeed, is dissembling to a far greater extent that Dondolo is aware of. Obviously, she is capable not only of singing, but also of producing children, and along with a tendency to dissemble she inherited from her mother Eve's curse, the pain of childbirth, a punishment for her behaviour with Lactantio that is dramatically manifest in the farcical dancing lesson.

This reference to the Page's maternal inheritance can be related to an interchange between Aurelia and Andrugio, which occurs while Aurelia is manipulatively pretending love for him. The accuracy with which she leaps ahead of his explanation to guess at his planned disguise for her prompts

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36 Particularly since marriage to her is Lactantio's punishment, a role frequently given in Middleton's plays to prostitutes. Similarly, Dondolo's suggestion that men dress as women in order to sleep with women in the guise of innocent sisters (II.iv.77-84) is a damaging comment on the Page's masculine guise.
him to say:

Now by this light 'tis true!
Sure if you prove as quick as your conceit,
You'll be an excellent breeder. (II.iv.97-99)

This linking by pun of dissembling\(^38\) and breeding is answered with "I should do reason by the mother's side, sir" (100).

Like the Page, Aurelia has inherited the full complement of female attributes from her mother, and the Page's suffering on stage awaits Aurelia also.

The Duchess's allusion to maternal inheritance is more sinister, for significantly, the assertion that death, the brother of love, "comes by the mother's side", follows almost immediately after Cupid's song, which claims:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{I give the flaming heart,} \\
\text{It is my crest;} \\
\text{And by the mother's side,} \\
\text{The weeping eye,} \\
\text{The sighing breast.} \\
\text{It is not power in you, fair beauties;} \\
\text{If I command love, 'tis your duties.} \\
\end{align*}\]

(I.iii.87-94)

Ostensibly, this is a reference to Cupid's mother Venus, the goddess of love, and the traditional love conceit of Cupid's assumption of command over women. However his association of weeping with the mother's side can clearly be related to the Page, while his reference to his power over women echoes Aurelia's "The power of love commands me" (I.i.71) and looks forward to the Duchess's acknowledgement of the supremacy of

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37 As well as meaning "follow the example of" (Edward Dyce The Works of Thomas Middleton [London: Lumley, 1840], p.572), here there is the unconscious irony associated with "cut", which refers to the vagina.

38 The irony behind Maudlin's (A Chaste Maid I.i.10) claim she was "quick and lightsome" before she married relies on the same pun.
love in "this kingdom" of the flesh. The Duchess's linking of love and death as brothers, and her subsequent assertion that death "comes by the mother's side", sheds a starkly religious light on the romantic ethos. For it not only relates sin, the mother of death, to Venus, the mother of Cupid, and adds death to the tears that Cupid gives by the mother's side, but also alludes to Eve, whose broken vow and abrogation of God-given responsibility caused death to be brought to mankind; the pain and suffering of childbirth experienced by the mother's side of a couple being an ever-recurring punishment for this broken vow. In this context, the Duchess's allusion highlights the fact that in allowing Cupid to command her to break her vow, she is in fact abrogating her responsibility just as Eve did. Equally, by analogy, the Page and Aurelia, in allowing love to command them, are also re-enacting Eve's fall, for which the Page is suffering Eve's punishment. 39

In this context the sexually initiatory behaviour of the women, and their desire to hide the reality of their fall (even from themselves) also reflects the behaviour of the first woman. 40 This is particularly clear in the Duchess, whose attempt to blame the Cardinal for her fall is followed by her successful temptation of both him and Lactantio, and her public denouncement of them in order to conceal her own role in their downfall. 41

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39 This is underlined by the Duchess's early complacent assumption of prelapsarian purity, and her final resolution to "Return from whence I fell". Similarly Aurelia reassures Andrugio of her love by saying "More than thyself what woman could desire,/If reason had a part of her creation?" (II.iv.46-7).
Ultimately, then, the attack on the Petrarchan ethic contained in *More Dissemblers Besides Women* functions at the expense of the female sex. The assumption the title is based on is more than borne out by the play, which presents the capacity for deceit as an inherently female trait. Indeed, such a capacity appears to affect the characterisation, since the only character who fails to compromise morally is the ruggedly masculine General Andrugio, while the play's male dissemblers are presented as lacking in masculinity. Yet even the most skilful of these effete men fails to equal the dissembling of the play's women, who not only successfully manipulate the men around them, but even manage to deceive themselves as to the reality of their behaviour. This qualitative distinction between male and female dissembling is matched by that of motivation, for unlike the play's women, who are motivated solely by sexual desire (universally interpreted by them as romantic love) the men are primarily motivated by ambition. Moreover where the majority of the men have at least a cynical awareness of themselves and the reality of their situation (and in Andrugio's case moral integrity), the women consistently fail to exhibit self-awareness, insight or moral integrity.

This dramatisation of female dissimulation is compounded by the play's manifold expressions of cynicism concerning a

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**Footnotes**

40 Cf. Doob, who points out that Beatrice-Joanna (Changeling) 'hides like Eve,' p. 193.
41 A parallel emphasised by the Cardinal's constant Edenic allusion when alluding to the Duchess, such as "I dare trust that daughter with a world, / None but her vow and she" (1.iii.47-48).
woman's capacity for deceit, which emanate not only from the morally compromised, but also from the authoritative Andrugio, who wisely uses this concept as the premise for his attitude to his blatantly dissimulative bride.

The play's gender presentation is clarified by the network of allusion linking this female behaviour with that of Eve, since these suggestions universalise the implications of the play's action and provide the key to its unbalanced gender presentation. The implication is that a belief in romantic love provides women with a licence to ignore the moral reality of their behaviour and encourages them to indulge the manifold weakness they inherit from Eve. This leads not only to their own damnation but also that of the men who are too weak to resist the temptation that they offer. It is thus surely not coincidental that the Page is the only woman at the end of the play to fulfil the role of "romantic" heroine by achieving marriage to the man she wants, since it is her behaviour and punishment that constitute the reality of the romantic illusions and behaviour found in the other two women.
The Witch, although more fantastic than More Dissemblers, shares the earlier tragicomedy's ironic treatment of the Petrarchan code. Rather than constituting its dominant theme, however, "romantic" love functions as a satiric weapon in the play's attack on the revenge ethic.¹ Set in parallel, these concepts are exposed as equally illusory codes of behaviour, encouraging their adherents to glamorise and indulge emotions which are revealed as manifestations of lust.² This conflation of the revenging and sexual drives is embodied in the play's titular figure, the witch Hecate, the symbol of lust,³ whose grotesque sexual appetite is scarcely

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1 While I agree to some extent with Asp, and even McElroy that the play satirises revenge, I differ from both in that I feel The Witch satirises and thus exposes revenge for the irreligious evil that it is much as A Chaste Maid satirises and exposes marital and parental abuse. Consequently I do not think it necessary to interpret the play as a parody or burlesque of the tragicomic form.

2 This equation between the sexual and murderous desires also occurs in The Old Law, where Hippolita tells Eugenia "Thy lust for blood proclaims thee now a strumpet" (IV.ii.264).

3 Asp sees the witches as the embodiments of lust in the play (pp.251-2), and McElroy points out that their failure to initiate any of the dramatic action emphasises this symbolic role, pp.193-4. Harris identifies this failure as one of the major distinctions between Shakespeare's Weird Sisters and Middleton's Hecate: Night's Black Agents (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), p.83.
distinguishable from her malevolent desire for revenge. \(^4\) In addition, however, it informs the play's movement toward marital unity, since marriage is the only proper remedy for sexual desire. \(^5\) Hence while the three deliberately maritally divisive characters are punished at the end of the play with wounds or death, \(^6\) the three surviving revengers choose or are forced to abandon revenge and embrace marriage.

Moreover since The Witch's presentation of revenge and romantic love involves the ironic juxtaposition not only of the Duchess and Sebastian, the play's two major revengers, but also of Francisca and Antonio (its secondary revengers), it lends itself, like More Dissemblers, to comparative gender evaluation. \(^7\) As in the earlier tragicomedy, the romantic and religious justification advanced by the two major revengers is ironically undercut by the amoral pragmatism of their secondary counterparts. \(^8\) Yet, for all that Sebastian's

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\(^4\) McElroy comments: "the two chief preoccupations of the witches, sex and revenge, are the same as those of the human agents, only writ large," (p.192). Similarly, Anthony Harris notes that "the witches' main function can be seen as providing grotesque parallels with the behaviour of the principal characters in the play. The hags are obsessed with achieving satisfaction through sexual indulgence and acts of vengeance and these are also the main preoccupations of the leading characters" p.84.

\(^5\) This aspect of marriage is the basis of Phoenix's eulogy as I have suggested (above p.24). Hecate underlines this power when she tells Sebastian: "We cannot disjoin wedlock; /'Tis of Heaven's fastening" (1.i.192-3).

\(^6\) Antonio, who lies about Sebastian's death in order to marry his betrothed, dies as a result of "lust and wrath" while Gaspar (who lied in order to corroborate his master's story) and Florida, Antonio's whore, are both severely wounded.

\(^7\) "Middleton balances a male and a female revenger with real grievances against a male and a female revenger with imagined injuries," Asp, p.227.

\(^8\) The similarity between the two plots extends further than
position can more profitably be compared with that of Touchwood Senior in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* than that of the Cardinal in *More Dissemblers*. For although his moral authority is undercut by his consistent reference to his desire for Isabella as a religious or spiritual experience, his rejection, albeit belated, of revenge as a morally unacceptable option makes him unique among the four revengers. Like Touchwood Senior, therefore, he functions as a compromised moral spokesman, whose speeches (although reflecting his position at the top of the play's moral gradient) undercut his own position while simultaneously reinforcing the play's rigidly orthodox moral structure. 

It is at first sight curious that, in spite of Sebastian's major role as a revenger, he fails to refer to revenge at any stage in the play. Instead he consistently justifies his behaviour with reference to his own superior claim to Isabella, which he considers to be sanctioned: "by contract before Heaven/And all the angels" (I.i.4-5). These appeals to religious authority, however, are undercut by his

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this, as the "romantic" characters in *The Witch* also return to their original relationships: Sebastian and Isabella, the "romantic" hero and heroine who were betrothed before Sebastian went to war, are finally united in marriage, as are Andrugio and Aurelia. The Duchess is ultimately reunited with her "dead" husband the Duke; like her namesake in *More Dissemblers*, she returns to this original marriage vow in the final scene, when her plans to marry a new husband are foiled by external intervention. Finally, the flagrantly immoral Aberzanes (like Lactantio) is forced into a reluctant marriage with Francisca, the mother of his illegitimate child.

9 Here I am disagreeing with Asp, who sees Sebastian as a moral exemplar (p.243).
acknowledgement, as he enters Hecate's abode, of the spiritual danger involved in his behaviour:

Heaven knows with what unwillingness and hate
I enter this damned place: but such extremes
Of wrongs in love fight 'gainst religion's knowledge,
That were I led by this disease to deaths
As numberless as creatures that must die,
I could not shun the way. (I.ii.75-80)

In contrast with his other speeches, which present religion as justification for his behaviour, Sebastian here recognises that he is contravening morality, and his opposition of "wrongs in love" and "religion's knowledge" reveals that he is using the romantic ethic in order to abrogate his moral and religious responsibility. 10 The reality of the emotion that Sebastian presents as a religious love, however, suddenly emerges as he continues this train of thought:

I know what 'tis
To pity madmen now; they're wretched things
That ever were created, if they be
Of woman's making, and her faithless vows.
I fear they're now a-kissing: what's a'clock?
'Tis now but supper-time; but night will come,
And all new-married couples make short suppers.—
Whate'er thou art, I've no spare time to fear thee;
My horrors are so strong and great already,
That thou seemest nothing. (I.ii.80-89, my emphasis)

The sudden irruption of sexual jealousy amidst Sebastian's self-pity clearly identifies his motive as lust. 11 This

Footnotes
10 Fernando's soliloquy on Sebastian's condition presents this "romantic" view of his friend's state in terms which ominously suggest the religious consequences of his behaviour:
That sorrow's dangerous can abide no counsel;
'Tis like a wound past cure; wrongs done to love
Strike the heart deeply; none can truly judge on't
But the poor sensible sufferer whom it racks
With unbelieved pains. (I.i.28-32)

11 This is reinforced by the juxtaposition of his visit to Hecate to obtain snake-skins "Knit with charms and
revelation is reflected in the symbolic significance of this incident, for Sebastian is entering the abode of lust, and at the moment when his sexual jealousy dominates his train of thought he is confronted with Hecate herself. In this context, his references to "numberless" deaths and "horrors" suggest not only the ultimate consequences of his behaviour, but also the reality of his situation; until Sebastian resists the dictates of this vice, he remains in Hell, the abode of lust.12

The religious terminology employed by Sebastian however, also serves to highlight his elevation of this lust to the status of a religion. His reflection on the success of Hecate's anaphrodisiac, for example, in likening his condition to that of the damned, equates the sexual possession of Isabella with heavenly joys:

Yet I'm not thoroughly happy:
His ill does me no good; well may it keep me
From open rage and madness for a time,
But I feel heart's grief in the same place still.
What makes the greatest torment 'mongst lost souls?
'Tis not so much the horror of their pains,
Though they be infinite, as the loss of joys;
It is that deprivation is the mother
Of all the groans in hell, and here on earth
Of all the red sighs in the hearts of lovers.

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12 Hecate's allegorical function can be compared with that of Mephistopheles in Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, who also admits that marriage, as a heavenly sacrament, is beyond his power, and who (more importantly in this context) explains to Faustus "Why this is hell, nor am I out of it" *Faustus* (I.iii.76). Similarly, Vermandero at the end of *The Changeling* responds to Tomaso's assertion that the dead Beatrice and De Flores have gone to hell with "We are all there, it circumscribes us here" (V.iii.164).
Still she's not mine, that can be no man's else
Till I be nothing, if religion
Have the same strength for me as 't has for others:
Holy vows, witness that our souls were married!

(II.i.240-258)

While this statement reveals the extent to which Sebastian has substituted the "romantic" code for Christian morality, and elevated lust accordingly, it also reflects the redemptive power of marriage.

As the language Sebastian uses to describe his desire becomes more and more elevated, his attitudes and behaviour reveal a correspondingly increasing degradation, (reflecting the vice that rules him). This downward moral spiral is reflected in his attitude to Isabella. So long as his intention is to prevent Antonio possessing her sexually, he interprets her response to her husband's impotence as an indication of her virtue:

how well she bears it yet!
Hardly myself can find so much from her
That am acquainted with the cold disease:
O honesty's a rare wealth in a woman!
It knows no want, at least will express none,
Not in a look. (II.ii.240-245)

When, however, he resolves to gratify his desire for Isabella by tricking her into sexual union with him, he interprets her anger at Francisca's pregnancy as sexual frustration, saying "I know what makes you waspish: a pox on't!/She'll every day be angry now at nothing" (III.ii. 56-7). 13

As Sebastian justifies his imminent deception to Fernando

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13 His interpretation is revealed as invalid by Isabella's following soliloquy which reveals that her rage is the result of her discovery of Francisca's letter from Almachildes. (III.ii.73-82).
the disparity between the reality of his behaviour and his "religious" rationale for it reaches its greatest extent:

Then you best understand, of all men living,  
This is no wrong I offer, no abuse 
Either to faith or friendship, for we're registered 
Husband and wife in Heaven; though there wants that 
Which often keeps licentious men in awe 
From starting from their wedlocks, the knot public, 
'Tis in our souls knit fast; and how much more precious 
The soul is than the body, so much judge 
The sacred and celestial tie within us 
More than the outward form, which calls but witness 
Here upon earth to what is done in Heaven.  
(IV.i.8-18)

The irony of Sebastian's justification of his impending defloration of Isabella, in distinguishing his own bond with her from that of Antonio by analogy to the distinction between the soul and the body, is equalled only by his contemptuous assessment of the "knot public" as necessary merely for the prevention of adultery in "licentious men".

The juxtaposition of this speech and his coarse and degraded conversation with Florida, the whore, undercuts Sebastian's position still further by emphasising the essential similarity of their moral positions. Florida, for example, explains her enthusiasm for her task on the grounds that, like the devil, she wishes others to share her own misfortune:

What need you urge that 
Which comes so naturally I cannot miss on't? 
What makes the devil so greedy of a soul, 
But 'cause h'as lost his own, to all joys lost? 
So 'tis our trade to set snares for other women, 
'Cause we were once caught ourselves.  
(IV.i.57-63)

Footnotes

14 McElroy points out that the parallel between them in the first scene, where both bewail the wedding, ironically underlines the similarity in their attitudes (p.186).
Since Sebastian's snakeskin charms have put Antonio into the position of deprivation that he is himself experiencing, he has already demonstrated his own affinity with the devil in this respect. Likewise his intention to ignore Antonio's marriage in order to possess Isabella puts him in the position of the "devil in a sheepskin" at the beginning of the play. In addition, Florida's traditional use of "joys" (IV.ii.61) to refer to the heavenly reward that the devil has forfeited, emphasises Sebastian's misapplication of the word, underlining the spiritual reality of his position. 15

As a consequence Sebastian's response to Florida's explanation is highly ironic:

A sweet allusion!
Hell and a whore it seems are partners then
In one ambition; yet thou'rt here deceived now;
Thou canst set none to hurt or wrong her honour,
It rather makes it perfect. (IV.ii.63-67)

Since he and Florida are not only partners in the gulling of Isabella but also share an ambition to disrupt her marriage by sexual means, his contemptuous description of her partnership with the devil and of her faulty assessment of Isabella's situation is doubly damaging.

Footnotes 15 Sebastian's use of the word "joy" to refer initially to Florida's sexual anticipation of Antonio, ("Your joys are false ones, You're like to lie alone tonight" [65-66]) and subsequently to his own sexual anticipation of Isabella
(I will think
This night my wedding-night; and with a joy
As reverend as religion can make a man's,
I will embrace this blessing. [IV.ii.70-73])
highlights the similarity between his lust and that of Florida, and emphasises the spiritual loss that they are both risking.
This interchange, however, marks Sebastian's moral nadir. For on the brink of damnation his reason reasserts its control over his appetite, so that his next speech reveals not only a recognition of the immorality of taking sexual advantage of Isabella, but also a concern for her, rather than his earlier self-pity:

I cannot so deceive her, 'twere too sinful,
There's more religion in my love than so.
It is not treacherous lust that gives content
T' an honest mind; and this could prove no better.
Were it in me a part of manly justice,
That have sought strange hard means to keep her chaste
To her first vow, and I t' abuse her first?
Better I never knew what comfort were
In woman's love than wickedly to know it.
What could the falsehood of one night avail him
That must enjoy for ever, or he's lost?
'Tis the way rather to draw hate upon me;
For, known, 'tis as impossible she should love me,
As youth in health to dote upon a grief,
Or one that's robbed and bound t' affect the thief:
No, he that would soul's sacred comfort win
Must burn in pure love, like a seraphin.

(IV.ii.113-129)

Sebastian's sudden recognition of his revenge as "treacherous lust" and rejection of it as sinful and false indicate that he has abandoned the role of revenger. Yet in spite of this sudden reversal, however, Sebastian remains (romantically) deluded as to the nature of his feelings for Isabella. His description of the sexual satisfaction he would achieve by deceiving Isabella, for example, sounds so much like a description of damnation ("him/that must enjoy for ever, or he's lost") that it requires a positive effort of will to remember that he is talking about continued sexual enjoyment of Isabella. Equally, though the last two lines of his speech sound like a prescription for salvation, the phrase "soul's
sacred comfort" once again refers to legitimate physical union with Isabella.

The final scene provides the climax to all three aspects of Sebastian's portrayal. While his rejection of revenge and lust are rewarded with the hand of Isabella in marriage, he describes his behaviour to the Governor in terms which for the last time describe the sexual attainment of Isabella as if it were heavenly "joys":

I've walked beneath myself, and all my comforts
Like one on earth whose joys are laid above:
And though it had been offence small in me
T'enjoy mine own, I left her pure and free.
(V.iii.72-5)

This last example of Sebastian's confusion of physical union with Isabella and the achievement of salvation is the culmination of the multiple levels of suggestion associated with these references, reflecting not only the earthly and heavenly consequences of this confinement of his lust within the boundaries of marriage, but also the play's continued ironic presentation of romantic love.

Nevertheless, for all his faults, Sebastian is the most moral of the play's major characters. Rejecting revenge and

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16 Lines 74-5 clearly indicate that the comforts he refers to involve the sexual enjoyment of his "own" Isabella.
17 Protestant doctrine presented the godly marriage as "a paradise on earth" Perkins, p.418.
18 The earlier juxtaposition of Florida's swooning description of Antonio as "my sweet servant" (V.ii.46) and Sebastian's subsequent assurance to Isabella as he Discovers himself "Your service cannot alter me from knowledge;/I am your servant ever"(V.ii.60-61) adds to this effect, as Florida's use of the word to denote one who serves sexually highlights the reality behind Sebastian's distinction between a domestic servant and a Petrarchan "servant."
affirming marriage, he also shows superior insight and spiritual awareness. His instant recognition of Antonio as "the devil in a sheepskin" (I.i.15), for example, contrasts with the failure of the Governor, Fernando and Isabella to recognise the bridegroom's immorality. Equally, his accurate assessment of Gasparo (III.ii.20-21) is paralleled by his instant recognition of Florida's whoredom (III.ii.17-18).

Moreover although Sebastian allows his belief in "romantic" love to undermine his resistance to lust, his speech on entering Hecate's abode reveals that he is partially aware of this conflict, in contrast to the drunken Almachildes, who reels into the witches' abode immediately after him, knocks over two of Hecate's minions and muses: "Call you these witches? they be tumblers methinks./Very flat tumblers" (I.ii.67-68).

The suggestion that Sebastian's moral awareness is suppressed rather than absent is found also in Isabella's expression of regret at his death:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{had my first love lived} \\
\text{And returned safe, he would have been a light} \\
\text{To all men's actions, his faith shined so bright.}
\end{align*}
\]

(IV.ii.110-112)

While ironically emphasising the extent of Sebastian's moral degradation, in that although he has "returned safe" he is preparing to trick her into an adulterous union, this speech also suggests that Sebastian was originally a religious man and thus lends credence to his sudden change of heart.

Certainly from this point on Sebastian's role becomes that of

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19 See page 112.
a morally exemplary revenger,\textsuperscript{21} whose behaviour highlights the shortcomings not only of Antonio's unjust and savage revenge, but also that of the play's central revenge figure, the Duchess.\textsuperscript{22}

While Sebastian's revenge arose out of his desire for Isabella, the Duchess's desire (first for Almachildes and then for the Governor) arises out of the revenge she announces in the first scene. This inverted parallel is reflected in the final scene, where the Duchess's rejection of the charge of adultery can be compared with Sebastian's renunciation of revenge, with each character rejecting a secondary aim and found guilty of "intent" only.\textsuperscript{23} Moreover the Duchess's qualified repentance reveals that like Sebastian, she continues to consider her original desire to have been elevated, since her remorse is at applying her revenge to a cause which was beneath it:\textsuperscript{24}

\begin{quote}
I am guilty,
And of a cruelty above my cause:
His injury was too low for my revenge.
(V.iii.110-112)
\end{quote}

This is a parallel, however, which functions at the

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\begin{itemize}
\item 20 As McElroy points out, p.178.
\item 21 Asp also considers Sebastian an exemplar at this point, (p.243.)
\item 22 "Of the four characters, the Duchess is drawn most fully in the tradition of the revenge play and the plot of which she is the central character is most parodic of that tradition," Asp, p.227.
\item 23 Sebastian's confession ("I'm guilty in a rash intent/But clear in act"[V.iii.35]) is echoed by the Duke's exoneration of the Duchess: "though her intent sinned, yet she makes amends" [V.ii.156])
\item 24 The literal elevation of Hecate and her minions to "toy and kiss"(III.iii.84) can be seen as a symbolic parallel of the revengers' elevation of their "lust".
\end{itemize}
Duchess's expense. For while Sebastian's repentance was voluntary, the Duchess is forced to repent at the point of the Governor's sword. Similarly, her rejection of the charge of adultery with Almachildes does not exonerate her from her attempt to arouse the Governor's love; her visit to the witches in order to facilitate this desire constitutes a damaging parallel to Almachildes and Sebastian, who were both driven to Hecate by the vice lust. Consequently she remains morally compromised, with the "honour" that she retains at the play's end merely physical continence. Moreover unlike Sebastian's rejection of revenge, which is witnessed by the audience, the Duchess's assertion of physical continence comes as a complete surprise, and relies entirely on the corroboration of her maid, Amoretta, who swears on her own chastity that the Duchess is telling the truth (V.iii.138-143).

Even this "proof" of the Duchess's continence, however, is somewhat compromised by the incident in Act Two, when Almachildes manages to slip Hecate's love-charm "into her bosom" (II.ii.41). Amoretta's subsequent expressions of physical desire for him 25 make her previously chaste rejections look ridiculous.

This incident has several interesting implications. Anne

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25 Significantly, when Amoretta is under Hecate's influence, she echoes the principle behind Sebastian's assertion that the removal of their beloved can drive a lover mad (I.ii.83, or p.109), emphasizing the lustful nature of his behaviour: "I'll call him back again; he must not keep/out of my sight so long; I shall grow mad then"(II.ii.53-54).
Lancashire suggests that

Antonio's lust/whoring . . . is thematically the moral
cause of his impotence with Isabella—witchcraft, with its
allegorical implications on the moral level, being the
cause on the plot's literal level".26

This being so it seems possible that Amoretta's question
("Blest powers, what secret sin have I committed/That still
you send this punishment upon me?"[II.ii.35-6]) has some
foundation, and that she is susceptible to the charm due to an
innate unchastity; whereas Almachildes, who lacked murderous
intent toward the Duke, was not killed by the witches' potion.
In any event, this vacillation diminishes Amoretta's dignity
and moral authority, suggesting that her honour may be
somewhat precarious.27

Moreover, there is a suggestion in this scene that the
Duchess picks up the charm. Until it falls to the ground, she
is abrupt and business-like, attempting to ascertain whether
or not Amoretta has organised a meeting for her with
Almachildes. She notes the fall of the ribbon, saying "what's
that fell/Out of her bosom now? some love-token?"(83-84), and
subsequently reacts to Amoretta's now-chaste assertions that
she hates Almachildes with a eulogy in his defence:

He is a gentleman deserves as much
As ever fortune yet bestowed on man;
The glory and prime lustre of our court;
Nor can there any but ourself be worth of him.
And take notice of that now from me,
Say you have warning on't, if you did love him,

Footnotes

26 Lancashire, p.181n.
27 This suggestion is reinforced by her subsequent
dissembling with Almachildes at the Duchess's command,
where she pretends love for him and intimates that her
chastity is nothing more than concern for her public
reputation (I.i.141-150).
You must not now. (II.ii.105-111)

In essence this speech is indistinguishable from that of Amoretta, while under the influence of the charm -

There's not a sweeter gentleman in court; Nobly descended too, and dances well. Beshrew my heart, I'll take him when there's time; He will be caught up quickly. (II.ii.46-49)

-since both speeches begin with praises of Almachildes deserving nature, and his prowess at court, and end with a jealous conviction that others must also share their attraction.

The significance of this parallel seems open-ended. On the one hand, the Duchess, whose name is also Amoretta, may have picked up the charm, which as Almachildes leaves in no doubt, is nominally specific:

A threepenny silk ribbon of three colours, Necte tribus nodis ternos Amoretta colores: Amoretta! why, there's her name indeed: Necte Amoretta; again. (II.ii.10-13)

If this is the case, then it follows that Hecate's charm will make the Duchess incapable of resisting Almachildes when she has him at her mercy, and that consequently her assertion of chastity at the end of the play is false. If, on the other hand, the Duchess has picked up the charm and is still able to resist Almachildes, then Amoretta's failure to resist the charm must indicate an innate moral flaw. This flaw, however, will be just as damaging to the Duchess's final claim to honour, since that is dependant on the corroboration of

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28 Immediately after her praise of Almachildes she reminds Amoretta "Thy name is Amoretta, as ours is; 'Thas made me love and trust thee", (II.ii.113-114).
Amoretta, who swears "by all the hopes of a maid's comfort/ Either in faithful service or blest marriage" (V.iii.138-139). If the Duchess has picked up the charm, then either way she must be seen to have severely compromised her claim to sexual continence. If, however, the Duchess has not picked up the charm, the similarity between her attitude to Almachildes and that of the bewitched and physically infatuated Amoretta constitutes a parallel that is obviously unflattering.

Ultimately, then, the charm incident must compromise the Duchess's exoneration on the charge of adultery. Indeed, so ambivalent is the resuscitation of the Duchess's sexual morality in the last scene that it seems likely that her attitudes toward revenge and honour are being ironically paralleled and mutually undercut in this scene. Just as her qualified "repentance" reveals that she still sets revenge above all forms of morality, so her exclusively physical interpretation of "honour" reveals that she also sets sexual continence above morality. The irony here, therefore, functions to undercut her doubly by making her sexual continence extremely dubious, and also suggesting that she has, in any event, compromised her honour by embracing a revenge which is as lustful as sexual appetite.

Footnotes

29 Moreover as the audience has already seen Amoretta forswear herself with Almachildes (II.ii.136-161), on the instructions of the Duchess, her final vow must be at least slightly tarnished in any case, particularly in view of Gaspar's admission (V.iii.64-66) that his "fearful oaths" were false, and sworn in order to corroborate his master's story.

30 Here I disagree with Baines p.60.
While the ironic disjunction associated with Sebastian's romantic delusion is still present at this point, it is considerably less damaging, since his redirection of his desire into an exclusively marital bliss means that Sebastian's attitude and the play's affirmation of marital unity are in harmony. By contrast, the Duchess's dangerous illusions concerning an honourable revenge are ruthlessly and ironically wrenched into an uneasy conformity with this affirmation of marital unity at the point of the Governor's sword.\footnote{While the Governor congratulates Sebastian on his renunciation of revenge, his only comment on the Duchess's dramatic assertion of chastity is "Die then a murderer only" (V.i.ii.148)}

This unbalanced presentation of the play's chief male and female revengers can only be increased by the close parallel between the Duchess's revenge and that of the amoral Aurelia, whose revenge is not only unjustified but also purely self-seeking. Each attempts to manipulate a man into the role of tool-villain, for example, and each fails as a result of her inability to assess correctly the candidate concerned. This lack of insight is particularly evident in the case of the Duchess, who begins by choosing the clownish Almachildes, and then fails to perceive the consequences of leaving such a reluctant murderer no real choice but to appear to accept her proposition.

This is followed by an even more spectacular lack of insight in Act IV scene i, where she fobs off the suspicious Almachildes with vague warnings and promises of future joy.
Her conviction that he is fooled by her performance is completely undercut by his accurate assessment of her character and motivation, revealed in the juxtaposition of his aside ("I do expect now to be made away/’Twixt this and Tuesday night"[45-6]) with the Duchess's

This fellow lives too long after the deed; I'm weary of his sight, he must die quickly, Or I've small hope of safety. (IV.i.48-50)

The Duchess completes this succession of disastrous character assessments by attempting to proposition the virtuous Governor, whose aside to the audience renders her self-congratulation at the success of her venture savagely ironic:

How sh'as betrayed her! may I breathe no longer Than to do virtue service, and bring forth The fruits of noble thoughts, honest and loyal! This will be worth the observing; and I'll do't. (IV.ii.93-96)

Ultimately, it is the Duchess's lack of insight into character that leads both to the failure of her revenge, and to her public humiliation, since the men whom she attempts to corrupt use their superior insight to thwart her plans and ultimately to force her back into her marriage at the point of a sword.

Likewise, Francisca's attempt to gull Antonio into murdering Isabella goes (hopelessly) awry when, after "killing" the couple he supposes to be his wife and her lover, he turns his sword on her, driving her first to confess the

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32 What a sure happiness confirms joy to me, Now in the times of my most imminent dangers! I looked for ruin, and increase of honour Meets me auspiciously. (IV.ii.97-105)
pregnancy which her revenge was designed to conceal, and secondly into marriage with her lover Aberzanes. Like the Duchess, therefore, her failure to assess Antonio correctly leads directly not only to the thwarting of her revenge but also to her marriage at the point of a sword. This lack of insight and subsequent punishment is highlighted in both women by the fact that Sebastian demonstrates some of the keenest insight into character found in the play, and is subsequently rewarded for his voluntary rejection of revenge.

This failure of insight is not limited to the female revengers, but is shared by the virtuous Isabella, in spite of her exemplary role. In her first extended conversation with Francisca, for example, the contrast between the reality of the family that she has married into (expressed in Francisca's bawdy and cynical asides) and her praise of the immoral Antonio emphasises her virtue at the expense of her insight.

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33 Her virtuous reactions highlight the immoral behaviour of those around her. When her concern for Antonio prevents her from revealing Francisca's immorality to him, for example, it reflects badly not only on Sebastian, who shows no concern for her as he hastens to inform her of Antonio's infidelity, but also on the complete lack of concern for others which Francisca demonstrates when she implicates the innocent Isabella and Gasparo in adultery without considering its impact on any of them.

34 McElroy points out that before this speech Middleton "primes the audience for her entrance with a blatantly unromantic overture in two parts. The first part . . . dramatizes Antonio's desperation at his impotence . . . . [and] The second part is given over to Francisca's outrageously amoral ruminations on her pregnancy . . . . Middleton allows their overtones to reverberate throughout the heroine's subsequent lecture on the joys of marriage" (p.179). McElroy also suggests that "There is no tragic pity because the author deliberately refuses to make the heroine's predicament an ethical one, as he could easily have done by having Isabella
I must acknowledge, sister, that my life
Is happily blest with him: he is no gamester,
That ever I could find or hear of yet,
Nor midnight surfeiter; he does intend
To leave tobacco too . . .
He saw it did offend me, and swore freely
He'd ne'er take pleasure in a toy again
That should displease me . . .
These good offices,
If you had a husband, you might exercise,
To the good o' the commonwealth, and do much profit.

(II.i.82-86,88-90,98-100)

Isabella's lack of insight is also evident in Act III scene ii, where she presents Francisca with Aberzanes' incriminating letter. She opens with the futile hope that Francisca will experience remorse, saying "If you did weep, it could not be amiss,/A sign you could say grace after a full meal"(108-109).35 This is followed by her promise ("As truly as I bear a love to goodness"[119]) to conceal her sister-in-law's transgression if Francisca will turn over a new leaf; before giving her the incriminating letter, she departs with "As you've goodness,/You may make use of this; I'll leave it with you"(124-5). This merciful behaviour certainly

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35 This sentiment is not only echoed by the Governor's exhortation to the Duchess to "Behold thy work, and weep before thy death! If thou be'st blest with sorrow and a conscience" (V.iii.104) but also follows Gasparo's cynical comment on Florida's reaction to Antonio's marriage:

Alas, the poor whore weeps!
'Tis not for grace now, all the world must judge;
It is for spleen and madness 'gainst this marriage.
(I.i.27-29)

This triple parallel highlights not only the lust that the three women have in common, but also casts doubt on the Duchess's final repentance, since, as Gasparo points out, tears do not necessarily signify "grace".
emphasises Isabella's virtue, but it represents a poor assessment of Francisca's personality, since the latter uses Isabella's warning as an inducement to begin intriguing against her.

Significantly, Isabella's apparently random discovery of Francisca's letter is paralleled by Sebastian's discovery of Antonio's infidelity. The latter's discovery, however, is based on his unerring insight not only into the morality of Florida (deduced from one fleeting glimpse), but also from his correct assessment of Gasparo's gossiping tendencies (III.ii.17-54).

Finally, Isabella's reaction when told of Antonio's adultery, although not unchaste is certainly not flattering. For while her initial defence of her husband is commendably loyal (contrasting favourably with Antonio's eagerness to believe Francisca's similar suggestion) it is undercut by the audience's assumption that she is basing her judgement on Antonio's sexual impotence, knowledge which considerably damages Isabella's dignity and authority:

36 As McElroy suggests, p.183.
2.2

Why, I tell thee,
It were too great a fortune for thy lowness
To find out such a thing; thou dost not look
As if thou'rt made for't. By the sweets of love,
I would give half my wealth for such a bargain,
And think 'twere bought too cheap: thou canst not guess
Thy means and happiness, should I find this true
First, I'd prefer thee to the lord my uncle;
He's governor of Ravenna, all the advancements
I' the kingdom flows from him. (III.ii.242-252)

As McElroy suggests, this promise of material advancement
through her influence with the Governor represents a damaging
parallel to the Duchess's speech to Almachildes (IV.i.39-44).37 Similarly, her financial metaphors, and her
oath "by the sweets of love" represent the culmination of the
play's repeated suggestions of her sexual frustration;
suggestions which both diminish her dignity and contribute to
the deflation of her virtue.

Finally, Isabella's assertion that Sebastian's "lowness"
disqualifies him from having the "great . . . fortune" to
have deduced Antonio's adultery not only reveals her failure
to assess him correctly, but also implies that such a
discovery is elevated. Yet ironically, Isabella is in the
process of joining Sebastian in his "lowness", since rather
than confronting Antonio with his adultery as she did
Francisca, she agrees to Sebastian's intrigue, leaving herself
open to abuse. This irony continues in her interchange with
Fernando, when she refuses to disclose her informant, saying
"Nay, sir, betraying is not my profession" (IV.ii.89). Not
only is she about to spy on Antonio, but since at this point

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37 McElroy, p.183.
Sebastian is still intending to consummate his betrothal with her, to the audience's knowledge she is also on the brink of sexually betraying her husband. Since she is only saved from this by Sebastian's last-minute moral awakening, she is denied not only the chance to demonstrate a similar moral peripety, but also the sort of chaste rebuffs under duress with which Amoretta demonstrates her chastity.

Ultimately, Isabella cuts a chaste but foolishly unaware figure, and even her chastity, as a donnée is never really tested. Her bewildered attempts first to request sexual satisfaction of her husband, and then to obtain evidence of his adultery, undermine her virtue without seriously damaging her role as the "chaste maid."

In this play, as in More Dissemblers, insight appears to be a masculine trait. Isabella's failure in this respect, which not only leaves her vulnerable to sexual abuse, but almost causes her death, is equalled by that of Francisca and surpassed by that of the Duchess, both of whom are foiled in their revenge plots by their failure to assess correctly the men whom they attempt to manipulate.

This damaging presentation of female insight is highlighted by the fact that most of the scenes in which these women appear involve a male character whose choric asides highlight his superior male perception. Thus the Duchess's mismanagement of Almachildes is accompanied by his cynical running commentary, emphasising not only that she has failed to judge him correctly, but that in contrast his perception of her is
2.2

acute. Similarly Isabella's failure to recognise the immorality of Francisca and Antonio is balanced by Sebastian's accurate moral assessment of Antonio, Gaspar and Florida.

Even Aberzanes demonstrates a superior moral awareness to that of Francisca, when he responds to a suggestion that she be given whip with:

No, no, no;
Though we have both deserved it.

Prithee, talk to us of no whips, good boy;
My heart aches when I see 'em. (II.iii.60-64)

This acknowledgement of culpability for their behaviour is in stark contrast to Francisca's half-limited recognition of the physical consequences of her pregnancy (II.iii.33-35); similarly, she responds to Aberzanes' financial assessment of its consequences as if they are all there are: "You see what 'tis now to get children, sir" (II.iii.55). Even Hecate and her minions are consistently undercut by the cynically accurate comments of her son Firestone, whose awareness of the spiritual consequences of their behaviour appears to be greater than theirs.

The Witch's presentation of male and female revengers contains a similar bias. While both Francisca and the Duchess seek to have others murdered on their behalf and contemplate with callous enthusiasm the murder of men who are innocent of the crime they are ostensibly revenging, Sebastian's revenge never involves the murder of Antonio, and the latter, although damned, expresses remorse at what he perceives to be misplaced revenge. Moreover these male revengers both fail in their
revenge actions as a direct consequence of their own morality, so that Sebastian's decision to emulate a "seraphin" and hence choose the virtuous path is balanced by Antonio's fall, "Blinded by wrath and jealousy" (V.iii.35) into hell pit at the play's end. By contrast, in spite of their enthusiastic desire for revenge (which is unclouded by any suggestion of remorse) the two female revengers are both thwarted in their revenge actions by men whom they have failed to assess, and are forced by these men to conform to the play's drive toward marital harmony.

This distribution of insight, self-awareness and feminine dissimulation is particularly interesting when compared to that of More Dissemblers, where the superior awareness and insight of Andrugio highlights the dangerous romantic delusions which allow the play's women to give free rein to the lust they inherited from Eve. By contrast, Sebastian's romantic delusions do not seem to prevent him from exerting rational control over his lust. The Witch's gender presentation, with its pattern of aware and insightful men with the capacity to control both their own fates and those of the women (whose lack of insight disqualifies them from such control), in turn looks forward to a similar distribution of power and insight in The Old Law.
While *The Old Law* is fantastic in both location and conception, it is structurally far simpler than either *The Witch* or *More Dissemblers Besides Women*. Indeed, as McElroy points out, it resembles *The Phoenix* more closely than it does its fellow tragicomedies, with a "disguised" Duke, a sympathetically presented moral spokesman, and an overtly didactic moral structure.\(^1\) Since Evander's design is disguised from the audience as well as from the characters in *The Old Law*, however, the tone of the later play is darker, with apparent executions and bereavements which continue unrelieved until the Duke's surprise revelation in the final scene. This tragicomic tone is also evident when the later play's treatment of legal, familial and marital abuse is compared with that of *The Phoenix*, which explores these abuses in a (relatively) straightforward and frequently comic vein. In *The Old Law*, however, all three issues are inextricably associated with death, which as the result of the play's fantastic donnée, Evander's *Old Law*, becomes legalised murder. This adds considerably to the grimness of the tragicomedy's presentation.

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Footnotes

1 McElroy, p.217-218. I cannot however agree with McElroy's interpretation of the play as a parodic attack on the concepts of kingship and royal decrees.
of marital abuse, since Eugenia, rather than blithely committing adultery (as does the Jeweller's wife), eagerly awaits the death of her husband. The early play's farcical attack on parental exploitation becomes a savage study in murderous filial exploitation and ingratitude, and The Phoenix's exploration of conventional legal abuses is paralleled in the tragicomedy by the "legal" invocation of a morally unacceptable decree in order to avoid holy and natural laws.

Indeed, the moral structure of the play revolves around this conflict between the "new" Old Law, and the traditional moral standards which are laid down in the "old" law of Moses, the ten commandments. The consequence of this conflict is the transformation of Epire into a society without clear religious direction, as Cleanthes suggests:

Heaven is the roof of all [states],
And now, as Epire's situate by this law,
There is 'twixt us and heaven a dark eclipse.
(I.i.430-432)

Footnotes

2 Catherine Shaw points out that "the deliberate ambiguity of the play's title [involves] a conflict between the Old Law, a law concerning old people, as we might use the term Corn laws or Poor Laws, which has been newly enacted by Evander, Duke of Epire, and the old law of Moses, 'honour thy father and thy mother.'" The Old Law, ed. Catherine M. Shaw, Garland English Texts, No.4, p.xxxxv. She also notes that this antithesis is behind the play's frequent punning on the authority of the "church-book", citing as an example:

1 LAWYER It is so plain it can have no demur,
The church-book [parish chronicle] overthrows [is the guide for] it.

CLEANTHES And so it does,
The church-book [Bible] overthrows [defeats or subverts] it if you read it well.
(I.i.125-8)

Shaw, p.xxxxvii.
The Old Law's inverting effect on Epire's traditional norms and values is reflected at many levels. Joy and sorrow, for instance, are repeatedly transposed (I.i.386-7, II.i.174-230, IV.i.34-38, V.i.436-440), and this transposition frequently is associated with a marriage/death nexus (II.i.4-5, IV.i.34-38, IV.i.186-188) culminating in Gnotho's discordant funeral/wedding procession. Equally, fashion and youth are elevated over age and wisdom, and in the final scene vice is seated in judgement over virtue.

The moral inversion of society in The Old Law is exemplified in the four young characters most directly affected by the compulsory euthanasia. Thus the morally exemplary nature of Cleanthes and his wife, heightens the injustice of their relegation to the status of social outcasts and criminals, while the greed and lust of Simonides and Eugenia emphasise the unnaturalness of a society which legally puts them in positions of power not only over Cleanthes and Hippolita, but also over the innocent and virtuous elderly.

This stylised contrast between the good and evil sons, Cleanthes and Simonides, and the good and evil wives, Hippolita and Eugenia, both invites and facilitates a comparative evaluation of the play's gender presentations, particularly since the focus on the women is on their wifely, rather than filial, qualities.

Hippolita is particularly instructive in this context, since in spite of her role as an exemplar of married virtue she is inadvertently responsible for the betrayal of her
father-in-law to the rigours of the Old Law. Critics such as Barker and Schoenbaum, interpreting Hippolita's indiscretion as the consequence of her virtue or compassion, see it as the play's central tragic irony, constituting a profoundly pessimistic statement either about the nature of female virtue or about the weakness of virtue itself in the face of evil. Others diminish the importance of her betrayal by explaining it in terms of narrative progression, or by arguing that it is only disastrous "in terms of the false social and legal situation permitted by the Duke, and not in terms of the total structure of the play." Relative or not, however, the incident involves Hippolita in divulging, with potentially devastating consequences, a secret that she was morally obliged to keep. Moreover, she herself acknowledges both her own responsibility and the gravity of her action to Cleanthes, attributing it at least in part to her "own pity":

Her tears that never wept, and mine own pity
Even cozened me together and stole from me
This secret, which fierce death should not have purchased. (IV.ii.271-73)

Footnotes

5 Barker sees it as evidence "that feminine virtue, in spite of its attractiveness, is really not virtue ... but weakness, and its consequences are no less deadly than those of evil." Thomas Middleton, p.105.

6 Schoenbaum, for example, maintains that it represents a metaphysical statement about the ineffectiveness of virtue in an evil society." Quoted by Asp, p.151

7 Shaw suggests that "the unconscious betrayal of her father-in-law by the otherwise ideal Hippolita ... serves primarily in terms of narrative progression rather than total thematic impression," The Old Law, pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

8 Asp, p.151.
The betrayal is particularly interesting if it is looked at in terms of the play's emphasis on her role as a wife, rather than merely as an exemplar of virtue. Her unity with Cleanthes is obvious from their relationship and is presented by him as insurance against betrayal:

"Why, there's but one body in all this counsel. Which cannot betray itself. We two are one, One soul, one body, one heart, that think all one thought . . . Who shall betray us where there is no second?"

(I.1.500-6)

Cleanthes' speech evinces the traditional Christian view of marriage, as a union of souls. So considered, this marital body has, analogous to Christ as head of the church, the husband as its "head", and his absolute authority involves total obedience on the part of the wife in accordance with the Pauline injunction: "Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be in everything." Consequently Hippolita's failure to keep the secret she shared with her husband is not merely a breach of faith, but also a breach of the obedience she owes Cleanthes.

Hippolita explains her concern for Leonides in a speech which, while referring to wifely obedience, reveals that it is not her first consideration: "Mine own pity, sir, did first

Footnotes

9 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, Even as Christ is head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.' Eph. v.22-23. Eugenia's subsequent taunt to Cleanthes, "An ass-colt with two heads, that's she and you"(IV.ii.262), ironically echoes Cleanthes' description of himself and his wife as "one body"; while Hippolita's failure to be ruled by the "head" of her marriage effectively means that they are a marital body with "two heads".

10 Eph. v.24.
instruct me, /And then your love and power did both command me" (I.i.379-380). Because Hippolita's pity takes precedence over her obedience to Cleanthes, she fails to resist Eugenia's feigned tears, saying, "Alas! I have a secret lodged within me/Which now will out. In pity, I cannot hold" (II.ii.174-5). It seems likely, therefore, that rather than making a pessimistic statement about virtue, or pity, the play suggests that even a woman's most virtuous impulse should be subject to the control of her husband.

Traditionally, such masculine dominance was justified on the grounds of the inferiority of women, "proved" by reference to the weak judgement of the first woman:"For ... Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."11 Read in these terms Hippolita's behaviour is itself evidence of the need for marital control. Like Eve, she was deceived, and her lack of insight is contrasted with her husband's clear recognition of Eugenia's depravity. Moreover, in IV.ii, when Leonides is led away to his execution, the parallel between Hippolita and Eve becomes more obvious, as Asp implies when she remarks:

The forest retreat functions as a kind of archetypal Eden which is invaded by evil bringing "death". Death later proves illusory and a kind of resurrection occurs ... evil enters into the innocent retreat because of one woman's weakness and another woman's wickedness.12

Footnotes

11 1 Tim. ii:14.
12 p.189. Although Asp does not further discuss the Eve-Hippolita parallel, later in her analysis she argues that since Hippolita's "fall" leads to Evander being disabused of his false impression of Cleanthes it can be considered as instrumental in the happy ending. She adds: "Seen in this light, Hippolita's weakness is a felix culpa because it reveals the truth.
Significantly, when Cleanthes turns on Hippolita suspiciously, pointing out that "To thy trust only was this blessed secret/Kindly committed" (IV.ii.239-40), she responds by attributing this suspicion to his unjust equation of her with the unreliable Eve:

Miserable! Why, here's the unhappiness of woman still, That having forfeited in old times their trust, Now makes their faiths suspected that are just! (IV.ii.242-45)

The irony here is obviously damaging, since Hippolita is attempting to stress the difference between her own "just" behaviour and that of the woman who brought death to mankind when she, like Eve, has been tricked into betraying Cleanthes. Moreover her extension of her condition to apply to the rest of her sex extends the irony to include all of womankind. The implication seems to be that Hippolita, although virtuous, is unable to rise above the general weakness inherent in womanhood, which is a lack of judgement, or insight. This weakness, which should have been counteracted by her reliance on Cleanthes, superior judgement, leads her to betray them both, just as Eve's failure to obey Adam led to the fall.

This universalising of Hippolita's situation becomes explicit in Cleanthes' reaction to her admission that Eugenia's tears "and mine own pity"\(^\text{13}\) led to her indiscretion:

Nay, then we're at an end, all we are false ones

Footnotes

13 Her use of the phrase "mine own pity" echoes her earlier speech (see above p.138) underlining the mistake she has made in allowing her own judgement (or pity) to preempt her obedience to Cleanthes.
And ought to suffer: I was false to wisdom
In trusting woman, thou wert false to faith
In uttering of the secret, and thou false
To goodness in deceiving such a pity.

(IV.ii.274-78)

Cleanthes' assumption of responsibility for her betrayal reflects his role as her "head", and implies that such a role should not involve an equal sharing of responsibility, but that he alone should rather have shouldered the burden of their secret. It also implies that no woman would be capable of keeping such a secret, and implicitly equates his trust in Hippolita with her own trust in Eugenia; whether disqualified by feminine weakness or wickedness, women are equally untrustworthy.

This notion is implicit in Hippolita's assertion of trustworthiness despite her femininity in Act I scene i: "You must not mistrust my faith, though my sex/ Plead weak[ness] and frailty for me"(507-508). The action of the play proves this assertion wrong, and in the final scene Cleanthes' attitude toward his wife is one of protective concern, informed by his new knowledge of her frailty. When he sees her coming, he says "Let me prevent thy joys • • • Thou hast not strength enough to bear them else" (V.i.385-7). She confirms this by fainting, and he comments "I feared it all this while. I knew 'twas past thy power, Hippolita"(389-390).

The extent to which Hippolita's standing in the play is damaged by her fall is indicated by the cessation of the extravagant speeches in her praise which predominated before the revelation of her indiscretion. By contrast, Act V scene i
culminates rather in speeches of extravagant praise for both
Evander and Leonides, with the former likened to God, and the
latter described by Cleanthes as "virtue's throne".\footnote{This
apparent shift in value may be associated
with Cleanthes' exhortation to the judges to follow the
example of Aeneas, "Who took his bedridden father on his
back...[and] Hewed out his way through blood, through
fire... Only to save a father" (V.i. 223-228). Aeneas saved his
father at the expense of his wife, whom he lost in the confusion.}

It should be noted that despite her fall, Hippolita's
virtue is not seriously questioned. She remains the exemplar
of wifely virtue in the final scene, when the Duke appoints
her as a judge of female marital conduct, and is set against
Eugenia in a series of stylised contrasts which culminate in
Evander's explanatory speech:

Of... wives, we see the worst and best;
May future ages yield Hippolitas
Many, but few like you Eugenia.

(V.i.398-400)

This insistence that Hippolita constitutes the best of
possible wives increases the significance of her weakness,
implying not only that even the most virtuous women must be
ruled by their husbands, but also that they should not be
trusted with responsibilities that they are too weak,
inherently, to bear.

Hippolita's antithetical counterpart, Eugenia, has much in
common with other tragicomic villainesses, as McElroy points
out:

[Eugenia] has the sexual drive of Aurelia, the malicious
instincts of Francisca (both react similarly to moralistic
assaults on their "honor"), and the dubious notion of
respectability held by the Duchess in The Witch (neither
will violate the rules of sexual propriety until her
Unlike Hippolita and Cleanthes, who are presented as moral and physical equals, Eugenia and Lysander are widely disparate in age and moral outlook. The disparity in age is constantly emphasised by Eugenia's complaints about his physical infirmity:

-Out upon it!
The mere conceit turns a young woman's stomach
His slippers must be warmed in August too,
And his gown girt to him in the very dog-days
When every mastiff lolls out his tongue for heat.
Would not this vex a beauty of nineteen now?

(II.ii.8-13)

While this obviously represents an attack on such marital disparity, its target does not appear to be the traditional one of the elderly man who has married the "beauty of nineteen". Unlike the young brides in A Chaste Maid and More Dissemblers, who are pushed by their fathers toward marriage with older men, Eugenia has chosen an aged husband, for reasons which she explains to Parthenia:

-But always take age first to make thee rich;
That was my counsel ever, and then youth
Will make thee sport enough all thy life after.
'Tis the time's policy, wench. What is it to hide
A little hardness for a pair of years or so?
A man whose only strength lies in his breath,
Weakness in all parts else, thy bedfellow
A cough of the lungs, or say a wheezing matter;
Then shake off chains and dance all thy life after?

(II.ii.139-147)

This blatantly exploitative attitude is in sharp contrast to the poignancy of Lysander's admission, as he recollects

Footnotes
15 McElroy, p.216n.
16 Her taunt to Cleanthes, after gloating over her role in the arrest of Leonides, reveals that her father (i.e. Cleanthes' uncle) is already dead: "Had you an uncle? He should go the same way too" (IV.ii.258-9).
himself after a tirade against her gloating suitors, that he married Eugenia for love:

I am too uncharitable!
Too foul! I must go cleanse myself with prayers.
These are the plagues of fondness to old men,
We're punished home with what we dote upon.
(II.ii.101-4)

Just as Hippolita is presented as a model of wifely virtue, so Eugenia's behaviour is generalized by one of her suitors as that of all young women marrying elderly husbands:

Do not we know the craft of you young tumblers?
That [when] you wed an old man, you think upon
Another husband as you are marrying of him?
(II.ii.48-50)

Eugenia embraces this assertion with enthusiasm: "How wondrous right he speaks! 'Twas my thought indeed" (II.ii.52) and herself universalises her behaviour in her response to Cleanthes' ill-fated attempt to "wake her loudly"
(III.ii.294): "All this is nothing to a mind resolved;/ Ask any woman that, she'll tell you so much"(330-331).

Eugenia's exploitative attitude to marriage is underlined in the play's juxtaposition of her behaviour with that of Gnotho and his colleagues. At the end of Act II scene ii, for instance, Eugenia resolves:

I'll go count o'er my suitors, that's my business,
And prick the man down. I ha' six months to do it,
But could dispatch him in one, were I put to it.17
(226-228)

This speech is immediately followed by Gnotho's deal with the parish clerk to reduce the time Old Ag has remaining to "but a

Footnotes

17 The fact that she presents Lysander to be executed on the same day as Gnotho brings in Agatha suggests that in fact she does just this.
month to live by the law" (II.i.89-90). He is subsequently joined by the servants Simonides has sacked, who have come to the clerk to identify the oldest (and consequently most temporary) wives they can find, or "to deal with this merchant for some commodities" (III.i.145-6). This sordid and mercenary attitude to marriage provides a further unflattering parallel to Eugenia's marital philosophy:

Nay, we have looked out our wives already. Marry, to you we come to know the prices; that is, to know their ages; for so much reverence we bear to age, that the more aged they shall be the more dear to us.

(III.i.148-152)

Between them, then, the characters in the sub-plot provide a grotesque mirror reflecting not only the financial pragmatism of Eugenia's marriage to Lysander, but also her desire to "dispatch" him in order to marry a younger partner. Gnotho, like Eugenia, flaunts his substitute spouse under Agatha's nose, while the Cook's grossly offensive description of his marriage partner echoes Eugenia's scorn for Lysander's infirmities:

[I have] stuck her with rosemary too, to sweeten her, she was tainted ere she came to my hands. What an old piece of flesh of fifty-nine, eleven months and upwards! She must needs be flyblown.

(IV.i.12-16)

It should be noted, however, that Gnotho and the servants are all responding to the temptation presented by the Old Law. There is no evidence to suggest that Gnotho would be choosing a new wife if Agatha were not due for "dispatch", or that he married her with a new wife in mind (unlike Eugenia II.ii.48-52). Similarly, the servants are all driven to their mercenary
marriages not only directly (in response to the hope of immediate financial gain aroused by the Old Law), but also indirectly, (since their financial hardship is the result of their sacking at the hands of Simonides, an Old Law heir). Consequently their farcical versions of Eugenia's attitudes carry particularly savage implications, since for her the Old Law, rather than inducing immoral behaviour merely underpins what is already her philosophy of life.

This harshness of portrayal is also evident in the stylistic difference between the two plots. The clowning of Gnotho and his colleagues, like that of Falso in The Phoenix, palliates the audience's negative reaction to their behaviour. This is particularly so in the case of the servants, where the near-virtual absence of their elderly wives makes their villainy comically insubstantial. Eugenia, on the other hand, is presented more seriously, and her malicious enjoyment of the jealousy and pathetic attempts at rejuvenation on the part of her husband contrast unflatteringly even with Gnotho's callous and hypocritical indifference towards Old Ag. 18

The religious morality of both plots also reflects this stylistic contrast, being far more savagely applied to Eugenia than to Gnotho. Eugenia receives a series of blistering salvoes from the play's morally authoritative Cleanthes, which begin with epithets such as "strumpet" and "whore", and culminate in a savage attribution of the responsibility for Lysander's behaviour:

Footnotes

18 Discounting the final funeral/wedding procession, Agatha is the only sub-plot wife to appear in the play.
Look on thy work
But with a Christian eye, 'twould turn thy heart
Into a shower of blood to be the cause
Of that old man's destruction. Think upon it!
Ruin eternally! For through thy loose follies
Heaven has found him a faint servant lately.
His goodness had gone backward and engendered
With his old sins again, has lost his prayers

. . . Thy too hasty lust
Has driven him to this strong apostacy.
Immodesty like thine was never equalled!
(III.ii.306-313,322-324)

In the sub-plot, however, the moral component functions
ironically, as in many of the comedies. Consequently
Cleanthes' puritanical reminder to Lysander of his folly
is balanced by Gnotho's outrageously hypocritical indignation
when Agatha surprises him at his revels with Siren:

Art not ashamed
to be seen in a tavern, and hast scarce a fortnight
to live? Oh, old woman, what art thou! Must thou
find no time to think of thy end? (IV.i.121-124)

In its audacity this is amusing, but the parallel between the
desperate behaviour of Agatha and Lysander and the two moral
reproofs carries implications which reflect badly on him.
These implications are made even more obvious by Gnotho's
reaction to Agatha's assertion that she is with child:

I'll take my corporal oath I begat it not, and then
thou die'st for adultery . . . Oh, you'd be
stoned to death, would you? (IV.i.153-4,157)

Since his relationship with Siren19 and his attitude toward

Footnotes
19 The play presents this relationship ambiguously.
Gnotho's assertion to Siren that while he has her by him
Agatha won't be with child (IV.i.148-150), the servants' exit to sleep with their wives (whom they take to be whores) saying "Gnotho, we are all provided now, as you are" (IV.i.102-4), and Gnotho's final exit with Siren all suggest that they have an adulterous relationship.
Yet when Gnotho's marriage to her is finally thwarted he laments "No bride, but thou mayest prove a strumpet! . . . . Case up thy maidenhead! No priest, no bedding"
old Ag's death are in flagrant contravention of Mosaic law.
this invocation is ironically self-applicable. Rather than being attacked by an outraged moral spokesman, then, Gnotho ironically undermines his own moral position. Yet although the morality underlying these two modes of commentary is identical, Cleanthes' denunciation of Eugenia is obviously harsher and more humiliating than Gnotho's unconscious irony. Moreover the latter's biblical allusion to adultery can be more aptly applied to Eugenia's behaviour, since it involves adulterous women; like Gnotho (and unlike Agatha) Eugenia is behaving adulterously.

There is an interesting parallel between Lysander and Agatha, since they both attempt to attract the attention of their disloyal spouses through undignified and inappropriate behaviour. Although Lysander's dyed hair and attempts to appear youthful are humiliating and undignified, the fact that he bests the young men at their own games to some extent mitigates this humiliation, as does his rapid repentance. His failure to castigate or attack Eugenia, moreover, highlights the malice with which she enjoys his humiliation.

Footnotes

20 Shaw: "(see Leviticus xx:10, Deuteronomy xxii:24, then John viii:4 'And say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act,' and viii:5 'Now Moses in the Law commanded us, that such should be stoned: what sayest thou.' It is bitterly ironic that Gnotho, of all people, should be citing the law of Moses," p.133n.

21 Again, while there is no suggestion that Eugenia is physically committing adultery, her willingness to be courted and choice of second husband are as adulterous as Gnotho's choice given that both still have living spouses.
By contrast, Gnotho wins his verbal battle with Agatha, tricking her into admitting that her "pregnancy" is in fact a cushion before leaving in triumph with Siren. While the audience's sympathy is presumably with Agatha, her impotent attacks on Gnotho, and failure to trick him into believing her pregnant, mean not only that, unlike Lysander, she is defeated verbally but also that she is as aggressive as her spouse. Moreover her angry resolve as she leaves reveals that the preparation she is making for her death is vengeful rather than religious:

Nay, I'll follow thee and show myself a wife. I'll plague thee as long as I live with thee, and I'll bury some money before I die that my ghost may haunt thee afterward! (IV.i.189-192)

This echo of Simonides' barbed suggestions that Lysander is already a ghost stresses the parallel between them. Since it constitutes a failure to repent, however, it also underlines the contrast in the balance of sympathy between them.

Both Eugenia and Agatha are presented as sexually frustrated, which inevitably diminishes their dignity and in Eugenia's case, at least, her virtue. But while Lysander is presented as being too old to satisfy his rapacious young wife, Gnotho is merely unwilling to satisfy his. And while Eugenia uses this frustration as fuel for her complaints about her aged husband, and her irony when praising him to

Footnotes

22 "Let the ghost talk, ne'er mind him" (II.i.80), "Alas poor ghost! Consider what the man is" (II.i.82) and "So, so! The ghost is vanished; now, your answer, lady" (II.i.105-6).
Hippolita, in III.ii. the situation is reversed when she and her suitors overhear Lysander joking with the dancing-master about the sexual rapacity of young wives. Similarly Gnotho uses his disinclination to satisfy Agatha against her in their verbal battle in IV.i.

To cap all this, the play also conveys a subtle linking in the marriages of Eugenia, Siren and Agatha. Thus Eugenia's marriage to Lysander in expectation of his death can be related to Siren's assertion to Gnotho that five years is too long to expect her to wait as she "may bury two husbands by that time" (IV.i.146), while this assertion ironically links her to Agatha, since Gnotho reminds her that "thou had'st two husbands before me" (III.i.303-4). The implication seems to be that Gnotho's new wife is merely a younger version of the old. Since Eugenia is preparing to take a second husband after burying her first, moreover, it also serves to illustrate the consequences of continuing to marry younger men until you yourself become an old wife. And finally, since Lysander's daughter Parthenia is evidence that his marriage to Eugenia is at least a second one, it may be that this parallel is an ironic indication of what Gnotho will have in store for him when he finally gets rid of Agatha and marries a young woman.

Footnotes
23 "mine [husband] is a jewel, cousin,/So quietly he lies by one, so still"(III.ii.172-3) and "He's the quietest man,/Especially in bed" (180-81).
24 "If thou could'st teach a man/To keep his wife to himself, I'd fain learn that"(III.ii.99-100) D.MASTER . . . "The horse-trick [whore's] comes the nearest"(102) LYSANDER "Thou sayest true, i'faith,/They must be horsed indeed, else there's no keeping on'em"(103-4).
25 See page 119.
It seems, then, that in spite of the parallel between the bad wife in the main plot and the bad husbands in the subplot, the bad wife is portrayed in a far more savage light than her subplot counterparts. Moreover her husband is presented comparatively sympathetically, as a victim of exploitation who nevertheless manages to vanquish younger suitors before rising above his jealousy to prepare himself for death. This is in contrast to Agatha, the wife of the bad husband, who fails to defeat Gnotho and Siren and exits vowing a dangerous and futile revenge. In addition, the women in both plots are forced to endure the humiliation of their husband’s public acknowledgement of sexual frustration and are both denounced by a man whom they are unable to defeat verbally. This uneven distribution of sympathy and success is compounded by the entertaining presentation of Gnotho, the bad husband, which includes the suggestion that he, like Lysander, is in danger of falling victim to an unscrupulous younger woman.

When the play’s presentation of the two exemplary wives is compared, similarities emerge despite the obvious contrast between them. Both their husbands, though in different ways, bring pain upon themselves in loving and trusting wives whom they excel in insight. This parallel is emphasised by the similarity between Cleanthes’ admonition to Eugenia:

\begin{verbatim}
Be I ne'er so well
I must be sick of thee! Thou art a disease
That stickest to the heart, as all such women are.
\end{verbatim}

(III.ii.300-03)

and his sudden doubt about Hippolita:

\begin{verbatim}
Thou should'st be good,
\end{verbatim}
Or thou art a dangerous substance to be lodged
So near the heart of man. (IV.ii.235-7)

Between them, Hippolita and Eugenia bring about the main plot catastrophe by revealing Cleanthes' secret. This failure to remain silent is highlighted by the play's constant reminder that women's tongues are forever active (III.i.251,II.i.45-6,V.i.377, and 586-587) and is presented as the result of the good wife's lack of insight combined with a failure to obey her husband before her own instincts, and as the result of the bad wife's vengefulness.26

Functioning entirely at the expense of the women, this parallel between the good and bad marriages places both in the role of Eve. In such a context Eugenia's lust can be seen as the inheritance of the Fall. She has allowed, indeed encouraged, lust to control her reason. Consequently the parallel between her behaviour and that of the first woman is to be expected. Hippolita's portrayal, however, is more difficult for twentieth century readers to accept. She is presented as the best of possible wives, combining virtue with a vigour and intelligence that her colourless predecessors (Castiza in The Phoenix and Isabella in The Witch) lacked. Yet even Hippolita, it seems, cannot afford to trust her own judgement, but must obey her husband "in all

Footnotes

26 Eugenia's malice is specifically linked to her lust by Hippolita, Eugenia's enthusiasm for the courtier's attack on Cleanthes provoking the comment: "Thy thirst of blood proclaims thee now a strumpet" (IV.ii.294). Eugenia agrees with this equation between lust and murderous intent, saying "'Tis dainty, next to procreation fitting, I'd either be destroying men or getting"(IV.ii.295-6).
things" in order to avoid a repetition of the Fall. If Eugenia represents fallen women's inheritance, therefore, Hippolita reflects that inherent female weakness which led the prelapsarian Eve to disaster.

This overtly didactic affirmation of the Pauline doctrine of the total submission of women casts an illuminating light on the earlier plays. Common elements in their gender presentations, such as the consistent privileging of the male intellect and spiritual awareness over what is presented as weak female insight, the constant emphasis on woman's inherent tendency toward lust and deceit, the steady stream of Edenic allusions, and the constant drive toward marital unity are all entirely consistent with a rigidly Pauline presentation of women as the inherently inferior sex. Their weakness, demonstrated at the Fall, makes marriage essential, in order to ensure that they will be guided and controlled by the male sex who are innately more virtuous, mentally vigorous and spiritually aware.
CHAPTER THREE

TRAGEDY

"TRAGIC PASSION, AND SUCH GRAVE STUFF"

Although written within a few years of one another,1 Middleton's three tragedies are widely dissimilar examples of their kind. Hengist, King of Kent, as befits its consciously anachronistic status as a chronicle play, or "tragicall history,"2 alternates between realistic satire and highly formal archaisms and rhetoric. By contrast, the intensely focussed psychological "realism" of The Changeling has prompted comparison with more modern drama,3 while Women Beware Women's realistic satire and diffuse focus on a broad canvas of characters lend it a strong stylistic resemblance to

Footnotes

1 Hengist was probably staged around 1620 (Lake, p.20; Heinemann, p.136), and The Changeling can be dated 1622 (Lake, pp.37,200). The dating of Women is more speculative (Lake, eg., puts it anywhere between 1612 and 1627, [p.20]) but R.B. Parker suggests: 1621 is the usual dating of the play, though the only sure date we possess is that of the first edition in 1657. Bentley, judging from stylistic evidence, suggests it should be put later, after The Changeling. ("Middleton's Experiments", p.192n).

2 Baines, p.83.

3 T.B. Tomlinson, for example, likens The Changeling to Racine and goes on to say: Middleton uses the story of The Changeling to make a characteristically modern and un-Jacobean point. Rather like an Ibsen ... he gradually presents the real affinity between Beatrice and the apparently utterly dissimilar De Flores. All the action focuses on this image.

Despite this stylistic variety, however, the tragedies are informed by a continuing didactic intention which makes them, as Kirsch points out, "resemble the moralities even more explicitly than do the comedies and tragicomedies."\(^5\)

Three elements of the morality tradition which give rise to this increased resemblance are particularly relevant for my purposes. The first of these is the inexorable pattern, common to all three tragedies, by which the fallen women progress from lust through adultery and murder to their own deaths. The second is a corresponding darkening in the presentation of marriage. Rather than emphasising its redemptive aspect, as do the earlier plays, the tragedies focus on unholy marriages or, in the Cardinal's words, "lust's offerings . . . On wedlock's sacred altar" (Women IV.iii. 23-24). Finally, the third, and perhaps the most significant of these morality elements, is the advent of the Jacobean tragic Vice figure, whose enormous energy and sardonically intelligent moral commentary inevitably dominate each tragedy at the expense of all the other characters, good or evil. Together, these elements make Middleton's presentation of women in the tragedies the harshest in the canon.

Since Hengist, King of Kent is not only the earliest and simplest of the tragedies, but also contains the first and most obvious of the playwright's tragic Vice figures, it is

Footnotes

4 R.B. Parker analyses this similarity in his excellent article "Middleton's Experiments with Comedy and Judgement."

5 Kirsch, p. 82.
the most appropriate play to begin with.

Although the relative dating of the two later plays remains uncertain, I have placed The Changeling before Women Beware Women, since its intense psychological portrayal of its heroine is an interesting vantage point from which to consider Women Beware Women's three tragic heroines.
In order to shape its otherwise formless historical plot, Hengist, King of Kent draws on two separate types of Elizabethan tragedy, De Casibus "with ambition as a chief motivating force," and "Italianate intrigue tragedy, with love or jealousy usually the central passion."¹ This marrying of diverse tragic traditions reflects the play's central expository technique, which merges ambition and lust into a single appetite. For here, as in The Witch, lust appears to be the given evil, a manifestly unheroic and degrading appetite through which the true nature and effects of the desire for power, or ambition, are revealed.

This is a duality reflected in the structure of Hengist, which falls into two distinct movements, or sections. While the first of these concentrates (predominantly) on Vortiger's ambition, and its fulfilment at Constantius's expense, the second focuses on his lust for Roxena, which is fulfilled at Castiza's expense. This shift in thematic focus, from ambition to lust, is reflected in the balanced pair of characters, one good and the other evil, central to each section.²

Footnotes

1 Baines, p.83.
2 These conspicuous oppositions and parallels can be closely related to the morality play tradition (Baines interprets these as chronicle play features, pp.85-87).
The first section of *Hengist* revolves around the opposition between the Machiavellian ambition of Vortiger, the usurper, and the saintly virtue of the rightful king, Constantius. With the death of the latter, however, and the advent of the Saxons, this good-evil polarity shifts to the contrast between the virtuous Castiza and the lustful and ambitious Roxena, who usurps not only her place as queen of England, but also her role as paragon of chastity. At the same time, Vortiger is joined by the Saxons Hengist and Horsus, who materialise just as he assumes the role of ruler. At their advent, the earlier opposition between royal virtue and usurping ambition is replaced by an expository parallel. Vortiger's ambition is mirrored in Hengist, whose aid and professed friendship conceal a thirst for power which is apparently boundless. Similarly, Horsus embodies the lust which leads Vortiger to wrest Castiza from her religious retreat, and subsequently to abandon her in favour of the pagan Roxena. Just as Hengist is entirely motivated by ambition, so the sexual enjoyment of Roxena appears to be the central drive in Horsus's life. Between them, therefore, the Saxons embody the two appetites that rule Vortiger, and although they both appear to help the usurper satisfy these appetites, they do so purely in order to further their own.

It is this second movement, with its contrasted good and evil queens, that is the most interesting in terms of gender presentation in *Hengist*. It is dominated by the powerful figure of Horsus, who not only engineers and directs the
intrigue involving both women, but who also functions as the play's moral spokesman. Explaining to the audience the significance of his own behaviour as he gulls first Hengist, and then Vortiger, Horsus also provides them with a ruthlessly cynical commentary on the morality of the other characters, informed with an objective moral accuracy that is conspicuously absent in his own motivation, as Baines points out:

[His contempt for her] does not prevent Horsus from sacrificing everything to maintain his sexual relationship with Roxena. His contempt for Vortiger does not prevent him from becoming Vortiger's companion and advisor; his awareness of Castiza's suffering does not prevent him from torturing her. Horsus's moral and psychological awareness coupled with his contemptible behaviour constitutes an unforgettable statement about the degenerative power of lust.

While this disjunction does indeed reflect Horsus's function as a statement about the degenerative power of lust, the statement is metaphorical, rather than psychological, since the drive that informs Horsus's attitudes and behaviour is prescribed by the nature of his role as a Vice figure, as defined by Spivack in its Jacobean, hybrid form:

Footnotes

3 Conversely, Hengist functions as a Saxon spokesperson, consistently enunciating a belief in fortune, rather than God (II.ii.36-38), a fierce pride, rather than Christian humility (IV.iii.52-55), a desire for worldly, rather than heavenly glory, and a reliance on the self and on reason rather than on God and faith (II.iii.16-21). This presentation of his pagan philosophy as the antithesis of Christianity represents an overt demonstration of the inherent godlessness of Vortiger, with whom he is paralleled.

4 Baines, p.89.
[The Vice] survives [the decline of the morality tradition] by crossbreeding with humanity, and the hyphenated role shows its fission even in farce . . . whereas metaphor sustained his intrigues on the allegorical stage, in the literal drama they are sustained by fusion with the character and behaviour of some person of serious stature, whose evil career has come to the attention of the dramatist out of literature or life. Such a villain and his history wrap the perennial role in the surface texture of human passion and appetite, beneath which it goes its ancient bravura way in the homilectic dimension and out of the organic compulsion with which we are familiar. Villainy thus dramatised becomes a demonstration . . . The motives of villainy, even when they are explicit, are robbed of vitality by the amoral temper of the performance and its homilectic showmanship . . . And the Vice's unique intimacy with the audience survives, although progressively modified by an evolving sense of theatrical naturalism.9

Such a reading of Horsus makes coherent sense of what are otherwise glaring inconsistencies in his emotions and behaviour. His sudden flashes of emotion, for example, which fail to influence his predominant attitude even when they are completely antithetical to it, represent elements of his imperfect human "disguise", flitting across the surface of his implacably detached and cynical role.6

Horsus's cloudy and indeterminant motivation is equally characteristic. Although he suggests that this motive is ambition,7 he subsequently undercuts this suggestion, pointing

Footnotes

5 Spivack, p.339.
6 The sadistic relish with which he participates in the torment of Castiza, for example, is unabated by the brief flash of "pity" he experiences ("This almost moves . . . I'll wrestle down all pity" [III.ii.102-104]). Continuing to address Castiza with unabated brutality, he proceeds to instruct the audience on the moral significance of the interlude with a dispassionate insight that is informed only by sardonic amusement, and further sadistic relish at his "joke," (III.ii.111-120).
7 [HORSUS]
Ha, ha!
He's well provided now: here struck my fortunes . . . Methinks I should not hear from fortune next
out that in following Vortiger to Wales he has voluntarily
given up any ambitious hopes:

---You'll confess, my lord,
My love to you has brought me to this danger?
I could have lived, like Hengist, King of Kent,
London, York, Lincoln and Winchester,
Under the power of my command, the portion
Of my most just desert, enjoyed now
By pettier deservers. (V.ii.30-36)

Horsus's real motive, however, is expressed in soliloquy to
the audience when, after weeping in sympathy with Vortiger,
and assuring him of his unyielding devotion, he watches him
leave with a speech which explicitly presents his major motive
as a desire to destroy:

I'll follow you through the world, to cuckold you;
That's my way now. Every one has his toy
While he lives here: some men delight in building,
A trick of Babel, which will ne'er be left;
Some in consuming what was raised with toiling;
Hengist in getting honour, I in spoiling.

(IV.iii.141-146)

This motive, unlike his more "natural" or realistic earlier
motive, makes sense of his attitude not only toward both
Castiza and Roxena, but also toward Vortiger, and accurately
reflects the Vice's role in the play as a stage-manager,
demonstrating the destructive action of vice in his victim.

As in The Phoenix, and before that the morality tradition
itself, the realism and vitality associated with the Vice are
more dramatically effective than the (relatively) formal

Under an earldom now: she cannot spend
A night so idly, but to make a lord
With ease, methinks, and play.

(IV.ii.263-270)

8 Another archetypal Vice characteristic, as Spivack
points out, pp.344-345, 355-358.

9 Barker notes: "once at least, he represents himself as a
kind of destructive force in the world," p.119.
morality of the two virtuous figures, Constantius and Castiza.

This effect is reflected in critical opinion. Barker, for example, after dismissing Constantius as querulous, 
"incompetent, opinionated, [and] somewhat priggish", goes on to say:

The characters in this part of the play generally lack depth and distinction, but Horsus is an exception and a very notable one. . . . The ruling passion of Horsus is no doubt lust for Roxena . . . and yet his passion is so completely transformed by his intelligence that it scarcely seems to be lust at all. His vision is so wonderfully clear that he has no illusions of any kind, least of all about his mistress.10

Not only does this flattering description testify to the appeal of the hybrid Vice figure, but Barker's qualification of Horsus's "ruling passion" reflects the uneasy marriage between the "realistic" motivation that the latter has been provided with and the inherited role it imperfectly disguises.

In fact this "realistic" disguise constitutes an adaptation of the Vice figure which substantially increases the dramatic dominance traditionally accruing to the role. By marrying the generalised power and villainy of the later hybrid Vice figure with a single disguising human motivation, lust for Roxena, Middleton focuses the (later) Vice's human characteristics and generalised evil energy into a single-minded sexual obsession; rather than personifying and demonstrating villainy, he personifies the specific vice of lust.

Paradoxically, this increase in realism and sharpening of focus nevertheless moves Horsus's role closer to that of the medieval Vice, who originally demonstrated and personified a
particular vice. Consequently Horsus's dominance of the play arises from a "realistic" and savagely cynical performance which is invested with the power and intensity of focus associated with his more overt medieval forerunners.

The lurid appeal of the Vice contributes considerably to the play's unsympathetic presentation of its villainess, Roxena, whose harsh portrayal is in any case augmented by the ruthlessly cynical contempt of Horsus as he belabours the audience with his morally clear-sighted interpretations of her scurrilous character and behaviour. This running commentary, however, is probably less damaging than the contrast between Roxena's relatively one-dimensional character and that of the complex and contradictory Vice with whom she is involved. While Horsus's relentless focus in the play remains squarely on Roxena, her own vision is directed inward with equally unremitting intensity, bearing out her lover's early description of her lust for him as essentially narcissistic:

\[ \text{tis her cunning} \\
\text{The love of her own lust, which makes a woman} \\
\text{Gallop down hill as fearless as a drunkard.} \]  
\text{(II.iii.185-187, my emphasis)}

This contrast is reinforced by Horsus's occasional propensity for expressing his lust for Roxena with poignancy, lending it a conviction that is conspicuously lacking in the emotions of Roxena. His pain at the news of her intimacy with
Vortiger, for example, is expressed in terms of his heart, and his subsequent rationalisation of it to Hengist suggests that its intensity bewilders him: "I feel a pain like a convulsion,/A cramp at heart; I know not what name fits it" (II.iii.211-212). Again, although this comment is ironic, at Hengist's expense, since Horsus knows that the name for his "cramp at heart" is his sexual jealousy of Hengist's daughter, its wistful phrasing, coupled with what appears to be genuine pain, make him a briefly sympathetic character. Since an apparent inability to name his pain would suggest, conventionally, that he is suffering from the pangs of love, the phrase can also be seen as an ironic comment on the reality of "romantic" love, given the nature of Horsus's attitude to Roxena. However its double-ended quality leads to ambivalence, since in presenting love, ironically, as mere lust, it momentarily lends lust a haunting quality normally associated with "romantic" love.

This emotional tinge to Horsus's lust is another aspect of his "disguise," which increases his humanisation at the expense of Roxena, since it arouses (however briefly) the sympathy of the audience while simultaneously highlighting her consistent self-centredness.

Footnotes

11 [HORSUS]  
O, this ends bitter now! our close-hid flame  
Will break out of my heart; I cannot keep it.  
(II.iii.207-8).

12 Unlike Horsus's "emotion", which is delivered to the audience with real conviction, that of the morality vice functioned purely as a manipulative tool, and was consequently directed solely at his victims, while the Vice grinned exultantly at the audience.
It is consistent with this contrast in focus that while Horsus remains obsessionally faithful to Roxena, she causes him pain by becoming involved with Vortiger. When Horsus confronts her with what he sees as her betrayal of him, for example, she interprets his pain as envy, asking: "Do you pine at my advancement, sir?" (III.i.4). The aggrieved self-pity which colours her subsequent explanation of her behaviour leaves no room even for an acknowledgement of the pain she has caused him, let alone an apology, while his response highlights the gulf between their attitudes:

O barreness
Of understanding! what a right love's this!
'Tis you that fall, I that am reprehended:
What height of honours, eminence of fortune,
Should ravish me from you? (III.1.5-9)

This contrast is emphasised in the final scene, where Horsus admits the truth of Vortiger's assertion that they are enduring "torment waking" in terms which reveal that his torment is occasioned by concern for Roxena: "True; my heart finds it, that sits weeping blood now/For poor Roxena's safety"(V.ii.29-30). Roxena, however, is concerned only for her own safety, and seeks out her husband and lover merely as a refuge. Her cry of disillusion as they fight carries pathos, but it is still relentlessly self-centred:

O hear me, O help me, my love, my lord! 'tis here!
Horsus, look up, if not to succour me,
To see me yet consumed. O what is love,
When life is not regarded! (V.ii.143-146)

Roxena's conspicuous failure to acknowledge that her husband and lover are both wounded unto death, in spite of their desperate struggle in front of her eyes, lends her reproach a
bitter irony.

This contrast between Roxena's egotism and Horsus's focus on her also characterises her relationship with her father. Unlike her insensitivity to his feelings, and the lack of any evidence of genuine emotion directed toward him, Hengist's love for his daughter underlies his every mention of her. This is particularly obvious when he learns of her danger, and subsequently of her death:

The consumer has been here; she's gone, she's lost;
In glowing cinders now lie all my joys:
The headlong fortune of my rash captivity
Strikes not so deep a wound into my hopes
As thy dear loss. (V.ii.173-177)

This expression of genuine pain at Roxena's death contrasts strongly with her failure to comprehend, emotionally, the death of the man she is appealing to as her "love", particularly since Hengist, like his daughter, is confronting his own death when he receives the news of the other's.

It is important to recognise the extent to which Horsus's symbolic function in the play serves to emphasise Roxena's egotism. His unrelenting focus on her, for example, reflects his role as the walking embodiment of Vortiger's lust. Similarly, his disregard of death while continuing to focus on her is a characteristic common to all Vice characters; since they are metaphors rather than men, death is not an issue. It is, then, at least in part, the advent of the tragic Vice figure which makes Hengist's portrayal of Roxena such a harsh

Footnotes

13 The moment he hears of this he sweeps into action, saying "For her safety/I'll forget food and rest; away!" (V.i.?)
14 See Kirsch, p.83; Spivack, pp.197-198.
Before turning to Castiza's portrayal, it is useful to look briefly at Roxena's role as an exemplar of female lust. Just as the lust and ambition in Vortiger, her male counterpart, are inextricable, so Roxena's lust is fused with ambition, as her reassurance to Horsus reveals:

Take reason's advice, and you'll find it impossible
For you to lose me in this king's advancement,
Who's an usurper here; and as the kingdom,
So shall he have my love by usurpation;
The right shall be in thee still. My ascension
To dignity is but to waft thee higher;
And all usurpers have the falling-sickness,
They cannot keep up long. (III.1.6-13)

This description of Vortiger's desire for Roxena in terms of his usurpation of the crown presents the play's central equation of lust and ambition as synonymous in its principal character. Equally Roxena's double entendres as she describes her "advancement" in terms which can also be applied to sexual intercourse and male potency present her ambition as synonymous with her lust. This intentional irony, although damaging, pales beside the unconscious ironic implications of her references to usurpation and "the falling-sickness". Not

Footnotes

15 As I have suggested, Vortiger and Roxena are the evil King and Queen who are balanced against Constantius and Castiza, the good King and Queen.
16 This equation is also heavily emphasised in Vortiger's conversation with the rebellious Hengist:

Vort... Have not I raised your daughter to a queen?
Heng You have the harmony of your pleasure for it;
You crown your own desires; what's that to me?
Vort And what will crown yours, sir?
Heng... I demand Kent. (IV.iii.81-86)

Vortiger's final speech ends with a similar use of "crown":

Whom lust crowned queen before,
Flames crown her now a most triumphant whore;
And that end crowns them all! (V.iii.162-164).
only does she, as a "whore," suffer from the "falling-sickness" herself, but as we have seen in the previous scene, the "falling-sickness" is an ailment that in Horsus is the direct consequence of his lust. Moreover she completely fails to consider either her own position as a usurper with regard to the rightful queen, Castiza, or the consequences for her of what she presents as Vortiger's inevitable fall, a failure which clearly delineates the limits of her pragmatism.

In addition to constituting an exemplar of female lust, however, the pagan Roxena is almost certainly intended, as Heineman suggests, to symbolise the Roman Catholic Church, or the whore of Babylon, usurping the position and status of the Church of England, represented by Castiza. In this context the relationship between the two women resembles that found, in The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased, between "Wisdom," who symbolises Elizabeth I as the head of the Church of England, and "Idol-worshipping", the embodiment of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly since Horsus describes Roxena's lust as a type of narcissism. Similarly, the play's emphasis on the

Footnotes

17 Similarly, Gaspar describes the whore Florida as "one of the falling family" (The Witch, III.ii.42).
18 Heineman, p.141. Not only are there two references comparing the Saxons to Romans in Act II scene iii, as Heineman points out (p.139), but the names of Castiza's Roman Catholic confessors, Lupus and Germanus, translate as "German" and "Wolf", providing an ontological link between their church and the Saxon wolves from Germany.
19 See above, p.166, for Roxena's narcissism, and p.7n for the Wisdom equivalent.
uniqueness of Castiza's purity can be related to the earlier poem's assertion of Wisdom's purity at the expense of the rest of her sex. Since any slur on Castiza's virtue, given her emblematic significance, would be tantamount to blasphemy, it is perhaps not surprising that her position as a spotlessly chaste heroine makes her unique in Middleton's work; she is neither undercut in the manner of Castiza (in The Phoenix) or Hippolita, nor comically deflated as are Moll Yellowhammer, and Isabella (in The Witch).

A second major factor in this (comparatively) unequivocal presentation of female virtue involves Castiza's position in relation to Constantius. For just as Constantius represents virtuous royalty exploited, tormented and finally murdered by usurping ambition, in the person of Vortiger, so Castiza can be seen as a representation of wifely chastity or "honour", sadistically abused and publicly destroyed by adulterous lust, also in the person of Vortiger.

This structural presentation of the play's central equation of ambition and lust involves a careful balancing of what is depicted as Constantius's spiritual rape with the "rape" of Castiza's honour. Both characters are, in effect, dragged from a monastic or holy lifestyle into a worldly one, and forced by

Footnotes

20 This is emphasised by the contrast between she and the other court women, who know what a man "is good for" (III.ii.10-14), and who cannot swear to their chastity when Vortiger asks them to (IV.ii.80-120). The contrast is comically reinforced by Simon's formal greeting to "thy grace, thy queen, and her fair trollops" (IV.i.4).

21 This is underlined by the way Aurelius refers to Castiza's "murdered honour" in the final scene (V.ii.170)
Vortiger to accept a worldly crown. Constantius's description of this treatment at Vortiger's hands in a sense presages Castiza's rape:

- That riches is not best, though it be mighty,
- That's purchased by the ruin of another . . .
- And if't be worthily held sacrilege
- To rob a temple, 'tis no less offence
- To ravish meditations from the soul,
- The consecrated altar in a man.

(I.i.104-110)

This description of Constantius's enforced coronation as a spiritual rape and a sacrilegious robbery is echoed in Horsus's delineation of the rape plan to Vortiger, where he proposes that Castiza be surprised, on a solitary walk, while she "consecrates her time to contemplation" (III.i.149), and subsequently subjected to "a rape of honour without words" (172). The great advantage of his plan, he contends, is that "She's robbed of all, yet knows not where she's robbed" (176).

The parallel between Vortiger's two acts of violation is

Footnotes

22 While Castiza's "honour" has not been raped, as she believes, she herself is certainly raped by Vortiger, as Horsus's emphasis on the "anguish" with which she submits makes abundantly clear. Consequently I see no justification for quotation marks around the word "rape" when alluding to her husband's action.

23 The first two lines of this speech can be applied not only to the usurpation of wealth and power that occurs in the play, but also to Vortiger's behaviour toward the two women, since the sexual honour of each is described in terms of "treasure". Constantius says to Castiza (I.i.173-5)

Keep still that holy and immaculate fire
You chaste lamp of eternity! 'tis a treasure
Too precious for death's moment to partake.

Subsequently Horsus says of Roxena, "A treasure 'tis, able to make more thieves/Than cabinets set open to entice" (II.iii.159-60). This ironically presages Vortiger's ecstasy at Roxena's oath, "O thou treasure that ravishes the possessor!" (IV.ii.255). A related pattern of imagery is that in which sexual possession of a woman is described as robbery (III.i.54-5; I.i.176).
also evident when Constantius's coronation scene is compared with that of Castiza's rape. Thus both victims kneel in a vain bid for mercy, begging their tormentors not to imperil their immortal souls. Constantius's speech reflects the worldly responsibility with which he is being threatened:

On these knees
Hardened by zealous prayers, I entreat you
Bring not my cares into the world again!
Think with how much unwillingness and anguish
A glorified soul parted from the body
Would to that loathsome jail again return;
With such great pain a well-subdued affection
Re-enters worldly business. (I.i.55-62)

Castiza's reference to her kneeling, and emphasis on the eternal consequences of her rape are obviously closely related to the metaphors and form of Constantius's plea, although she couches hers in terms of physical and spiritual sight:

O sir! whate'er you are, I teach my knee
Thus to requite you. be [sic] content to take
Only my sight, as ransom for my honour,
And where you have but mocked my eyes with darkness
Pluck them quite out; all outward lights of body
I'll spare most willingly, but take not from me
That which must guide me to another world,
And leave me dark forever; fast without
That cursed pleasure, which will make two souls
Endure a famine everlastingly. (III.ii.92-101)

Vortiger responds to Constantius's speech with a request for "consent" which goes on to present the overt threat of enforcement:

We beg the freeness of your own consent,
Which else must be constrained; and time it were
Either agreed or enforced. (I.i.66-68)
Similarly, Horsus overcomes a brief spasm of pity and responds to Castiza with "What! will you consent? . . . . Farewell words then! / You hear no more of me; but thus I seize you" (III.ii.104-107). Both victims request death rather than the damnation that they fear will result from Vortiger's action, and both respond to being raised to face their torment with bitter assertions of the cruelty involved in what they see as a return to death involving the loss of eternal life. Constantius reproaches Vortiger with

This is a cruelty
That peaceful man did never suffer yet,
To make me die again, that once was dead,
And begin all that ended long before. (75-78)

His sentiment is echoed by Castiza, when Horsus revives her:

Never did sorrows in afflicted woman
Meet with such cruelties, such hard-hearted ways
Human invention never found before:
To call back life to live, is but ill taken
By some departing souls; then to force mine back
To an eternal act of death in lust,
What is it but most execrable?

(III.ii.71-77)

Although both Constantius and Castiza are persecuted and tormented, their refusal to consent to what they see as the threat of damnation not only leaves their virtue unblemished, but also demonstrates its strength. In each case, Vortiger forces onto his victim what he himself desires. Constantius's

Footnotes

24 Her ability to arouse this pity corresponds to that of Constantius, whose humility in the face of his assassins caused them to experience a temporary "strife of pity and fury" before "gold/Made pity faint" (Chorus, I.i.).
25 Constantius comments "Were't but my death, you should not kneel so long for it" (I.i.71), and Castiza says: You kill me more in talking sinfully Than acting cruelty: be so far pitiful, To end me without words. (III.ii.52-54)
spiritual rape, as he is forced to receive the crown that Vortiger desires, is balanced by Castiza's physical rape, as she is forced to accept the (apparently) extra-marital sex that is her husband's ultimate object. Consequently the emblematic nature of Hengist and Horsus (who help Vortiger to gain the object of his desire in order to obtain it themselves) to emphasise not only the enormity of Vortiger's behaviour, but also enormous moral gulf that lies between his greedy acceptance of the Saxons' "help," and the martyred refusals of Constantius and Castiza. 26

In this context, Castiza's unblemished chastity reinforces the virtue of Constantius, and at the same time greatly increases the negative impact of Vortiger's two acts of violation.

While Castiza's virtue remains as unblemished in fact as it does symbolically, her portrayal is nonetheless almost as ambivalent, in its way, as that of the evil Roxena. This ambivalence is due to the length and intensity of the rape scene, which owes its impact almost entirely to the dialogue between Horsus and Castiza, since Vortiger's subsequent abduction of his terrified wife merely dramatises a sadistic

Footnotes

26 The Saxons merely furnish Vortiger with the means to achieve immoral ends he already desires, functioning as symbolic reflections of his two major vices rather than as figures of temptation. Consequently their betrayal of him reflects the self-destructive consequences of vice, as Vortiger momentarily recognises (before Horsus hurries to recloud his vision) as he reflects on Hengist's treachery:

Methinks, the murder of Constantius
Speaks to me in the voice of 't, and the wrongs
Of our late queen, slip both into one organ.

(IV.iii.120-122)
verbal rape. This intensity, while due in part to the threat of physical violation, and Castiza's desperation and vulnerability, must for the most part be attributed to the vitality, strength and dramatic impact of Horsus, the Vice figure. It is the Vice's evident enjoyment of his role of sexual violator, and the verbal expertise with which he wields his power over his victim, that lend the scene its shock-value. His cruelly mocking "reassurance" to her request for immediate death, for example, is followed by a suddenly brutal explanation:

Thus plainly,  
To strip my words as naked as my purpose,  
I must and will enjoy thee. [She faints]  
(III.ii.62-64)

He expands his cat-and-mouse game with the stricken queen into a gloating version (abounding in savage double entendres) of the Vice's traditional temptation. The very pleasure with which he revels in his power and in Castiza's distress to some extent obscures the echoes of Vortiger's earlier offer to Constantius which indicate its function here:

Footnotes

27 [HORSUS]  
Long may you live!  
'Tis the wish of a good subject; 'tis not life  
That I thirst after; loyalty forbid  
I should commit such treason: you mistake me,  
I've no such bloody thought; only your love  
Shall content me.  
(III.ii.55-60)

28 Vortiger says "here stoops a faithful servant", and "such common coarse employments/Cast upon your servant, upon Vortiger"  
(I.1.116,119-120)
List to me.
Here you are now far from all hope of friendship,
Save what you make in me; 'scape me you cannot,
Send your soul that assurance; that resolved on,
You know not who I am, nor ever shall,
I need not fear you then; but give consent,
Then with the faithfulness of a true friend
I'll open myself to you, fall your servant,
As I do now in hope, proud of submission,
And seal the deed up in eternal secrecy.

(III.i.79-88)

This disturbing cocktail of impressions is increased by
Horsus's suggestion that Castiza is being punished for her
sexual rejection of men:

Cast. What's my sin?
Hor. Contempt of man; and he's a noble creature,
And takes it in ill part to be despised.
Cast. I never despised any.
Hor. No? you hold us
Unworthy to be loved; what call you that?

(III.i.38-43)

This is a suggestion which comes unpleasantly close to one of
the most common psychological motives for rape, and is
difficult to relate to the scene's didactic function.28

Although the prolonged intensity and shock-value of the
dialogue in the rape scene can be seen as a way of emphasising
the brutality of Vortiger's spiritual rape of Constantius (and
thus of the ambition that drove it), the disturbing power and
impact of Horsus's performance here dwarf this didactic
function, lending the scene an ambivalence that is frequently
found, for example, in explicit anti-pornographic films, which
in attempting to shock their audience into a recognition of

Footnotes

28 It can perhaps be related to Constantius's contempt for
the crown which Vortiger desires so much (I.i.164-166)---
this contempt for ambition could then be related to
Castiza's contempt for lust.
the degradation associated with that genre, cater
unintentionally to the taste that they are attempting to
destroy. The ambivalence here is increased not only by the
(comparative) colourlessness of the characters surrounding
Horsus in this scene, but also by the sympathy generated by
his pain in III.i. Consequently, while in intention the
rape scene could be construed as feminist, in that it condemns
the sexual violence of both Horsus and Vortiger, its effect is
deeply ambivalent. Just as Horsus's dramatic appeal surrounds
the lust which he embodies with a simultaneously repellent and
fascinating aura, so the conviction and power that inform his
sadistic performance in the rape scene, when combined with the
weak dramatic appeal of Castiza's conventionally virtuous
pleadings, lend the rape scene a profoundly unfeminist
ambivalence.

When this scene is left out of consideration, the gender
presentation in this play can in many ways be closely related
to those of the tragicomedies. Neither woman demonstrates any
evidence of genuine emotional involvement with another
character, in contrast with two of the play's male characters.
In the case of Castiza this lack of emotional involvement is
associated with an exemplary chastity which is presented as
uniquely hers. Roxena, on the other hand, displays a total
self-absorption, which ensures that her only considerations
are the gratification of her own appetites for sex and
"glory", and ensuring the personal safety within which to
enjoy them. Castiza's naive lack of insight into character is balanced by Roxena's far more serious failure to recognise or acknowledge the limitation of her own vision, which is incredibly solipsistic and myopic. Moreover the marital infidelity in this play is still concerned with female sexual continence. The ultimate irony, it seems, of Vortiger's action in simulating his wife's "adultery" is that he is doubly abusing himself, firstly by deliberately courting the public dishonour associated with having an unchaste wife, and secondly and more importantly, by unwittingly exchanging a chaste wife for one who makes him a cuckold.

What pushes this familiar gender presentation into a more profoundly ambivalent portrayal of women than any manifested

Footnotes

29 This is most obviously demonstrated when she reflects on her husband's virtue and constancy as he lurks behind her, preparing to rape her in order to abandon her for Roxena:

Though among life's elections, that of virgin I did speak noblest of, yet it has pleased the king To send me a contented blessedness In that of marriage, which I ever doubted.

Enter VORTIGER and HORSUS disguised I see the king's affection was a true one; It lasts and holds out long, that's no mean virtue In a commanding man; though in great fear At first I was enforced to venture on it.

(III.i.i.15-22)

30 This Horsus points out to the audience, commenting that Vortiger's taste is "beguiled" by conceit into "Changing pure blood [Castiza] for some that's mixed and soiled [Roxena]" (III.i.i.119-120). Similarly, as Vortiger prepares to denounce Castiza Horsus comments: "What careful ways some take to abuse themselves!" (IV.ii.32). This irony is the Vice's crowning triumph as he educates Vortiger on the significance of his behaviour before helping him to Hell:

HOR. And to serve both our lusts, I practised with thee Against thy virtuous queen.

VORT. Bane to all comforts!

HOR. Whose faithful sweetness, too precious for thy blood, I made thee change for love's hypocrisy. (V.ii.118-122)
in the preceding plays, is the powerful Vice figure, Horsus. His obsession with Roxena, and the bizarre mixture of poignancy and cynical appreciation with which he regards her and her depravity combine to make her portrayal infinitely crueler than those of her tragicomic counterparts. More disturbing still is the sadistic impact of the rape scene, which operates independently of its realistic and symbolic intention to suggest that Castiza's rape functions as a punishment for the sexual rejection implicit in her chastity.

This darkening of vision looks forward to The Changeling, where the heroine is both virginal and lecherous, and consequently deserves her punishment at the hands of Horsus's more sophisticated counterpart, De Flores.
CHAPTER 3.2

THE CHANGELING

"THAT BROKEN RIB OF MANKIND"

The uneven but powerful female focus of Hengist, both intermittent, due to the play's De Casibus concerns, and divided between the heroine and the villainess, becomes consistent, intense and condensed in The Changeling, which concentrates on the decline and fall of a young virgin who considers herself to be as chaste as Castiza, but who ultimately proves to be a whore. This focus is central to the play's attack on the Petrarchan convention,¹ which is directed at that convention's definitive motif, the concept of the Petrarchan love-goddess. Since this concept involved the elevation of the Petrarchan woman above the men who desired her for her moral superiority (beauty and virginity being considered the physical symbols of an immaculate chastity), it was completely antithetical to the Pauline conception of an intrinsically inferior female sex subject "in all things" to their morally superior male counterparts.² Consequently, it is not surprising that The Changeling's paramount concern is

Footnotes

1 Robert Ornstein demonstrates the play's ironic inversions of stock Petrarchan romance characters and situations, pp.170-190.

2 "The courtly lover idealizes and idolizes his beloved, and subjects himself entirely to her every whim... the lady is exalted and worshiped [sic]" M.H. Abrams A Glossary of Literary Terms (1941; rpt New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p.35.
to expose the extent of its Petrarchan goddess's moral depravity. This concern is reflected in one of the play's central symbols, an ironic inversion of the myth of Beauty and the Beast, which was traditionally employed by Petrarchan convention to demonstrate the power of female purity to tame masculine appetite. As Jordan puts it:

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

Rather than demonstrating "that the princess is in fact a beast," however, the play presents the Beast as a moral reflection of the Princess's "real" identity, replacing the courtly with a morality myth: under the influence of the Beast Lust, the Petrarchan goddess proves to be a debased and fallen Eve.

Consequently, while Beatrice-Joanna is presented in the play as a self-styled Petrarchan Goddess, worshipped by both Alonzo and Alsemero, her speeches and behaviour simultaneously identify her with Eve, highlighting the reality of her condition. Unlike Eve, however, who was innocent until tempted by the serpent to contravene God's decree, Beatrice-Joanna is a member of fallen mankind. Consequently the serpent

Footnotes

4 Jordan, p.165.
5 Frost provides a good summary of these allusions, linking them with Calvinist Predestination (Selected Plays pp.413-415). Doob is more specific, pointing out the close parallel between Eve's fall and Beatrice-Joanna's deflowering and subsequent behaviour. "A Reading of The Changeling" Studies in Renaissance Drama 3 p.192-194 (1973).
tempting her is the vice of lust, the inheritance of the fall, whose action within her is externalised and dramatically manifested in the figure of De Flores.

The spiritually binding aspect of Beatrice-Joanna's betrothal to Alonzo (reflected in the ring incident) makes her marriage to Alsemero adultery, which is expressly forbidden in the seventh commandment. Consequently her temptation occurs when she meets Alsemerno in the first scene, and her decision to marry him can be compared with Eve's decision to eat the apple, an action which similarly contravened an express prohibition. Since Beatrice-Joanna's

Footnotes

6 Penelope Doob maintains that according to Augustine and others: a major consequence of original sin was that men became subject to lust and that sexual intercourse, which would have been governed by reason in Eden, became irrational (p.190n).

7 Arthur C. Kirsch points out De Flores' affinity with the Vice tradition (p.83), and David L. Frost (The School of Shakespeare [London: Cambridge University Press, 1968], p.71), Joseph M. Duffy ("Madhouse Optics: The Changeling" Comparative Drama 8 No.2 (1974), p.189), Charles A. Hallett (Middleton's Cynics [Salzburg: Universitat Salzburg, 1975], p.249), and Robert Jordan (p.158) all liken De Flores to Iago, whose affinity with this tradition is brilliantly discussed by Spivack. This aspect of De Flores will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

8 Frost, commenting on the indivisibility of Alonzo's finger and the ring (III.i.23-35), says: This emblematic detail was added by Middleton. The cleaving of ring to finger attests the binding nature of the betrothal contract, which only unnatural murder can cut through; even then, the contract cannot be annulled. (Selected Plays p.341n)

Similarly, he says of the passage describing the two as "one substance" (III.iv.37-8): The language alludes to the biblical doctrine that husband and wife become one flesh, a union symbolised by the indivisibility of finger and betrothal ring. (Selected Plays p.354n)

9 Exod. 20:14.
instigation of Alonzo's murder and subsequent deflowering by De Flores proceed causally from this decision, it seems that her fall occurs when she makes it.

This implication is emblematically presented in the first scene. As Beatrice-Joanna reveals her attraction to Alsemero she is approached by De Flores, and immediately after she expresses her determination to marry Alsemero the Vice retrieves the Petrarchan love-token she drops for her new lover. Her reference to him as "this serpent" emphasises the emblematic nature of the incident. Rather than constituting Satan incarnate, De Flores represents an externalisation of the serpent within Beatrice-Joanna, which has just won her over to the sin of adultery, a victory symbolised in their linking through a parodied Petrarchan ritual.

Although Beatrice-Joanna cannot begin, like Eve, in a state of prelapsarian innocence, she does stand, because of her belief in romantic convention to the exclusion of both moral and religious value systems, in a state of profound ignorance. A romantic or Petrarchan value system not only allows her to ignore her lustful motives but also leads her to turn her desire into a moral or religious absolute which over-rides all other considerations. Unlike Eve, who was at least aware that

Footnotes
10 As David Frost points out, Selected Plays p.319n.
11 This emblematic significance is reflected in critical opinion. Bowers, for example, says "In a sense De Flores is almost the personification of Beatrice's evil angel" (Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642 [Gloucester: Princeton University Press, 1959] p.205). Likewise Hibbard describes De Flores as corresponding to Beatrice-Joanna's "own unconscious self" ("The Tragedies of Thomas Middleton and the Decadence of the Drama" Renaissance and Modern Studies I [1957] p.59).
she was disobeying a divine decree, Beatrice-Joanna suffers from complete security.

Before being forcibly disillusioned by De Flores, Beatrice-Joanna reveals her Petrarchan values and aspirations to the audience in asides whose unconscious ironies, while highlighting the extent to which those values have superseded any moral or religious awareness, stress their fallen reality by mimicking the biblical account of the Fall.

In the book of Genesis, Eve's desire for the forbidden fruit, after her temptation by the serpent, is due not merely to its food-value, but also to its wisdom-enhancing propensity and visual appeal:

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat. (Gen.3.3)

While Beatrice-Joanna's obsessively visual value system has been widely analysed, it is important to note that this visual mindset is frequently linked with wisdom (or judgement) and romantic love, so that she expresses her Petrarchan beliefs through a complex of ideas that firmly parallel her experience with that of the woman who first brought sin to mankind.

In I.i., for example, Beatrice-Joanna reproves Alsemoro's

Footnotes

12 This disillusionment will be discussed in detail later in this section; suffice it to say at this point that the illusion she is forced to surrender is that of her Petrarchan divinity.

13 For an excellent example of such an analysis see Richard Levin's chapter on The Changeling in The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971), pp.44-45.
sudden ardour for her in terms which, while apparently reasonable, nevertheless link eyesight and judgement:

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

(I.i.72-76)

In her next speech, Beatrice-Joanna parries Alsemero's request for her hand with an obscure reference to her father before revealing in an aside that her previous speech is based on her romantic change of heart, and that although five days ago her eyes told her wonders of Alonzo, they are now more pleased by the look of Alsemero:

Oh, there's one above me, sir, [aside] For five days past To be recall'd! Sure mine eyes were mistaken, This was the man was meant me--That he should come So near his time, and miss it!

(I.i.83-86)

This speech reveals Beatrice-Joanna's failure to recognise her moral and religious obligations to Alonzo, the man she earlier believed to have been "meant" for her. Her total unawareness that her change of heart is a sinful one is, however, entirely consistent with a romantic value system, since within it the only criterion for virtue is achieving the man she loves, just as the only criterion for wickedness is the thwarting of that achievement. Moreover she appears to have substituted this value system for a religious one, since her speech reveals her belief that Alsemero has been divinely "meant" for her.

Footnotes

14 As Levin points out Multiple Plot, pp.39-41.
is similarly revealing. In a romantic universe, the paternal power of veto over prospective marital partners assumes divine status. It is a reference which is doubly ironic, since her betrothal not only means that Beatrice-Joanna should now be ruled by her husband, rather than her father, but also that the one above her who will not allow her to accept Alsemero is not her father the god, but God the Father!

At her next appearance Beatrice-Joanna contemplates the enlightening aspects of her love for Alsemero in a speech which even more specifically links eyesight, wisdom and romantic love:

How wise is Alsemero in his friend!
It is a sign he makes his choice with judgement.
Then I appear in nothing more approv'd
Than making choice of him;
For 'tis a principle, he that can choose
That bosom well, who of his thoughts partakes,
Proves most discreet in every choice he makes.
Methinks I love now with the eyes of judgement,
And see the way to merit, clearly see it.
A true deserver like a diamond sparkles,
In darkness you may see him, that's in absence,
Which is the greatest darkness falls on love;
Yet is he best discern'd then
With intellectual eyesight. What's Piracquo
My father spends his breath for? And his blessing

Footnotes

15 "Above 'royal' Beatrice is the ultimate God-like authority of her father," Frost, Selected Plays, p.314n.

16 This Petrarchan "religion" is also emphasised in her ostensibly religious response to her father's enquiry (I.i.154) as to the completion of her devotion:
   For this time, sir...
   [aside]. I shall change my saint, I fear me; I find
   A giddy turning in me...
   (I.i.154-156)
Where her father is God, her lover becomes a saint. Abrams, commenting on the Courtly Love ethic, says:
   "the lover prays to the god of love; there are saints of love and lists of commandments," p.35.

17 Perkins maintains that Lev. 22 12-13 and Num. 30 represent Biblical authorities for the idea that women must move their allegiance from their fathers to their husbands when they marry. p.429.
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.6-23)

Once again the terminology Beatrice-Joanna applies to her father could be applied with equal accuracy to God, whose blessing certainly turned into a curse when Eve failed to regard His authority. Moreover the specious "proof" that Beatrice-Joanna's love for Alsemero has led her to "see the way to merit" with "eyes of judgement" is followed by the revelation that what she is seeing in her mind's eye is Alsemero. Again, therefore, she is finding the man who is forbidden by God not only "pleasant to the eyes" but also "to be desired to make one wise".

The process of Beatrice-Joanna's speech suggests, however, that "the way to merit" that she can see so clearly leads into darkness, an irony that not only logically undercuts itself (since eyes which see most clearly in darkness must surely be blind), but is also cruelly premonitory. Beatrice-Joanna is about to choose De Flores to partake of her thoughts, a choice which brings an infinitely greater darkness than "absence" to her love for Alsemero, and which ultimately leads to her recognition of the Vice as a "wondrous necessary man" as he sparkles in the darkness of the last act. Beatrice-Joanna, it seems, is blinded by a lust which her romantic belief system does not merely prevent her from recognising, but causes her

Footnotes

18 Frost glosses this reference to her father: as far as I regard my father's authority ("name") or in so far as I respect the family name (by marrying well) or in so far as I heed the name of Piracquo alone, Selected Plays, p.328n.
3.2

to set above all other considerations.\textsuperscript{19}

This doubly ironic presentation of Beatrice-Joanna, which exposes her "love" as of lust while simultaneously comparing her with Eve, is compounded by the implications of her portrayal. Her fatal misjudgement of character and complete lack of moral awareness as she manipulates those around her, for example, can be attributed to the combination of her lustful nature as fallen woman and her romantic self-casting as a Petrarchan goddess, with attendant status and power.\textsuperscript{20} This allows her to see her own desires as divine, Alonzo as a mere impediment to their fulfilment, and De Flores as a useful tool with which to implement her right to remove that impediment.

This assumption of power is also evident in Beatrice-Joanna's effortless domination and manipulation of the men who "love" her, Alsemero and Alonzo. Both are prepared to "worship" Beatrice-Joanna and allow this domination because their romantic illusions and expectations coincide with hers; they take her, as she takes herself, as a chaste Petrarchan goddess. Interestingly, each expresses this belief most strongly just as an unfaithful Beatrice is in the process of successfully manipulating him. Alonzo's response to his

Footnotes
\textsuperscript{19} Again, the reality underlying her speech is heavily emphasised (as she finishes) by the emblematic entrance of De Flores, who as Ornstein points out: provides an apt commentary on her platonic musings. . . She voices the romantic ideal; he turns it seamy side out by translating it into realistic sexual terms (p.183).

\textsuperscript{20} Here I am discussing the realistic or psychological reasons for her blindness. As I shall suggest, it also carries symbolic implications (see below, pp.193-4).
brother's warning, for example, links his belief in her chastity with a romantic desire to act as her courtly champion, physically defending her faith against all comers in order to "prove" her purity:

I should depart
An enemy, a dangerous, deadly one,
To any but thyself, that should but think
She knew the meaning of inconstancy,
Much less the use and practice.

(II.ii.145-9)

The juxtaposition of this romantic speech and Beatrice-Joanna's postponement of their wedding (on the pretext of modesty) in order to further her desire for Alsemero, shows Alonzo's attitude to be dangerously naive.21

Similarly, it is immediately after Beatrice-Joanna has organised the bed-trick (again on the pretext of modesty) and successfully mimicked the effects of the virginity test in order to conceal her adultery that Alsemero gives fulsome expression to a sentiment identical to Alonzo's:22

My Joanna,
Chaste as the breath of Heaven, or morning's womb
That brings the day forth, thus my love encloses thee.

[Embraces her]

If anything, the irony here is even more brutal, since Beatrice's successful manipulations at this point are designed to continue an illusion which is now a physical, as well as a moral fiction.

Footnotes
21 Tomazo's instant recognition of both the reality of Beatrice-Joanna's condition and the danger that his brother's continuing illusion will lead to heavily underlines this irony.
22 This scientific "proof" of her virginity parallels Alonzo's chivalric one, underlying the quixotic folly of attempting to prove the purity of a member of the more depraved sex.
It need hardly be added that since both Alonzo and Alsernero are Beatrice-Joanna's "husbands" at the time of these incidents, the irony of their situations when coupled with the heavy Edenic allusions constitutes a savagely Pauline criticism of the Petrarchan convention.

Besides being shown as dominating and abusing her "husbands," in direct contravention of Christian doctrine, Beatrice-Joanna is also portrayed as a parody of the Petrarchan "cruel fair." Traditionally this cruelty was as integral a part of the Petrarchan woman's elevation as her power, because the woman's purity, or unattainability, makes her real source of power withheld sexual consent. Since the desire of the man drives him to seek this sexual consent, the power of the woman is directly proportional to the desire of the man. As the traditional Petrarchan goddess remains unattainable, however, the withholding of sexual consent becomes cruelty, inflicting the pain of unrequited love on her suitor. Again, the greater the desire, the more "cruel" her rejection.

In this context Beatrice-Joanna's rejection of Alonzo on the grounds of sexual modesty, or reluctance, represents an ironic version of the Petrarchan goddess's frigid rejection. Her withdrawal from him is not to preserve her chastity, but to satisfy her desire for another man, and the "cruelty" Alonzo is to suffer is not that of unrequited love, but of

Footnotes
23 She says to her father, for example:

I cannot render satisfaction
Unto the dear companion of my soul,
Virginity, who I thus long have liv'd with,
And part with it so rude and suddenly.

(1.1.193-6)
"cruel" murder. Moreover the play suggests that this rejection is synonymous with her desire for Alsemero; in other words, that Beatrice-Joanna's eagerness for Alonzo's murder and her lust for Alsemero are facets of the one appetite. As Ricks points out (in a slightly different context), this conflation is reflected in the word "blood":

and so the inexorable laws which are caught in the unity of the word insist . . . that Beatrice's lust must cause murder and be trapped by De Flores' lust.

This conflation is reflected in Beatrice-Joanna's manifest "cruelty" toward De Flores. While her vitriolic attacks on him certainly constitute sexual rejection, they are far from the icy withdrawal and neglect that is traditional in rejection by the "cruel fair." Indeed, their intensity and passion rather seem to suggest a subconscious attraction toward him that approaches his own, as Christopher Ricks points out:

How far are we to take her initial loathing for him as sexual in origin? Certainly from the start of the play, she is far from indifferent to him; her thoughts return again and again to him, with obvious fascination; and there is more than mere dislike in the violent episode of the glove, which Middleton added to the original story. She herself is heard to say that "My loathing was prophet to the rest, but ne'er believ'd" (V.iii.156-7). And in support of such a view, one might perhaps instance those pregnant interchanges with De Flores, where for all her simple cunning and, in the later scene, outraged modesty, she picks up again and again the words which are tragically

Footnotes

24 She calls herself a "cruel murd'ress" when attempting to justify herself to Alsemero (V.iii.65).
25 This eagerness is suggested through the rising excitement in her duet with De Flores as she exhorts him to murder Alonzo.
26 "The Moral and Poetic Structure of The Changeling" Essays in Criticism 10 (1960), p.293. He notes that this theme is also found in The Old Law, where Hippolita [Ricks says Cleanthes in error] says to Eugenia "Thy lust for blood proclaims thee now a strumpet" (IV.ii.264-6).
capable of a double meaning. 27

It is interesting to note, in this connection, that (as her exultant reflection on her strategy reveals) Beatrice-Joanna identifies her antipathy toward De Flores with the emotion which drives her to have Alonzo murdered: 28

I shall rid myself
Of two inveterate loathings at one time,
Piracquo, and his dog-face.
(II.ii.144-6)

Beatrice-Joanna's simultaneous attraction and repulsion toward De Flores can, therefore, be seen as an externalised conflation of the twin aspects of her lust, which manifests itself both as a vindictive blood-lust, or "loathing", and as a sexual lust or "loving." 29

At a symbolic level this interaction between the Vice and his victim reflects a contradiction within Beatrice-Joanna between her eagerness to accept and indeed celebrate lust, and her simultaneous refusal to recognise the ugly reality of her motivation. Likewise, De Flores' role as the murderer of Alonzo reflects the part lust plays in Beatrice-Joanna's

Footnotes
27 Ricks, p.302-303. Other critics who espouse this viewpoint are Baines, p.104, Joseph Duffy ("Madhouse Optics in The Changeling" Comparative Drama 8 (1974) p.188), Douglas Duncan "Virginity in the Changeling" English Studies in Canada 9 (1983) p.33), Ornstein, p.182, Samuel Schoenbaum (Middleton's Tragedies p.160), and Thomson, p.xii. Gorley Putt, whose article "The Tormented World of Middleton" (TLS August 2nd, 1974) is devoted to proving that the "naked nerve" of the play is Beatrice-Joanna's "sexual obsession" with De Flores, represents the most extreme example of this reading.

28 This equation is also implied by her conception of her strategy as akin to that of great men, who "make much of poison,/ [and] Keep one to expel another" (II.ii.46-47).

29 Alsemero underlines this aspect of Beatrice-Joanna when he observes (with unconscious irony) "There's scarce a thing but is both lov'd and loath'd" (I.1.125).
murder, just as the trust and admiration Alonzo, Alsemero and Vermandero evince toward "honest De Flores" reflects their belief in Beatrice-Joanna's sexual honesty. 30

When Beatrice-Joanna, in prosecuting the murder of Alonzo, enlists the aid of the Vice, there is a particularly interesting interaction between psychological complexity and symbolic significance, with both undercutting her role as Petrarchan goddess. Psychologically, it is her supreme confidence in her Petrarchan power which leads Beatrice-Joanna to misjudge De Flores so badly. Assuming that his only use—indeed his divine vocation 31—is as the means by which she can obtain the object of her desire, she interprets his evident sexual desire as Petrarchan adoration akin to that of Alonzo and Alsemero. 32 Hence the more De Flores reveals his desire for her, the more confident Beatrice-Joanna becomes not only of her power over him, but also of her inviolate status as a Petrarchan goddess.

Symbolically, the interaction between De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna in this scene constitutes the successful

Footnotes
30 When he is finally disillusioned, Alsemero asks Beatrice-Joanna "Are you honest?" (V.iii.20).
31 She says the ugliest creature Creation framed for some use, yet to see I could not mark so much as where it should be! (II.iii.43-45) The manifest use for which De Flores has been framed makes this speech cruelly ironic.
32 De Flores underlines both her blindness and the real basis of such such love by pointing out that his "Petrarchan" gestures were an index of his desire: Did you not mark, how I wrought myself int't? Nay, sued and kneeled for't? Why was all that pains took? (III.iv.109-110)
temptation of the Vice, which invariably involves the persuasion of the victim to commit a sin which will then put the latter in the power of the Vice. Consequently Beatrice-Joanna's failure to recognise her danger is entirely traditional. Since the Vice is merely a dramatic metaphor for the vice which is already working within the victim, such blindness is inevitable.

The manifold implications and levels of suggestion involved in Middleton's elaborate "setting-up" of Beatrice-Joanna all lead inevitably to her rape, an event which systematically cuts down every aspect of her previous elevation. Indeed, the rape functions as a nexus in the play, with the action, imagery and thematic significance spiralling into it and subsequently arising out of it. It is this spiralling effect that is responsible for the gathering tension in the first half of the play, as the audience watches a blithely unaware Beatrice-Joanna plunging headlong into an inevitable and unwilling union with the man she hates. The same effect, however, is also responsible for the lack of sympathy aroused by her plunge, since it indicates, cumulatively, that her fate is not only of her own making, but is also, in every respect, aptly retributive.

Since De Flores is a Vice figure, his rape of Beatrice-Joanna can be seen as emblematic not only of her conquest and the vice lust, but also (given his role as agent in Alonzo's murder and hence facilitator of her adulterous second marriage) of Beatrice-Joanna's embrace of murder and
adultery. Her reluctance and aversion in this context reflect her refusal to comprehend the ugly reality of her sins.

Beatrice-Joanna's rape, then, must be seen as part of the Vice's role as moral instructor. The key to this educative aspect of Beatrice-Joanna's rape is her virginity, which as the only "virtue" she is capable of recognising, allows her to ignore the reality of her sins. Hence rape is the only means by which De Flores can force her to comprehend not only her fallen condition, but also her adultery. Ultimately, indeed, these are the only two moral truths she learns. Rather than seeing herself as a chaste goddess, she is forced to acknowledge her relationship with Eve, and spends the rest of the play attempting to conceal her adultery from Alsemero. Her dying speech reveals that her rape is the only moral lesson that has registered with her:

Beneath yon stars, upon yon meteor
Ever hung my fate, 'mongst things corruptible;
I ne'er could pluck it from him; my loathing
Was prophet to the rest, but ne'er believed;
Mine honour fell with him, and now my life.
(V.iii.154-158)

This limited vision can be seen as a grim justification of Lolio's bawdy assertion concerning the genital "sight" that

Footnotes

33 Alsemero's description of De Flores to Beatrice-Joanna as "your lust's devil, / Your adultery!" (V.iii.53-4) operates (on the symbolic level of the play) at his expense, since De Flores' is the manifestation of the internal devil, lust that led Beatrice into adultery with Alsemero himself.

34 As she recognises the inevitability of her union with De Flores, she says:
   Was my creation in the womb so curs'd,
   It must engender with a viper first?
   (III.iv.165-166)
blind women must possess, given their vaginal "eye," since in opening Beatrice-Joanna's third "eye" De Flores grants her the only moral vision she will ever possess.

Before thus "enlightening" her, De Flores treats Beatrice-Joanna to a cogent exposition of the justice of his claim, based on the reality of his victim's moral situation. Since the dialogue involves the verbal pursuit of a mentally fleeing Beatrice-Joanna, and culminates in her surrender to the inevitability of sexual union with him, it is an instructive dramatisation of the rape that follows it, paralleling both its physical dynamics and its educative function.

Significantly, although De Flores begins by basing his claim on the grounds that he has earned her sexual consent, he responds to Beatrice-Joanna's attempt to exert her Petrarchan power over him by exposing the disparity between her virginity and her moral condition, which he implicitly compares with that of Eve:

Footnotes

35 He says "I'll never believe that [a woman can be struck blind]; for a woman, they say, has an eye more than a man" (III.iii.79-80).

36 He says:

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.97-100)

37 Her warning, for instance, that she "would not hear so much offence again/for such another deed" (III.iv.103-104), and that his behaviour is "so wicked" and his language "so bold and vicious" that she "cannot see which way [to] forgive it/With any modesty" (120-126), both assume an authority based on her purity or "honour".
Look but in your conscience, read me there,
'Tis a true book, you'll find me there your equal.
Push! Fly not to your birth, but settle you
In what the act has made you, y'are no more now.
You must forget your parentage to me:
Y'are the deed's creature; by that name
You lost your first condition, and I challenge you,
As peace and innocency has turn'd you out,
And made you one with me . . . .
Though thou writ'st maid, thou whore in thy affection!
'Twas chang'd from thy first love, and that's a kind
Of whoredom in thy heart; and he's chang'd now,
To bring thy second on, thy Alsemero,
Whom . . . If I enjoy thee not, thou ne'er enjoy'st.
(III.iv.132-147)

In a sense, this speech functions allegorically, representing
De Flores' announcement of his identity, since his presence on
stage is a reflection of his existence in Beatrice-Joanna's
"conscience." As he points out, in instigating the murder of
Alonzo she has already lost her "first condition," and is
consequently "one" with the Vice, a union which occurred when
she accepted lust as her ruling motive and "chang'd from [her]
first love." At a realistic level, however, he suggests that
as a "whore" she has forfeited her right to refuse him and
indeed, deserves her punishment.

The rape, then, has a powerful punitive, as well as
educative, function, both equally contingent upon the
significance of Beatrice-Joanna's virginity. In addition to
being the only "virtue" she recognises, it is also the symbol
of purity upon which both she and her lovers base her
elevation to the status of Petrarchan goddess. In destroying
this symbol, her rape topples her from her Petrarchan
pedestal, and humbles her by forcing her down to her true
level, that of Eve. And since this virginity, or the sexual
rejection which it symbolises, is also the basis of her Petrarchan power over the (biblically) superior sex, De Flores' rape of Beatrice-Joanna also destroys this power, restoring their relationship to sex-role "normality," as Paula Johnson points out:

Our laudable modern concern for civil rights should not blind us to the fact that . . . Beatrice and De Flores here assume the roles proper to the sexes in Jacobean society. Their dependency inverts: the woman relinquishes her unnatural tyranny, the man escapes his unnatural servitude. 38

It is a return emblematised in Beatrice-Joanna's action in kneeling to beg at De Flores' feet, neatly inverting the earlier Petrarchan tableau in which De Flores knelt at her feet, begging for the "service" which ultimately allowed him to reverse their roles. 39

This reversal is also symbolically significant, since as the inverted tableau suggests, Beatrice-Joanna and the Vice exchange roles. Her rape at his hands constitutes an exact inversion of the power and cruelty he suffered previously at hers, an inversion which reflects the status which she has granted to lust. Once this vice has her in its power, she must suffer the painful consequences of its control.

Because this pain is the inverse of Beatrice-Joanna's Petrarchan "cruelty" De Flores' action is doubly appropriate.

Footnotes
39 The incident with the Petrarchan love-token presages this return to normal roles. Although Beatrice would rather wear De Flores' "pelt tanned in a pair of dancing pumps" than that he should "thrust [his] fingers into her sockets", her desire to remain above him, with him beneath her feet, is thwarted by the rape, which physically sets him over her.
As he points out, in raping her he will remove the "cruel" rejection which is causing him pain ("I live in pain now: that shooting eye /Will burn my heart to cinders" [III.iv.152-153]). In addition, however, his action can be seen as the most appropriate response to, and punishment for, the depravity which fuels her unconscious attraction to him. Associated with this idea is the implication that once initiated into the sexual pleasure that she "really" desires, Beatrice-Joanna will come to welcome it, as De Flores suggests: "Thou'lt love anon/What thou so fear'st and faint'st to venture on" (III.iv.170-171).

To recap, then, the aptness of Beatrice-Joanna's rape is three-fold. Firstly, it constitutes the perfect means with which to strike at the heart of her Petrarchan power and status in the only way that she is capable of recognising. Secondly, it is presented as the inevitable consequence of her own depravity, since her unacknowledged desire for De Flores reflects her "real" attitude to the lust which he embodies. Finally, her rape restores Beatrice-Joanna's sex-role to Pauline "normality."

While this punitive education represents a savage attack on the Petrarchan convention (particularly since it presents De Flores as, in a sense, the ultimate Petrarchan lover⁴⁰) its

Footnotes
⁴⁰ Not only is he qualified for this role by his devotion, retrieval of the love-token and murderous "service" (as he points out, he "kneeled" and "sued" for it in the best Petrarchan tradition [III.iv.105-110]), but as his "judgement," insight into character and fidelity are all qualities Beatrice-Joanna mistakenly believes Alsemero to possess, De Flores can be seen to fulfill the "reality" of her romantic requirements. In this context
presentation of Beatrice-Joanna is extremely disturbing. Not only does she deserve to be raped, but in fact she unconsciously wants it to happen. Indeed, what appears to the uninitiated to be the intensity of her distress, aversion and denial is effectively presented as an index to the intensity of her hidden desire. Since the desire to humble, subjugate and punish women for their sexual denial is not merely implicit in The Changeling but reinforced theologically, morally and sociologically, it becomes difficult to avoid the conclusion that rather than objectifying "the covert wish of men and women alike for pleasure without blame because without consent," Beatrice-Joanna's sexual fall closely resembles an elaborately justified male rape fantasy.

This powerful movement, allotting the ultimate responsibility for this rape to its victim is a disturbing development of Castiza's rape in Hengist, which it closely resembles, particularly in the light of Horsus's untenable suggestion that the chaste queen is being punished for the

Footnotes

**Ornstein's comment is very interesting:**

[Beatrice] instinctively feared in him that which was latent in her . . . . She must know De Flores in order to know herself, for only he can free her from the chains of convention and of family duty. He is her Petrarchan lover; his single-minded, reckless, consuming sexual hunger is the closest approximation she will find to the literary dream of absolute passion. (p.187)

41 Johnson, p.334.

42 With the rape as a dramatised metaphor of Middleton's ironic portrayal, since both de-throne her with equal thoroughness, it is interesting to note that: the Vice acts as surrogate for the dramatist . . . [so that] the ironies of mankind's behaviour can be made evident by direct homilectic lectures, symbolic props, symbolic episodes, and rather explicit verbal ironies. Kirsch, p.85
sexual denial implicit in her virtue. In The Changeling this suggestion, far from being untenable, becomes the central justification for the rape, since the conflation of the earlier play's virgin and whore figures in an innately depraved Petrarchan goddess transforms Castiza's chaste rejection into Beatrice-Joanna's lustful and perverse cruelty.

This disturbing development is compounded by an accompanying development in the Vice figures. The intensification of the dark glamour and impact of Horsus (arising out of the fusing of "human" motivation with the vice which he personifies) is increased still further in De Flores by the removal of the Vice's male victim, so that De Flores both symbolises Beatrice-Joanna's desire and desires her himself. This intense focus provides the Vice with a unity of intent and significance that vastly increases his impact and credibility as a character (removing the Vice's characteristically indeterminate motivation) while lending him a moral significance that is closer to the morality play than those of other Jacobean Vices. The resulting contrast between De Flores' dramatically powerful focus on Beatrice-Joanna and her own blind and arrogant egocentricity diminishes the
sympathy that her plight should arouse in the audience.\footnote{This effect is increased by the fact that like Horsus, De Flores is capable of expressing his lust for Beatrice-Joanna with a tenderness which is in stark contrast to her own selfishness. His dying speech, for example, follows her shabby betrayal:

\begin{quote}
Make haste, Joanna, by that token to thee;
Canst not forget, so lately put in mind,
I would not go to leave thee far behind.
\end{quote}

(V.iii.175-177)}

Finally, this conflation of the rape victim with the victim of the Vice constitutes the ultimate allegorical statement allotting the responsibility for the rape to its victim. Since De Flores is the manifestation of the lust which drives Beatrice-Joanna to marry Alsevero, The Changeling can be seen on one level as a symbolic dramatisation of Horsus's earlier assessment of Roxena:

\begin{quote}
'tis her cunning
The love of her own lust, which makes a woman
Gallop down hill as fearless as a drunkard.
(I.iii.185-187, my emphasis)
\end{quote}

Insidiously disturbing, the elements of this comprehensive Petrarchan dethroning only increase when considered in a wider context within the play. For here, as in the comedies and tragicomedies, an overwhelming focus on a wife's adultery reinforces the play's emphasis on female depravity. While the sub-plot is exclusively concerned with the prospective infidelity of Isabella, the main plot revolves around the complexities of Beatrice-Joanna's double adultery. Even Diaphanta is presented as betraying Jasperino, who tells Alseremo "to that wench/I pretend honest love and she deserves it" (IV.ii.89-90). More importantly, just as Beatrice-Joanna is presented as responsible for her own rape, so she shares
the responsibility for her husband's adultery with Diaphanta. Once again, where Castiza was the victim of her husband's infidelity, that of Alsemero paradoxically makes him the victim of his wronged wife.

This gender presentation is reinforced by the sub-plot. Isabella's successful resistance to temptation, for example, is the result of a cynical recognition of the "reality" of that temptation, reinforced by (and indeed reflected in) the crudely obvious educative action of Lollio, the Vice figure of the sub-plot. Isabella highlights the fact that women are lustful by nature, because it is this knowledge which enables her to recognise and resist the persuasion of the vice/Vice.

Moreover the sub-plot also confirms the main plot's suggestion that women are ultimately responsible for the sexual morality of men, since the sexual behaviour of Lollio, Antonio and Franciscus depends entirely on Isabella. She tacitly acknowledges this responsibility when she assesses the temptation presented by Antonio in terms which suggest that male sexual attraction toward beauty is as involuntary and inevitable as magnetic attraction:

Footnotes

44 Just as Beatrice-Joanna's failure to recognise the reality of her lust for Alsemero is reflected in her blindness towards De Flores, so Isabella's cynical clear sightedness can be related to Lollio's swift warning, which in addition to educating Isabella on the consequences of transgression, clearly reflects her cynical attitude to Petrarchan "love." After parroting Alsemero's "Petrarchan" seduction, for example, he says:

and so it follows, but is not this the more foolish way? Come sweet rogue; kiss me, my little Lacedemonian. Let me feel how thy pulses beat; thou hast a thing about thee would do a man pleasure, I'll lay my hand on't. (II.iii.242-245)
Here the restrained current might make breach, 
Spite of the watchful bankers; would a woman stray, 
She need not gad abroad to seek her sin, 
It would be brought home one ways or other: 
The needle's point will to the fixed north; 
Such drawing arctics women's beauties are. 

(III.iii.219-224)

Just as Eve was originally responsible for the fall of Adam, so the responsibility for male morality remains with her descendants.

In this speech, moreover, Isabella suggests that what really motivates women to commit adultery is lust. Rather than seeking the man she loves, Isabella's "woman" is seeking her "sin." The implication, that the identity of the man involved is immaterial, is reinforced by Lollio's attempt to seduce her:

Come, there are degrees, one fool may be better than another. . . . Nay, if thou giv'st thy mind to fool's-flesh, have at thee! 

(III.iii.227-231)

This idea subtly reinforces the main plot's presentation of Beatrice-Joanna as driven not by love for Alsemero, but by a desire to satisfy her own lust; a desire which ultimately leads to her sexual violation by the personification of that lust.45

Footnotes

45 This implication is behind De Flores' cynical commentary as he watches Beatrice-Joanna entertain Alsemero:

I have watch'd this meeting, and do wonder much 
What shall become of t'other; I'm sure both 
Cannot be serv'd unless she transgress; happily 
Then I'll put in for one; for if a woman 
Fly from one point, from him she makes a husband, 
She spreads and mounts then like arithmetic, 
One, ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, 
Proves in time suitler to an army royal. 

(II.ii.57-64)

Since Beatrice-Joanna does, within the space of a few days, progress from her husband Alonzo, to Alsemero and
Finally, at a realistic level the sub-plot suggests that one of the reasons for Isabella's marital virtue is the degree to which she is watched and guarded. Alibius and Lollio's discussion on the adulterous propensity of young wives leads them to watch her closely, and as a result the moment she is tempted Lollio moves swiftly to leave her in no doubt about the consequences of succumbing to such temptation. Since she is not earlier given the chance to reject Antonio, the suggestion seems to be that suspicion is justified and guarding is necessary.

The situation in the sub-plot complements and reinforces the main plot, where Vermandero, Alsemero and Alonzo trust Beatrice-Joanna implicitly, and are consequently subjected to various degrees of pain and dishonour. The parallel is made explicit when the disillusioned Alsemero says to Beatrice-Joanna:

meantime you shall
Be my prisoner only. Enter my closet;
I'll be your keeper yet. (V.iii.85-87)

The implication is that his mistrust and dominance of Beatrice-Joanna have come too late.

This attitude reflects the fact that Alsemero has been forced by the depravity of his bride to adopt the power appropriate to his role as her husband. Unlike Adam, Alsemero finally responds to the dictates of reason and rejects his wife, successfully avoiding the repeat of the fall that she

Footnotes
then De Flores, the Vice's lecture on the moral implications of her behaviour proves, in fact, correct.
experiences. This emergence of an apparently superior morality along with his belated assumption of conjugal power is reflected in the way their relationship in the second half of the play is parallels that of Eve and God (rather than Eve and Adam):

Although she continues to give lip service to her love for Alsemero, she has once again changed her saint, and her avowed love for him is really fear: she dreads what she supposes to be his clear judgement, she spies on him, she tries to hide her loss of virginity just as Eve tried to hide her nakedness from God.

This parallel indicates the Pauline reality of their situation, since Alsemero's control over his wife should be like that of Christ over the Church. In the final scene, where he finally assumes this mantle of responsibility, he judges and condemns Beatrice-Joanna in words that echo God's banishment of the first couple from the garden. Then, as she and De Flores die, Alsemero comforts Vermandero with the observation that

justice hath so right
The guilty hit that innocence is quit
By proclamation, and may joy again.
(V.iii.185-187)

In this repeat of the Fall, it seems, it is only Eve who is banished from the garden, along with her vice. Once this

Footnotes

46 As Doob points out: "the emergent reason of Adam casts off the sin of Eve, thereby preparing us for a partially happy ending." (p.191).
47 Doob, p.192.
48 Doob points out that Alsemero's reference to Beatrice-Joanna's "ticklish heel" (V.iii.43-46) echoes God's warning to the serpent that Eve's heel should bruise his head, (p.191).
disruptive female element\textsuperscript{49} has been expelled by "justice" the two men who have been shocked and disillusioned by Beatrice-Joanna's depravity react to her death by uniting together in a father/son relationship which is presented as an adequate substitute for that between Vernandero and his daughter:

Sir, you have yet a son's duty living,  
Please you accept it; let that your sorrow,  
As it goes from your eye, go from your heart;  
Man and his sorrow at the grave must part.  
(V.iii.216-219)

This final affirmation of masculine unity and virtue in the aftermath of female betrayal can be compared with the last scene in The Old Law, which rings with the praises of Cleanthes, Evander and Leontes while the discredited Hippolita subsides into the faint which reflects her innately female weakness.

Ultimately, then, the central tenet of The Changeling's attack on Petrarchan convention is that it must be exposed as a dangerous and lustful inversion of Pauline doctrine. This is reflected in the play's balance of power, which begins with Beatrice-Joanna in the position of a Petrarchan goddess, whose elevated status and power over Alonzo and Alsemero are equally based on lust. Portraying the chaos that is the inevitable result of such an unnatural elevation, the play presents its Petrarchan heroine as a lustful descendant of Eve, plunging

Footnotes

\textsuperscript{49} Since De Flores is Beatrice-Joanna's vice personified, his death is part of hers. Similarly Diaphanta, as Johnson suggests (p.332), can be seen as personifying Beatrice-Joanna's virginity (in this context her name reflects its insubstantiality), and is consequently destroyed by De Flores.
blindly onward to a brutal and self-inflicted dethroning. In the final scene the balance of power reverts to "normality", with Alsemero, on Pauline authority, elevated to the status of God. Wielding a power based on reason, he judges and condemns Beatrice-Joanna before restoring an almost exclusively masculine peace at the end of the play.

It is difficult to imagine a more androcentric and aggressive presentation of women. All the elements of the earlier plays' unbalanced gender presentations, such as the widespread misogynistic comment, the focus on female adultery and depravity, and the privileging of the masculine gender are not only intensified in this play, but are brought to bear in the punishment of its heroine. Her portrayal can also be seen to contain the most negative elements found in earlier female characters. Her moral blindness, for example, is greater than those of either of the Duchesses (in More Dissemblers and The Witch), and it is combined with the amoral and manipulative sexual aggression displayed by lustful murderesses such as Francisca (in The Witch), Eugenia (in The Old Law) and Roxena (in Hengist).

This harsh portrayal is augmented by the play's central event, Beatrice-Joanna's rape. The elaborate justification of

Footnotes

50 It is interesting to note, in connection with this shift in power, that the Courtly Love or Petrarchan convention involved:

the importation into amatory situations, by a kind of serious parody, of Christian feeling and ritual, especially in the cult of the Virgin Mary. Thus the lady is exalted and worshipd [sic]; the lover prays to the god of love; there are saints of love and lists of commandments; [and] the lover sins and repents. (Abrams, p.35)
this act as a fully-deserved and unconsciously desired punishment for her depravity and blind arrogance is reinforced by the allegorical significance of her rapist, De Flores. Since he is a manifestation of her own inner vice, she is, by the play's cruellest irony, inflicting punishment on herself.

The Changeling, then, is the perfect example of the dangers inherent in reading Middleton as a psychological realist, since such a reading involves accepting as "realistic" a presentation of women that is at once rigidly Pauline and savagely misogynist.
Where The Changeling condensed Herrigist's uneven female focus into a tight analysis of its heroine, the broad satiric emphasis of Women Beware Women in turn diffuses The Changeling's intense vision, extending it to cover all three of its heroines. One of the most obvious consequences of this satiric diffusion is a loss of immediacy. Rather than forcing the audience to participate in an intense emotional experience, Women Beware Women distances them from the dramatic action, inviting an intellectual rather than emotional response. The play's Vice figure, Livia, adds to this effect, in that, unlike the playwright's male examplars of this kind, whose symbolic significance is both condensed into one vice and directed toward a single victim, Livia represents unholy matrimony or marital abuse, thus reflecting the vices of all the play's major characters. Whereas the narrowly focussed male Vice figures contribute to the emotional intensity of the plays they inhabit, Livia's more general significance has the opposite effect, defusing the

Footnotes

1 Kirsch describes Livia as a Vice (p.84), and other critics who ascribe her symbolic significance appropriate to this role are Charles Hallett Middleton's Cynics (Salzburg: Universitat Salzburg, 1975, p.257), Baines (p.130), Ornstein (p.192.3) and Schoenbaum (p.124).
intensity that would otherwise invite the audience to empathise with the characters. This contrast is particularly evident in the rape scenes. In *The Changeling* the emotional participation of De Flores as both Vice and rapist lends his brutal moral enlightenment of Beatrice-Joanna an immediacy which obscures the emblematic significance of the episode. Livia's role in the rape of Bianca, however, has the opposite effect, as Kirsch points out:

The chess game, with Livia's comments upon it, guarantees . . . a dispassionate apprehension of [the moral inevitability of Bianca's rape] not only directly, by overtly instructing us how we are to understand [it], but also indirectly, by interposing itself between the [rape] and us. The game functions not as a metaphor which involves us more deeply in the action, but a simile which ensures our distance from it . . . . Livia is at once Middleton's presenter and his satiric commentator, and the action she directs and comments upon is at once an abstraction of human behaviour and a conscious theatrical demonstration of it."

The overall effect of this satiric distancing is in many ways like that produced by the comedies, which also lack the psychological intensity of *The Changeling*. Indeed, *Women Beware Women* strongly didactic emphasis on marriage and its satiric attack on male exploitation of women lend it a thematic resemblance to *The Roaring Girl* which is increased by the way that both plays involve a paradoxically "masculine" female figure controlling and executing the play's intricate intrigues. Such a comparison throws the harshness of Middleton's tragic vision into high relief. Rather than affirming marriage, the tragedy concentrates its condemnatory energy on the immoral use of marriage "to sanctify hot lust."

Footnotes
2 Kirsch, p. 92.
(IV.iii.18). Similarly, where Moll embodies "holy matrimony," and functions as a virtuous moral spokesman and promoter of marital harmony, Livia the Vice promotes adultery, and her destructive reign, as Juno Pronuba, over the farcical mayhem of the marriage masque can be seen as a ferocious inversion of the joyful affirmation of marital harmony at the end of The Roaring Girl.

Despite the awarding of the dramatically attractive Vice role to a woman Women Beware Women's emphasis on female morality also reflects the playwright's darkened tragic vision (as its title would suggest). All of the play's major female protagonists, for example, including the Vice figure Livia, experience a steep moral decline associated successively with lust, adultery, murder and finally death. In each case this decline begins with an abrupt personality change, as the woman appears suddenly to undergo a moral and psychological about-face as difficult to accept as it is unexpected. This personality change, moreover, distinguishes these women from their male counterparts, who in spite of their immorality remain psychologically consistent throughout. The most startling volte face is undoubtedly that of Bianca, whose transformation from naive and loving wife to callous whore appears to occur instantaneously as the consequence of an adulterous rape for which she cannot logically be held responsible. 3 This transformation, however, becomes much

Footnotes

3 Ornstein comments on the surprising nature of this transformation (p.194), and Michael McCannles goes into it in some depth "The Moral Dialectic of Middleton's Women Beware Women" (in Accompaninge the Players,
becomes much clearer if Bianca is considered in the light of
Beatrice-Joanna's portrayal.

From the outset of Women Beware Women, Bianca's attitude to
Leantio is markedly sexual. In the first scene, for example, she
begs a kiss from him, and on her next appearance she
exerts considerable pressure on Leantio to abandon his work
for "But this one night" (I.iii.49). Such a powerfully
sexual marital focus was, as Stone points out, considered by
Jacobean theologians to be tantamount to adultery:

In England the consensus of theological opinion also
stressed the prime importance of "matrimonial chastity", as
it was called, and identified breaches of it with breaches
of the seventh commandment against adultery. By
"matrimonial chastity" was meant moderation of sexual
passion . . . . The husband was expected to give his wife
sufficient satisfaction to avoid her being obliged to seek
consolation elsewhere, but not so much as to arouse her
libido to the extent of encouraging her to seek extra-
marital adventures. Thus both Protestant and Catholic
theologians condemned not only extra-marital fornication
and adultery, but also the introduction of strong sexual
passion into the marriage itself. All passionate lovemaking
was sinful, regardless of whether it took place inside or
outside marriage. Sensuality itself, the lust of the flesh,
was evil.

Bianca, however, never even considers that her behaviour with
Leantio could constitute such a sin. Indeed, her description

Footnotes

4 Leantio's anticipation of his reception also emphasises
her sexual desire for him:

After a few days' fast
She'll be so greedy now, and cling about me,
I take care how I shall be rid of her.

(iii.i.106-108)

5 Stone, p.499. Elsewhere he comments:
Evidence of hostility to sexual desire as a basis
for choice of a marriage partner can be found in
every commentator of the seventeenth and eighteenth
centuries, and it would be merely wearisome to stack
up a pile of quotations to prove so uncontested and
unchanging a point (p.281).
of her happiness reveals that far from recognising that her marriage is based on lust, she believes her marital status to be the pinnacle of womanly achievement:

Kind mother, there is nothing can be wanting
To her that does enjoy all her desires.
Heaven send a quiet peace with this man's love,
And I am as rich as virtue can be poor;
Which were enough, after the rate of mind,
To erect temples for content plac'd here.
I have forsook friends, fortunes and my country;
And hourly I rejoice in't. (I.i.125-132)

Like Beatrice-Joanna, Bianca has given "all her desires" moral and religious priority, assigning "Heaven" a secondary role as a type of spiritual warehouse whose function is to supplement her "love" on request. Indeed, by describing the attainment of these desires in terms of wealth, and then favourably comparing this wealth with the "poverty" of virtue, Bianca cheerfully inverts the traditional opposition between lust and virtue. Her reference to temples completes this inversion, suggesting that, like Beatrice-Joanna, Bianca has replaced Christian peace and contentment with their sexual correlatives.

Where in The Changeling the contrast between Beatrice-

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6 There is a close parallel in Beatrice-Joanna's speech to Alsemero:
I have within mine eye all my desires;
Requests that holy prayers ascend heaven for,
And bring 'em down to furnish our defects,
Come not more sweet to our necessities
Than thou unto my wishes. (II.ii.8-12)
7 Frost: "Virtue is sometimes poor, in that it fails to 'enjoy all its desires'", Selected Plays, p.195n.
8 This reference is echoed at the end of the play, when Bianca defends her adulterous second marriage: "'Tis nothing virtue's temple to deface;/But build the ruins, there's a work of grace"(IV.iii.68-69); an echo which links the two marriages, consequently undercutting Bianca's initial assumption of chastity.
Joanna's romantic illusions and the sexual reality of her motivation are consistently highlighted by the cynical comments and symbolic significance of De Flores, the comparable disjunction here between Bianca's behaviour and attitude is emphasised by Leantio. His crude reflections on their relationship emphasise its sexual basis, but more importantly, his vestigial moral vision leads him to the confused recognition that in marrying Bianca he has committed a sin:

I must confess I am guilty of one sin, mother, 
More than I brought into the world with me; 
But that I glory in: 'tis theft, but noble
As ever greatness yet shot up withal. . . .
    Never to be repented, mother,
Though sin be death; I had died, if I had not sinn'd, And here's my masterpiece. Do you now behold her! . . . . the best piece of theft
That ever was committed. And I have my pardon for't: 'Tis seal'd from Heaven by marriage. (I.i.34-45)

Although Leantio identifies his sin as theft, his assertion that it has been pardoned by marriage implies that it is rather fornication. The limitations of his moral awareness are considerable, but it nevertheless highlights the absence of any comparable awareness on the part of Bianca.

Leantio's attitude to sex also underlines what is presented as Bianca's excessively sexual attitude to their marriage. When she pleads with him to remain in bed rather than go to work, his reluctant refusal again functions at her expense.  

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9 He says to her:
    I could well wish myself where you would have me;
    But love that's wanton must be rul'd awhile
    By that that's careful, or all goes to ruin.
    As fitting is a government in love
    As in a kingdom: where 'tis all mere lust
    'Tis like an insurrection in the people
and their contrasting attitudes are further emphasised by his
Mother's reaction to Bianca's behaviour:

'Faith, daughter, y'are to blame: you take the course
To make him an ill husband, troth you do,
And that disease is catching, I can tell you;
Ay, and soon taken by a young man's blood,
And that with little urging. (I.iii.58-62)

In adopting a sexually initiatory role, and disobeying Leantio
in tempting him from his duty, Bianca is not only being a bad
wife, but is taking the course "To make [Leantio] a bad
husband."

The implication here, that she is following Eve's example
rather than adhering to the Pauline guidelines for wifely
behaviour, is reflected elsewhere in a series of allusions to
the Fall. These begin with the first speech in the play, when
the Mother greets Leantio with pious enthusiasm:

Welcome, with all the affection of a mother
That comfort can express from natural love:
Since thy birth joy (a mother's chiepest gladness
After she has undergone her curse of sorrows)
Thou wast not more dear to me than this hour
Presents thee to my heart. Welcome again.
(I.1.1-7)

The Mother's qualification of her love as "natural" (rather
than holy) and more importantly her joy in his birth with
reference to Eve's "curse of sorrows" emphasise not only
female frailty, but also, by contrast, Bianca's lack of such
religious awareness. The latter's subsequent speech underlines
their contrasting attitudes by echoing the mother's references
to Leantio's birth and the birth of joys:

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That, rais'd in self-will, wars against all reason;
But love that is respective for increase
Is like a good king, that keeps all in peace.
Once more, farewell. (I.iii.40-49)
I'll call this place the place of my birth now,  
And rightly too: for here my love was born,  
And that's the birthday of a woman's joys.  
You have not bid me welcome since I came.

LEANTIO That I did, questionless.
BIANCA No sure, how was't?
LEANTIO I have quite forgot it.
BIANCA Thus. [Kisses her.]
LEANTIO Oh sir, 'tis true,  
Now I remember well: I have done thee wrong;  
Pray take't again, sir. [Kisses him.]

(I.ii.139-146)

Bianca's failure, despite the similarity of their speeches, to parallel the Mother's acknowledgement of her fallen inheritance is emphasised by Bianca's sexually initiatory role in the kissing sequence, which presages her subsequent attempt to "make Leanto a bad husband." Both incidents link Bianca with Eve, and cast doubt on Leanto's assertion that his wife, unlike other women, intends "To go after the rate of my ability,/Not the licentious swindge of her own will" (I.ii.91-92).10

Well before her rape by the Duke, then, Bianca is shown to be, like Beatrice-Joanna, a lustful woman whose belief in romantic love gives her delusions of virtue, when in fact her fall has already occurred. This undercutting is particularly evident in her attempt to reject the Duke, which is based on a supreme confidence in her own virtue:

Footnotes

10 Frost glosses as: "to make love according to my sexual powers, and not the lawless drive of her own appetite," Selected Plays p.194n.
Make me not bold with death and deeds of ruin
Because they fear not you; me they must fright;
Then am I best in health. Should thunder speak
And none regard it, it had lost the name,
And were as good be still. I'm not like those
That take their soundest sleeps in greatest tempests;
Then wake I most, the weather fearfulest,
And call for strength to virtue. (II.ii.353-359)

Ironically, the storm imagery which Bianca employs to describe her moral vigilance is also applied by Leontio to their elopement. Not only does he describe the anger of her parents as "storms," but his subsequent painful memory clearly alludes to tempting "tempests":

Canst thou forget
The dear pains my love took, how it has watch'd
Whole nights together, in all weathers, for thee,
Yet stood in heart more merry than the tempests
That sung about mine ears (like dangerous flatterers
That can set all their mischief to sweet tunes);
And then received thee from thy father's window
Into these arms at midnight (III.ii.255-262)

At the height of her resistance to the Duke, therefore, Bianca is using imagery which emphasises her failure to heed the "thunder" of moral and parental prohibition when succumbing to the "tempest" of temptation with Leontio.

Significantly, the Duke's perhaps successful seduction speech not only parallels Bianca with Eve, but also redirects her storm imagery:

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11 He tells his Mother:
From Venice her consent and I have brought her
From parents great in wealth, more now in rage;
But let storms spend their furies. Now we have got
A shelter o'er our quiet innocent loves
We are contented. (I.i.49-53)

12 Middleton handles ambiguously Bianca's submission to the Duke, since she fails to answer this speech.
She that is fortunate in a Duke's favour
Lights on a tree that bears all women's wishes;
If your own mother saw you pick fruit there
She would commend your wit, and praise the time
Of your nativity. Take hold of glory...
Let storms come when they list, they find thee shelter'd.

(II.ii.372-376,385)

This echo of Leantio's earlier attitude ("But let storms spend their furies. Now we have got/A shelter o'er our quiet innocent loves"[I.i.51-52]) heightens the similarity between the two relationships, and consequently highlights the fact that this is the second time Beatrice has been seduced. Similarly, his overt Edenic allusions indicate that, like Beatrice-Joanna, Bianca is about to be forced to acknowledge the reality of her fallen condition. 13

Although the effect of Bianca's rape is not as immediate as that of The Changeling, it is in some ways more disturbing. For whereas Beatrice-Joanna's depravity is manifest, in her murder of Alonzo, before De Flores "educates" her as to its reality, Bianca cannot be said to "deserve," in any realistic sense, her rape. The implication is, therefore, that it is "deserved" because of her sexually fallen condition.

In this context her sudden change in attitude and behaviour, rather than reflecting a metamorphosis, must be seen as indicating the emergence of the "real" Bianca. This is implied by the speed with which she rationalises and justifies her new attitude:

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13 Livia's role in her rape, therefore, can be seen as part of her function as moral instructor.
Yet since mine honour's leprous, why should I
Preserve that fair that caus'd the leprosy?
Come, poison all at once! ... sin and I'm acquainted,
No couple greater; and I'm like that great one
Who, making politic use of a base villain,
He likes the treason well, but hates the traitor
(II.i.426-428,442-445)

This immediate adjustment to her new situation is both
intellectual and emotional; it seems that Bianca liked "the
treason well." Moreover she not only fails henceforth to show
any warmth, regret or compassion toward Leantio, but also
indulges in a number of jokes at his expense, suggesting that
the Duke is a better lover as well as provider. 14

Once again, this deficiency in Bianca's attitude is set
against Leantio's pain at her loss. For whereas Bianca adjusts
to her new partner with rapidity and enthusiasm, Leantio
cannot control his grief:

Why should my love last longer than her truth?
What is there good in woman to be lov'd
When only that which makes her so has left her?
I cannot love her now, but I must like
Her sin and my own shame too, and be guilty
Of law's breach with her, and mine own abusing;
All which were monstrous. (III.ii.334-340)

His bewilderment at the intensity of his pain despite his
intellectual recognition that Bianca neither deserves nor
desires his love points up her failure to exhibit such
feelings when rationalising her own situation. Although

Footnotes
14 In response to his concern at her lack of welcome she
replies that far from being unhappy she has had "the
best content that Florence can afford" (III.i.121-122).
Frost comments "'Florence' being the Duke, she suggests
that she has had the highest quality of sexual
satisfaction to be found," p.244n. Similarly, she later
suggests that Leantio lacks the equipment to sexually
satisfy her (IV.i.49-50).
Leantio finally resolves to hate Bianca, his decision is expressed as a default option, and lacks conviction.¹⁵

In spite of this resolve, moreover, and of his subsequent liaison with Livia, Leantio is not able to resist confronting Bianca. And though he initially matches her indifference, her assertion that they are both now better off plunges him into the uncontrollable rage in which he inadvertently reveals the pain that she is still able to cause him:

Y'are a whore! ... An impudent, spiteful strumpet! ... And to spite thee as much, look there, there read! [Gives letter.]

Vex! Gnaw! Thou shalt find there I am not love-starv'd.

(IV.i.61-66)

Leantio's attempt to awaken Bianca's jealousy by revealing Livia's love for him is grounded in the hope that like him, she is still emotionally involved in their relationship. Rather than experiencing jealousy, however, Bianca responds only with contemptuous disbelief.¹⁶ As Leantio leaves, she gives vent to a distaste that is a far cry from Leantio's intensely painful "hatred:"

I'll have this sauciness
Soon banish'd from these lodgings, and the rooms
Perfum'd well after the corrupt air it leaves.
His breath has made me almost sick, in troth.

(IV.i.105-108)

Moreover her subsequent complaint to the Duke suggests that

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¹⁵ [LEANTIO] Then my safest course,
For health of mind and body, is to turn
My heart and hate her, most extremely hate her;
I have no other way. (III.ii.340-343)

¹⁶ [BIANCA] [Aside] Is't possible? Her worship was my pand'ress.
She dote and send and give, and all to him?
Why, here's a bawd plagu'd home!••••

(IV.i.72-74)
she is at least aware of the consequences of such a complaint, if not manipulatively organising Leantio's murder.¹⁷

Leantio's limited recognition of his culpability in marrying Bianca¹⁸ serves to emphasise her consistent failure to acknowledge any responsibility for her actions. Her refusal to recognise the sexual appetite that motivated her first marriage is followed by her abrogation of responsibility for upholding which ultimately involves, obliquely, the arrangement of Leantio's death.

Similarly, when meditating on her fallen state, Bianca attributes it firstly to her restrictive upbringing and then, by implication, to fate, refusing to acknowledge the fact that it is the direct consequence of her illicit marriage.¹⁹

Footnotes

¹⁷ After telling the Duke of Leantio's new lover, she says:

He showed me her name, sir . . .
With an intent to spite me; so his heart said,
And his threats made it good; they were as spiteful
As ever malice utter'd; and as dangerous,
Should his hand follow the copy. (IV.i.117122)

¹⁸ As he watches the Duke and Bianca together, Leantio says:

Here stands the poor thief now that stole the treasure,
And he's not thought on. . .
O equal justice, thou hast met my sin
With a full weight! I'm rightly now oppress'd:
All her friends' heavy hearts lie in my breast.

(III.ii.91-92,97-99)

¹⁹ After dismissing the court ladies, she muses:

How strangely woman's fortune comes about!
This was the farthest way to come to me,
All would have judg'd that knew me born in Venice. . .
To meet it here, so far off from my birthplace,
My friends or kin'red. 'Tis not good, in sadness,
To keep a maid so strict in her young days;
Restraint breeds wand'ring thoughts, as many fasting
A great desire to see flesh stirring again. [days]
I'll nev'r use any girl of mine so strictly;
Howev'r they're kept, their fortunes find 'em out;
I see't in me. If they be got in court,
I'll never forbid 'em the country; nor the court,
Though they be born i' th' country. They will come to't,
interruption of this train of thought by Leantio, who is reminded of their elopement by her position at the window, emphasises the flaw in her reasoning. Her fall occurred (as her belief that strictly kept maids will inevitably experience ”wand’ring thoughts” suggests), when, in Venice surrounded by ”friends [and] kin’red”, she climbed out the window in order to elope with Leantio.

At her death scene, Bianca expresses an awareness of her own depravity: ”But my deformity in spirit’s more foul:/A blemish’d face best fits a leprous soul” (V.ii.204-5). The limits of this recognition, however, are emphasised when she reveals that she believes her adulterous liaison with the Duke to be the cause of this depravity, and hence her damnation:

Leantio, now I feel the breach of marriage
At my heart-breaking! Oh the deadly snares
That women set for women, without pity
Either to soul or honour! Learn by me
To know your foes. In this belief I die:
Like our own sex, we have no enemy . . . no enemy.
(V.ii.210-215)

While she finally acknowledges here the sin of adultery, the shifting of responsibility for her loss of ”soul and honour” to Livia involves two major failures of insight. The first of these is her belief that before her rape by the Duke her soul and her honour were spotless. This allows her to blame the Vice figure for a damnation which was already imminent. The

Footnotes

And fetch their falls a thousand mile about,
Where one would little think on’t. (IV.i.30-40)

20 This limited recognition closely resembles that of Beatrice-Joanna, which also involves an acknowledgement of her depravity (”Oh come not near me, sir, I shall defile you”[CH V.iii.149]) and a similar abrogation of her responsibility for it, blaming it on the Vice figure (”Mine honour fell with him”[CH V.iii.158]).
phrasing of the last line of her speech, however, ironically emphasises this lack of self-knowledge, since Bianca (rather than Livia) was her own worst enemy, as the Lord's ambiguous comment suggests: "See my lord, What shift sh'as made to be her own destruction" (V.ii.216-217).²¹

The second flaw in her understanding concerns the Duke himself. If, as Bianca seems to believe, her fall was the result of her adulterous liaison with him then surely she should blame him as the agent of her damnation; Livia, after all, was merely acting on his orders. This omission is a particularly revealing one, underlining the real and still unrecognised origin of Bianca's sin, a sexual appetite which blinds her not only to her own responsibility for her fate, but also to that of the object of her desire. Like her first speech in the play, which suggested that she valued "all her desires" above virtue, her final speech reveals that while admitting the vices of pride and ambition, Bianca finds consolation in the romantic aspect of her death. Once again she has set lust in position appropriate to religion:

Pride, greatness, honours, beauty, youth, ambition,
You must all down together; there's no help for't.
Yet this my gladness is, that I remove,
Tasting the same death in a cup of love. [Dies]
(V.ii.218-221)

Her self-delusion contrasts sharply with the Cardinal's commentary on her speech, which labels as lust what Bianca had consistently identified as "love:"

Footnotes

²¹ Holmes points out that the title Women Beware Women also means "women beware yourselves," p.164.
3.3

Sin what thou art these ruins show too piteously.
Two kings on one throne cannot sit together,
But one must needs down, for his title's wrong;
So where lust reigns, that prince cannot reign long.

(V.ii.222-225)

Ultimately, then, Bianca's decline and fall can be closely related to that of Beatrice-Joanna. Each woman begins with a belief in love, reinforced by a thoroughgoing spiritual complacency, which is undercut by the predominantly sexual nature of her motivation. At the same time each is paralleled with Eve, not only through allusion, but also in her behaviour, with Beatrice-Joanna's speeches consistently presenting her as the tempted Eve and Bianca's sexual assertiveness linking her with the fallen and lustful Eve. Each woman is deceived by her Vice figure who organises a rape morally instructive in that it exposes her deluded belief in her virtue and the fallen reality of her condition. Although both Beatrice-Joanna and Bianca are forced to acknowledge such a reality, this acknowledgement remains the extent of their self-knowledge.

Abrogating her moral responsibility, each woman blames the Vice for her fall, just as Eve attempted to blame the serpent.

In spite of her belief in romantic love, neither woman demonstrates genuine emotional involvement with her husband or

Footnotes

22 Beatrice-Joanna's rape ensured that she recognise not only her fallen condition, but also the adultery which was the reality of her relationship with Alsemero. Similarly, Bianca is forced by the Duke's rape to acknowledge a depravity which was already informing her actions, while her accidental murder of the Duke forces her to recognise herself as the murderess of her husband (a role she has already obliquely filled by setting the forces in motion which led to Leontio's death).
lover; each is portrayed as being more concerned to satisfy her desire than with the man involved in that satisfaction. Consequently both Bianca and Beatrice-Joanna are shown transferring their "love" from one husband to another more or less instantaneously, and then organising the murder of their first husband by their rapist.

In each case, moreover, the "female" failings of the Eve figure are highlighted by the superior reasoning ability, moral awareness and emotional involvement of her first lover, who ultimately dies as a result of his relationship. Thus the Edenic significance of the women's behaviour extends to include the men, who like Adam are unable to use their superior reasoning ability to resist the temptation of Eve.23

While in *Women Beware Women* Isabella's portrayal is less substantial than that of Bianca, she experiences a similar decline and fall. At the outset apparently more virtuous than Bianca, she reacts to the news of her uncle's feelings for her swiftly and directly:

Farewell all friendly solaces and discourses;  
I'll learn to live without ye, for your dangers  
Are greater than your comforts. What's become  
Of truth in love, if such we cannot trust,  
When blood that should be love is mix'd with lust?  
(I.ii.228-232)

The intolerable position that her father's exploitation has put her in arouses considerable audience sympathy for her, but her lament at the prospect of marriage to a congenital idiot,

Footnotes

23 Both Alonzo and De Flores die as a consequence of their desire/love for Beatrice-Joanna, but Alsemoro, as I have suggested, finally utilises his superior reason and resists repeating the Fall with his wife.
although eminently justified, contains certain ambiguous indicators:

Marry a fool!
Can there be greater misery to a woman
That means to keep her days true to her husband,
And know no other man, so virtue wills it!
Why, how can I honour and obey him,
But I needs must commit idolatry?
A fool is but the image of a man,
And that but ill made, neither. Oh the heartbreakings
Of miserable maids, where love's enforc'd!
The best condition is but bad enough:
When women have their choices, commonly
They do but buy their thraldoms, and bring great portions
To men to keep 'em in subjection;
As if a fearful prisoner should bribe
The keeper to be good to him, yet lies in still,
And glad of a good usage, a good look
Sometimes, by'r Lady. No misery surmounts a woman's:
Men buy their slaves, but women buy their masters.
Yet honesty and love makes all this happy,
And, next to angels', the most blest estate.
(I.ii.164-183)

While the first half of this speech rests virtuously in the doctrine that "Women is created to honour and obey the image of God in her husband", it also contains disturbing echoes of Bianca's attitude. Isabella's use of "wills" when describing the dictates of virtue, for instance, reveals that she relies on her own virtue to govern her moral behaviour, an attitude identical to that behind Bianca's assertion that when tempted she calls "for strength to virtue (II.ii.359). The authority each woman ignores is that of God.

Similarly Isabella's interpretation of religious doctrine

Footnotes

24 Frost, Selected Plays, p.204n.
25 Frost comments:
the choice of the final word is significant. We would expect the plea to be addressed to "Heaven"; but the virtue of the couple has seen no need of that "prayer and repentance" Constantius felt to be the one necessity in the world. School, p.65.
suggests that what she wants is to worship not the image of God in man, but the man himself, a suggestion of worshipping the creature that parallels Bianca's (I.i.129-130).

Moreover Isabella's complaint at the harshness of subjection to men even in the best of marriages, while politically sound in the twentieth century, would be considered highly unsound by a Jacobean audience. As her previous allusion to idolatry reminds us, such subjection is presented doctrinally as a required worship of God (imaged in man). In the context of the play this undercuts her previous intention to honour and obey her hypothetical husband looks forward to her eagerness to marry the fool so that she can use him to conceal her relationship with Hippolito.

The coup de grace to Isabella's "virtue," however, is the eagerness with which she embraces not only adultery, but also (in order to further it), marriage to the repellent Ward. This collapse in credibility is heavily underscored by Livia's constant (and consciously ironic) emphasis on Isabella's right to choice: 26

Let it suffice, you may refuse this fool,  
Or you may take him, as you see occasion  
For your advantage; the best wits will do't.  
Y'have liberty enough in your own will,  
You cannot be enforc'd; there grows the flower,  
If you could pick it out, makes whole life sweet to you,  
That which you call your father's command's nothing;  
Then your obedience must needs be as little. ...  
How weak his commands now, whom you call father!  
How vain all his enforcements, your obedience!  
(I.ii.113-120,158-159)

Footnotes
26 Baines points out that rather than creating evil, Livia merely brings it out (p.142). This is, of course, part of her role as a Vice figure.
Despite this ironic emphasis, Isabella embraces the idea of adultery with Hippolito with a revealing enthusiasm:

Have I passed so much time in ignorance,
And never had the means to know myself
Till this blest hour? Thanks to her virtuous pity
That brought it now to light! Would I had known it
But one day sooner! He had then receiv'd
In favours what, poor gentleman, he took
In bitter words: a slight and harsh reward
For one of his deserts. (II.i.181-188)

Even while virtuously rejecting Hippolito, Isabella was, it seems, experiencing an unacknowledged incestuous desire for him. In this context her "self-recognition" emphasises the fact that Isabella's abrupt change of attitude and behaviour, like Bianca's, represents the emergence of a "real" personality previously hidden beneath a facade of virtue. Allegorically, the interaction between Livia and Isabella constitutes the traditional temptation by the Vice; Isabella succumbs (like Beatrice-Joanna [CH II.ii]) because Livia is the manifestation of the vice which is already at work within her.²⁷

Like Bianca, Isabella takes the sexual initiative in her relationship with Hippolito,²⁸ and like Bianca also, but even

Footnotes
²⁷ Kirsch suggests this in passing, p.84.
²⁸ This sexual initiation takes a very similar form, as Barker points out (p.158), with Isabella flirtatiously kissing Hippolito. Her analogy between wine and kisses also echoes Bianca's subsequent bawdy witticisms with the Duke on the aphrodisiac qualities of wine:

When we invite our best friends to a feast
'Tis not all sweetmeats that we set before them;
There's somewhat sharp and salt, both to whet appetite,
And make 'em taste their wine well: so, methinks,
After a friendly, sharp and savoury chiding,
A kiss tastes wondrous well and full o' th' grape.

[She kisses him]
(II.ii.198-203)
more acutely, she suffers from a dangerous spiritual arrogance.\textsuperscript{29}

The parallels between the two women are underlined by Isabella's reaction when Livia suddenly forces her to face the reality of her relationship with Hippolito:

Was ever maid so cruelly beguil'd
To the confusion of life, soul and honour,
All of one woman's murd'ring! I'd fain bring
Her name no nearer to my blood than woman,
And 'tis too much of that. Oh shame and horror!

. . . -- 'Tis time we parted, sir . . . If any goodness
Rest in you, hope of comforts, fear of judgements,
My request is, I may nev'r see you more;
And so I turn me from you everlastingly,
So is my hope to miss you. But for her,
That durst dally with a sin so dangerous,
And lay a snare so spitefully for my youth,
If the least means but favour my revenge,
That I may practise the like cruel cunning
Upon her life as she has on mine honour,
I'll act it without pity.

(IV.ii.129–150)

Just as Bianca's failure to recognise her own lustful behaviour with I.eantio allows her to see her only sin as adultery, and consequently to blame Livia for a depravity which she is already feeling, so Isabella's refusal to acknowledge the sin of adultery leads her to see her only sin as incest, for which she also considers Livia to be solely responsible. This abrogation of responsibility allows Isabella, like Bianca, to continue in a state of self-righteousness (as her righteous rejection of Hippolito

Footnotes

\textsuperscript{29} Frost points out that she assures Livia of her capacity to remain silent ("Equal assurance may I find in mercy,/As you for that in me" [I.I.129–130]), by swearing on "the confident expectation of God's mercy at the Day of Judgement," \textit{Selected Plays} p.216n.
indicates) while paradoxically espousing murder.\textsuperscript{30} As usual, however, Middleton ensures that this abrogation of responsibility is highlighted ironically; here by the ambiguity inherent in "All of one woman's murdering".

Where Leantio's attitudes and behaviour contrast favourably with Bianca's, Hippolito's limited moral vision highlights the selected morality of his incestuous lover. For while he is not able to resist his desire for Isabella, for instance, his recognition both of its moral reality, and of his responsibility for it, points up her refusal to recognise her incestuous feelings:

\begin{quote}
I would 't were fit to speak to her what I would, but 'Twas not a thing ordain'd, Heaven has forbid it; And 'tis most meet that I should rather perish Than the decree divine receive least blemish. Feed inward, you my sorrows, make no noise; Consume me silent, let me be stark dead Ere the world know I'm sick. You see my honesty; If you befriend me, so. (I.ii.157-164)
\end{quote}

Similarly, although his righteous anger at his sister's relationship with Leantio is obviously hypocritical, his dying speech reveals that he alone among the doomed has achieved self-knowledge:

\begin{quote}
Lust and forgetfulness has been amongst us, And we are brought to nothing. ... Leantio's death Has brought all this upon us (now I taste it) And made us lay plots to confound each other. The event so proves it; and man's understanding Is riper at his fall than all his lifetime. She, in a madness for her lover's death, Revealed a fearful lust in our near bloods, For which I am punish'd dreadfully and unlock'd for; Prov'd her own ruin too. (V.ii.146-159)
\end{quote}

Footnotes
\textsuperscript{30} Isabella, it seems, still has "hope of comforts", as her hope to "miss" him in hell suggests (Frost comments "she hopes to avoid Hippolito in hell, by refusing to commit conscious incest," \textit{Selected Plays} p.288n.)
The only major character to recognise that lust and spiritual security are at the heart of all their falls, Hippolito (unlike the two women) accepts his guilt and the appropriateness of his punishment.

While Isabella does not, like Bianca and Beatrice-Joanna, transfer her allegiance from one husband to another, the major elements in her fall coincide closely with those of Bianca. Beginning the play in a state of spiritual self-satisfaction each is assisted on the path of sin by the Vice, Livia, who is responsible both for the emergence of the true personality of each woman and also, at the last, for the limited and reluctant moral awareness that each is finally forced to. The belief of the two women in love, however, and their abrogation of responsibility for what is in each case sexual aggression, or wantonness, means that neither is ever capable of more than the a forced recognition of her own depravity.

Moreover <i>Women Beware Women</i>suggests that Isabella and Bianca are both responsible for the fates of the men with whom they are involved. In Isabella's case this suggestion is limited to her part in sexually initiating a relationship after succumbing to Livia's temptation, and to the symbolic nature of Hippolito's death by Cupid's poisoned arrow. Bianca, however, is personally responsible (either indirectly or directly) for the deaths of both Leantio and the Duke. The kiss with which she receives her own poison from the lips of the dead Duke alludes to her responsibility for the fall of Leantio, by repeating their early interchange. Indeed, the
close paralleling between her two lustful marriages, and the fact that the poison she receives from the Duke unintentionally originated with her, reinforces the play's suggestion that it is Bianca's own depravity which was originally responsible both for her rape and for her fall.

This unbalanced gender presentation is completed by the Vice figure, Livia, whose degeneration is particularly revealing. Whereas the personality changes of the other two women are presented as the consequence of a form of self-revelation, that of Livia is more complex, since she possesses the composite personality common to all Jacobean Vice figures. Manufactured by the melding of the old morality Vice (who is essentially an amoral drive, or "homilectic formula"\(^{31}\)) with a human disguise of unconvincing and inconsistent passion and motivation, Livia is in any case something of a split personality.\(^{32}\) In this context her personality change, rather than reflecting the emergence of an unrecognised depravity seems to reflect a sudden readjustment of the two aspects of her role, so that the lineaments of the Vice are displaced by an emerging humanity.

Before this change (which occurs in Act III scene ii) Livia is possessed of the full complement of dramatically glamorous Vice characteristics, as Barker's comment indicates:

Footnotes

31 Spivack, p.195.
32 Like Horsus and De Flores, she occasionally attempts to identify her own motives with something approaching mystification as she attempts to inject certainty into her analysis (See, for example [VWH II.i.70-73] and [CH II.i.26-29]); as a Vice, she neither possesses nor requires motives.
Livia is magnificent throughout, fully deserving her reputation as one of Middleton's most memorable characters. . . . She is ostensibly amiable, supremely clever, and completely unscrupulous. . . . The [rape] scene is one of the finest in the whole of Jacobean drama, and Livia's performance one of the most astonishing. For, working as though by instinct and forming a perfect team with Guardiano, she does everything right--hits on exactly the right blandishments and plays on exactly the right weaknesses. Her artistry is so wonderful and her domination so complete that the whole scene can almost be described as a reflection of her personality. 33

As Kirsch implies, 34 Livia's cynical moral awareness is the consequence of the Vice's homilectic function. It is, as a result, reflected not only in her pragmatic attitude to her own marriages, but also in the cynicism with which she describes the effects of depravity in her instructive asides to the audience. 35 Significantly, this cynically accurate vision distinguishes her from the women in the play, linking her rather with the men, as Ornstein suggests:

Livia is a good companion--especially of men, who admire her unsentimentality, shrewdness and candour. Indeed, her pleasure in being treated as their equal helps to explain the callousness with which she betrays her own sex. 36

These "masculine" attributes, the hallmarks of her role which lend her equality with the play's men, however, disappear when Livia is attracted to Leantio. Rather than

Footnotes

33 Barker, pp.138-9.
34 See above, p.212n.
35 Her comment on Bianca's reaction to her rape is typical:
   Are you so bitter? 'Tis but want of use;
   Her tender modesty is sea-sick a little,
   Being not accustomed to the breaking billow
   Of woman's wavering faith, blown with temptations.
   'Tis but a quail of honour, 'twill away;
   A little bitter for the time, but lasts not.
   Sin tastes at the first draught like wormwood water,
   But drunk again, 'tis nectar ever after.

   (II.i.i.472-479)

36 Ornstein, p.193.
speaking of "lust" and "sin," she now reveals that for the first time in her life she is thinking in terms of "love:"

[I] never truly felt the power of love 
And pity to a man, till now I knew him. 

(III.ii.64-65)

Livia is now bereft of the traditional characteristics of the Vice: her subtle use of language, her manipulative skill and even her basic self-control are all swept away by the all-confounding "love" she experiences for Leantio:

I am as dumb to any language now 
But love's, as one that never learn'd to speak. . . . 
Where's my discretion now, my skill, my judgement? 
I'm cunning in all arts but my own love. . . . 
I have tried all ways I can, and have not power 
To keep from sight of him. (III.ii.139-140,315-16,352-353)

Stripped of her "masculine" attributes, Livia is reduced to the level of Bianca and Isabella.

While Livia's anger at Leantio's death contrasts sharply with the emotional vacuity of Isabella, it can be compared with the dying Bianca's "love" for the Duke, or Roxena's for Horsus. In any case, this all-encompassing rage is a far cry from the transient flashes of emotion experienced by her fellow Vices, and it leads her to revenge and to death with no more self-knowledge than the other women in the play.37

Livia's decline and fall clearly reflect a distinction between men and women found throughout Middleton's plays. Whereas the "lust" experienced by De Flores, for

Footnotes

37 While Livia recognises that she has lost her old mastery, in her dying speech, she fails to acknowledge the part lust has played in her downfall. Consequently she, like the other women, contrasts unfavourably with Hippolito's clear vision: "My subtlety is sped; her art has quitted me./My own ambition pulls me down to ruin" (V.ii.132-133).
example, is certainly his driving motivation, it completely
fails to affect his reasoning, or indeed any of his attributes
as Vice. In Livia's case, however, lust swamps all rational
thought, submerging the "masculine" characteristics
associated with her role.

Significantly, although Livia's masculine characteristics
disappear, at one level at least she continues to function as
the play's Vice. Her brutal enlightenment of Isabella, for
instance, reflects the morally instructive aspect of her role,
while her part in both the wedding masque and the intrigue
which plunges it into carnage are entirely consistent with the
Vice's function as a dramatic motive-force, instigating the
dramatic action by initiating intrigues and setting the other
characters against one another. In short, Livia retains the
Vice's demonstrative function, while losing that of moral
commentator.

This latter function is assumed by the Cardinal, who makes
his first appearance immediately after Livia's descent into
moral incoherence. Like Prince Phoenix, the Cardinal
resembles one of the morality virtues, and his chief role is
to provide a moral absolute against which characters are
measured. Consequently he and Livia function as a pair, with
the Vice demonstrating the workings of lust while the Cardinal
anatomises and supplements her demonstration with a series of
homiletic lectures.

Footnotes

38 Schoenbaum likens the Cardinal to Prince Phoenix, p.126.
39 Ornstein, p.198. Heinemann points out that the Cardinal
closely resembles the popular puritan preachers in
It is interesting here to compare Livia with Moll, her comic inverse. For whereas the Roaring Girl's triumphant masculinity symbolises both her own chastity, and the virtue attendant on her as the personification of marriage, Livia's role as the embodiment of lust, or lustful marriage, involves what seems to be a crude feminising. Divested of her masculine virtues, Livia is ultimately wrenched into line with the rest of the play's fallen Eves.

In many ways *Women Beware Women* (as its title would suggest) is Middleton's most consistent and comprehensive statement about women. Like his other plays, it contains an inordinate quantity of misogynistic sentiment, emanating from "good" and "bad" characters alike. This tissue of suggestion counterpoints a gender presentation in which men and women continue to repeat the Fall. Although more intelligent and aware than the women, the men, like Adam, are powerless to resist their sexually aggressive female partners, and ultimately join them in death and damnation. The women all experience Beatrice-Joanna's fall (with minor variations), failing to evince intelligence, moral awareness or self-knowledge as they descend through adultery and murder to their own destruction.

This distribution of intelligence and moral awareness in *Women Beware Women* is starkly emphasised in the Vice figure, Livia. Stripped of the masculine virtues and the moral authority traditionally associated with her role, she is

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Footnotes

40 Cf Baines, p.150.
finally revealed as another Eve. In this context the relationship between her and the Cardinal reflects the gender imbalance which is found throughout Middleton's plays. As female lust the fallen Livia crouches blindly at the bottom of the play's moral gradient, bereft of power, vision and verbal fluency and engaged in an orgy of pointless destruction, while at the top of this gradient the Cardinal stalks and thunders, savagely fluent, as masculine virtue triumphant.
C O N C L U S I O N

Overall, when the gender presentations of Middleton's plays are compared, a consistent pattern emerges. In every work, the male is in a privileged position, and the disparity in mental and moral capacity between the sexes increases as Middleton moves from comedy through tragicomedy to tragedy. This progression, however, does not necessarily reflect a change in the attitude of the playwright. It seems more likely, indeed, that this change rather reflects the treatment appropriate to each genre, particularly when Middleton's early description of female chastity (in The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased) as "nothing but allurement into lust" (6.14) is compared with his portrayal of the virginal Beatrice-Joanna in The Changeling.

The further we move through the Middleton canon, the more marked become the intellectual deficiencies of the women, whether virtuous or vicious. Conversely, their male counterparts evince an increasingly active intellect and corresponding growth of dramatic power.

This imbalance is compounded with the advent, in the tragicomedies and tragedies, of anti-Petrarchan satire. While the lust of the "romantically" deluded heroes (Sebastian in The Witch and Alsemero in The Changeling) only temporarily over-rider their reason, which restores them to moral, intellectual and marital authority, similarly deluded heroines such as the Duchess (in The Witch) and Beatrice-Joanna (in The Changeling) are permanently divested of both rational and
moral capabilities.

In the tragicomedies, such deluded women are forced by men who are their intellectual and moral superiors to abandon their vicious intrigues and to conform to social and religious mores. In the tragedies, however, rather than being controlled by their male counterparts, these women are harshly punished, publicly dishonoured, vilified and finally cast out by intellectually acute and morally upright men (Ambrosius in Hengist, Alsemero in The Changeling and the Cardinal in Women Beware Women).

This disturbing presentation of women is reinforced linguistically by an astonishingly dense and comprehensive series of allusions to religious, social and moral authority, counterpointed by a chorus of misogynistic comment from characters both male and female. It is completed by the portrayals of the women themselves, who, even when virtuous, are shown to be weak and intellectually inferior to their male counterparts. Such a dark vision of womankind reaches its peak in his later heroines. Invariably self-centred, manipulative, and intellectually and morally imbecile, they are presented in terms relentlessly vaginal, incapable of perceiving anything other than in terms of their own sexual desire. Such women wreak havoc on the men who are deluded or immoral enough to associate with them, before receiving what Middleton presents as richly deserved punishment.

As his plays reveal, one of the central features of Thomas Middleton's didacticism is a concern to demonstrate that the
Pauline subordination of women is not merely desirable, or even necessary, but indeed essential.
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