CONVENTION AND DEVICE IN THE PLAYS OF THOMAS MIDDLETON

by

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ABSTRACT

It has been the object of this thesis to display the handling of conventions and devices in the plays of Thomas Middleton with a view to arriving at an assessment of his qualities as a tragic artist.

The term, convention, is here interpreted as an artist's means, necessarily both traditional and ephemeral, to produce certain familiar effects in building and sustaining a world of illusion. By "device" is meant any means employed by the artist to achieve the effects he aimed at, means that he originated or that have no tradition behind them.

The conventions surveyed have been grouped in each chapter under four headings: theme, structure, characterization, and staging. The conventional themes are those of sex (chastity, cuckoldry, wittoldom, lust), of honour, of revenge and delay in revenge, of gulling and the trickster tricked, of ambitious climbing, and of the self-destructiveness of sin. The conventions of structure include intrigue plot-patterns, disguise-revelation patterns, de casibus rise and fall, the sin-repentance-punishment sequence of domestic tragedy, and the action-counteraction pattern of revenge tragedy. The main conventional characters are the gull and the tricked trickster, the chastity figure, the cuckold, the wittol, the lecher, the faithless wife, the wilful woman, the jealous husband, the tyrant figure (commanding fathers, uncles, and guardians, dukes and usurpers), the disguiser, the malcontent, the resolute Machiavellian, the dedicated revenger. The chief conventions of staging are those
of the syncopation of time (often secured through the use of
dumb-shows), the neutrality of space, the exploitation of
spectacle (masques, plays-within-plays, dumb-shows, and songs).

The thesis is composed of eight chapters, the first
four being preparatory to the next three which detail the handling of conventions in the three main tragedies. The last chapter attempts an assessment of Middleton as a tragic artist insofar as this may be determined by measuring his tragic conventions against the generic nature of tragedy.

Middleton's City comedies, The Family of Love, The
Phoenix, A Mad World, My Masters, Michaelmas Term, Your Five Gallants, A Trick to Catch The Old One, A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, and The Roaring Girl, are full of the conventions of intrigue, disguising, gulling, the trickster tricked, cuckoldry, and fortune hunting, of such stock figures as gulls, cuckolds, lustful gallants, lecherous old men, faithless wives, scheming misers, young wastrels, and greedy social climbers. Dumb-shows, masques, plays-within-plays, disguises, feasts, trials, mock-funerals, the fluid handling of space and the telescoping of time are further conventions abundantly illustrated.

The early tragedies, The Revenger's Tragedy and The
Second Maiden's Tragedy (for which Samuel Schoenbaum in Middleton's Tragedies has assembled the evidence of Middleton's authorship), display most of these conventions, albeit frequently tailored to suit the requirements of Senecan revenge drama. Intriguing, disguising, cuckoldry, the trickster tricked, and
fortune hunting appear here in much the same forms as in the City comedies, as do the conventions of character - gulls, cuckolds, lechers, social climbers - and such conventions as the fluid handling of space and the syncopation of time. Such Senecan conventions as the revenge theme, the revenger, the ghost, dumb-shows, the fatal revels, wholesale butchering, malcontents, and madmen also appear, too.

Most of these conventions are discoverable in Middleton's Fletcherian plays (More Dissemblers besides Women, No Wit, No Help, like a Woman's, A Fair Quarrel, The Witch, The Widow, and The Old Law). But here the conventions of surprise, of the improbable hypothesis, the Protean character, the theme of honour, the rhetoric of exalted sentiment, the middle mood, and lavish spectacle, conventions which are outstanding characteristics of the new vogue of drama introduced by Beaumont and Fletcher, are prominent, too. Like most of his contemporaries, Middleton kept alert to changes in dramatic fashion.

The first of his three late tragedies, however, shows that Middleton was sometimes puzzled by what his audience wanted. Hengist, King of Kent is a belated chronicle play that utilizes nearly all the major conventions that Middleton had previously employed, but which also embodies such conventions of the history play as British chronicle material, a de casibus structure, royal ambition, a loosely attached comic sub-plot, the speculum principis, tyrants, usurpers, climbers, Machiavellians, and malcontents. The theme of the self-destructiveness of sin
appears here, too. This is a tragic counterpart of the City
comedy theme of the trickster tricked. But, in his uncertain-
ty of what to give his audience, Middleton rather abruptly
switches the purpose of his play from depicting ambition to
displaying sordid and lustful intrigues.

His next tragedy, *Women, Beware Women*, by virtue of
its being in part a domestic tragedy embodies a good many of
the conventions of the City comedies. Such conventions of
domestic tragedy as the exemplum moral concerning the wages of
sin, the chain of vice, and the self-destructiveness of the
wicked appear as well. There is here also something of domes-
tic tragedy's four-fold pattern of repentance (contrition,
confession, affirmation of faith, and amendment of life), but
because *Women, Beware Women* is transformed in Act IV into an
Italianate revenge play that repentance pattern is cut short.
Although the play contains many of the conventions of revenge
drama (delay in revenge, Machiavellian scheming, fatal revels,
for example), and some of Fletcherian drama (the Protean
character and elaborate spectacle), Middleton contrives, es-
pecially in the first three acts, to give a compellingly life-
like reality to his characters and their careers.

This life-like air is brilliantly embodied in Middle-
ton's final tragedy, *The Changeling*, which in the main plot is
a stunningly powerful realistic tragedy of lust and wilfulness.
Superficially, some of the features of Senecan revenge drama
also appear here, too. Such conventions as the self-destruc-
tiveness of sin, of the trickster tricked, the wilful woman, the lustful, Machiavellian villain are embodied here with virtually unrivalled brilliance. The artistic inferiority of the sub-plot, however, gravely disfigures the play.

The concluding chapter of the thesis shows that Middleton was undoubtedly a fine tragic artist in that he did present a tragic view of life - sin is self-destructive. Moreover, he showed that he was able to make such conventions as the trickster tricked, the lustful villain, the headstrong woman, and sin's suicidal nature consummately expressive of his conviction that there is a moral order in the world that works with inexorable justice. But the concluding chapter also shows that Middleton was not a wholly successful tragic artist since the dramatist all too often resorts to convention in the pejorative sense. Hengist, King of Kent is structurally very weak since the overloading of dumb-shows with story, the switch in purpose in the main plot and the very loosely attached sub-plot make the play disjointed. Women, Beware Women is disfigured by a Protean change in the character of Livia, the key intriguer, a change subserving the Senecan denouement which in turn employs the hackneyed device of the fatal revels to produce in the catastrophe an improbable huddle of bodies. The Changeling is marred by Rowley's artistically inferior sub-plot as well as by the archaic trial of chastity in the main action.
FOREWORD

It is a very real pleasure to record my many obligations incurred in the preparation of this thesis. For encouragement in what has been a much protracted task I owe a debt of gratitude to members of the Department of English at the University of British Columbia. To Dr. Marion Smith and Mr. Craig Miller I owe an additional debt for their help in obtaining books and periodicals which have proved extremely useful. To Mr. Inglis Bell of the University Library go my especial thanks for his unstinted readiness to supply me with hard-to-procure volumes and for innumerable kindnesses extending far beyond his professional services.

But my obligations are heaviest in three other directions. Every chapter of this thesis bears witness to the helpfulness of that indispensable study of Middleton's tragedies by Samuel Schoenbaum. Every page bears even more compelling witness to the extraordinary patience, acumen, and kindly but searching advice of the English Department's Dr. G. P. V. Akrigg to whose scholarship my obligations are far more extensive than this acknowledgment can convey. Finally, though, it is to my wife that I owe most. Every word of the following chapters has benefitted from her encouragement, cajolery, criticism, and patience. Hers, too, was the weary labour of typing several draughts of a study that grew to unforeseen proportions.
| CONTENTS |
|----------|-----------|
| I        | INTRODUCTION ............................... 1 |
| II       | THE CITY COMEDIES ........................... 10 |
| III      | THE EARLY TRAGEDIES ........................ 46 |
| IV       | THE FLETCHERIAN PLAYS ........................ 78 |
| V        | HENGIST, KING OF KENT ...................... 117 |
| VI       | WOMEN, BEWARE WOMEN ....................... 169 |
| VII      | THE CHANGELING ............................. 237 |
| VIII     | CONCLUSION ................................. 318 |
|          | BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................... 344 |
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this essay is to study Middleton's use of dramatic conventions and devices with a view to assessing his qualities as a tragic artist, for it is a commonplace of criticism to assert that an artist's stature is to be measured in terms of the success with which he works within the limits of convention or in terms of his success in getting innovations accepted. And his stature is to be further measured in terms of who is his master: mere convention, or independent vision.

Middleton is a Jacobean playwright who deserves more attention than he has received; as J. Q. Adams put it,

> It is strange that of the major English dramatists contemporary with Shakespeare Thomas Middleton, who at several points touched the master, has been the most neglected by modern scholarship.¹

Samuel Tannenbaum concurred.

> Notwithstanding his many high qualities and the abundance of his output, scholars have neglected him in a manner which is almost inexplicable.²

Although a considerable quantity of periodical literature has appeared since Bald published his edition of *Hengist, King of Kent* in 1938, only one full-length study of a major aspect of Middleton's dramatic art has

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appeared in the last thirty years. Samuel Schoenbaum brought out in 1955 a study of Middleton's tragedies. If, then, for no other reason than that Middleton has not received his due from scholars a paper on him is justified. Much more positive a reason for studying him, however, is that in The Changeling Middleton wrote one of the few great tragedies of the Elizabethan Age.

Because the elucidation of the processes of art is of such absorbing fascination, the following pages will attempt to shed light on the nature of Middleton's three chief tragedies, Hengist, King of Kent; or The Mayor of Queenborough, Women, Beware Women, and The Changeling by tracing the development of his handling of conventions from his realistic City comedies through his Fletcherian plays to the major tragedies. Along the way this paper will examine conventions in The Revenger's Tragedy and The Second Maiden's Tragedy, plays which are Middleton's according to evidence that has been assembled by Schoenbaum. Finally, an assessment of the achievements of Middleton in tragedy will be made.

"Poetry is, in essence, of convention all compact." That the very medium of poetry is conventional, Lowes reminds us when he says that

...language itself stands in no immediate relation to the objects which it represents, but is a congeries of conventional symbols...


4 J. L. Lowes, Convention and Revolt in Poetry, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1919, p. 46.

Conventions, indeed, are often defining characteristics of artistic genre. But not merely conventions, and not all conventions. Poetry springs out of language's metaphorical possibilities whereby the fresh perception of likenesses is an intuitive, creative act. That is, the poet expresses himself within limits imposed by the medium he chooses, exploiting the expressive possibilities inherent in the conventional symbols of language. Lowes' statement, then, which opens this paragraph is valuable as a reminder of the pervasive presence of convention in art, but misleading as a generalization; it overlooks the vital element in art - individual vision.

It is not, however, convention as the defining characteristic of artistic genre that is the concern of this paper. It is convention in a narrower sense. The defining conventions of drama are, we remind ourselves, action-with-conflict, and dialogue disclosing a story scenically by means of actors on a stage. Such indispensable conventions we may, following M. C. Hyde's suggestion, call "principles of dramaturgy." The term "convention" we shall therefore reserve for certain of those features and techniques that are characteristic of some periods of drama but which fail to gain acceptance in others.

What, precisely, is a convention? We cannot go to the Elizabethans for a definition of the term. They never formulated the canons of their art nor did they take pains to detail the conventions of drama.

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7 This is a generalization whose truth is not, I hope, materially affected by the fact that Eugene O'Neill for one has resurrected the soliloquy.
in their criticism. Neo-classical critics in Italy, France and England drew up rules of dramatic propriety, but Aristotle's later descendants (on Minturno and Castelvetro out of Horace) did not breed in the Elizabethan theatre—despite Jonson's attempts at paternity. The Elizabethan playwright was perforce an empiric. Not the canons of art but the tolerance of his audience shaped his plays. In such a circumstance it is not surprising that original practices which were successful on the stage would be imitated by other writers. The theatrical effectiveness of such features would determine the duration of their existence; as their usefulness declined they would disappear from the playwright's bag of tricks. Thus, dismissing as irrelevant "convention" interpreted as "a defining characteristic of an artistic genre", and realizing that many of the features of Elizabethan drama were produced by playwrights necessarily lackeying with the tides of taste, we may approximate a little more closely to the more common area that discourse labels convention.

A convention in this narrower sense is an artist's means, necessarily both traditional and ephemeral, to produce certain familiar effects in building and sustaining a world of illusion. M. C. Hyde expresses one aspect of our definition in this way:

Conventions are fashions of a time, and as is the case with fashions, have not only the quality of influence but also that of transience.

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8 Cf. Lowes, op. cit., pp. 2–3, for whom convention is to be defined in terms of "acceptance" and "illusion".

9 Playwriting for Elizabethans, p. 4.
The modishness and transient nature of conventions is implied by the N.E.D. definition of the term:

A rule or practice based upon general consent, or accepted and upheld by society at large; an arbitrary rule or practice recognized as valid in any particular art or study.

This definition brings out a further aspect of convention - the fact that it represents an agreement between the artist and his audience. John Livingston Lowes makes explicit this aspect.

Convention ... so far as art is concerned, represents concurrence in certain accepted methods of communication.10

But perhaps the most thoughtful definition of convention is Bradbrook's:

A convention may be defined as an agreement between writers and readers, whereby the artist is allowed to limit and simplify his material in order to secure greater concentration through a control of the distribution of emphasis.11

In suggesting a steadily alert artistic sensibility exercising unflagging judicious care over the disposition of elements within a play, Bradbrook's definition is probably flawed with respect to the Elizabethans since the structure of Elizabethan plays is often ramshackle. They are not "well-made plays" in the neo-classical or Scribean12 senses. They are built

10 Lowes, op. cit., p. 3.
11 M. C. Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1935, p. 4. She further says: "It was...impossible that writers who worked at the speed of these dramatists should not evolve a convention." (p. 4).
12 John Gassner says of Scribe in Masters of the Drama, Third Revised Edition, New York, Dover, 1954, p. 349: "He set an example of closely knit dramaturgy...for realities that could not be scattered over the stage in Shakespearean romantic fashion."
more like twentieth century musical comedies or commercial films\textsuperscript{13} or vaudeville shows\textsuperscript{14} or revues.\textsuperscript{15} Nevertheless, Elizabethan conventions were functional, if not always in a dramatic way, then at least in enhancing the theatrical quality of the plays.

It must be realized that the term "convention" will not necessarily be used in a pejorative sense. This study hopes to keep clear the distinction between the use of conventions and evaluations of their worth, for, as Gassner remarks, rightly, "A convention is not objectionable; only its results can be so."\textsuperscript{16}

One danger facing the student embarked on a study of convention is the disposition to see everything in a play in terms of stock characters, imitative structural patterns, hackneyed dialogue, and conventional devices of staging. Levin Schucking and E. E. Stoll have contributed much towards our understanding of conventions in English Renaissance drama, but their studies are sometimes marred by their tendency to miss the originality in these plays. Stoll makes much of a "slanderer believed"\textsuperscript{17} convention in interpreting Iago, but it is at least debatable that an Elizabethan audience really did "carry around in memory, a Convention of the Calumniator


\textsuperscript{15} Bradbrook, \textit{Themes and Conventions}, p. 35.

\textsuperscript{16} Gassner, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 349.

Credited as an aid in swallowing Iago, although it is true that "slander was conventionally believed" and that the character of Iago contains a number of discernible stock traits of the Elizabethan villain. A similar fallacy is to interpret the plays wholly by means of current Renaissance theories, beliefs, philosophies, and dogmas. A dramatic work is not merely an exemplification of conventional intellectual habits. Alfred Harbage warns us, in criticizing Lily B. Campbell's *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, Slaves of Passion*, that

Two major flaws appear in this learned approach to the plays. One is that fiction does not conform in detail to the philosophy of the age. The second flaw is more grave. It does not follow because resemblances appear in a philosophical system and a play that the play is "patterned" on the system. The system may not be a cause but a parallel effect.

In short, there is a danger to the critic "of being hag-ridden by conventions".

No attempt will be made here to list the conventions that will be discussed in the following chapters. We shall attempt to keep our definition in mind, however, when evaluating Middleton's artistry in handling the conventions, supplementing it with Bradbrook's, and her inter-

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19 Bethell, *op. cit.*, p. 15.


interpretation with Langer's following prescriptive observations:

All artistic conventions are devices for creating forms that express some idea of vitality or emotion. Any element in a work of art may contribute to the illusory dimension in which such forms are presented, or to their appearance, their harmonization, their organic unity and clarity; it may serve many such aims at once. Everything, therefore, that belongs to a work is expressive; and all artifice is functional.22

The conventions studied will be grouped under four headings for reasons of methodological convenience: conventions of structure, of theme, of characterization, and of staging. They need not be detailed here since their existence is well established and since the volumes of Stoll, Schücking, Bradbrook, Hyde, Bethell, Harbage23 and others examine them at length for the reader wishing to study them.

The term "device" is difficult to define precisely. We shall mean by it any means employed by Middleton to achieve the effects he aimed at, means either that he originated or that have no tradition behind them. This is as explicit as we can make what is meant in this paper by "device". Perhaps, in connection with definition, it is wise to remember Aristotle's advice given in the *Nichomachean Ethics*:

Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought


for alike in all discussions....

Finally, a brief bibliographical note. For the canon of Middleton's works reliance will be mainly on R. C. Bald's article, "The Chronology of Middleton's Plays"\(^2\), which supplies dates, too, although here Baldwin Maxwell\(^2\) and others supplement Bald. Dewar M. Robb\(^2\) provides the necessary information on the collaboration with Rowley. Samuel Schoenbaum\(^2\) assembles the evidence of Middleton's authorship of *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*. It need scarcely be added that use has been made of those formidably intimidating volumes of Chambers\(^2\) and Bentley\(^2\) to which the student of Elizabethan drama is indebted so much. Bullen's edition is the standard one for Middleton's plays\(^3\); it has been supplemented, of course, with Bald's fine edition of *Hengist, King of Kent*, Greg's Malone Society editions of *The Witch* and of *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, and Nicoll's edition of Tourneur's plays.


\(^2\) "The Date of Middleton's Women, Beware Women", *Philological Quarterly*, vol. 22 (October, 1943), pp. 338 - 42.


\(^3\) See p. 2, above, n. 3.


CHAPTER II

THE CITY COMEDIES

Thomas Middleton has been called "the greatest" and "the most absolute" realist in Elizabethan drama; he is a dramatist who, T. S. Eliot says, gives us "a dispassionate picture of human nature...." Eliot further remarks,

That Middleton's comedy was 'photographic', that it introduces us to the low life of the time far better than anything in the comedy of Shakespeare or the comedy of Jonson, better than anything except the pamphlets of Dekker and Greene and Nashe, there is little doubt. But if realism is not merely "the accurate reproduction of detail for purposes of incidental embellishment" and if it

is characterized by an over-all faithfulness in the rendition of actuality, especially in terms of the relationship of individual to environment, the nature of the events in which he is involved, and the whole shape of his life and personality,


4 Loc. cit.


6 Ibid., p. 335.
then we must agree with L. C. Knights about the "limited usefulness as social documents" of Middleton's comedies. His plays are not photographic. Moreover, if Thrall and Hibbard are right in stating that one other quality of realism should be emphasized:

*it presents the individual rather than type character...*

then we must conclude that Middleton is not a realist of the kind implied since his characters are, for the most part, social types. "Middleton", Knights declares, somewhat exaggeratedly, in discussing the comic characters, "tells us nothing at all about these as individuals in a particular place and period." And in parenthesis Knights remarks on the "completely generalized conventionality" of the brothel scenes in Middleton, suggesting thereby that convention plays a much larger role in the City comedies than critics have hitherto cared to discuss.

But if Middleton's realism is not that of photographic actualism, he is realistic in a sense to be defined in contrast to Elizabethan romantic comedy with its abundant sentiment, exotic settings, high-born, idealized characters, love themes, and happy endings highly artificial in contrivance. The many songs in this genre contribute to its lyrical effect, as does the customary medium of verse. In contrast, Middleton's

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9 Knights, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

10 *Loc. cit.*.

comedies are satirical and cynical in tone, are set in burgher London, have citizens and rogues as their main characters, and are largely concerned with gulling and tricking plots. With the prosaic settings goes a decreased use of verse and song; and prose abounds.

Middleton by no means initiated this branch of the comedy of manners - its pattern goes back at least to Plautus. It appears in England at least as early as Gascoigne's Supposes, and both Jonson and Chapman were writing plays of this type before Middleton entered the field. Indeed, Middleton's sources are everywhere discoverable in literature or in life. Latin and Italian comedy and their English descendants, the English relatives of German and Dutch education drama, the morality plays

12 Although Ferrara is the setting of The Phoenix, the follies and vices exposed are those of London, while some of the characters not only have "English" names (Falso, Quieto, Tangle) but are also typical figures of realistic comedy (the citizen's social-climbing wife, the fleecing lawyers, the courtiers parasitic on citizens, and the newly-made knight who cuckolds shopkeepers).

and the interludes, novella, verse satire, rogue literature, contemporary plays, and pamphlets - his sources were numerous, though undoubtedly his clearest debt is to the latter three. Middleton obviously owes much to the vogue of realistic comedy inaugurated by Jonson.

Whichever way we look at it, we see that Middleton was working within a tradition; that there were conventions for him to adopt. It is the purpose of this chapter to review these conventions in terms of theme, structure, character, and staging, and to examine, too, the devices Middleton employs in these City comedies.

The eight comedies that will be surveyed here are the following, listed in the probable order of composition. The Family of Love (written in 1602 and revised in 1606 or 1607) is a play that "must be allowed to take the place previously occupied by Blurt, [Master Constable] as Middleton's first known venture into the field of drama". Thereafter


there appeared *The Phoenix* (either in 1602 or 1603), the plot of which may have anticipated that of *Measure for Measure, A Mad World, My Masters* (written in 1604 and revised in 1606 or 1607), *Michaelmas Term* (1604), *Your Five Callants* (1605, 1607), *A Trick to Catch The Old One* (c. 1606), a play extremely useful to Massinger for his comedy, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts, The Roaring Girl* (1607 - 8), which is about two-fifths the work of Dekker¹⁶, Middleton's collaborator in *The Family of Love* and elsewhere, and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613), Middleton's final realistic comic statement about London life.

"The predominant themes are probably cuckoldry and gullery...."¹⁷ Cheating, tricking, tricking the tricksters; sex-lust, money-lust, and land-lust; social-climbing and parasitism; needy youth versus greedy age - these, in detail, are the major themes of the City comedies.

Cuckoldry, attempted or achieved, appears in all these plays. In the sub-plot of *The Family of Love*, Glister, Lipsalve, and Gudgeon pursue the wife of Purge, a jealous apothecary, who "cuckolds" himself in the darkness at a meeting of the Family (IV. iv. 1 - 14 and 44 - 5.) so that he might bring a charge of unfaithfulness against his wife. He contrives to get her "to answer a venereal crime, for having carnal copulation with others besides [her] husband"¹⁷ (IV. iv. 155 - 6.). In The


Phoenix the nobleman, Proditor, attempts the honour of Castiza, the Captain's wife (I. iii. 1 - 11.), and the Knight enjoys his "sweet Revenue", the Jeweller's Wife, who makes room for her love both at her father's house and at her husband's since "they're both good for nothing else" (I. v. 35 - 6.). So blatant is her cuckoldry that she blandly assures her father, the vile Falso, that "my husband and he [the Knight] has lain both in one belly" (I. vi. 55 - 6.). Penitent Brothell, a conscience-ridden sinner in A Mad World, My Masters, yields to his passion for Mistress Harebrain, cuckolding thereby the jealous Harebrain, the "watch and ward" of his wife whom he keeps locked up lest he sprout horns. Quomodo, the memorable usurer of Michealmas Term, realizes that the "deadly enmity" between town and country, between citizen and gentry, exists because "They're busy 'bout our wives, we 'bout their lands" (I. i. 112.). Lethe, the up-start Scotsman, explains to Mistress Quomodo in a letter how his marriage to her daughter will facilitate his access to the mother, thereby benefiting all concerned (I. i. 230 - 9.). Quomodo, however, is more concerned that Easy should cuckold him than Lethe, but is consoled by Shortyard's

To be a cuckold is but for one life;
When land remains to you, your heir, or wife.
(I. i. 114 - 5.)

Quomodo not only is nearly cuckolded by Easy but is also almost the loser of a wife to him. Mistress Newcut of Your Five Gallants has "broke the back of one husband already; and now th' other's dead with grief at sea"

(V. i. 13 - 4.) as a result of her pursuing her "sheer pleasure and affection" (II. i. 20.) with gallants and proper gentlemen. Though cuckolding does not play a role in *A Trick to Catch The Old One*, Middleton returns to the theme in the scenes he wrote for *The Roaring Girl*. Here Laxton attempts the virtue of the apothecary's wife, Mistress Gallipot; Jack Dapper pursues the wily Mistress Tiltyard, the featherer's wife; and Goshawk seeks to gain Mistress Openwork's favours by means of insidious suggestions (II. i.). Perhaps the most notorious instance of cuckoldry in Elizabethan drama and certainly the most striking in Middleton is in the Allwit scenes of *The Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. Allwit, however, is a contented cuckold, a conscious wittol, vile, calculating, and yet dreadfully comic. His self-revelation (I. ii. 11 - 56.) is thorough and exact, his morality revolting. Of Sir Walter Whorehound he says:

I thank him, has maintain'd my house this ten years; Not only keeps my wife, but 'a keeps me And all my family; I'm at his table: He gets me all my children, and pays the nurse Monthly or weekly; puts me to nothing, rent, Nor church-duties, not so much as the scavenger: The happiest state that ever man was born to! (I. ii. 15 - 21.)

19 George R. Price, op. cit., p. 614; Middleton's share seems to be: I. ii - iii., II., III. i - ii., IV. i., V. ii. Middleton revised some of the other scenes, too. Although Middleton signed the preface, "To the Comic Play-Readers, Venery and Laughter", we may feel sure that Dekker's more generous and less cynical spirit is behind the words: "... 'tis the excellency of a writer to leave things better than he finds 'em." The remark of Alfred Harbage, *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions*, p. 176, on these words might be taken as epitomizing the main approach of his study of the competing traditions in the Elizabethan theatre. Harbage remarks that "it is revealing when the cynic of Paul's becomes the idealist of the Fortune...."

confirming our impression of his debased nature in III. ii. 66–71:

No mar'l I heard a citizen complain once
That his wife's belly only broke his back;
Mine had been all in fitters seven years since,
But for this worthy knight,
That with a prop upholds my wife and me,
And all my estate buried in Bucklersbury. 21

Gulling occupies an even larger area than cuckoldry in Middleton's comedies, perhaps because a greater variety of comic effects could be extracted from this theme. Although cuckoldry is a species of gulling, it has been examined as a separate theme since it leads so directly to the sex themes of Middleton's later plays. Thus the following discussion of gulling will ignore what was said above about cuckoldry. Gulling in a wide sense of tricking or deceiving is to be found in all the City comedies; in the narrow sense of fleecing and sharping, in half of them.

Gulling in the wide sense occurs notably on three occasions in The Family of Love: first, Glister gulls Lipsalve and Gudgeon with his art magic which causes the two gallants "that only pursue city lechery" to whip each other; second, Purge gulls Lipsalve and Gudgeon at a meeting of the Family by anticipating their attempt to fornicate with his wife; third (and here the narrow sense operates, too), Gerardine, disguised, gulls Glister of a thousand pounds plus "her father's portion" with a bond that gives Maria to Gerardine and that releases Glister from the charge of in-

21 Allwit's fear is of conditions described by Lear's Fool:

The cod-piece that will house
Before the head has any
The head and he shall louse;
So beggars marry many.

(III. ii. 27–30.)
cest. Since The Phoenix exposes the "infectious dealings in most offices, and foul mysteries throughout all professions" so that "abuses that keep low, come to the right view of a prince" (I. i. 108 - 15.), there is a rather formal pattern in the disclosure of abuses. We observe Tangle gul­ling suitors of their money under the guise of performing legal services (I. iv. 1 - 194.) and Falso doing the same (I. vi. 1 - 56.) and attempting to bilk his niece of her dowry (I. vi. 119 - 44.). Phoenix deceives Pro­ditor, forestalling his treasonable designs on the Duke by means of a report which reveals to the court the abuses rife in the state (V. i. 68 - 153.). A Mad World, My Masters is similar in situation to A Trick to Catch The Old One. Follywit in A Mad World determines to gull his grand­sire, Sir Bounteous Progress, for whom "charity begins abroad and ends at home"22, but in the end the trickster is tricked, betrayed by a watch he has stolen from Sir Bounteous (V. ii. 240 - 1.). Moreover, Follywit discov­ers he has been gulled by a courtesan into marrying her (V. ii. 284.). The reverse of these situations occurs in A Trick. Witgood gulls both his uncle, Pecunius Lucre, and Walkadine Hoard, the one of the mortgage to his land, the other of enough money to discharge his debts. In this play, it is the old Hoard's fate to discover that he has been gulled into marrying a courtesan, not a widow with lands in the country worth £400 a year (V. ii. 96 - 101.). In A Mad World the courtesan, Mistress Gullman, is instrumental in Mistress Harebrain's desire to outwit her husband. Her lover, Penitent Brothell, is admitted to Harebrain's closely watched house

in the guise of a doctor of physic bringing cures for the "sick" Gullman (III. ii.). The central gulling episodes in Michaelmas Term involve Quomodo who fleeces Easy of his Essex land by means of the surety trick (II. iii. 267 - 391.), and Easy and Thomasine who gull Quomodo, disguised as a Beadle attending the linen-draper's funeral. For a while Easy gets Thomasine as his wife. Other gulling scenes appear in this play, the most important being the tricking of the lecherous Lethe into marrying his Country Wench. But the play which exhibits gulling best in its coney-catching sense is Your Five Gallants which exposes in almost ballet-like pattern the tricks, cheatings, and deceptions of five accomplished coney-catchers: Frippery, the broker-gallant, Primero, the bawd-gallant, Goldstone, the cheating gallant, Pursenet, the pocket-gallant, and Tailby, the whore-gallant. In the end the disguised gentleman, Fitsgrave, gulls them all of Katherine, the wealthy orphan. Clothing, jewels, a chain of pearl change hands many times as light-fingered filchers "nim" other people's property (II. i. 119 ff.). We see in Act II, scene iii all the time-worn tricks of the professional gambler, topped by the purloining of a gilt goblet (ll. 321 - 412). Goldstone, disguised as Mistress Newcut's cousin, decamps with her salt-cellar (IV. vii. 68.) - one of the many tricks in the play that Middleton owes to rogue literature. The gulling and counter-gulling of this play seems to have exhausted most of Middleton's interest in this theme since except for Witgood's trick in catching the old Lucre and Hoard, the later plays in the City group show little interest in the subject. There is

23 Bald, "The Sources of Middleton's City Comedies", p. 378. The scene depicting the theft of the salt-cellar is highly reminiscent of Sc. ix in Dr. Faustus.
some tricking in *The Roaring Girl* (Moll allows herself to be lured to assignations but she discomfits her would-be lovers by drawing her rapier on them and thrashing them (II. i. 253 - 70; III. i. 60 - 207.), and Sebastian gulls his father, Sir Alexander Wengrave, feigning love for Moll to drive Wengrave into approving of his passion for Mary Fitzallard).

And in *A Chaste Maid* Allwit preserves his security in his arrangement with Sir Walter by deceiving him about possible mates (I. ii. 99 - 104.):

I have poison'd
His hopes in marriage already with
Some old rich widows, and some landed virgins;
And I'll fall to work still before I'll lose him;
He's yet too sweet to part from.

Touchwood Junior tricks Yellowhammer, the goldsmith, into fashioning a wedding ring for Moll Yellowhammer and himself although Yellowhammer has promised his daughter to Whorehound (I. i. 171 - 208.). But the main emphasis in the play is on cuckoldry and wittoldom.

Middleton apparently could not think about cuckoldry and gulling without thinking, too, of themes allied to them by the literature and thought of his time. His prose expose of London vices, *The Black Book*, written some time between the summer of 1603 and the end of 1604, when it was published, links sex-lust and money-lust and land-lust with social climbing and parasitism and the need of youth with the greed of age, all-

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24 Middleton mentions "this last plaguy summer" and refers to a coverlet that "was made of pieces a' black cloth clapt together, such as was snatched off the rails in King's-street at the queen's funeral". See Bullen's edition, vol. 8, pp. 16, 25.

25 See "The last Will and Testament of Lawrence Lucifer, the old wealthy bachelor of Limbo, alias Dick Devil-barn, the griping farmer of Kent" in *The Black Book*, pp. 33 - 45.
though he regards the gravest abuses, the "two devouring gulfs", as being "deceit and luxury". 26

The locus of the sex-lust, money-lust, land-lust themes is Michaelmas Term, written about the same time as The Black Book. 27 Quomodo's speech, already quoted, points the matter:

They're busy 'bout our wives, we 'bout their lands.

(I. i. 112.)

Quomodo, with the assistance of Shortyard and Falselight, persuades the needy young Easy to accept commodity by way of cash and to sign surety for Blastfield (Shortyard) who is the actual borrower. In this way Quomodo acquires the deeds to Easy's Essex lands which Quomodo apostrophizes thus:

O that sweet, neat, comely, proper, delicate parcel of land! like a fine gentlewoman i' th' waist, not so great as pretty, pretty; the trees in summer whistling, the silver waters by the banks harmoniously gliding.

(II. iii. 91 - 4.)

And his desire to have his family come up in the world is expressed in his following words. He says the lands are

an excellent place for a student; fit for my son that lately commenced at Cambridge, whom now I have placed at inns of court. Thus we that seldom get lands honestly, must leave our heirs to inherit our knavery....

(II. iii. 95 - 9.)

The "sweet inventions" (IV. i. 84.) that the "thought of green fields" (IV. i. 85.) inspired in Quomodo also inspired Hoard to dream eagerly of the "goodly parks and champion grounds" (IV. iv. 55.) he now owns as a

26 "The Epistle to the Reader", The Black Book, p. 5.

22.

as a result of his marriage to "Widow Jane Medler". Both Hoard (IV. iv. 10 - 23.) and Quomodo (IV. i. 74 - 80.) gloat over the effect their trips to their country estates will have on their city neighbours and rivals.28

The powerful attraction that the green fields of Essex have for Quomodo, higher social ranks have for certain women in these plays. The Country Wench exhibits this in its mildest form; Hellgill has enticed her from her father's country cottage with his "sweet enchantments"; felts and silks and all fashionable attires (Michaelmas Term, I. ii. 14 -16.) are promised her; she will "go like a gentlewoman" (I. ii. 30 - 1.) if she will become Lethe's mistress, and she is all "in a swoon" (I. ii. 58 - 9.) to acquire gentility. Since Maudlin Yellowhammer in A Chaste Maid wants to have good connections, she pushes her daughter towards Sir Walter Whorehound's arms to the consternation of Moll and her young lover, Touchwood Junior. Perhaps the striking instance of the wish to climb the social ladder occurs in The Phoenix. The Jeweller's Wife, whose lover, the Knight, has addressed her as "lady", replies,

Lady? that word is worth an hundred angels at all times....

(III. ii. 3 - 4.)

and the silly female gawks like a simpleton in the Duke's palace:

Who would not love a friend at court?
What fine galleries and rooms am I brought through!

(V. i. 209 - 11.)

28 The whole matter of land-hungry affluent citizens preying upon the possessions of country gentry is discussed in an illuminating manner by L. C. Knights in Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, pp. 261 - 69. He says on p. 267: "Middleton constantly gives us such glimpses of a society in the process of rapid reorganization. Most of his characters assume that social advancement is a major preoccupation of the citizen class...."
But her genuinely middle-class, debased nature is displayed in her answer to Phoenix's "... know you not me?". She says,

Your worship is too great for me to know:
I'm but a small-timbred woman, when I'm
out of my apparel, and dare not venture
upon greatness.

(V. i. 221 - 3.)

In her knight Middleton satirizes the parasitic courtier or gallant who lives off citizens' wives, often a situation that was the object of his satire. Middleton's intention in The Phoenix, of course, is partly to gird at James I's proliferation of knights - a popular theme with Jacobean dramatists and satirists alike.

So much for the stock themes of the City comedies. Now it is appropriate to examine the general pattern, the structure, of the kind of comedy Middleton wrote. At once we may say that the pattern is that of intrigue comedy, a type that has its roots in ancient Greece and that the typical Elizabethan playwright, if he had any education at all, would encounter in the plays of Plautus and Terence.

"The plots of Latin comedy are manipulated

29 Middleton's attack on courtiers is summed up in challenging form in the report sent by Phoenix to his father, the Duke: "Against Lussurioso and Infesto, who not only most riotously consume their houses in vicious gaming, mortgaging their livings to the merchant, whereby he with his heirs enter upon their lands; from whence this abuse comes, that in short time the son of the merchant has more lordships than the son of the nobleman, which else was never born to inheritance: but that which is more impious, they most adulterously train out young ladies to midnight banquets, to the utter defamation of their own honours, and ridiculous abuse of their husbands." (V. i. 91 - 100.)

30 Madeleine Doran, Endeavours of Art, pp. 152 - 6.

31 Bond, Early Plays from the Italian, pp. xv - cviii.
plots, with someone managing the intrigue.... The ingenuity of his devices, the narrowness of the escapes, the success of the execution, not realism, are the tests of excellence. It is only in a few plots, however, that the intriguer carries things to a conclusion without the help of good fortune. 32

Elizabethan dramatists had modern Italian models for this type of plotting, too.33

For the intrigue plot was a fundamental characteristic of renaissance Italian comedy, both academic and popular. It was often much complicated by disguises, mistaken identities, and subplots.34

But Middleton did not need to go to either of these sources for his intrigue plots; he could have discovered the patterns in English drama itself, in The Bugbears, Gascoigne's Supposes, Lyly's Mother Bombie, perhaps The Comedy of Errors, The Taming of the Shrew, and The Merry Wives of Windsor (Shakespeare's only "City" comedy), in Porter's Two Angry Women of Abingdon, Chapman's All Fools35, and probably Jonson's two early humour plays. Then, too, some of the elements of intrigue in tragedy no doubt influenced Middleton.36 There were, moreover, in non-dramatic literature scores of patterns of intrigue tricking in the rogue pamphlets.

32 Doran, op. cit., p. 153.
33 Bond, op. cit., pp. xv - xvi, 1 - xcii.
34 Doran, op. cit., p. 153.
36 See, especially, The Phoenix, I. i. and V.
The basic intrigues in the City comedies concern the activities of a young man to foil the efforts of other, usually older, people who try to prevent his marriage and the recouping of his fortune. Six of the eight plays follow this pattern, The Phoenix and Michaelmas Term being the exceptions, although even here more than traces of the pattern are to be found: Proditor attempts to seduce Castiza away from her ideal of true love, and Rearage's pursuit of Susan Quomodo is opposed by her father (I. i. 68 - 9.). But the central pattern of The Phoenix is akin to that of Measure for Measure, and the chief intrigue in Michaelmas Term involves Quomodo's fleecing Easy of his lands, the trickster being tricked in the denouement as a result of over-reaching. It is, then, not until the concluding lines of Act Four that the pattern common to most of the other comedies makes its appearance in Easy's career.

In A Mad World, My Masters and A Trick to Catch The Old One we have the best illustrations of the basic intrigue pattern. This is true despite the fact that the marriage which is revealed at the end (V. ii. 270 - 84.) of A Mad World is not quite what Follywit thought it to be. Like Hoard in A Trick, he discovers that he is linked to a courtesan, not to an honourable woman of means.

37 Muriel Bradbrook sees the pattern from a slightly different angle: "For Middleton, the hunting of a widow and the setting up of a broken gallant are the favourite bases of intrigue..." See her recent study, The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy, London, Chatto & Windus, 1955, p. 154; also p. 235, n. 19.

38 Mary Lascelles, Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure", London, The Athlone Press, 1953, pp. 26 - 27. After comparing supposedly similar figures in other plays to Shakespeare's Duke, Lascelles says, "Middleton's Phoenix...is engaged in an enterprise which bears some resemblance to his, at least in the exposition. The son of an ageing Duke of Ferrara, he has reason to suspect lax administration, and therefore gives out that he will travel abroad, the better to lurk in disguise at home and discover hidden abuses."
26.

The intriguing and the tricking in these plays depend to a marked extent on disguise used structurally. "Disguise", Bald points out, "in some form or other, enters into three-quarters of Middleton's plays...." Since the disguise convention is encountered so frequently it is best to single out the play that most richly illustrates it, referring to others for corroboration and diversity. *Michaelmas Term* is our instance.

The two types of disguise most common in the comedies are the "rogue in multi-disguise" and the "spy in disguise", the former attracting more of Middleton's ingenuity. In *Michaelmas Term* the chief rogue in multi-disguise is Shortyard, Quomodo's "true and secret" "familiar spirit". When Quomodo urges Shortyard to draw Easy, the fresh, landed gallant from Essex, into Quomodo's clutches, he suggests a disguise to Shortyard:

"shift thyself speedily into the shape of gallantry" (I. i. 125.); hence Shortyard poses as "kind master Blastfield" (II. i. 34.). Easy is as easy as his name declares; he allows "Blastfield" to become friendly with him:


40 Bald, "Sources", p. 383. The terms are Freeburg's. Perhaps it should be noted at this point that Middleton, in using disguise, was not doing so with a 'philosophical' sense of appearance and reality in his mind, a sense that was seemingly in Shakespeare's consciousness at times.

41 "Keep foot by foot with him, outdare his expenses, flatter, dice, and brothel to him; give him a sweet taste of sensuality; train him to every wasteful sin, that he may quickly need health, but especially money ...." (I. i. 126 - 30.).

42 Later Easy describes Blastfield fulsomely: "Methinks I have no being without his company; 'tis so full of kindness and delight: I hold him to be the only companion in earth... So full of nimble wit, various discourse, pregnant apprehension, and uncommon entertainment; he might keep company with any lord for his grace." (III. ii. 8 - 15.)
and soon his friend witnesses his discomfiture at dice (II. i. 70.). "Blastfield" discovers he is out of cash too (II. 80 - i.), so off they go to Quomodo's for a loan where they learn that Quomodo can give commodity only (II. iii. 191 - 3.). "Blastfield" pretends wrath at this offer but Easy talks him into accepting the cloth. Easy, as the second party, gladly signs the loan bond "for fashion's sake" (I. 274.) as Falselight, Quomodo's other familiar spirit "disguised as a Porter, sweating", lugs the cloth out only to return a few minutes later with the news that no merchant will buy the cloth. Quomodo then mentions "a new setter up", a Master Idem, who will be sure to "lay out money upon't", and calling in Falselight, who appears as himself, he sends for the merchant - Falselight disguised as Idem (II. iii. 466.). "Idem", however, can offer only three-score pound, a sum the gallants are obliged by need to accept. After the passage of a month, during which "Blastfield" reminds Easy, "I am seven hundred pound in bond now to the rascal" (III. i. 139 - 40.), "Blastfield" disappears to show up with Falselight, Shortyard disguised as a Sergeant and Falselight as a Yeoman, both preparing to arrest Easy (III. iii. 1 - 10.), knowing that Easy will surrender his lands to Quomodo rather than go to prison, but not until he has made a search for "master Blastfield, worshipful master Blastfield" (III. iii. 15 - 6.) to rescue him from his difficulties. The "Sergeant", after conducting Easy to Quomodo, suggest to Easy that "two substantial subsidy citizens" be procured to bail him so that he may make his search; Easy gives him his purse, and under pretext to Quomodo (and Easy!) about "a little urgent business at Guildhall" (III. iv. 129.) the two constables go off. Then, "Re-enter Shortyard and False-
light disguised as wealthy citizens in satin suits" (III. iv. 197.). They provide security for Easy who then makes his search. The next day, accompanied by Shortyard in his latest disguise, he encounters Rearage, Salewood, and Lethe, none of whom has seen Blastfield. Easy begins to realize his predicament ("I begin to be sick" III. v. 45.), despairing finally when "citizen" Shortyard decides to turn him over to Quomodo (l. 70.), and, in doing so, says to Quomodo,

Here are all his lands forfeited to us, master Quomodo; and to avoid the inconscionable trouble of law, all the assurance he made to us we willingly resign to you.

(IV. i. 20 - 2.).

Quomodo takes the deeds and declares Easy a free man as he affably bids his wife to bring Easy "a cup of small beer" (ll. 53 - 6.) and urges him that since he knows Quomodo's house to visit them often and dine with them once a quarter (ll. 58 - 9.). Enraged, Easy leaves.

Describing Shortyard's Protean changes does not exhaust disguising in this play. The "spy in disguise" convention appears notably in the last two acts: Quomodo disguised as a Beadle observes the effects of his death on his wife, his son, and his daughter (IV. iv. ff.). But, in turn, he is disillusioned by the "censure" of his servants, Sim, his son, and of Thomasine, his wife (V. i. 108 - 32.). Even when he discovers himself (l. 131.) subsequent to self-betrayal caused by placing his signature to the discharge memorandum (l. 104.) he is not believed to be Quomodo until he swears before the judge in the last scene.

A variant on the "spy in disguise" convention is provided in the same play by the Country Wench's Father who disguises himself to act as his daughter's servant "to fright her from base evils" (II. ii. 37.), but,
when this fails, to "see/How former follies did appear in me" (III. i. 303 - 4.). And an echo of this disguise pattern is heard in the failure of Mother Gruel, who has come to London to search for her son, to recognize the now dandified Andrew. She serves as his servant until she defies him in the final scene of revelation and judgment.43

The spy motif is also worked out in III. iii. where Thomasine, not disguised but "watching above", observes Quomodo and his accomplices playing at cat-and-mouse with Easy. Her pity for the gulled gallant grows to love (ll. 267 - 8.) which motivates her matrimonial-financial rescue of Easy after Quomodo's "death".

Multi-disguise is found elsewhere in the City comedies, notably in The Family of Love, where Gerardine dons the guises of Porter (IV. iii. 35 ff.), of Parator (IV. iv. 72 ff.), and of Doctor of Law (V. iii. 159.). Follywit in A Mad World successively appears in disguise as Lord Owemuch (II. i. 87 ff.), as a thief (II. iv - v.), as the lord again (II. viii.), as - and in this we can see the convention of the "boy-bride" disguise - the Courtesan (doubly disguised since "she" wears a mask) in IV. iii., as a player (V. i. 36.), but finally as himself, the retainer of stolen goods that betray him (V. ii: 198 - 246.).

The spy in disguise is best illustrated in Middleton in Phoenix, the son of the Duke of Ferrara, in The Phoenix. The disguised young man

43 Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama, p. 133, n. 1, says in reference to the conclusions of Middleton's plays, "The last acts, it is true, are usually taken at a gallop so that a certain amount is left inconclusive. This is due not so much to carelessness on the part of the author as to an understanding of the psychological condition of an audience at the end of a comedy intrigue. Once they have foreseen the end they only want it sketched, not expounded."
hunts out abuses in the city ostensibly after having set out on his travels. Treacherous courtiers have suggested the travels,

and part of his success consists in the unravelling of a conspiracy among those who have wished him out of the way; part, in his intervention in the affairs of those who (as he had suspected) are hindered of access to justice. By an ingenious trick - he hires himself out to each of the evil-doers in turn - he obtains the information needed for eventual interposition.44

Fitsgrave in Your Five Gallants is also a spy in disguise. He observes the actions of the five gallants and discomfits them at the end of the play by disclosing their unsuitability as husbands for Katherine.

Before we leave the discussion of the structural conventions in the City comedies, we must briefly investigate coincidence, the dumb-show, the masque, and the play-within-the-play, and glance at Middleton's use of verse and prose.

Middleton's realistic comedies are full of coincidence, a convention which elicits the "commonest complaint against the Elizabethan drama"45 - that the action is illogical. But the Elizabethans worked within a tradition of narrative in which the "consecutive or causal succession of events [was] not of the first importance".46 So we find in the eight comedies coincidence used often in the place of what in a "well-made play" would be an elaborate causal chain. Sometimes a character enters at the

44 Mary Lascelles, op. cit., p. 27.


46 Loc. cit.
fortuitous moment to inspire or supply the solution to a problem facing
the on-stage people. In *A Trick to Catch The Old One* (I. i.), Witgood
has just uttered, "Any trick out of the compass of law now would come hap-
pily to me" (l. 27 - 8.), when the Courtesan, who a few moments later will
inspire the solution to his difficulties, enters. Again, instead of a
careful, logical motivation of the entrance of a character, Middleton
employs a psychological justification of his appearance. The on-stage
characters will talk about him for a few moments; then that character
will enter, patly, the action moving ahead once more. Sometimes Middleton
gives such pat entrance an ironic tone as we see in *Michaelmas Term*, (I.
i. 239 - 53): Lethe has written the vile, mistaken letter to Mistress
Quomodo explaining how his marriage ("copulation", he calls it) to her
daughter will give him readier access to Mistress Quomodo. Lethe needs
someone to deliver the document; he expresses a wish that

Some poor widow woman would come as a
necessary bawd now!                       (I. i. 250 - 1.)

At that moment he sees someone, and continuing with his soliloquy which is
broken up only by action, not by words, he exclaims,

and see where fitly comes - [Enter
Mother Gruel] my mother!                   (11. 251 - 3.)

All these are stock ways of using the convention of coincidence in the
organization of events in an Elizabethan play.

Other structural means are the related conventions of dumb-show,
the masque, and the play-within-the-play. The dramatic value of these
conventions, as distinguished from their theatrical utility, was in for-
warding action. The dumb-show could be used to symbolize themes or moods;
to outline action, that is, to provide perspective on forthcoming events too lengthy for stage narrative; or it could be used to sketch action peripheral to the main events. Three of Middleton's realistic comedies have dumb-shows: The Phoenix (before III. i.), which employs the convention in order to introduce the first scene of the third act without the delay normally consequent upon ordinary entrances with their customary dialogue; Michaelmas Term ("Induction" 32 ff.) which symbolically represents one of the main objects of satire in the play: the unscrupulous use of law to acquire sudden riches. Not only the symbolic nature of this dumb-show but also the abstract morality figures of the "Induction" in which it appears gives to this dumb-show an old-fashioned flavour. The third play containing a dumb-show is A Chaste Maid in Cheapside (V. iv. ff.) in which the convention has become almost indistinguishable from a lengthy stage direction. As is the case with the dumb-show in Michaelmas Term, most of the characters mentioned in the dumb-show directions take part in the dialogue that immediately follows. The chief structural value of this dumb-show is to establish a funereal mood which Middleton will soon suddenly convert to its opposite.

Related to the dumb-show are the conventions of the masque and the play-within-the-play, both of which could serve the same structurally dramatic purposes. The disguised Follywit and his "players" in A Mad World,

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47 B. R. Pearn, "Dumb-Show in Elizabethan Drama", Review of English Studies, vol. 11 (October, 1935), pp. 385 - 405. Pearn shows that more than half of the plays written between 1562 and 1626 that contain dumb-shows fall within the two decades during which Middleton was active as a dramatist.

48 Ibid., p. 387 - 91.

49 So classified by Pearn, op. cit., p. 396.
My Masters for the benefit of the unsuspecting Sir Bounteous act "The Slip" (V. ii. 19 - 124.), an extemporized interlude which enables Follywit to walk off with his uncle's chain, jewel, and watch. And in Your Five Gallants the five would-be wooers take part in a masque (V. ii. 9 - 25.) which ends as Frippery presents Katherine with the chain of pearl, a gift that proves the undoing of him and the four other rogues.  

Middleton wrote none of the City comedies entirely in verse, and none entirely in prose. In general, he used prose for moments when the emotional tension was relaxed, reserving the more formal pattern of verse for emphasis. Sententious utterances are often cast into couplets, and couplets frequently terminate scenes and acts, but when verse occurs it is normally unrhymed pentameter; the few songs and the masque in Your Five Gallants resort to other meters. The conventional reformation of wayward characters sometimes results in forms other than blank verse: in The Phoenix Quieto delivers an ode-like couplet incantation to cure the mad Tangle (V. i. 317 - 38.), and the Courtesan and Witgood in A Trick renounce their evil ways in couplets which hesitate between octosyllabic and


51 Cornelia C. Coulter in "The Plautine Tradition in Shakespeare", The Journal of English and Germanic Philology, vol. 19 (January, 1920), p. 73, says that the similarity between mixed verse and prose in the two authors referred to in her title is "probably accidental", but she does say, "One might draw a neat parallel between Plautus's variation of lyric and simple dialogue meters, and Shakespeare's alternation of prose and verse, especially when the senarius of the Latin poet and the prose of the English bring a distinct lowering of the emotional tone."
pentameter lengths.

The conversion of the wayward, however, points to another major division of convention in the City comedies, that of character, and certainly the conventional reformation of scapegraces is not the only instance of convention in character portrayal in these plays. Everywhere in them we discover the presence of stock figures, some tracing their descent from the intriguing slaves, dissolute wastrels, well-born courtesans, cowardly braggarts, conservative fathers, "worldly-wise and anxious" in Latin comedy; others coming out of Italian comedy - the doctor of laws, the doctor of medicine, the magician, the pedant, the elderly suitor, the nurse and the Pantalones, Dottores, zannis, and servettas of the commedia dell'arte; some descending from the native English tradition - the Vice and the Devil; and some from current literature and the Italianate traveller - the malcontent.

52 Thomas Marc Parrott and R. H. Ball, A Short View of Elizabethan Drama, New York, Scribners, 1943, p. 33.
55 Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 28.
56 If Marston gives us the typical portrait of the malcontent, the figure of the melancholy satirist railing against what he sees about him in society is not a whole-cloth product of Marston's imagination. The malcontent is a compound of the melancholic, the bitter railer, and the retainer whose employment security is precarious. Phoenix has some of the character traits of the malcontent and exhibits some of the conventional ways of staging him. The Duke of Ferrara's son rails bitterly against the abuses of his time, and he does so in set speeches (II. ii. 162 - 196; I. iv. 197 - 227.). See Theodore Spencer, "The Elizabethan Malcontent", Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies, Washington, Shakespeare Folger Library, 1948, pp. 523 - 35, and Lawrence Babb, The Elizabethan Malady, East Lansing, Michigan State College Press, 1951, pp. 73 - 101.
Middleton is lavish with dramatis personae. There are so many people in his plays that it is impossible to consider them all in a study of this kind. But the chief stock characters are the rake-hell wastrel, the miserly old man, the courtesan, the young woman (who is sometimes the courtesan and who marries well in the end, sometimes with the dissolute young man), the virtuous young man, the gallant, the wanton wife, the jealous husband, the faithful friend, the intriguer, the rogue, the parasite, the gull, the wittol, the usurer, the lawyer, the doctor, and the servant.

The most apparent instances of the rake-hell dissolute are Folly-wit of *A Mad World* and Witgood of *A Trick*. Like many of their prototypes in Latin comedy, they are young men who have finally come to their senses and now begin to scheme and intrigue to recoup their losses. Pecunius Lucre, Witgood's uncle, Walkadine Hoard of the same play, Sir Bounteous Progress of *A Mad World*, Quomodo of *Michaelmas Term*, Falso in *The Phoenix*, and Glister in *The Family of Love* represent old men who cheat young people out of their money. They are miser figures. Unlike them are the courtesans in *A Mad World*, *Michaelmas Term*, *Your Five Gallants*, and *A Trick to Catch The Old One*. These women are entirely conventional while the old misers are often vital in a Dickensian manner. They constitute, with Sir Walter Whorehound, a "great group of eccentric originals"57, even though it is clearly possible to see in them the lineaments of conventional comic types. Like Falstaff, they betray their origins but are at the same time vigorously alive individuals. This is hardly true of many of the other figures in

36.

the City comedies. Fidelio is merely a faithful friend and son in The Phoenix, and Phoenix is both a conventional intrigue manager and a mouthpiece for conventional morality. Fitsgrave is a wooden spy who dupes the five gallants, and another example of the intriguer convention with which these plays teem.58 We must agree with L. C. Knights, then, that Middleton's characters are not often individuals seen in a particular place and period but are for the most part completely generalized conventionalities. His gulls, wittols, rogues, gallants, lawyers, usurers, lovers and scapegraces normally do exactly as we would expect them to do since we have met them so many times before.59 It is profitable, however, to examine two stock figures at some length, the usurer and the Puritan.

Since the theme of usury is of such central importance to A Trick to Catch The Old One, it is not surprising to find half a dozen usurers in the play. Nor is it surprising to discover conventional traits in their portrayal. Pecunius Lucre, the Hoards (Walkadine especially), Moneylove, Dampit, and Gulf betray by their label-names either their profession or conventional moral attitudes towards it. Walkadine and Pecunius, moreover, querulous like the traditional stock usurer, are old men, Walkadine displaying the further characteristic of being a doting aged suitor.60

58 See pages 23 - 30 above.

59 L. C. Knights, op. cit., p. 258: "But, reading his comedies as carefully as we can, we find - exciting discovery! - that gallants are likely to be in debt, that they make love to citizens' wives, that lawyers are concerned more for their profits than for justice, and that cutpurses are thieves."

Another stock trait, self-destruction by hanging\textsuperscript{61}, is alluded to in Hoard's boasting that he will vex Lucre with a display of wealth. Lucre, he says,

\begin{quote}
will never endure it, but run up
and hang himself presently.
\end{quote}

(IV. iv. 22 - 3.)

Conventionally, the usurer lives in semi-starvation; thus a sign of his reformation is the banquet spread at his expense.\textsuperscript{62} In Hoard's final acceptance of his situation, revealed in his words at the end of the play, "So, so, all friends! the wedding-dinner cools", such reformation appears.

In Quomodo in \textit{Michaelmas Term} we see yet further stock traits. Quomodo invites his victim, Easy, to visit him often and to dine with him once a quarter (IV. i. 58 - 9.). In this appears the convention of the usurer as niggardly host\textsuperscript{63}, while in his victimizing of Easy appears the trait suggested in these words by Wright.

\begin{quote}
One chief Elizabethan grievance against
the usurer was his ruin of the hospitable gentry.\textsuperscript{64}
\end{quote}

Finally, of course, there appear in all these usurers such conventional characteristics as heartlessness, chicanery, and diabolic delight in trickery.

The Puritan is the second stock figure deserving rather detailed

\textsuperscript{61} Wright, \textit{SP}, vol. 31 (April, 1934), pp. 192 - 6.
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 181 - 7.
\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 186.
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 187.
analysis. Middleton often mocked the Puritan; in fact,

The Family of Love is a laboratory specimen, with appendages complete, of the anti-Puritan comedy.

The precisian's clothing, speech, manners, and morals are satirized here in typical terms, but by far the strongest attack is delivered against Puritan hypocrisy. Middleton makes his point by repeated ironic contrasts between what may be styled the honest corruption of the gallants and the hypocritical corruption of the Familists. Such hypocrisy may be seen in the following colloquy between Dryfat and Gerardine, Gerardine's statement betraying rationalized cant and "justified" lechery, Dryfat's reply being a parody of the Puritan's diction and standard hypersexuality.

Dryfat: Well, master Gerardine, I hope to see you a Familist before I die.

Gerardine: That's most likely, for I hold most of their principles already: I never rail nor calumniate any man but in love and charity; I never cozen any man for any ill will I bear him, but in love and charity to myself; I never make my neighbour a cuckold for any hate or malice I bear him, but in love and charity to his wife.

Dryfat: And may those principles fructify in your weak members!

(IV. ii. 68 - 77.)

Hypocrisy appears in the following passage, too, as well as sexual innuendo, but the Puritan's preciseness, bibliolatry, fear of popery, and fanaticism

65 This conventional character is ably discussed by William P. Holden in his recent study, Anti-Puritan Satire, 1572 - 1642, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1954, pp. 101 - 44.

66 Ibid., p. 129. At this point it may be noted that although The Puritan is not studied in this thesis, many scholars believe it to be Middleton's.
are its chief themes.

Dryfat: I commend this zeal in you, Mistress Purge; I desire much to be of your society.

Mistress Purge: Do you, indeed? blessing on your heart! are you upright in your dealings?

Dryfat: Yes, I do love to stand to any thing I do, though I lose by it: in truth, I deal but too truly for this world. You shall hear how far I am entered in the right way already. First, I live in charity, and give small alms to such as be not of the right sect; I take under twenty i' th' hundred, nor no forfeiture of bonds unless the law tell my conscience I may do't; I set no pot on a' Sundays, but feed on cold meat drest a' Saturdays; I keep no holydays nor fasts, but eat most flesh o' Fridays of all days i' the week; I do use to say inspired graces, able to starve a wicked man with length; I have Aminadabs and Abrahams to my godsons, and I chide them when they ask me blessing: and I do hate the red letter more than I follow the written verity.

(III. iii. 61 - 78.)

The detestation of Catholicism is expressed, too, in Mistress Purge's animadversion on organs where a scarcely-veiled sexual allusion provides a further piquant remark for the prejudiced audience:

Organs? fie, fie, they have a most abominable squeaking sound in mine ears; they edify not a whit; I detest 'em: I hope my body has no organs.

(III. iii. 29 - 31.)

Puritan logic is burlesqued by Club in his "proof" to Mistress Glister that the Familists love their neighbours better than themselves:

Yes, better than themselves; for they love them better than their husbands and husband and wife are all one; therefore better than themselves.

(II. iv. 75 - 78.)
The stock stage Puritan was sexually intemperate, and was usually cast in the role of an adulterer, but one who could argue that his behaviour was religiously moral. And provided she preserved appearances, the Puritan's wife could cheat him sexually without danger from God's wrath. This Mistress Purge proceeds to do at the Family's meeting (IV. iv. 14 ff.), thereby providing Middleton's coterie audience with a situation that could titillate and outrage at once.67 Mistress Purge's later hypocritical defense of her actions at the meeting - she declares that she turned her wedding ring over to help "distressed Geneva" (V. iii. 262 - 78.) - is partner to her injured innocence which prompts her "doggerel verse on the order of a bad hymn"68:

Here I am - 0 time's impiety! -
Hither I come from out the harmless fold
To have my good name eaten up by wolves:
See, how they grin! Well, the weak must to the wall;
I must bear wrong, but shame shall them befall.
(V. iii. 185 - 9.)

Finally, Mistress Purge's reprehension of plays reveals a stock Puritan attitude:

Fie, fie, 'tis pity young gentlemen can
bestow their time no better: this playing
is not lawful, for I cannot find that either plays or players were allowed in the prime church of Ephesus by the elders.
(I. iii. 110 - 113.)

67 Holden remarks, op. cit., p. 129, that "Middleton has used the name of the sect [of the Family of Love] only because it had to his audience an aura of Paphian rites and secret sins." On sex in the coterie theatres see Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions, pp. 186 - 258.

68 Holden, op. cit., p. 131.
It is apparent, therefore, that vital as some of Middleton's characters may be, they disclose at nearly every turn conventional traits.

Conventional, too, is the use Middleton makes of the stage of his time. For him space is neutral and fluid when he wishes it to be, and time is telescoped in a manner not acceptable to dramatists of a later age. Act IV, scene i of The Phoenix apparently begins in a street near the Court of Law but then switches to the Court:

Phoenix: Hah, whither have my thoughts conveyed me? I am now Within the dizzy murmur of the law. (IV. i. 37 - 9.)

Actually there is no need to definitely localize either the Phoenix-Proditor part of this scene or the Tangle-Falso-Quieto section. Not until Phoenix accidentally jars the ring of the Jeweller's door do we need a specific setting; we then realize that one part of the stage possibly stood for the Court of Law as the part Phoenix is now on must represent the area immediately before the Jeweller's House. That is, Middleton (conventionally enough) localizes action only when localization is necessary. His treatment of time is similarly conventional - the time of the action is whatever moment the dramatist wants it to be. In the space of one hundred and forty lines Middleton can allow a month to pass away. In Michaelmas Term this interval stands for the lapse of time during which "Blastfield's" note with Quomodo becomes mature (III. i. 1 - 140.). Perhaps Middleton learned something about the utility of telescoping time

69 Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions, pp. 7 - 14.

70 We learn from the stage direction at line 211 that the Jeweller's House is nearby, too.
in writing *The Family of Love* with Dekker whose Gerardine-Maria scenes are separated by "sufficient" time to allow Maria to conceive, then to grow noticeably pregnant.

It is apparent from the above survey that Middleton's City comedies are full of convention, that everywhere the reader looks he will encounter stock characters, familiar plots, conventional themes, and the customary Elizabethan treatment of staging. Conventional, too, are the uses of soliloquy, asides, the five-act structure, the scene, and the emphasis on story and brisk action, although limitations of space have prevented a study of these matters here.

Before making final generalizations on convention in the City comedies, however, we must note in the plays devices popular with Middleton. In their use we can see Middleton resorting to means that would be acceptable to most of his audience if not always to the twentieth century theatre-goer. But since they were used frequently by previous dramatists, it might seem that at least some of these devices should more properly be called conventions. Admittedly, the distinction is difficult to make, but in partial defense of classifying them as devices, it should be observed that many of these means used by Middleton to create certain effects are not stock conceptions of plot, theme, or character but rather stage properties. Other means may be termed devices because of the relative infrequency of their appearance. In realistic Elizabethan comedy we expect intrigue plots, cuckoldry and tricking, gallants and gulls, but we do not necessarily look for the supernatural, banquets, or trials. Hence these
latter may be termed devices rather than conventions.

One of Middleton's favourite devices is the written document: the letter, the deed, the bond, the release. In *The Family of Love* (V. iii. 323 - 38.), a letter implicates Glister in bastardy; Phoenix, in a supposed "brief of all his travels", makes known to his father, the Duke, the evildoers in Farrara (*The Phoenix*, V. i. 68 - 153.); Easy loses his land to Quomodo by going surety for a bond for "Blastfield", but regains it when Quomodo, blinded by arrogance, signs his own name to the Beadle's quittance receipt (V. i. 104.); in *A Trick* Joyce receives a note from her lover, Theodorus Witgood, who assures her that all will be well (III. ii. 16 - 9.), and Hoard has the Scrivener read the release by which Witgood gives up all claim to the widow and her estate (IV. iv. 252 - 69.).

The precise legal phraseology of this document points to another device Middleton exploited, technical language, whether the jargon of lawyers as in *The Phoenix* (I. iv. 46 - 121.), medical terms as in *A Mad World, My Masters* (III. ii. 55 - 74.), or the cant of gallants and rogues as in *Your Five Gallants* (II. iii. 109 ff.).

One of the devices most interesting in these realistic plays is the supernatural. In *The Family of Love*, Lipsalve and Gudgeon separately appeal to Glister to help them with art magic in their love for Mistress Purge (II. iv. 130 - 219.), each thinking the other to be a spirit when they put Glister's charm to use (III. vi.).

In *A Mad World* a succubus actually appears before the love-distracted

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72 The *Black Book* describes a journey of the Devil through London where he views, in various guises, the abuses rife in the city.
Penitent Brothel in the shape of Mistress Harebrain, lasciviously tempting him with charms, song, and dance (IV. i. 29 - 74.). But very common in Elizabethan plays of all types, not merely in Middleton's, is the device of the banquet for concluding a play. A Trick to Catch The Old One and A Mad World both end in this manner. Common, too, is the final scene as court trial; the fake trial of The Family of Love and the judgment in Michaelmas Term illustrate the device. Finally, Middleton resorts to the use of such devices as trunks, rings, chains of pearl, whips, tobacco, dice, liquor, and weapons for achieving certain dramatic effects.

What, then, is the pattern, the trend in Middleton's handling of convention and device? Obviously, as the meaning of convention implies, it is the playwright resorting to means found effective by his contemporaries and his forebears. And since the City comedies are heavily weighted in favour of the taste of the Jacobean private theatre audience with its demand for the titillating, the piquant, and the amoral rather than for the romantic, the cheerful, and the edifying (the demands of the audiences in the popular theatres), the pattern in Middleton's handling of convention is that of the dramatist maintaining a sensitive response to current fashion. As will be seen in the later chapters of this thesis, like so many other writers then (and now), Middleton lackeyed with the tides of taste. Whether he could be genuinely vocal in dramatic forms other than that of the realistic we do not know; we do know that at his maturity he produced tragedies whose power is largely a product of the actual deeds and language

of men and women. Not that his art became shapeless as chronicle, not
that it became journalistic; on the contrary, because he was able, like
Hemingway in our own times, to confer artistic order on the material life
supplies, with the shaping power of art so concealed that art is life,
did Middleton succeed. But his success was only intermittent because, in
large part, his audience forced him to follow fashion. Some of his
bewilderment, frustration, and bitterness that this should be so is ex­
pressed in *A Mad World. My Masters* (V. i. 29 – 34.) where Sir Bounteous
Progress exclaims:

But for certain players, there thou liest,
boy; they were never more uncertain in their
lives; now up, and now down; they know not when
to play, where to play, nor what to play: not
when to play, for fearful fools; where to play,
for puritan fools; not what to play, for critical
fools.

Long before Middleton achieved his summit as a dramatist, however,
he was to undergo an apprenticeship to two fashions that exerted great pres­
sure on all Jacobean playwrights: the Italianate tragedy of blood revenge,
and the mode of tragi-comedy defined by the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher.
Middleton's plays in these vogues must now receive attention.

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74 Six of the eight comedies were acted by dramatic companies appealing
to special audiences, more courtly than those of the Globe, the Fortune, or
the Rose. *The Family of Love* was acted by His Majesty's Revels, but *The
Phoenix, Michaelmas Term, A Mad World, My Masters, Your Five Gallants, and
A Trick to Catch The Old One* were acted by Paul's boys. See E. K. Chambers,
The Elizabethan Stage, vol. 3, London, Oxford University Press, 1923,
pp. 439 - 41, for information on the staging of these plays, and Alfred
Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions, passim, for the fashions
Middleton had to pursue in these City comedies.
CHAPTER III

THE EARLY TRAGEDIES

Anyone coming from a study of Middleton's early City comedies to The Revenger's Tragedy will not be at all startled by the attribution of that Italianate revenge play to Middleton since it conforms to Middleton's acknowledged early writings in diction and in verse, in idiom and in mannerism. The play is very similar to the City comedies in point of view, characterization, and dramatic technique. It affords also striking examples of phraseology paralleled closely in works accepted as Middleton's.

The structural skill, the intensity of mood, the poetic excellence of The Revenger's Tragedy all have parallels in the earlier plays as Schoenbaum's analysis has shown. There is thus no need to account for putative "problems of artistic continuity" allegedly arising when this play is taken out of the Tourneur canon and placed among Middleton's works.

These problems, furthermore, are no more relevant to The Second


2 Ibid., pp. 181 - 2.

3 Ibid., pp. 3 - 35.


47.

Maiden's Tragedy, although it is obviously an inferior work. The decline in power in this play from that of Vindice's tragedy can be accounted for in terms of a shift in dramatic purpose resulting from the enormous popularity of a new vogue - the Beaumont-Fletcher play. But in view of the fact that much in The Second Maiden's Tragedy conforms to the mode of the Italianate drama of blood revenge, the chief discussion of this play will take place here in connection with The Revenger's Tragedy.

When Middleton in telling Vindice's story made his first incursion into tragedy he already had half a dozen years of comic playwriting experience behind him, while the second of his early tragedies, The Second Maiden's Tragedy, came at the end of this early comic period. As might be expected, then, both plays show the influence of the themes, structures, characterization, and staging worked out in the comedies. But equally it is to be expected that many of the preoccupations and techniques of the Senecan - Italianate tragedy of blood revenge, the typical species of Elizabethan tragedy, should have deeply affected Middleton. The following pages will delineate these two major influences in Middleton's early tragedies, the comic influence receiving treatment first. At

6 Schoenbaum, pp. 183 - 202, 36 - 68, discusses authorship and provides a critical analysis, the most extensive available.

7 F. T. Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 1587 - 1642, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1940, pp. 166 - 7. See also Schoenbaum, pp. 36 - 68.

once it will be observed that Middleton assimilates into tragedy conventions that he exploited in comedy.

First, then, the conventional themes. As in the comedies, sexual corruption is the object of satirical attack in the tragedies, and this constitutes just as an important a theme here as there. The very first lines of *The Revenger's Tragedy* establish the tone of bitter, almost savage, railing against lechery that smolders and flares in this play in a way highly reminiscent of *The Phoenix*. Vindice's opening speech quivers and writhes with loathing of sexual intemperance:

Duke: royall lecher; goe, gray hayrde adultery,  
And thou his sonne, as impious steept as hee:  
And thou his bastard true-begott in euill:  
And thou his Dutchesse that will doe with Diuill,  
Foure exlent Characters - 0 that marrow-lesse age,  
Would stuffe the hollow Bones with dambd desires,  
And stead of heate kindle infemail fires,  
Within the spend-thrift veynes of a drye Duke,  
A parcht and iuicelesse luxur. 0 God! one  
That has scarce bloud Enough to live vpon.  
And hee to ryot it like a sonne and heyre?  
(I. i.[1 - 14])

The striving of the vicious folk in this play to outdo one another in sin is the theme of Vindice's reply to Lussurioso's question if he "knowst Ith world strange lust",

0 Dutch lust! fulsome lust!  
Drunken procreation, which begets so many drunckards;  
Some father dreads not (gonne to bedde in wine) to slide from the mother,  
And cling the daughter-in-law,  
Some Vncles are adulterous with their Neaces,  
Brothers with brothers wiues, 0 howre of Incest!  
Any kin now next to the Rim ath sister  
Is mans meate in these dayes....  
(I. iii. 65 - 72)

9 All quotations are from Nicoll's edition cited above.
Lechery alone is not Middleton's target in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Middleton presents, really, a kind of anatomy of sexual excesses and deviations in this play. He had in *The Phoenix* shown us Falso's would-be incest, in *A Trick to Catch The Old One* the old Hoard's lechery, in *Michaelmas Term* Hellgill's pandering, in *The Family of Love* Lipsalve's and Gudgeon's attempted rape of Mistress Purge. But in his first tragedy Middleton, adopting a much more vehement tone, presents us with a case of actual rape - the youngest son of the Duchess, Junior, has, we learn, violated the virtuous wife of the good old lord, Antonio (I. ii. 1 ff.).

Although by an error accorded the extremity of justice, Junior hears his sentence with flippant cynicism:

Must I bleed then, without respect of signe? well -
My fault was sweet sport, which the world approves,
I dye for that which every woman loves.

(III. iv.[85 - 7])

And instead of pandering being a minor theme as in *Michaelmas Term*, Lussurioso, the Duke's son, engages the disguised Vindice, who poses as a "strange digested fellow...Of ill-contented nature", to pander for him to Castiza, Vindice's sister. Although Vindice fails in this mission (II. i. 47.), he does succeed in persuading Gratiana, his mother, to plead with Castiza on behalf of Lussurioso (II. i. 62 - 177.). The boldest and most shocking sexual irregularity is, however, the cold-blooded proposal of incest made by the Duchess to Spurio, her husband's bastard son, after the Duke has sent Junior to prison. Spurio consents, agreeing with the Duchess that by begetting him out of wedlock the Duke did him a gross injustice. He therefore declares,

Duke on thy browe Ile draw my Bastardie.
For indeed a bastard by nature should make Cuckolds,
Because he is the sonne of a Cuckold-maker.

(I. ii.[222 - 4.]).

Incest in The Family of Love and The Phoenix had either been supposed or merely proposed.

The same sexual abuses, then, that appear in the London plays make their presence strongly felt in The Revenger's Tragedy. They do so with a difference, though. Here, as befits tragedy and as is the case with earlier tragedies - those of Marston, for example - a seriousness, a bitterness, in fact, informs the satire. Only in the dark comedy, The Phoenix, had this tone prevailed before in one of Middleton's plays. But satire against lechery and other sexual aberrations was by this time a convention of literature, a stock theme for the comic expose, and for tragedy - witness Hamlet, Antonio's Revenge, and Malevole in the tragi-comedy, The Malcontent.¹⁰

To make the theme of sexual abuse dramatic Middleton takes his cue from earlier plays which derive this technique ultimately from the Moralities: figures of Virtue are contrasted sharply with those of Vice. Against the blackness of the Duke and his court is set the dignity of virtuous poverty that we see in Castiza and in her mother (before her seduction and after her reformation), in the "miracle" of the chaste wife of Lord Antonio, in "the common sense horror of Antonio at the revengers' deed",¹² and in the agitated indignation of the outraged Vindice.

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¹⁰ We are reminded of Bosola's later attacks, too.

¹¹ In The Phoenix we have Middleton's best early example of this Morality technique.

It is this contrasting of black with white that Middleton employs to dramatize the themes of sexual abuses in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, too. Here, also, we find themes explored in the City comedies: the lust of the powerful for the unprotected, the sick anxiety about a woman's fidelity, the temptation of a wife, the contented cuckoldry of a wittol, the solicitations of a pander. But against the predatory machinations of the lustful Tyrant is set the steadfastness of the Lady's pure love for her "matche", Govianus, who has despaired of her constancy as a result of his deposition, groaning

-o shees a woman, and her eye will stande
upon advauncement.  
(I. 1. 68 - 9)

The Lady's behaviour in the main plot contrasts yet again with that of the Wife in the sub-plot. The Wife yields to Votarius's pleading, soon addressing him as "my best and dearest servaunt" (II. ii. 845.). If the chastity of the Lady in the main plot reminds the reader of Castiza in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and of Fidelio's mother in *The Phoenix*, the temptation and fall and the subsequent hardened duplicity of the Wife in the sub-plot he will encounter again in *Women, Beware Women* and *The Changeling*. The Wife acts under the belief expressed by the courtesan's mother in *A Mad World, My Masters*,

Who gets th' opinion for a virtuous name
May sin at pleasure, and ne'er think of shame.  
(I. i. 182 - 3.)

The Wife's duplicity, in fact, in prompting the dying Anselmus's final re-

mark, evokes at the same time the comment in this play most applicable to the action of *Women, Beware Women* and *The Changeling*:

> O thou beguiler of man's easy trust
> ,, The serpents wisdome is in weemens lust.

Another sex theme in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* that found expression, though in humorous rather than tragic terms, in *A Mad World* was fearful anxiety over a wife's faithfulness. But whereas the frantic Hare-brain in the latter play was terrified lest his wife cuckold him and so guarded her strictly, Anselmus in the former play is driven by a pathological compulsion to test his wife's fidelity and consequently exposes her to temptation. His devoted friend, Votarius, having noticed Anselmus's distraught condition, wonders why Anselmus does not enjoy "peace and pleasure", and asks,

> had you not both longe since
> by a kinde worthy Ladie your chast wife
> (I.ii. 282 - 3)

Anselmus replies, revealing the source of his turbulence of spirit,

> that's it that I take pains with thee, to be sure of what true reporte can I send to my sowle of that I know not...
> but saie shees all chast, yet, is that her goodnes? what labour ist for woman to keep constant thats never tride or tempted?
> ... give not me the things that is thought good, but what's approu'd so
> ... pry thee set to her and bring my peace alonge with thee.
> (I.ii. 284 - 303)

The intensification of feeling against sexual corruption that is found in *The Revenger's Tragedy* caused Middleton for maximum dramatic effect to cast Vindice in the role of pander to his own sister. In his next tragedy, he did a similar thing (and we shall see him recurring to
the trick ten years later in *Women, Beware Women* where Livia panders for her own brother). The Tyrant engages Helvetius to pander to his own daughter, the object of the Tyrant's lust. Helvetius, however, is converted to virtue by Govianus's violence (he fired a pistol at him), and for the rest of the play acts as one of the Morality foils of goodness against the wickedness of the usurper. The Tyrant, therefore, is obliged to make use of Sophonirus, the wittol.

Contentment in cuckoldry fascinated Middleton. Mention of it is found in his earliest play, *The Family of Love* (III. iii. 131 - 7.), and in his last City comedy, *The Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, it receives its most famous expression. But Allwit's words there echo with remarkable closeness the words spoken here by Sophonirus who has been hoping to profit by getting his wife preferment at court (I. i. 40; II. iii. 1117 - 18.). Sophonirus says,

\[
\text{I' allowe her her [one]OWNE frend, to stop her mouth and keep her quiet, gi[he]' him his table free, and the huge feeding of his great stone horse ON [wth] wch he rides in pompe about the Cittie only to speak to gallants in bay-windowes; marry his lodging he paiies dearly for, he getts me all my children, there I saue by'te, beside I drawe my life owte by the bargaine some twelue yeres longer then the tymes appointed, when my young prodigall gallant kicks up's heeles at one and thirtie, and hes dead and rotten some ffyve and fortie yeares before I'me coffinde, Tis the right waie to keep a woman honest one frend is Baracadoe to a hundred & keeps em owte, nay more, a husbands sure to haue his children all of one[5]mans getting, & he that performes best, can haue no better. (I.1. 42 - 58)}
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Perhaps the most shocking sexual abuse in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* is the Tyrant's insane desire to embrace the Lady even after she
has taken her own life; he vows that

death nor the marble prison my love sleepes in
shall keep her bodie lockt vp fro myne armes.

(IV. [ii. 1709 - 10])

His pathological lust drives him to wrest the Lady from her tomb and to take her to his palace where her body is decked "in all the glorius Ritches" of the "treasure howse of arte". His necrophilia betrays him, though, for he needs the assistance of "a Picture drawer" to alter "the too constant palenes" of the Lady's cheek, "to purchase ther/ the breadth of a red Rose, in naturall coloure". Govianus, disguised, is the picture drawer. After he finishes the job, the Tyrant then employs "Armes and lipps/... to labour life into her". Govianus, however, has used in his paints "the best poison [he] could get for monie", and the Tyrant dies. Govianus and the ghost of the Lady are the virtue-figures contrasting in these scenes with the Tyrant whose lust reaches an extreme not equalled elsewhere in Middleton.

If the Tyrant's hysteria, resulting from his being cheated by death of the love of the Lady, reminds us of Tamburlaine's fury in being similiarly frustrated of Zenocrate's love, a frustration that drives him to have her embalmed so that he might carry her with him wherever he goes (Part II, II. iv. 127 - 32.), the decision of the Tyrant to hire someone to simulate life in the Lady points forward to Massinger's Duke of Milan where Sforza hires the villain, Francesco, disguised as a Jewish doctor, to cure the Duchess, Marcella, from the illness that the insane Duke believes his murdered wife to be suffering from. Francesco rouges the lips and cheeks of the corpse, so that Sforza exclaims,

This hand seems as it was when first I kissed it,
These lips invite too: I could ever feed
Upon these roses, they still keep their colour
and native sweetness.

(V. ii.)

The themes of cheating and of the trickster tricked, so prominent in the City comedies, are equally prominent in the early tragedies. Indeed, one critic regards The Revenger's Tragedy as being made up primarily of diverse illustrations of the about-face experienced when a trickster is tricked. Since these themes may be most conveniently discussed in connection with the conventions of structure, they will be examined below.

Finally, then, the themes of virtuous poverty tempted by the corrupt possessors of power and place, the innocent (gentle) folk of the country ensnared by the sophisticated city schemers (including courtiers), and the theme of social climbing, themes exploited in Michaelmas Term, The Phoenix, and The Chaste Maid of Cheapside, receive their attention in the two early tragedies. In The Revenger's Tragedy the same contrast between the virtuous poor and the corrupt rich that was made in Michaelmas Term appears between Vindice's family on one hand and the Duke's on the other. With two exceptions, "luxury goes to the heads of the poor" in the tragedy as in the comedy where the Country Wench's Father remained, as a result of disillusioning youthful experiences, untempted, while his daughter was lured into sin with promises of finery and the life of a gentlewoman. The two in The Revenger's Tragedy unaffected by the wealth and pleasures of the court are Vindice and Castiza. But their mother, Gratiana, is seduced by the disguised Vindice to pander to her stubborn daughter who continues to

Deny advancement, treasure, the Dukes sonne!

(II. i. [179])

15 Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy, p. 165.
16 Ibid., p. 169.
56.

Vindice urges his mother to continue pleading with her:

O thinke vpon the pleasure of the Pallace,
Secured ease and state; the stirring meates,
Ready to moue out of the dishes, that e'en now
quicken when their eaten,
Banquets abroad by Torch-light, Musicks, sports,
Baré-headed vassailes, that had nere the fortune
To keepe on their owne Hats, but let horns were em.
Nine Coaches waiting - hurry, hurry, hurry.

(II. i.222 - 84)

In *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* the Tyrant tries to buy the Lady's love with jewels "worth ten citties", but she scorns him, declaring,

I have a mynde,
that must be shifted ere I cast of thease
or I shall weare straung coloures; - tis not titles
nor all the bastard - honoure of this frame
that I am taken w'th, I come not hether
to pleaze the eye of glorie, but of goodness
and that concernes not yo' sir, you're for greatness
I dare not deale w'th yo', I have found my matche
and I will never loose him.

(I. i. 132 - 40)

Though Govianus is "as poore as *Vertue*" she remains loyal to him. She is strikingly contrasted by the wittol, Sophonirus, who strives to get his wife "preferd" by offering her ostensibly as a pledge before going off to plead the Tyrant's love to the Lady. Actually, he hoped that the Tyrant would take his wife as his mistress, to the making of the wittol's fortune.

But that the powerful, wealthy people in these tragedies should attempt to buy the virtue of the poor with offers of place and jewels and that the poor should corrupt themselves by seizing the opportunity not only repeats a conventional theme of the London comedies but also points forward to one of the dominant themes of *Women, Beware Women*.

In his London comedies Middleton gained much experience with the intrigue pattern, the conventional form of Elizabethan realistic comedy.
The framework of the early tragedies is the intrigue pattern, too. Vindice is the chief intriguer in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Indeed, he is consciously so; of the killing of the Duke, he says with considerable satisfaction,

_Twas somewhat witty carried tho we say it. (V. iii. [139])_

But as happened in *Michaelmas Term* and *A Mad World* the main intriguer overreaches himself - Vindice is haled off to execution since, as Antonio says,

_You that would murder him would murder me._ (V. iii. [148])

Events have "come about" indeed for Vindice as for many other intriguers in the play, one of the more memorable ironic reversals of fortune being the attempt of Ambitioso and Supervacuo to have the imprisoned Lussurioso executed. They are shocked to discover that Junior, instead, has felt the axe (III. vi. 69 - 100.). (Junior's smug assurance of rescue, it might be noted, is reminiscent of Pedringano's in *The Spanish Tragedy*.) So numerous are the _volte-faces_ in this tragedy, that M. C. Bradbrook was led to assert that "...the main structure of the play...is an enlarged series of _peripeteia_." 18

The narrative illustrates with ingenious variety in how many ways a villain may be hoist with his own petard. 19

_In The Second Maiden's Tragedy_ also the intrigue pattern is apparent. The Tyrant schemes to gain the Lady's love; her suicide does not

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17 Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 165, says she counted twenty-two.
18 Ibid., p. 165.
19 Ibid., p. 165.
thwart him for he plots to have her even in death, until Govianus's counter-intrigue defeats his demented desire. One detail at the end of the Tyrant's story that aptly illustrates ironic reversal of fortune in this play is the Tyrant's calling his lords to aid him only to find they have deserted him for Govianus (V. ii. 2401 - 17.). Anselmus's plot in the secondary action of the play for testing his wife's fidelity boomerangs dreadfully as the result of Leonela's trap, but the maid herself also falls victim to her own device, as does her revengeful lover.

As in the comedies, so in the early tragedies does disguise form one of the chief structural conventions. Almost adroit as Follywit is Vindice with disguise. As Piato he deceives Lussurioso, his mother, Gratiana, Castiza, his sister, and the Duke, his nine-years enemy. As Hippolito's malcontent brother he deludes Lussurioso into believing that "going to Law" for "three and twenty years" has made him melancholy. Lussurioso hires him to lure Piato to where Lussurioso may kill him. So Vindice, the Revenger, is engaged as the Malcontent to slay the Pander, all of whom are Vindice. Finally, Vindice, disguised, a participant in the Mask of Revengers in the revels which conclude the play, slays Lussurioso and reveals to the shocked Antonio the unknown hero-villain of the play. (Govianus's disguise of a picture drawer is instrumental in securing revenge in The Second Maiden's Tragedy.)

Further structural conventions are the dumb-shows and masques, but since these are stock features of Senecan tragedy their use will be discussed later. Moreover, no identifiable influences of the comic handling of these conventions can be discerned in these tragedies.

That The Revenger's Tragedy occupies a crucial position in the
history of the revenge play is considerably the result of its characters, especially Vindice. Yet if the people of the City comedies are largely stock figures repeatedly found in the realistic London comedy of the age, the characters of The Revenger's Tragedy all have their prototypes in revenge drama written prior to 1606 - 7 or the Jonsonian humour or in the morality. V indice is a composite of the revenger-protagonist (who has, in comic guise, been encountered before in Middleton's Phoenix), the villain (in the comedies Proditor is one such), the malcontent, and what in morality terms might be called Outraged Righteousness (again Phoenix is called to mind). However, unlike another but more famous composite character, Falstaff, the combination of stock characters known as Vindice is not credibly human, since no incantation was uttered over the mixture by the playwright to make the elements fuse into a creative whole, individual and vital. Moreover, we have seen the lineaments of Vindice's character in some of Middleton's earlier figures: his shocked outrage over corruption in Phoenix, his over-confident scheming in Quomodo, his manipulation of the wicked consequent upon disguise in Fitsgrave, and his quick-change talent in Follywit.

Other figures in the tragedies whom we have seen to be stock characters in the comedies are the paragon of chastity, Vindice's betrothed, Gloriana, Lord Antonio's wife, two chaste women who do not appear in

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20 Bowers, op. cit., p. 138: "The Revenger's Tragedy stands practically at the crossroads of Elizabethan tragedy."

21 Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 165: "... for this play Tourneur also used the Humorous system of characterization,..."

22 F. P. Wilson, Elizabethan and Jacobean, pp. 101 - 2.
person, Castiza, Govianus's Lady), the wanton woman (the Duchess, the Wife of Anselmus, Leonela), the gallant (Lussurioso, Spurio - possibly, Votarius), the jealous husband (Anselmus), the faithful friend (Hippolito, Votarius), the intriguer (Lussurioso, Ambitioso, Supervacuo, the Duchess, Leonela, the Wife), the wittol (Sophonirus), and the gull (Vindice must be included here, too, as well as the Duke, Lussurioso, Ambitioso, Supervacuo, the Tyrant, Anselmus, Leonela, indeed, all those cheated of their expectations).

Conventions of staging observable in the City plays are in evidence here, as well. As in Michaelmas Term, so in these tragedies Middleton felt no need to observe unity of time; with virtually no indication of the time necessary for its development he traces the inception, disclosure, and growing notoriety of a case of incest in The Revenger's Tragedy, while in The Second Maiden's Tragedy Anselmus's purposeful absence from home is lengthy enough to permit his wife to fall in love with Votarius and to confer her utmost favours upon him.

The City comedies were not Middleton's sole source of convention. Before turning to the other major influence on these two plays, that of the Italianate drama of blood revenge, it is worth noting that literary tradition provided Middleton with conventions found outside drama, too. A major instance of this is the memento mori theme. "Hav mynd o thi last ende!" was the perpetual warning of Medieval pulpit orators, and this theme of the sermon became that of many literary forms, from the lyric to the Morality, and later exerted enormous pressure on the Elizabethan mind.

If its most famous dramatic embodiment involves Yorick's skull, and if its most exalted prose expression is in Ralegh's "Hic jacet", it also occurs in memorable form in *The Revenger's Tragedy* where the motif is allied with the theme of lust. We hear Vindice at the beginning of the play addressing the skull of his "betrothed Lady" in these terms:

O thou terror to fat folkes  
To have their costly three-pilde flesh worene of  
As bare as this

and later on in III. 5. we encounter one of the great speeches of the play; gazing at "the skull of his loue drest up in Tires", Vindice asks,

Dos euery proud and selfe-affecting Dame  
Camphire her face for this? and grieue her Maker  
In sinfull baths of milke, - when many an infant starues,  
For her superfluous out-side, all for this?  
Who now bids twenty pound a night, prepares  
Musick, perfumes, and sweete-meates? all are husht,  
Thou maist lie chast now! it were fine me thinkes,  
To haue thee seene at Reuells, forgetfull feasts,  
And uncleane Brothells; sure twould fright the sinner  
And make him a good coward, put a Reueller  
Out off his Antick amble  
And cloye an Epicure with empty dishes.  
Here might a scornefull and ambitious woman  
Looke through and through her selfe, - see Ladies,  
with false formes  
You deceiue men, but cannot deceiue wormes.  

There is little, if any, of "the genuine tragical feeling - certainly more classic than Christian" in Middleton's handling of the theme. G. R. Owst tells us that the *ars moriendi* theme in the Medieval sermon did possess this feeling. Rather, Middleton seems to have been inspired by the grotesqueness, the demonic glee, the mordant satire, and the savage irony found in the *Danse Macabre*.

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A second literary convention needs only the briefest mention. Not only the satiric posture but also the very objects satirized in the early tragedies were an attitude assumed and targets for attack at least as early as the Medieval homilists. Jacobean satire reworked a much-plowed field.

Another much-plowed field was the Italianate tragedy of blood revenge. The Revenger's Tragedy is set squarely in the vogue of revenge plays that owe their paternity to the Roman Seneca and their maternity to the sensational novella. In fact, Fredson Bowers considers the play as belonging to the school of Kyd whose Spanish Tragedy may be regarded as the typical Elizabethan tragedy.

The influence of Seneca on Elizabethan drama may be summed up in the following way. The tragedies of Seneca sanctioned the sensational action of the revenge tales dramatized by the Elizabethans, and provided models for organizing the action around the theme of revenge. Seneca's plays, moreover, supplied the typical Elizabethan tragedy its background of Fate and Nemesis. The classic tradition established the convention of Blank Verse, of five Acts, of Moralising and Introspection, Rhetoric and Stichomuthia, Ghosts and the Supernatural.

All these Senecan features are discoverable in The Revenger's Tragedy but

26 Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, pp. 132 - 8.
not in unmixed form since in popular English revenge drama the Italian influence was very powerful. Hence the Machiavellian evil spawning bloody vendettas in corrupt Mediterranean courts made foul with horrible sexual crimes, outrageous murders, ghastly poisonings, and other sensational deeds. The novella were ransacked for these.

As is characteristic with the genre, revenge gives shape and direction to the tragedies of Vindice and the Lady. The long-harboured revenge of Vindice controls much of the action. This long wait for vengeance before the opening of the play "gradually became a semi-convention" of revenge drama. It appeared much later in Massinger's Duke of Milan for instance. But it was not original with Middleton. In Marston's Antonio's Revenge Piero discloses that he and Andrugio were, years before, rivals for Maria's love. Andrugio won her, had a son by her, and lived long enough to see that son grow to manhood; Piero declares,

We both were rivals in our May of blood,  
Unto Maria, faire Ferraras heire.  
He wan the Ladie, to my honours death:  
And from her sweetes, cropt this Antonio:  
For which, I burnt in inward sweltring hate,  
And festred rankling malice in my breast,  
Till I might belke revenge upon his eyes:  
And now (o blessed now!) tis done.  
\( \text{I. i. 23 - 30.} \)

The long delay may be accounted for - and questioned.

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28 Bradbrook, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 167, "Vindice...controls events more than the other characters...." But see Bowers, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 136: "There are so many intrigues that the revenger loses control and is lost in the maze."

29 Bowers, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 136, n. 23.

30 All quotations from Marston are from H. H. Wood (ed.), \textit{The Plays of John Marston}, 3 vols., Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1934.
Presumably the audience was to be impressed with the revenger's tenacity of purpose and fierceness of resolve. Seldom is this period of inactivity well motivated, for the revenger's ultimate course of action could as well have been adopted at the beginning as at the end. Since only rather villainous revengers are presented as waiting such a period, the suspicion is well founded that the information is given to illustrate their own bloodthirsty characters.31

Perhaps it can be pleaded in Middleton's defence that Vindice had to wait until Hippolito gained favour with Lussurioso before he could gain access to the court where his revenge could be consummated.

There is delay, too, after the plays open, conventionally enough.32 (Marston, it is to be remembered, had Antonio refrain from slaying Piero, Antonio vowing, "Ile force him feede on life/Till he shall loathe it" (III. ii.).) Lussurioso lets slip the chance to be revenged on "Piato" (IV. i. 1-44.), Govianus fails even to think of revenge until he learns that his Lady's tomb has been rifled, and Bellarius who hates Votarius for some reason never disclosed to the audience allows Leonela to take the active role in planning his revenge.

It would seem, then, that Middleton was aware of the convention of delay in revenge tragedy, took enough pains to work it into his plays, but was not sufficiently conscientious as an artist to feel responsible for its presence there. Particularly does this appear to be the case with Bellarius's hatred for Votarius; it is merely a contrivance for bringing about the catastrophe.

31 Bowers, op. cit., p. 136, n. 23.
32 This is a feature of The Spanish Tragedy, Titus Adronicus, Antonio's Revenge, and Hamlet.
In addition to the revenge theme and the delay in revenge, other Senecan features of Italianate tragedy profitable to examine in these two plays are the characters, the settings, the trappings of death, the dumb-shows and the masques, and the use of the supernatural.

That Vindice is a conventional figure in terms of Middleton's comedies has been indicated above. It must now be declared that he is also essentially like a dozen other protagonists in revenge plays. His role as revenger-protagonist, villain, malcontent, and corrector of abuses has parallels, or at least echoes, in The Spanish Tragedy, Hamlet, Hoffman, and, especially, Antonio's Revenge. He resorts to a masque to effect his final revenge, he bitterly castigates the rankness of his times, he is a hero-villain, he displays a callous cruelty.

The other characters in The Revenger's Tragedy are conventional enough, too. Mainly they are the corrupt Italianate caricatures of humanity so often discoverable in plays of this vogue, especially that development of it which was largely inspired by the pioneering of Marston who, in Antonio's Revenge,

set his tragedy in the turbulent Italian Renaissance court of an imaginary Sforza and painted a full-fledged Italian despotic villain of the Renaissance. Machiavellian deeds in his play have their proper background....

Lustful, murderous intriguers, these beings snatch at every means which will serve their personal ambitions and often perish hideously in traps of their own setting. So, in The Revenger's Tragedy, the Duke, the Duchess, and their progeny, Gratiana and Castiza are, as we have seen, stock figures

33 Bowers, op. cit., p. 120.
providing piquant scenes of temptation, pandering, and reformation, this latter possibly inspired by *Hamlet*. Gratiana's behaviour confirms the conventional Jacobean belief that a tempted woman will capitulate to rhetorical blandishment, and Castiza represents the traditional chastity figure. Hippolito, like Horatio, is a symbol of fidelity.

The Tyrant in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* behaves according to pattern, too. The Elizabethans distinguished a tyrant's behaviour from that of a genuinely Christian prince

by his injustice, his cruelty, his sensuality, and his hatred of good counsel. But elsewhere could be found models for the figure.

Among the stock characters bestowed by Seneca upon the tragedy of Renaissance was that of the cruel villainous tyrant. Macbeth, of course, is one of these ambitious, cruel, lustful usurpers, but Middleton's immediate pattern must have been Piero in *Antonio's Revenge* where the tyrant Claudius-like, seizes the throne from Andrugio, and pursues the former occupant's wife. He is finally defeated by a revenger galvanized into action by the revelations of a ghost. But the Lady whom the Tyrant in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* pursues is not a Maria but a Castiza. She is, however, more than a conventional paragon of chastity;

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she is one of Middleton's courageous and fiercely self-possessed women who know precisely what they stand for and where they are going. It is to be recalled that in reply to the lustful Tyrant's bribe she asserts,

I haue a mynde,
that must be shifted ere I cast of thease
or I shall weare straung coloures; - tis not titles
nor all the bastard-honoures of this frame
that I am taken with, I come not hether
to pleaze the eye of glorie, but of goodnes
and that concernes not you sir, you're for greatness

( I. [I. 132 - 8])

The Tyrant continues to scheme to enjoy her, according to pattern rejecting the reformed Helvetius's counsels to goodness, until his insane lust betrays him to the disguised revenger, Govianus.

Middleton had used the disguised revenger before - Vindice. Marston had provided some help for Vindice's disguising. In Antonio's Revenge the ghost of Andrugio urges his son thus,

Fly deare Antonio:
Once more assume disguise, and dog the Court
In fained habit, till Piero's blood
May even oere-flowe the brimme of full revenge.

(III. v.)

But Govianus points more clearly to the most probable source of the device,

The Malcontent.

Where The Malcontent had its first great influence was in its popularization of Chettle's device of the disguised revenger introduced when the rightful Duke Malevole returns in disguise to revenge himself on the usurper.

(Vindice's story borrows more obviously another novel feature of The Malcontent, the "tangled web of revenges".) So Govianus, conventional in

37 Bowers, op. cit., p. 130.

38 Bowers, op. cit., p. 131.
his beliefs about women at the beginning of the play39, becomes equally conventional as an intriguing revenger near the end, except for one trait. He is one of the first revengers without any sign of hysterica passio, unless we take his Hamlet-like sudden violence towards Helvetius and Sophonirus as symptomatic. (This occurs, though, before his Lady's death.) Perhaps because of this lack, he lapses more readily from a figure of credible humanity into the wooden intriguer who survives the catastrophe to

Live ever honourd here, and blest aboue. (V.iii. 2399)

Kyd and Marlowe had placed the action of revenge dramas in the Mediterranean area; Marston set his plays squarely in the centre of gravity for this region, Italy, the locus of Renaissance culture as a whole. The settings of Middleton's two early tragedies are conventional enough, then, though Italy is not so obviously the locale of The Second Maiden's Tragedy, but because of the Latin40 forms of the characters' names the Tyrant's corrupt court may reasonably be located in that country, if any such specific location is necessary.

A conspicuous convention of Senecan tragedy was such portents of doom as comets, thunder, lightning, and tremblors of the earth. It was thought by Elizabethans that the wrath of Heaven was expressed in these

39 "o shees a woman, and her eye will stande/upon advauncement."

40 As Schoenbaum has pointed out (op. cit., p. 38) the sub-plot is drawn from Don Quixote, I, "The Story of the One Who Was Too Curious For His Own Good". In Cervantes the setting is Florence, and the characters have Italian names. See Samuel Putnam (ed.), Don Quixote, New York, The Viking Press, 1949, vol. 1, p. 280 ff.
signs. Hence we have in *The Revenger's Tragedy* (V. iii. 3.) a blazing star, and in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* the Tyrant's terror in the "earthquake" of the appearance of the ghost of the Lady (V. ii. 2385 - 6.). His despair in the court's acclaim of Govianus as their virtuous king wrings from his dying lips the cry,

that thunder strikes me dead

(V. [i. 2416 - 17])

Further conventional aspects of these two plays are the trappings of death. The tomb-settings of some scenes and the use of poison may be chosen as illustrations, the former perhaps chiefly inspired by *Antonio's Revenge*. In that play the first three scenes of Act III take place in Saint Mark's Church near Andrugio's tomb which the agitated Antonio is visiting to express his woe:

Graves, valts, and toumbes, groane not to beare my weight.
Colde flesh, bleake trunkes, wrapt in your half-rot shrowdes,
I presse you softly, with a tender foote.
Most honour'd sepulchre, vouchsafe a wretch Leave to weepe ore thee.

(III. i.)

After raising the ghost of his father, Antonio swears by graveyard objects to avenge Andrugio, vowing

By the astonning terror of swart night,
By the infectious damps of clammie graves,
And by the mould that presseth downe
My deade fathers sculle: Ille be reveng'd.

(III. ii.)

Although the addresses to Gloriana's skull in *The Revenger's Tragedy* have some of the charnel-house flavour of Marston's scenes, perhaps the closest Middleton gets to Marston in his first tragedy is in I. iv. where the "discontented" Lord Antonio discloses the body of his wife to certain lords
and Hippolito who says,

My Lord since you enuite vs to your sorrowes, 
Lets truely tast 'em, that with equall comfort, 
As to our selues we may releiue your wrongs; 
We haue greefe too, that yet walkes without Tong....

(I. iv. 25 - 8)

and Piero says,

Her funerall shall be wealthy, for her name 
Merits a toombe of pearle; my Lord Antonio, 
For this time wipe your Lady from your eyes, 
No doubt our greefe and youres may one day court it, 
When we are more familiar with Reueng.

(I. iv. 76 - 80)

In The Second Maiden's Tragedy, however, two striking tomb-scenes succeed each other. In IV. iii. the Tyrant, who has been behaving "wondrous discontentedly", enters the echoing vault to find that the monument was, as he says,

weepinge to it self before I came,

and he orders the soldiers to

pierce the Iawes
of this cold ponderous creature.

(IV. iii. 1752 - 3)

As the moon rises the Tyrant observes,

how the monuments glister
as if Deathes pallaces were all massie syluer
and scornd the name of marble

(IV. iii. 1822 - 4)

After embracing the corpse, he carries her off to his palace to practise his "fine chill venerie". Act IV, scene iv opens with Govianus conventionally arrayed and equipped; we see him "in black, a booke in his hand, his page carying a Torche before hym", entering the vault. Govianus, too, weeps,

Allreadie myne eyes melts, the monument
71.

no sooner stood before it, but a teare
ran swiftlie from me   ( IV.[iv. 1879 - 81])

and then "kneels at the Toomb wondrous passionatly". His subsequent
apostrophe to his "Eternall maid of hono" has the startling result of
evoking his lady's ghost, as Antonio's tearful dolours had awakened the
spirit of Andrugio.

One of the trappings of death discoverable in these early tra­
gedies without any sense of surprise is the use of poison in the death
scenes, a conventional enough device even at the time of The Spanish Tra­
gedy. Poison was especially appropriate to Middleton's Italianate plays
since, as Mario Praz has shown^\(^41\), in the customary use of the word, Machia­
vellism suggested "a treacherous way of killing, generally by poison".
(And Machiavellian Middleton's two plays were, The Revenger's Tragedy in:
an especially thoroughgoing fashion.)

These Machiavellian poisons, punctual like
clock-work, became no less of a regular
property of the Elizabethan stage than
the Senecan bloody blades^\(^42\)

(the latter figuring in the catastrophes of both early tragedies). A con­
ventional way of mingling the Machiavellian poison with the Senecan swords
was to envenom the weapons. Thus Leonela in the later tragedy contrives
her sweetheart's revenge with the aid of a poisoned rapier. From Kyd's
Soliman and Perseda^\(^43\) Middleton took a device he exploited in both plays,

\(^42\) Ibid., p. 81.
\(^43\) Bowers, op. cit., p. 135, "...murder by poisoned lips is found in
Soliman and Perseda."
the poisoned kiss, producing with Gloriana's skull in his earlier play effects of dreadful, indeed, sadistic, power. The lethal cosmetics Govianus places on the face of his Lady have their sure potency, too, but the force of the scenes portraying the Tyrant's death has diminished from that of the Duke's, possibly because Middleton had one eye cocked at a new dramatic fashion.44

A further convention is the dumb-show. Gorboduc had nearly half a century before abundantly displayed this feature in a Senecan play, and it had appeared in many later revenge dramas, so its presence in The Revenger's Tragedy and in The Second Maiden's Tragedy could virtually be predicted. Middleton had used it in the London comedies; he was to use it often during his last decade of playwriting. In fact, only one other dramatist during Middleton's lifetime employed the dumb-show more often45, but Middleton is wholly commonplace in his treatment of it. During the Jacobean era, we are told, the

majority of dumb-shows...contribute directly to the advance of the action. They are, in fact, additional scenes, sometimes prologues and sometimes integral parts of the play, differing from the principal scenes only in that they are acted by the performers without the accompaniment of speech.46

At the beginning of V. iii. in The Revenger's Tragedy such a plot advance occurs:

In a dum show, the possessing of the young

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44 The vogue of the Fletcherian play is discussed below in the next chapter.


46 Ibid., p. 395.
Duke with all his Nobles: Then sounding Musick. A furnish'd Table is brought forth: then enters the Duke & his Nobles to the banquet. A blazing-star appeareth.

In *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* a similar use is made of the convention:

They bringe the Body in a Chaire drest vp in black velvet which setts out the pailenes of the handes and face, And a faire Chayne of pearle crosse her brest and the Crucyfex aboue it; He standes silent while letting the Musique play, becknying the soldiers that bringe her in to make abeisaunce to her, and he hym self makes a lowe honour to the body and kisses the hande

( V. ii. 2225 - 9)

Here the dumb-show is performed "by characters of the main play", as might be expected, but also as a prologue to the scene,

the purpose...being primarily to bring the characters into the necessary positions on the stage for the ensuing scene without the delay which would be caused by ordinary entrances with spoken accompaniments.47

Another sort of spectacle popular with revenge dramatists was the masque. This convention is represented in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and the use to which it is put is also commonplace. As in *The Spanish Tragedy* the final defeat of the forces of evil is brought about by a revenger participating in a show purporting to be innocent entertainment. Vindice, his brother, Hippolito, and two lords participate in a "Maske of Reuengers".

The Reuengers daunce. At the end, steale out their swords, and these foure kill the foure at the Table, in their Chaires.

(V. iii. 54 - 6)

This action resulting in the death of Lussurioso, the remaining villains are slain in the aftermath of a second masque. The Machiavellian character

of these ironic situations is conveyed by Vindice's words as he plotted the intrigue; it was his wish that

when they thinke their pleasure sweete and good,
In midst of all their ioyes, they shall sigh bloud.

(V. ii. 23 - 43)

Middleton was to remember Vindice's wish in writing *A Game At Chesse*. There, the Black Knight, the Machiavellian Gondomar, says (I. i. 257 ff.),

And what I've done, I've done facetiously,  
With pleasant subtlety and bewitching courtship,  
Abus'd all my believers with delight, -  
They took a comfort to be cozen'd by me:  
To many a soul I've let in mortal poison,  
Whose cheeks have crack'd with laughter to receive it.  
................................................................  
They took their bane in way of recreation.

There is scarcely need to labour the conventions further. It is precisely the omnipresence of the stock characters, the conventional setting, the hackneyed pattern of melodramatic action, and the familiar Senecan and Italianate devices that flaws these plays.

It is true, however, that in the sub-plot of *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* Middleton starts to write about people with the simple language and great power that so distinguish his late tragedies; here is the beginning of his penetrating insights into "the way the mind works". Whether it is the development which five years have brought, or whether it was a congeniality a domestic setting possessed for Middleton's temperament, this sub-plot is not the victim of convention, nor is it merely a tour-de-force

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48 Praz, *op. cit.*, pp. 81 - 2, points out how typically Machiavellian such situations were taken to be, how Webster, for instance, "set great store on 'the rare trickes of a Machiavellian'."

49 Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions in Elizabethan Tragedy*, p. 213.
involving trite characters, themes, and plots. Convention is there, but for the most part it loses the pejorative meaning it has in the main plot because of the compelling credibility of the characters. One instance will suffice. After Votarius has most reluctantly undertaken to test the fidelity of Anselmus's wife, he falls in love with her in spite of himself. She returns his feelings and grants him enjoyment of her person. But Anselmus returns from his purposed absence. It is at this point that Middleton's insight into human beings expresses itself in a wonderfully credible fashion. In equivocal terms Votarius answers Anselmus's queries about the Wife's faithfulness, but Anselmus interprets his words favourably, declaring,

I will no more seme so unfashionable for pleasure and the chamber of a ladie
(II. [ii. 903 - 4])

and makes his exit with his wife. Then the loyal, the devoted friend, Votarius, becomes a strikingly convincing individual for he asserts,

I do not like his company now, tis irksome his eye offends me, mee thinckes tis not kindlie wee two should liue together in one howse.

I do not like his ouerbouldnes with her hees to famylier with the face I loue, I feare the sicknes of affection I feele a grudging on't, I shall grow jealous eene of that pleasure with she has by lawe I shall go so neere with her
(II. [ii. 913 - 28])

Unfortunately, Middleton fails to sustain this sort of thing to the very end of the sub-plot since the catastrophe is a sensational blood-bath of Senecan conventionality. (Curiously enough, the Senecan blood-bath is missing from the end of the main plot.) The charge therefore remains - conventionality, in the pejorative sense of the term, mars these plays.

Finally, then, by way of reinforcing the contention made here
that Middleton disfigures his early tragedies by over-loading them with overworked conventions we may turn to the conclusion of the main action of the second play.

As was noted above, Govianus in IV. iv. goes to the tomb to pay his respects to his betrothed. At this juncture Middleton cannot resist making use of a Senecan ghost, the spirit of the Lady, who reveals that her body has been stolen. Middleton exploits the spectacle fully, describing her sensational appearance in a long stage-direction:

On a sodayne in a kinde of Noyse like a Wynde, the dores clattering, the Toombstone flies open, and a great light appears in the midst of the Toombe; His Lady as went owt, standing just before hym all in white, Stuck with Iewells and a great crucifex on her brest.

(IV. [iv. 1926 - 31])

Characteristically in Seneca the ghost prompts the revenge; it is the Lady's revelation which stirs Govianus into vengeful action here. Had Middleton dismissed the ghost at this point the traditional use he makes of it would have had the shock-value often obtained by the convention, but he allows the ghost to hang around in the tiring room, pushing her on-stage in V. ii. to answer the poisoned Tyrant's call for aid. Her appearance in a costume similar to that of the Lady in the chair elicits from him the cry,

I cald not thee thow enemie to firmeness mortallities earthquake

50 Bowers notes that "the Lady is the first female ghost to appear to a revenger" (op. cit., p. 167.). But after recovering from our mild surprise over this fact, we realize that this original trait in the convention matters little. More significant is a second novelty - the ghost does not urge revenge upon Govianus. This turns out to be equally unimportant since her appearance had the same effect on Govianus that a somewhat more traditional ghost would have had. Govianus is prompted to revenge by her revelations, anyway.
and from Govianus the rhetorical flourish,

welcombe to myne eyes
as is the day - springe from the morninges woombe
vnto that wretche whose nightes are tedius
as liberty to Captives, health to laborers
and life still to ould people, never weary on't,
So welcombe arthow to mee: the deedes don
thow Queen of spirrits, he has his end vpon him,
thy bodie shall returne to rise agen
for thy Abuser falls, and has no powre
to vex thee ffarder \[\textit{nowe}\] \(V.\[\text{iii. } 2388 - 97\]\)

And then Middleton resorts once more\(^{51}\) to the same supernatural character!

At line 2447

The Spirit enters
agen and stayes to
goe out with the
body as it were
attendinge it.

It is this over-working, this undramatic, hyperbolic, exaggerated employ-
ment of convention that disfigures Middleton's tragedies.

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\(^{51}\) Marston, in \textit{Antonio's Revenge}, had made much use of Andrugio's ghost - even for drawing the curtains of Maria's bed (\textit{III. v.})!
CHAPTER IV

THE FLETCHERIAN PLAYS

Middleton was always sensitive to changes in the fashion of playmaking. Thus, when Beaumont and Fletcher inaugurated a type of sophisticated courtier drama with *The Faithful Shepherdess* in 1608, *Philaster* in 1609, and *The Maid's Tragedy* in 1611, Middleton was hard on their heels with *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, the main action of which adopts many of the characteristics of the new vogue. During the entire second decade of James's reign Middleton continued to write Fletcherian plays, and even his two final tragedies, *Women, Beware Women* and *The Changeling*, masterpieces as they are, betray the enormous popularity of the new fashion. But within this fashion we should distinguish between Fletcher's comedies and his tragi-comedies.

A few features of Fletcher's comedies were novelties to Middleton, but most of them he had himself employed in his earliest City dramas. Perhaps the most important characteristic that he was now to borrow was the social setting, upper-class English life, a section of society whose manners the gentle-born Fletcher often described.¹ Other salient features of this playwright's comedies Middleton had already exploited: lively bustling plots, Jonsonian humours, inconsistency of character, disregard for a moral, explicit or implied, and "ingenious complication and solution

of intrigues, with the attendant reversals and surprises of an entertaining plot". Fletcher's keen sense of stage effect may have been a happy example to Middleton, too, since a number of his entirely Fletcherian plays have a theatrical effectiveness and a shapeliness not found in such plays as The Second Maiden's Tragedy, The Chaste Maid of Cheapside, and The Witch where other dramatic fashions constitute the chief patterns.

Fletcher's main influence on Middleton in this period, however, was a result of his most famous dramatic product, tragi-comedy, a genre that Fletcher attempted to define in what he wished "had been the prologue" to The Faithful Shepherdess. The definition is brief.

A tragi-comedy is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near, which is enough to make it no comedy, which must be a representation of familiar people, with such kind of trouble as no life be question'd; so that a god is as lawful in this as in a tragedy, and mean people as in a comedy.3

This explanation has evoked considerable comment, elaboration, and reappraisal; F. H. Ristine4 has supplied the most famous exposition.

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2 Op. cit., p. 202. Parrott and Ball divide Fletcher's comedies into two groups, those of manners, and those of intrigue, warning, however, against sharp divisions. A similar division - and warning - may be made of Middleton's City comedies.


Perhaps the first impression gained from reading any such group of plays is one of startling unreality. The reader is transported to a no man's land, beyond the ken of human experience, where men take on superhuman characteristics, where strange events happen, and imaginary history is made and unmade in the twinkling of an eye. The checkered fortunes of monarchs, generals and lords and ladies of high degree engross his chief attention; war, usurpation, rebellion - actual or imminent - furnish a subordinate interest; while a comic touch or sub-plot is the diverting accompaniment of the romantic action. Love of some sort is the motive force; intrigue is rife; the darkest villainy is contrasted with the noblest and most exalted virtue. In the course of an action teeming with incident and excitement, and in which the characters are enmeshed in a web of disastrous complications, reverse and surprise succeed each other with a lightning rapidity, and the outcome trembles in the balance. But final disaster is ingeniously averted. The necessary dei ex machina descend in the nick of time: wrongs are righted, wounds healed, reconciliation sets in, penitent villainy is forgiven and the happy ending made complete.

Not all scholars, however, have been satisfied with Ristine's analysis: they have felt that the defining characteristic of the new type of drama lay elsewhere. Una Ellis-Fermor, for example, was concerned with the tonal significance of the genre when she said that

it is the creation of [a] middle mood which is the contribution of Beaumont and Fletcher to subsequent drama.\(^5\)

One of the most recent appraisals\(^6\) of the genre adds three characteristics only implied by Ristine's analysis. The first of the three is the presence


of Protean characters who are "monsters and saints, living abstractions and combinations of irreconcilable extremes" who "confront each other as opposites...and by their intense reactions exploit to the full the possibilities of some fantastic situation".7

In every case the character, conceived as an extreme type, is subordinate to the situation and often changes radically to suit the requirements of the intricate plot.8

The second characteristic is the "lively touches of passion".

The passions...have more real solidity than the characters themselves. In the most unlikely situations the most extravagant characters react to each other with emotional outbursts which have, as it were, a life of their own.9

These emotional outbursts are embodied in poetry which does nothing to give the moral problems of the play fresh significance, Waith goes on to say in describing the third characteristic, the "language of emotion". Of the poetical speeches he asserts,

Their conspicuous artificiality suits them to the plays, but there is no more deception here than in any artistic convention.... The verse of Beaumont and Fletcher, which does not deal seriously with life, as does the verse of some of their contemporaries, is exactly what the situations demand, a means of eliciting maximum emotional response. The poetry of every major scene is a brilliant

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7 Eugene M. Waith, op. cit., p. 38.
8 Ibid., p. 39.
9 Ibid., p. 39.
solution to a rhetorical problem. 10

It might be said, then, that Fletcherian tragi-comedy is a verbal game which exploits rhetoric, sentiment, and surprise, that utilizes the theatrical devices of spectacle and song, that employs extravagant themes and characters, that is placed in exotic settings, and that has escapist entertainment as its chief object.

The nature of Fletcherian tragi-comedy has been dwelt on at length since if scholars working for years over Fletcher's definition and performance have only painfully and partially understood the genre, it is perhaps too much to expect a busy playwright like Middleton to have had an acute grasp of it. We shall see that such is the case; he took the more obvious features of the tragi-comedies and worked them up into saleable products. And with the conventions of this new genre Middleton mingles conventions and devices that a dozen years of dramatic composition had made habitual to him.

In turning to examine Middleton's Fletcherian plays, we are faced with difficulties that did not arise in connection with his earlier plays. These difficulties have to do not only with the dating and respective shares of collaborators in these dramas but also with attribution. The respective shares of Middleton and Dekker in the two City comedies, The Family of Love

10 Eugene M. Waith, op. cit., p. 39. Waith continues, "The renunciation of meaning is no mere relaxation of control, however. It can better be described as one of the strategies by which Beaumont and Fletcher achieve their superbly calculated succession of dramatic moments. Theirs is a deliberate playing with the most serious issues. To make much of every relationship becomes a kind of game which is most successfully when most daringly played. The sudden change, the unexpected revelation, the disappearance of one issue to make way for another are all parts of an intricate pattern of feeling which is fundamental to Fletcherian tragicomedy." (pp. 39 - 40).
and _The Roaring Girl_, can be determined with considerable precision. Such determination of authorship may be arrived at with nearly equal accuracy in the cases of _A Fair Quarrel_ and, especially, _The Old Law_. The theme and two-thirds of _A Fair Quarrel_ belong to Rowley, Middleton being responsible chiefly for a revision of the first and last two pages. In _The Old Law_ "the hands of Middleton, Massinger, and Rowley are all clearly discernible" but

Middleton's is the dominating personality: whoever suggested the theme, his is the close-knit structure and the artistry which permitted no page to stray from the theme. The other two contributors deal with specific aspects of the theme – Massinger develops the pathos and nobility of Cleanthes's story, Rowley the brutal fun of Gnotho – but the presence of Middleton, whether as designer, as writer or as reviser is everywhere apparent.

But if these two Fletcherian plays present no further problems in collaboration, they still need to be dated definitively. This, indeed, ...
is the case with all of Middleton's plays of this period. Some scholars, for instance, would remove The Witch from the Fletcherian group and place it in the City comedy - early tragedy period. Then, too, critics argue over the authorship of the plays. Anything for a Quiet Life may be Webster's or Middleton's, or a product of both authors. More Dissemblers besides Women seems in many ways not to be the unaided work that the 1657 title page suggests. The expletive, "push", which in conjunction with other evidence proves to be so useful a clue to the authorship of The Revenger's Tragedy and The Second Maiden's Tragedy, does not appear at all in More Dissemblers. Instead, a form not nearly so characteristic of Middleton is used: at I. iv. 10. and at IV. ii. 153. "pish" occurs. Even sounder grounds are appealed to when The Spanish Gipsy is entirely struck from the canon; in fact, so persuasive a case can be brought against this play that it will not be included among the dramas surveyed in this chapter. Many other problems - such as the precise relation of The Witch to Macbeth - remain, but they must not detain us in a study of this kind.


20 Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies, pp. 176, 196.

In view, therefore, of diverse opinion on all these matters, the most expedient approach to a study of convention in Middleton's Fletcherian plays will be to fix on the special researches of the apparently soundest students of the canon, chronology, and authorship of these dramas, trusting that no subsequent research will seriously impair the validity of any conclusions drawn here. At any rate, it might be argued that a study of convention and device does not depend too substantially on the details of bibliographical and historical research (excepting, of course, details of authorship).

For chronology, then, R. C. Bald\textsuperscript{22} is the authority. For the canon Dewar Robb, Schoenbaum, Lucas, and Dugdale Sykes.\textsuperscript{23} The plays that Middleton composed, wholly or in part, under Fletcher's influence are, accordingly, the following: The Second Maiden's Tragedy (the main plot only), More Dissemblers besides Women, (c. 1615), No Wit, No Help, like a Woman's (c. 1615), A Fair Quarrel (1615 - 16), The Witch (1616), The Widow (1616), and The Old Law (c. 1616).

When writing on Middleton's early comedy, Arthur Symons was led to declare,

\textit{The idea of sex dominates the whole}


\textsuperscript{23} See notes 12, 18, 20 and 21 above.
Elizabethan drama; here, however, it is not a terror, a fascination, or a sin, but an occupation.24

The persistence with which Middleton explored sexual themes suggests, however, that he saw more than dramatic utility in sex. Like Marston, Donne, and other Elizabethans, he was not merely occupied but frequently preoccupied with it. In the Fletcherian plays this interest, this fascination, continued. Chaste heroines and lecherous men had frequently appeared in Elizabethan drama, even before Middleton began to write, but the appearance of The Faithful Shepherdess, Philaster and A King and No King ushered in a taste for the piquant theme, the intensified, super-human extreme, "the improbable hypothesis"25, a taste that led to Restoration heroic drama (and that enabled a serious artist like Ford to analyze in detail an incestuous brother-sister relationship). We saw in The Second Maiden's Tragedy the Lady who defended her chastity with life-sacrificing heroism, the lust-maddened Tyrant who descends to the loathsome horror of necrophilia, and the wittol who cynically and complacently offers his wife's honour in his scramble for place. Preternatural chastity is also the subject of More Dissemblers besides Women. Middleton asked himself, "What consequences might ensue if a widow, miraculously chaste for seven years, should, improbably, experience love at first sight?". The Duchess of Milan


25 Waith, op. cit., p. 37. Waith explains his term thus: "The situations which compose the plot are as unusual as they are sensational.... Each of them is a challenge to the reader or spectator to imagine what it would be like to experience such conflicting emotions...and as one such hypothesis follows another, we come to accept them as properly belonging in a world that is neither impossible nor quite probable - a world of hypotheses." (pp. 37 - 8.)
That strange great widow, that has vow'd so stiffly
Ne'er to know love's heat in a second husband:
... who has kept the fort most valiantly,
To th' wonder of her sex, this seven year's day
(I. i. 9 - 12.)

whereas "A month's constancy/is held a virtue in a city-widow", is the
"religious triumph" of the Cardinal. He, "spirit-ravish'd", stands up in
admiration of her. He declares,

I make her constancy
The holy mistress of my contemplation;
Whole volumes have I writ in zealous praise
Of her eternal vow.
(I. ii. 4 - 7.)

And yet the Cardinal cannot be totally sure of her since he agrees
at once to the First Lord's proposal to test her (Middleton evidently re-
membered Anselmus's sick compulsion, at this point). When the First Lord
suggests,

She that has no temptation set before her,
Her virtue has no conquest....
(I. ii. 31 - 2.)

The Cardinal replies with alacrity,

You've put my zeal into a way, my lord,
I shall not be at peace till I make perfect:
I'll make her victory harder; 'tis my crown
When I bring grace to great'st perfection....
(I. ii. 43 - 6.)

The Cardinal then persuades the Duchess to break her vow of keeping strict-
ly private "since the glory on't/Is but a virtue question'd", and she
watches from the balcony of her house the victory parade of General An-
drugio, secure in her belief that the sight of no man, "Held he the worth
of millions in one spirit", had the power to alter her. But the sight of
Andrugio rips from her the cry,

My faith is gone forever,
My reputation with the cardinal,
88.

My fame, my praise, my liberty, my peace,
Chang'd for a restless passion: O hard spite,
To lose my seven years' victory at one sight!
(I. iii. 124 - 8.)

Paralleling the theme of the Duchess's chastity and near-fall is the un­veiling of Lactantio, the Cardinal's nephew, whom the churchman believes
is a paragon of virtue:

He's but a youth,
To speak of years, yet I dare venture him
To old men's goodnesse and gravities
For his strict manners, and win glory by him;
And for the chasteness of his continence,
Which is a rare grace in the spring of man,
He does excel the youth of all our time

The company of a woman's as fearful to him
As death to guilty men; I've seen him blush
When but a maid was nam'd....
(I. ii. 80 - 91.)

Lactantio all the while keeps a mistress whose disguise as a page does not for long conceal her pregnancy; he also pursues Aurelia, who is exposed by her father and who, upon discovering Lactantio's perfidy, finally allies herself to Andrugio, her first love. There is yet a third aspect of the chastity theme: the magnified virtue of the Cardinal and his constant faith in the steadfastness of the Duchess. He is a man who

Wears so severe an eye, so strict and holy,
It not endures the sight of womankind
About his lodgings:
Hardly a matron of fourscore's admitted;
Though she be worn to gums, she comes not there
To mumble matins; all his admiration
Is plac'd upon the duchess; he likes her,
Because she keeps her vow and likes not any;
So does he love that man above his book
That loves no woman....
(I. i. 49 - 58.)

As might be expected, the effects of lust on human actions and character is another conventional sex theme occurring in the Fletcherian
plays. The lustful enterprise of Sir Gilbert Lambstone in *No Wit, No Help*, *Like a Woman's* - he desires the rich widow, Lady Goldstone, as his wife, and the impoverished Mistress Low-water as his mistress - is revealed by the latter who greatly values her chaste honour. Lambstone solicits her favours by means of a letter which provokes her to utter,

> what strange impudence
> Governs in man when lust is lord of him!  
> Thinks he me mad? 'cause I've no monies on earth,  
> That I'll go forfeit my estate in heaven,  
> And live eternal beggar?  

(I. ii. 76 - 80.)

Unwitting incest horrifies one of the main characters of this play. Philip is told by his newly-found mother that the girl he married in Antwerp is his long-lost sister (IV. i. 201 ff.). He is shattered by the news, groaning,

> 0, to what mountain shall I take my flight,  
> To hide the monster of my sin from sight!  

(IV. i. 247 - 8.)

Perfidious lust is shockingly displayed by the Physician in *A Fair Quarrel* who demands from Jane as the price of his silence about her illegitimate child such love as she gave Fitzallen (III. ii. 29 - 135.).

*The Witch* reminds the reader of *The Revenger's Tragedy* in setting and in atmosphere, but especially in its anatomy of sexual abuses. Lust is rampant in this play; incest is disclosed; marital infidelity occurs; marriage vows are foresworn; a young woman is got with child out of wedlock; lechers resort to witches' love-charms, and intriguers to substitute "brides". The Duchess of Ravenna, hating her husband because of his pathological insistence on her drinking pledges from her father's skull (I. i. 125 - 170;
and II. ii. 774 - 8.) 26, engages the lascivious Almachildes to slay him, promising to reward the slayer with her own person. But he takes his pleasure blind-folded, and the denouement reveals that he knew not the Duchess but "only a hirde-Strumpet: a Professo[r] of Lust, and Impudence" (V. iv. 2166 - 7.), the courtesan, Florida. As well as betraying her husband, the Duchess strives to win the affections of the Lord Governor, Almachildes being only a tool to be disposed of when his usefulness is over. The deceit of the Duchess has its parallel in Antonio who hypocritically assures Isabella that her contracted betrothed, Sebastian, has died in battle, thereby gaining Isabella as his wife; and there is a further parallel in the affair between Francisca and Abberzanes which results in her being with child. Illustrating further the sex-aberrations anatomized in this play, a stock notion about the moral iniquity of dealers in the black arts appears in the incest episode of I. ii. Firestone speaks:

(Mother) I pray
give me leave to ramble a-broad to night, with the Night-Mare; for I haue a great mind to over-lay a fat-Parsons Daughter.

Hec. and who shall lye with me then?
Fire. the great Cat, for one night (Mother) 'tis but a Night make shift with him for once.

Hec. you're a kind Son:
but 'tis the nature of you all, I see that:
you had rather hunt after strange women still then lye with your owne Mothers....
(ll. 282 - 92.)

The attempt of a young woman to cuckold her old husband forms one of the main strands in the plot of The Widow. Justice Brandino has a youthful wife, Philippa, who looks "to the Maine-Chaunce, (that's

26 All references are to the Malone Society edition.
Reputation,)

but who covertly by means of a letter seeks an assignation with the gallant, Francisco. This failing, she tries to make "Ansaldo" the substitute. Although Francisco's declaration of his passion for Philippa caused Brandino to "feel this Inns-a'-court man in [his] temples" (I. i. 216), and although Francisco soothed the old Justice's temper by asserting that he merely made a "friendly trial of her [Philippa's] constancy" (I. ii. 231.) "to damp slander/And all her envious and suspicious brood" (I. ii. 229 - 30.), Brandino only escapes being cuckolded because Francisco is robbed and delayed on his way to his assignation and because "Ansaldo" turns out to be a woman.

A final instance of sex-themes in these plays is the revolting, cold-blooded proposal Simonides makes to his aged mother in The Old Law. Her husband, Creon, is to be executed because he has reached an age where he is no longer useful to the state. Antigona, pleading vainly with the Duke of Epirus for Creon's life, is urged by Simonides to desist and to make the most of her remaining years.

I'll help you to a courtier of nineteen, mother, (II. i. 108.) he offers, suggesting further,

You've but a short time to be cast down yourself; And let a young courtier do't.... (II. i. 136 - 7.)

Social climbing or the rise of the less-well-born in the social hierarchy is a theme in the Fletcherian plays as well as in the earlier ones. Lactantio in More Dissemblers spurns Aurelia when he learns (III. i. 181 ff.) that the Duchess loves him. He knows that "such another/Whole
life could never meet with", and exultingly congratulates himself, exclaiming,

The best dissembler lights on the best woman.

(III. i. 220.)

Almachildes in *The Witch* rejoices, too, that he is beloved of a Duchess. She threatens death to him if he refuses to kill her husband, but marriage if he commits the deed. His reply reveals his social ambition:

then by all
the hopefull fortunes of a yong mans Rising
I will performe it (Madam)

(III. i. [1000 - 1002.])

In *The Old Law*, Simonides, cynical, hypocritical, and covetous, cheerfully sends his father to his death that he might inherit sufficient wealth to be on a footing with Evander's courtiers. Before Creon's execution, Simonides would agree with the First Courtier who asks,

prick'd up in clothes,
Why should we fear our rising?

(II. i. 61 - 2.)

But until his fortune was made he refused to mingle with these men who would be familiar with him.

Second Court. Sim!
Sim. Push! I'm not for you yet,
Your company's too costly; after the old man's Despatch'd, I shall have time to talk with you;
I shall come into the fashion, ye shall see too,
After a day or two; in the meantime,
I am not for your company.

(II. i. 72 - 8.)

Themes involving sex and social climbing appeared in Middleton's earlier plays; the theme of the trickster tricked did, too, and it is also exhibited in the Fletcherian dramas. This theme, of course, is connected with the intrigue plot pattern which was as much a part of Fletcher's
Several intrigues are set going in *More Dissemblers*. Lactantio disguises his mistress as a page in order to enjoy her within the house of his severe and holy uncle. After attempting to smuggle his sweetheart, Aurelia, into the palace under similar circumstances and being foiled by her father's recognition of her, Lactantio is heartened to hear that he is the object of the Duchess's affections. From the heights of dizzy expectations he is, however, soon flung. There is even a touch of *hubris* in his reply to his uncle's advice that he prepare himself to be the choice of the Duchess -

> Alas, I'm not to learn to know that now!  
> Where could she make choice here, if I were missing?  
> 'Twould trouble the whole state, and puzzle 'em all,  
> To find out such another.  

(V. ii. 176 - 9.)

But the Duchess reveals that she will remain faithful to her seven-years vow, but that the Cardinal's nephew is "provided for/According to his merits", and she thereupon brings out the pregnant "Page" and explains Lactantio's responsibility in the case. The tricked trickster can only reply, in accepting this very different chooser,

> I'm paid with mine own money.  

(V. ii. 225.)

Lactantio's exalted hopes had originated in an intrigue begun by the Duchess after her falling in love with General Andrugio. She needed Lactantio as a blind. Giving out that she loved him, she used him as her amanuensis in forging a letter that would implicate Andrugio (III. ii. 70 ff.), and then sent Lactantio to arrest him, which he gladly does since

> The only enemy that [his] vengeance points to

---

But the Duchess's schemes are defeated by the constancy of Andrugio's love for Aurelia before whom the Duchess withdraws when it is disclosed (V. ii. 112 ff.) that "the straggling gipsy" is really a creature whose perfection did outshine her.

The trickster-tricked theme of No Wit involves, chiefly, the attempts of the Low-waters to recoup their fortune which has been wrested from them by Lady Goldenfleece, a rich widow, whose hand and wealth are the goals of a covey of scheming suitors, Sir Gilbert Lambstone, Weatherwise, Pepperton, and Overdone. Not only does Mistress Low-water finally restore her fortune but she also marries her brother, Beveril, to the woman who had originally tricked her out of it (V. i. 129 ff.).

The Duchess in The Witch is tricked out of a new husband in the Lord Governor by Almachildes's deception - he lied about killing the Duke - as Philippa in The Widow is cheated of the object of her scheming by the revelation that her would-be bedfellow is a woman. And the complacently murderous Simonides and Gnotho in The Old Law are tricked out of their inheritances and widows at the height of their triumph in the great trial scene which concludes the play. Evander reads to the court a legal clause,
appended to the old law, which subverts their dreams of wealth and pleasure. Sufficient, then, the illustrations of the trickster-tricked theme.

A theme characteristic of the new drama that Beaumont and Fletcher brought into being and one that received intensified expression at their hands because of their gentle birth, court background, and courtier audience was that of honour, a matter of great concern to the Renaissance. The code of honour was a super-subtilized collection of rules for gentlemen touchy about the punctilios of reputation. Their exaggerated sensitivity led to frequent charges of slander, and this in turn led to the duel as the test of honour.31

If Robb is correct in his analysis of the authorship of A Fair Quarrel32, Middleton is to be credited with much of the effectiveness of that fine play, despite the fact that the theme and two-thirds of the original play is Rowley's, for, apparently,

Middleton came in on it from the start, assisted in the planning, talked it over till it captured his imagination, wrote the chief scenes (in the process revealing potentialities of his own genius, which had had no scope in the satirical comedies which had been his line so far), and finally - this is most noteworthy - revised, sometimes superficially, sometimes in detail, many of Rowley's scenes....33

Middleton, therefore, must have given at least dramatic, if not intellectual,


32 Robb, op. cit., p. 130.

33 Ibid., p. 130.
sanction to the code of honour as it is displayed in this play, thereby committing himself to one of the age's most characteristic social institutions, one which received frequent theatrical expression from Romeo and Juliet to, at least, The Lover's Progress of c. 1623.

The play relates how two soldiers verge on a duel as a result of a dispute between their friends over the comparative worth of the choleric Colonel and the more rational Captain Agar. The Colonel resists Russell's pacifications, exclaiming,

Shall I lose here what I have safe brought home
Through many dangers?

My fame,
Life of my life, my reputation.

(I. i. 108 - 10.)

He is placated, but soon the quarrel breaks out in earnest over Russell's allowing the Sergeants to imprison the Colonel's friend, Fitzallen, for indebtedness. The Colonel loses his temper, curses Russell, Agar's uncle, and at Agar's remonstrance, calls Agar the son of a whore. Agar is deeply disturbed; he knows that

There is not such another murdering-piece
In all the stock of calumny

(II. i. 3 - 4.)

and he knows where the cause is just he will fight valourously, but

0, there's the cruelty of my foe's advantage!
Could but my soul resolve my cause were just....

(II. i. 19 - 20.)

Theoretically, he is sure of his mother's honour,

But when my judgment tells me she's but woman,
Whose frailty let in death to all mankind,
My valour shrinks at that.

(II. i. 28 - 30.)

To prevent her only son from duelling, Lady Agar tells him that once she
did sin, with the result that Agar goes to the field and not only patiently endures the Colonel's taunts but also highly praises him. The Colonel thereupon sneeringly proclaims Agar "A base submissive coward". The charge is all that Agar needs; he cries,

0, heaven has pitied my excessive patience,
And sent me a cause!

Blessed remembrance in time of need!
I'd lost my honour else.

(III. i. 109 ff.)

In the fight which ensues he vindicates his honour; the wounded Colonel admits his wrong and begs forgiveness; and Lady Agar later redeems herself by confessing her lie. The Colonel deeds his property to Captain Agar, and bestows his sister's hand on the "Noble deserver! ... most valiant and most wrong'd of men". Thus all honours are restored and quarrels end.

The theme of honour is a convention of tragi-comedy. The exalted quintessentialized glorification of it is one, too; the Colonel's attitude to honour in A Fair Quarrel is thus entirely conventional. Equally conventional is the apparent triviality of the cause of the initial quarrel in this play. It was the duty of a gentleman "to find quarrel in a straw
When honour [was] at the stake". And conventional, too, is Agar's conviction that being called the son of a whore is to be hurt with the deadliest weapon in "all the stock of calumny". A further stock reaction is his decisiveness when the charge of cowardice is hurled at him.

In the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher there is, we must note,

no satire upon the duel or upon the duellist.
There is, to be sure, satire upon gulls
who foolishly pretend to valor or who have

34 Baldwin Maxwell, op. cit., pp. 91 - 2, examines some of the trivialities which provoked many duels.
an exaggerated esteem for their nonexistent honor.\textsuperscript{35}

This assertion fits Middleton's plays, too. His treatment of the theme of honour accords with prevailing dramatic practice. Russell, whose attitude must not be misconstrued, takes, for instance, a realistic, common-sense view of the Colonel's conception of himself, not a satirical view.

Col. ... I am square'd and measur'd out; My heights, depths, breadth, all my dimensions taken! Sure I have yet beyond your astrolabe A spirit unbounded.

Rus. Tush! All this is weighing fire, vain and fruitless: The further it runs into argument, The further plung'd.... (I. i. 111–17.)\textsuperscript{36}

Conventional satire of the would-be valourous gull appears in \textit{A Fair Quarrel} as the comic counter-part to the serious main action. In one of the Rowley scenes the Physician reveals to Chough that his bride-to-be is "naught". Incensed, the roarer draws his sword, only to see the Physician drawing his while declaring,

Sir, I do not fear you that way; what I speak My life shall maintain; I say she is naught.

Immediately there follows this colloquy,

\begin{tabular}{ll}
Chough & Dost thou not fear me? \\
Phy & Indeed I do not, sir. \\
Chough & I'll never draw upon thee while I live for that trick; put up and speak freely. \\
\end{tabular}

(V. i. 95–100.)

\textsuperscript{35} Maxwell, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 90.

\textsuperscript{36} Since Chough is a foolish Cornish gentleman, Rowley's roaring school scenes may be regarded as a parody of the training in honour of the true gentleman.
Middleton parallels this satire in *The Widow*. Encountering Philippa's suspected lover, Martino says to Brandino,

> Let's both draw, master, for there's nobody with him,  
> (I. ii. 168.)

but when Francisco appeals to reason, Martino urges Brandino thus,

> Pray, hear him; it may grow to a peace: for, master, though we have carried the business nobly, we are not altogether so valiant as we should be.  
> (I. ii. 216-18.)

And the scene (III. ii.) in *The Old Law* in which Lysander engages in a fencing match as proof of his restored youth is a further satiric comment on the theme of gentlemanly honour.

Womanly honour had frequently been one of Middleton's themes in the City comedies, though it was usually given cynical treatment in serving as an illustration of female duplicity. In this sense the theme is exemplified in the Fletcherian plays in the Philippa - Francisco - Ansaldo scenes of *The Widow*, and, in the sense of honour preserved, in the Duchess of Milan scenes of *More Dissemblers*.

From his previous plays Middleton imports another feature, conventions of structure, to which must be added the structural devices made popular by Fletcher. The intrigue pattern, with its recourse to the convention of disguise, was a manner of shaping plays familiar to Middleton long before Fletcher turned to writing for the stage, but the pattern, being common to all Elizabethan dramatists, was one that Fletcher was to adopt and, characteristically, develop to an extreme.  

> Enough was said about intrigue in Middleton's Fletcherian plays

in the above discussion of the trickster tricked theme, except that it must now be shown that Middleton, too, under Fletcher's influence, pushed the intrigue plot to its limits of complication and surprise.

*More Dissemblers besides Women* has a tangled set of love relationships unravelled in a denouement full of revelations. Loved by the Page, his pregnant mistress in disguise, Lactantio, pursuing and abandoning Aurelia, strives for the hand of the Duchess. Aurelia is pursued by Andrugio but she prefers Lactantio to her first love. She disguises herself as a gypsy to escape her father's bondage, but in this guise she is bestowed on Dondolo as his doxy. The Duchess in her pursuit of Andrugio dissembles love to Lactantio. The unravelling of these complications is not a simple affair, for when the Duchess finally realizes who Aurelia is and surrenders Andrugio to her, Aurelia turns from him to Lactantio who has just entered, exclaiming,

0, there appears the life of all my wishes!

(V. ii. 136.)

In turn, however, Lactantio rejects her since his marriage to the Duchess is imminent. Aurelia, contrite, appeals to Andrugio who spurns her at first but then accepts her. Lactantio's turn to be rejected then comes, for the Duchess reaffirms her vow of fidelity to her dead husband, and then provides Lactantio with a wife - fittingly enough, the poor Page.

The surprises reserved for the end of this play are not as startling as those which enable *The Witch* and *The Old Law* to end on happy notes. Only one hint in the entire course of the action of *The Witch* up to V. iv (where thirteen lines before the end of the play the Duke suddenly springs to life) indicates that the Duke had not been murdered. In his soliloquy
on his "pretty kind of Lightnes" Almachildes parenthetically had remarked about the Duchess's reckoning the Duke's made away (IV. i. [1389 - 90]).

Nothing else but the fact that Almachildes is "a fantastical Gentleman" prepares the audience for the volte-face in this plot. However, these foreshadowings are not to be found in Middleton's last tragi-comedy. Nothing at all in any way suggests that the outcome of The Old Law will not be brutally tragic. With Cleanthes's incredulous stupefaction we watch Leonides, Creon, Lysander and other old men file into the court-room to the accompaniment of loud music, and it is only as the grave and formal language of Evander's decree is read to a court on which amazement sits do we realize that the impossible has happened, that justice in Epirus reigns triumphant. The tragicomic convention of surprise is unmistakably present here.

Associated with this convention and that of the intrigue plot pattern is the structural convention of disguise. This appears in all the Fletcherian plays except the two in which Rowley had a hand. It appears best in No Wit, No Help, Like a Woman’s where the theme declared by the title receives its exemplification in the efforts of Mistress Low-water to retrieve her husband's fortune from Lady Goldenfleece. Disguised as a gallant gentleman and her husband as a servant, she insinuates herself into a resplendent banquet being given Lady Goldenfleece by her suitors, and there exposes the shameful proposition of the most hopeful suitor, Sir Gilbert Lambstone, by disclosing his lustful letter addressed to Mistress Low-water, the Lady's "most mortal enemy". Later, when the remaining suitors come to call she discomfits them by an assumed familiarity with Lady Goldenfleece. The suitors
decamp, for, as one of them remarks,

he that can be so saucy to call her Bess
already, will call her prating quean a
month hence.

(II. iii. 77 - 8.)

Kate Low-water then sweeps the Lady off her feet with her ardent wooing,
and in the presence of the returned suitors the Lady chooses the "gentleman"
for her husband. But Kate contrives to compromise Lady Goldenfleece with
Beveril, Kate's brother, breaks off the marriage after accepting a casket
of coins and jewels as a settlement, and after extracting a promise of mar­
riage to Beveril from Lady Goldenfleece. Kate and her husband thereupon
discover themselves.

In The Widow Martia's disguise as a gentleman is efficacious in
tyning the two plots together, and the medical disguise of the thieves,
Latrocinio and Occulto, with their colleagues dressed as patients, affords
the fun of the gulling scenes in the City comedies.

A convention of tragi-comedy that Middleton incorporated into his
four plays of this genre is what might be called the heightened poetic mood,
a phrase that includes the extended rhetorical expression of sentiment and
passion, as well as that middle tonal ground described by Ellis-Fermor. It
is not, of course, valid to contend that this convention is original with
Beaumont and Fletcher. They merely made fashionable the lengthy rhetorical
expression of sentiment, and hence Middleton, ever alert to the current
vogue, puts far more of such extended rhetoric into the Fletcherian plays
than he had in his City comedies.

Although treated above as being chiefly influenced by the vogue
of the Senecan-Italianate play of blood revenge, The Second Maiden's Tragedy
clearly betrays in the main plot the popularity of the new courtier drama. Indeed, one critic maintains that the externals of blood and thunder tragedy are used simply as atmosphere for a sentimental romance.\(^{38}\)

Bowers demonstrates that the poetic mood of this play, in conforming to the conventions of Fletcher's pattern, expelled or altered conventions of the older vogue.

The hysteria of the revenger at the appearance of the ghost is entirely missing; instead the lyrical atmosphere of the romantic love of Govianus and his Lady is emphasized, a romance so high-flown that Govianus delays vengeance at one point for the pure delight of seeing the ghost of his beloved again.\(^{39}\)

The rhetorical flourishes and extended expressions of sentiment and passion characteristic of the new courtier mode have been illustrated for *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* in the previous chapter, but they must now be indicated for Middleton's tragi-comedies. It should be noted at first, though, that the proportion of verse to prose in *More Dissemblers*, *A Fair Quarrel*, *The Witch* and *The Old Law* is very much higher than in the Fletcherian intrigue comedies of this period. Tragi-comedy is at least versified, if not poetic, drama.

From *More Dissemblers*, the high-flown praise of the Cardinal for the Duchess's chastity may now be displayed at length; in his eulogy rhetoric, sentiment, passion, and hyperbole are all found.

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\(^{39}\) Ibid., p. 167.
My lords, I've work for you: when you have hours
Free from the cares of state, bestow your eyes
Upon those abstracts of the duchess' virtues,
My study's ornaments. I make her constancy
The holy mistress of my contemplation;
Whole volumes have I writ in zealous praise
Of her eternal vow: 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,
And all their momentary frantic follies,
Here I stand up in admiration,
And bow to the chaste health of our great duchess
Kissing her constant name. O my fair lords,
When we find grace confirm'd, especially
In a creature that's so doubtful as a woman,
We're spirit-ravish'd; men of our probation
Feel the sphere's music playing in their souls.
(I. ii. 1 - 19.)

At the revelation of his mother's betrayal "to a most sinful hour",

Captain Agar in A Fair Quarrel cries,

O, were you so unhappy to be false
Both to yourself and me? but to me chiefly.
What a day's hope is here lost! and with it
The joys of a just cause! Had you but thought
On such a noble quarrel, you'd ha' died
Ere you'd ha' yielded; for the sin's hate first,
Next for the shame of this hour's cowardice.
Curst be the heat that lost me such a cause,
A work that I was made for! Quench, my spirit,
And out with honour's flaming lights within thee!
Be dark and dead to all respects of manhood!
I never shall have use of valour more.
(II. i. 196 - 207.)

Equally eloquent, equally ringing with rhetorical flourishes, is this ad-
dress by the Colonel to his sister:

0 wretched is the man
That builds the last hopes of his saving comforts
Upon a woman's charity! he's most miserable:
If it were possible, her obstinate will
Will pull him down in his midway to heaven.
I've wrong'd that worthy man past recompense,
And in my anger robb'd him of fair fame;
And thou the fairest restitution art
My life could yield him: if I knew a fairer
I'd set thee by and thy unwilling goodness,
And never make my sacred peace of thee:
But there's the cruelty of a fate debarr'd
Thou art the last, and all, and thou art hard!

(IV. ii. 95-107.)

It is the speeches of Sebastian that bring The Witch closest
to the typically rhetorical, sentimental "language of emotion" of the
other tragi-comedies.

Better I neuer knew what Comfort were
in womans love, then wickedly to know it.
What could the faldsehood of one Night availe[him] that must enjoy for ever, or he's lost?
'tis the way rather to drawe hate vpon me:
for (knowne) tis as impossible she should love me,
as youth, in health, to doat vpon a greif,
or one that's robd, and bound, t'affect the Theif
No, he that would Soules sacred Comfort wyn,
must burne in pure love, like a Seraphin

(IV. ii. 1604-13.)

Finally, and although it is marred by an unmetrical slip or
two, Cleanthes's greeting to his father in his forest refuge is filled
with devices of rhetoric and noble sentiment.

I hope to see you often and return
Loaden with blessings, still to pour on some;
I find 'em all in my contented peace,
And lose not one in thousands; they're disperst
So gloriously, I know not which are brightest.
I find 'em, as angels are found, by legions:
First, in the love and honesty of a wife,
Which is the first and chiefest of all temporal
blessings;
Next, in yourself, which is the hope and joy
Of all my actions, my affairs, my wishes;
And lastly, which crowns all, I find my soul
Crown'd with the peace of 'em, th'eternal riches,
Man's only portion for his heavenly marriage!

(IV. ii. 37-49.)

If Middleton did not write that passage, he almost certainly wrote the one
that immediately follows. It is Leonides's reply.
Rise; thou art all obedience, love, and goodness.
I dare say that which thousand fathers cannot,
And that's my precious comfort; never son
Was in the way more of celestial rising:
Thou art so made of such ascending virtue,
That all the powers of hell can't sink thee.

(IV. ii. 50 - 5.)

The creation of a middle mood mediating the temper of comedy
and that of tragedy will be regarded here as the defining characteristic
of tragi-comedy for that genre is "not a mere juxtaposition of serious and
comic scenes". 40 This mood, "the outstanding contribution of Beaumont
and Fletcher" 41, is, then, a convention, although it is one that Middleton
never succeeded in mastering in an unaided work unless More Dissemblers
may be classified as tragi-comedy (no one is brought near death in this
play).

A Fair Quarrel, though of dual authorship, Strike the balance
between tragedy and comedy. The pressure of high sentiment is well main­
tained in the Captain Agar scenes, and Jane's plight is serious from the
moment of Fitzallen's arrest in the first scene to his release in the
last. The comic episodes involving Chough and Trimtram constitute an ef­
fective parody of the honour theme in the main plot.

The Witch, however, is a different matter. This play is a
mere juxtaposition of serious and comic moods, with the humour of Fire­
stone and Almachildes being pretty poor stuff, and the serious situations
being excessively tangled intrigues full of the old lumber of the Italian­
ate revenge play. And the shockingly improbable conclusion wrenches what

40 Parrott and Ball, A Short View of Elizabethan Drama, p. 189.
41 Waith, The Pattern of Tragicomedy in Beaumont and Fletcher, p. ix.
might have been a third-rate tragedy into a fifth-rate tragi-comedy.

The Old Law, on the other hand, is another collaborated play which is a successful tragi-comedy. Here, too, the middle mood is achieved and for reasons similar to those true for A Fair Quarrel. The Gnotho scenes provide a grimly comic counterpart to the Cleanthes' plot; with the story of Simonides they make a powerful attack on human greed.42

We may conclude these remarks on the structural conventions of Middleton's tragi-comedy by observing that in the use of the intrigue pattern with its dilemmas multiplied, in the employment of disguise as framework, in the recourse to an intenser and more elevated kind of speech, and in the establishment of a middle mood (and in the descent towards death arrested by a sudden flight up to reconciliation and happiness) Middleton shows his knowledge of the main structural commonplaces of the new courtier mode.

The two remaining aspects of convention that he also shows a knowledge of are conventions of character and those of staging.

The stock figures of the new fashion in drama are exaggerated extremes: the incredibly chaste woman (the Lady in The Second Maiden's Tragedy, the Duchess in More Dissemblers); the lustful, all-powerful tyrant (the Tyrant in Govianus's story, Evander in The Old Law); the constant lover (Govianus, Andrugio, Sebastian, Jane, and the Page); the inconstant lover (Lactantio, Aurelia, Abberzanes, Gnotho); the quintessential

42 Waith, op. cit., pp. 43 - 85, discusses the role of the satyr and of satire in Beaumont and Fletcher tragi-comedy. The scourging of villainy there, however, was so closely merged with pastoral elements that there was produced "a genre more formalized and further removed from everyday life" (p. 84) than the Middleton-Rowley imitations.
gentleman or valourous soldier (Captain Agar, the Colonel); the foolish 
gentleman (Chough, Almachildes); the fidelity figure (Andrugio, the 
Duchess of Milan — until her first sight of the General, Sebastian, Cle-
anthes); and the faithless folk (Lactantio, Aurelia, the Duchess in The 
Witch, Simonides).

Although many of these characters are hyperbolic, they are not 
so startling as that other conventional figure of tragi-comedy, the Pro-
tean character. Sometimes he is merely a disguised personage, sometimes 
he is merely a dissembler, but he achieves his most distinct form as the 
character who suddenly changes. His change is either unmotivated or not 
sufficiently accounted for by the situation in which he is involved. In 
The Second Maiden's Tragedy, Helvetius, a would-be pander to his own 
daughter, suddenly changes as a result of Govianus's violence into an 
exemplar of goodness who resists the Tyrant's evil desires. The Duchess 
of Milan at her first glimpse of Andrugio suddenly alters from a seven-
years-constant widow to a restless, love-smitten intriguer. The Physician 
in A Fair Quarrel is at first a kindly credit to his profession, then a 
base lecher. The Duke in The Witch changes at the end of the play from 
a brutal psychopath into a forgiving setter-to-rights. Most startling of 
all is the alteration of Evander in The Old Law from a callous executioner 
of the aged into a perfect symbol of justice and mercy.

The above characters are all from the tragi-comedies (or The 
Second Maiden's Tragedy), but Middleton's Fletcherian comedies contain 
equally conventional beings, too. A quotation at this point should make 
the matter plain. Parrott and Ball state that Mistress Low-water in
No Wit, No Help, Like a Woman's

is one of Fletcher's girls, clever, audacious, and essentially virtuous,

and they add that The Widow, too, has fashionable Fletcher characters:

a foolish old Judge with a wanton young wife, an amorous young gallant, a swaggering suitor, and a runaway girl in boy's clothing....

The Fletcherian comedies do not require any further examination on this point; and patently, many of these characters Middleton had delineated in the plays of other fashions. Although the increasingly aristocratic composition of the audience accounts for much of the up-grading of the social setting, it should be observed that Middleton did owe a significant debt to Fletcher's comedies, too, where so many of the characters are drawn from among the gentle-born. Except for the thieves in The Widow, "London" low-life is excluded from Middleton's Fletcherian plays.

The most important convention of staging contributed by the new vogue of drama is that of spectacle. The eye and the ear had always been appealed to in Elizabethan drama by means of dumb-shows, masques, and song, but Fletcher greatly multiplied the spectacular element.

There are many more songs in Middleton's Fletcherian plays than in, say, the City comedies. The grieving Govianus has a boy sing dolorously to him as he weeps before his Lady's tomb. More Dissemblers opens

43 A Short View, p. 164.
44 Ibid., p. 164.
45 Italy was a common setting for Fletcher's comedies. The Italian settings for More Dissemblers and The Widow may result from this fact, or may spring from Marston's influence or Jonson's.
with a song that expresses a major theme of the play:

To be chaste is woman's glory,
'Tis her fame and honour's story:
Here sits she in funeral weeds,
Only bright in virtuous deeds;
Come and read her life and praise,
That singing weeps, and sighing plays.

Three songs are sung in the victory masque that is held in honour of Andrugio (I. iii. 67 ff.), two on victory in battle, and one on conquest in love. The gypsy scene in this play contains songs in abundance. There is a rhythmic swing to the songs here appropriate to the setting as, for instance, in the song beginning

Come, my dainty doxies,
My dells, my dells most dear....
(IV. i. 88 ff.)

And the lively, octosyllabic couplets of the Gipsy Captain ("Thou shall have all thy heart requires", IV. i. 195 ff.) provide additional song-like elements. A somewhat adventitious song is the one at I. iv. 89 that Don-dolo extracts from the Page, though it does provide a thematic contrast with the opening lyric.

Two songs in *The Witch* gain their fame not from any intrinsic merit but from their association with *Macbeth*; they are the song "in ye aire", "Come away: Come away:" at III. iii. 1331 and the charm song at V. iii. 1999: "Black Spiritts, and white: Red Spiritts, and Gray". Undistinguished also is Isabella's song in the first scene of the second act (l. 590 ff.), a song that extols the married state. Once again in a Fletcherian play there are rhymed lines - especially prevalent in the witch scenes - that contribute to the lyrical effect which was one object of the writer of tragi-comedy. The Duke's final speech, moreover, is a
conventional couplet conclusion.

Many of the songs in the Fletcherian plays are functionally related to the plot only in atmosphere, if indeed they are related at all. But Lactrocinio's song in *The Widow* at III. i. ("I keep my horse, I keep my whore", l. 22 ff.) is a part of the action since the last line contains a command to Martia to surrender her purse, while the thieves' song (l. 110 ff.) provides a choric commentary on the ironic change of hands which money undergoes. The part song that Philippa sings with her waiting-maid, Violetta, alludes to Philippa's situation (III. ii. 33 ff.) but the "Song, in parts, by Lactrocinio and the rest" at the end of the fourth act ("Give me fortune, give me health"), a spirited but conventional assertion that the witty are the ones in this world assured of success, is adventitious. Such gratuitously proffered melodies are abundant in Elizabethan drama.

Almost equally prevalent is the appeal to the eye. This is especially abundant in plays of the new vogue. Perhaps it is once more necessary to mention, however, that spectacle in Fletcher's plays did not act as a source of inspiration for Middleton (spectacle had long been a popular feature of Elizabethan drama) but rather as a pointer to the kind of play that was becoming fashionable. Thus we find much more spectacle in Middleton's Fletcherian plays than in his City comedies or even in the early tragedies. If none of the Fletcherian plays contains a dumb-show, certainly the numerous masques and showy devices make up for the lack. There was no dearth of these in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*: the appearance of the Lady's ghost in the tomb, and the bedecked corpse in the Tyrant's palace, for example. *More Dissemblers* contains the masque of victory (I. iii. 67 - 89.) and the operetta-scene of the gay gypsy band (IV. i.
which concludes "with a strange wild-fashioned dance to the hautboys or cornets". Music begins the great banquet in No Wit. Some idea of its elaborate nature may be gained from this stage direction:

Music. The banquet is brought in, six of WEATHERWISE'S Tenants carrying the Twelve Signs, Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces, made of banqueting stuff.

(II. i. 94 ff.)

But by far the most elaborate spectacle in the Fletcherian plays is the masque of the suitors in the fourth act of No Wit, a show which W. J. Lawrence roundly declared to be "the last word in Pre-Restoration spectacular display...." One could almost say from this striking instance alone that Middleton was powerfully influenced by Fletcherian spectacle during the second decade of the Jacobean era. Certainly nothing like this masque had appeared in his City comedies or early tragedies, and one must search in Middleton's final period to find, in Women, Beware Women, its equal.

When the diners have seated themselves the masque begins:

After loud music for a while, a thing like a globe opens on one side of the stage, and flashes out fire: then SIR G. LAMBSTONE, in the character of Fire, issues from it, with yellow hair and beard intermingled with streaks like wild flames, a three-pointed fire in his hand; and, at the same time, WEATHERWISE, as Air, comes down, hanging by a cloud, with a coat made like an almanac, all the twelve moons set in it, and the four quarters, winter, spring, summer, and autumn, with change of weathers, rain, lightning, tempest, &c.; and from under the stage, on different sides at the farther

end, rise OVERDONE as Water and PEPPERON
as Earth: Water with green flags upon his
head standing up instead of hair, and a
beard of the same, with a chain of pearl;
Earth with a number of little things resem­
bling trees, like a thick grove, upon his
head, and a wedge of gold in his hand, his
garment of a clay colour.
(IV. ii. 63 ff.)

Each of the disguised suitors then says his piece, not the one expected
of him but rather a travesty of it. Eighty-five lines of near-doggerel,
interspersed with the spectators' exclamations and asides, are then
finally concluded with Sir Gilbert Lambstone's

And now to vex, 'gainst nature, form, rule, place,
See once four warring elements all embrace!
(IV. ii. 170 - 1.)

As the elements embrace, another set of disguised figures enters and soon
the suitors are exposed:

Re-enter, at several corners, BEVERIL with three
other persons, attired like the four Winds,
with wings, &c., the South Wind having a
great red face, the North Wind a pale, bleak
one; the Western Wind one cheek red and another
white, and so the Eastern Wind: they dance to
the drum and fife, while the four Elements seem
to give back and stand in amaze: at the end
of the dance the Winds strip the Elements of
their disguises, which seem to yield and almost
fall off of themselves at the coming of the
Winds. Exeunt all the Winds except that repre­
sented by BEVERIL.
(IV. ii. 171 ff.)

But there are numerous other instances of spectacle in Middleton's
Fletcherian plays. Rowley's masque of dancing old women in A Fair Quarrel
has its first cousin in the dance of the witches at the end of the third
scene of Act V. of The Witch, and an even more astonishing feast than that
in No Wit occurs at the close of the first act: Almachildes applauds
Hecate for conjuring up a cat playing on a fiddle and spirits bringing food so that the witch and he might sup. The most spectacular show in The Witch, however, is the masque-like descent, ascent, and flight of spirits and witches in III. iii. Less spectacular is the device resorted to in The Old Law that was almost a commonplace of the comedy of the age - the mock funeral. At II. i. 149 a funeral procession enters, "the hearse followed by Cleanthes and Hippolita gaily dressed". Their habiliments contrast with their situation to symbolically suggest Cleanthes's joy at his father's having beguiled the state's cruel edict, yet at the same time Cleanthes weeps at the realization that his father is "dead". His tearful joy fittingly symbolizes, too, the characteristic mood of tragi-comedy.

That the new fashion in drama inaugurated by Beaumont and Fletcher strongly influenced Middleton there can now be no doubt. That it attracted Middleton's deeper sympathies seems improbable if the poor quality of The Witch is an index of how profoundly he could be engaged by the fashion when working alone. A Fair Quarrel and The Old Law seem to suggest that Middleton excelled in this genre only when stimulated by the presence of a collaborator.\footnote{Surely it is minority opinion to declare that the "most important name in Elizabethan tragicomedy is Thomas Middleton". This is the view of L. E. Alexander in his A Study of Thomas Middleton's Tragi-comedies, an unpublished thesis of which an abstract appears in Summaries of Doctoral Dissertations, University of Wisconsin, vol. 14, 1954, pp. 422 - 3.} Unfortunately, the critic is reduced to employing such terms as "seems" in discussing these plays as a result of the uncertain authorship of the various scenes and situations in them. It is clear that in the Fletcherian comedies Middleton achieved a more consistent artistic
success than in the tragi-comedies. It is equally clear that his first period of dramatic activity served him well in draughting these realistic intrigue plays. That his success with tragi-comedy was only a qualified one may, then, be explained by what has often been asserted, that only within the framework of the realistic play could he express his genius since here he could display his interest in the mental processes of men and women.

That the lack of over-all meaning in Fletcher's tragi-comedies and that the irresponsibility revealed in their Never-never-land settings, atmosphere, and themes could lead Middleton astray from his genius even in realistic comedy might be illustrated by what he failed to do with a very minor episode in No Wit, No Help, Like a Woman's. Weatherwise, we observe, penetrates Mistress Low-water's disguise in II. i. 193 - 6., saying in an aside,

A proper woman turned gallant! If
the widow refuse me, I care not if
I be a suitor to him; I have known
those who have been as mad, and given
half their living for a male companion.

Despite his keen interest in sex, no realistic study of homosexuality appears in Middleton's plays. Perhaps the laws governing the stage in the Jacobean state were too powerful to resist; perhaps Middleton did not find homosexuality a congenial topic for realistic treatment, comic or tragic; but perhaps the prevailing taste for the piquant and the titillating, rather than the serious and searching, a taste given tremendous

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48 "The predominance of the Fletcherian school in Jacobean times created a most unfavorable situation for an artist with Middleton's gifts. He was by temperament a realist - but the new drama was wildly romantic." (Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies, p. 57.)
reinforcement and much satisfaction by the plays in the Beaumont and Fletcher canon, forbade the realistic analysis of such a subject.

With the City comedies, the early tragedies, and the Fletcherian plays as a background to our study of convention and device, we may now turn to a close examination, play by play, of Middleton's final tragedies, Hengist, King of Kent, Women, Beware Women, and The Changeling. In them we shall see Middleton moving farther and farther away from commonplace themes and stock situations and characters, and working towards a realism that becomes so artistically splendid in the main plot of The Changeling that it merits comparison with that of Shakespeare.
CHAPTER V

HENGISt, KING OF KENT

When Henry Herringman published The Mayor of Queenborough in 1661, the title-page announced the "first flight" of a "comedy", and the title itself explains the designation: so popular were the comic scenes in the play that the King's Men, succeeding in 1641 in obtaining from the Lord Chamberlain a warrant to prevent the printing of their plays, were led to name it by reference to the hero of the sub-plot. The memory of Simon the tanner was kept alive during the Commonwealth by the printing of a scene involving him in Wit Restored (1658), and by 1687 "Simon had become a proverbial figure". But the seventeenth century title of the play is misleading since the Simon episodes are clearly subsidiary to those involving Vortiger, Hengist, Horsus, and Roxena, all of whom perish in the final scene of the play. As a consequence, A. H. Bullen called The Mayor of Queenborough a tragi-comedy. However, this label will not do either, for the play draws most of its material from Holinshed and Fabyan, thus

1 Herringman's address to the reader describes the edition thus.

2 R. C. Bald (ed.), "Introduction" to Hengist, King of Kent: or the Mayor of Queenborough (Folger Shakespeare Library Publications), New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938, p. xiv. All textual references will be to this edition.

3 Ibid., p. xv.


5 Bald's studies in the sources are summarized in pp. xxxvii - xlii of his edition.
suggesting to Schelling that Middleton had produced a history play of the legendary chronicle type. But very recently another genre has been insisted upon. R. C. Bald, in the introduction to his splendid edition of the play, says flatly that "Hengist is a tragedy...." Boas agrees. The latest appraisal is more cautious, for Schoenbaum, in justifying his concern with the play in a study of Middleton's tragedies, will only go so far as to say that "Hengist is as much a tragedy as a history play." It will be the purpose of this chapter to support Schoenbaum's view by demonstrating that the conventions of the chronicle play and those of realistic intrigue tragedy do form the chief models for Middleton in Hengist, King of Kent; or the Mayor of Queenborough.

During the last thirty years and particularly in the last fifteen the Elizabethan history play has attracted much attention from scholars, largely, of course, as a result of renewed interest in Shakespeare's chronicle plays. Nevertheless, there is little agreement about what

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constitutes the defining characteristics of this mode of drama, particularly since Shakespeare, the most prolific exponent of the type, by virtue of the "thoughtfulness"\textsuperscript{11} of his treatment of historical material, is somewhat removed from the main stream. If "the norm of the Chronicle Plays is the factual treatment of Holinshed"\textsuperscript{12} and chroniclers like him, then Shakespeare is abnormal. If a concern for "degree" and "order" is the norm, then Greene is to be excluded. If history plays must be "mirrors of Elizabethan policy"\textsuperscript{13}, then \textit{James IV} must be dismissed from the genre.

Lily B. Campbell asserts that it is to an Aristotelian distinction between private and public morals that we must look for the distinction between tragedy and history. Tragedy is concerned with the doings of men which in philosophy are discussed under \textit{ethics}; history with the doings of men which in philosophy

\textsuperscript{11} The term is Tillyard's. See his \textit{Shakespeare's History Plays}, London, Chatto and Windus, 1951, pp. 120 (and \textit{passim}): "Where such political interest occurs, Shakespeare...comes into the case. In other words, the norm of the Chronicle Plays is the factual treatment of Holinshed. When exceptionally the superior thoughtfulness of Hall is found, then Shakespeare is found too."

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 120.

\textsuperscript{13} Lily B. Campbell, of course, uses this phrase as the sub-title of her \textit{Shakespeare's Histories} (San Marino, The Huntington Library, 1947). Her remarks on p. 116 suggest that the phrase is applicable to all writers of chronicle plays: "At the beginning of this book I quoted Professor Schelling as saying that the English chronicle play was closer in its affiliation to the wealth of historic literature in verse and prose which was springing up about it than to other varieties of the drama. This statement goes too far, I should say, but it does serve to emphasize the need for studying the history play as a separate genre from tragedy and comedy. It is still drama, but it cannot be understood by studying alone its dramatic technique. Instead, it must be studied as a form of art which selected and used its subject matter for the purposes universally accepted as appropriate." Those purposes, she goes on to say, are "the recognized purposes of history".
Such a distinction, however, would permit the inclusion of *Corboduc*, *Catiline*, and *A Game at Chess*, within a genre having limits too wide to be of much value for clarity of distinction. A similar weakness would seem to be present in Irving Ribner's definition which has it that history plays serve ends which Elizabethans considered the legitimate purposes of history, for Ribner discovers seven such purposes, a number of which are vague and sweeping. And if the history play is to be defined as that which draws its materials from chronicles such as Holinshed's then *Macbeth* is one. If patriotism is a mark of the history play, then a case can possibly be made out for including *The Shoemaker's Holiday* in the genre.

Unsatisfactory as the above definitions are as valid generalizations, they all, nevertheless, are relevant in varying degrees to an understanding of what Middleton was trying to do in *Hengist, King of Kent*.

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14 Op. cit., p. 17. As will be seen below, this distinction does have some value for the interpretation of Middleton's achievement in *Hengist*.


16 For example, number (7): "exposition of a rational plan in human events which might affirm the wisdom and justice of God". How this criterion would enable the critic to distinguish between history plays and domestic tragedy Ribner fails to consider in a persuasive way.

17 Schelling, *The English Chronicle Play*, p. 5. Schelling's theory that the chronicle play "began with the tide of patriotism which united all England to repel the threatened invasion of Philip of Spain" (p. 1) is not held today, at least not in the sense that would make the Armada the cause of the genre. See Tillyard, pp. 100 - 1.
which like many other plays drawing their stories from chronicles sought to instruct "an inquisitive public in some of the facts and legends of English history"\textsuperscript{18}, to appeal to a popular audience\textsuperscript{19}, to exploit "the mere accident of successive events"\textsuperscript{20} narrated in Holinshed, and to tell a story in a dramatic form that resembled in structure the episodic pattern of the Miracle play\textsuperscript{21}, although certain elements - the presence of didacticism is one - reveal the influence of the Morality. Hengist differs from many chronicle plays in one significant respect. Except for the choice of English history\textsuperscript{22}, the portrait of the holy Constantius, the presentation of Aurelius as a noble British figure contrasting with the perfidious Vortiger and the wicked foreign Saxons, and the recognition that the Saxons are "strangers in religion...\textit{which is ye greatest alienation Can bee}" (II. iii. 34 - 5.), there is little of that patriotic appeal to the sense of nationality which critics from Schelling to Tillyard\textsuperscript{23} have

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} Tillyard, \textit{Shakespeare's History Plays}, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Raynulph's phrase, "this round faire ring", in Chorus i. indicates a public play-house. A later passage (I. ii. 34 - 5.), however, suggests a private theatre. See Bald's note on p. 101 of his edition of the play.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Tillyard, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 99.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ribner, \textit{PMLA}, vol. 69 (June, 1954), p. 607. Tillyard remarks that "just as Holinshed revives the medieval simplicities of Higden, so the plays on English history go behind the severer form of the Morality to the factual and accidental forms of some of the Miracle Plays" (p. 99.).
\item \textsuperscript{22} The Elizabethans did not make the distinction between history and legend that we do.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Madeleine Doran, too, in her study of form in Elizabethan drama, \textit{Endeavours of Art}, p. 114, says that in the chronicle history play "the chief shaping attitude is patriotism".
\end{itemize}
seen to be characteristic of the chronicle history play. What concern there is for Respublica appears in scattered remarks by the dissembling Vortiger to the pious Constantius in the first Act, but especially in the last lines of the final scene. Aurelius turns from Hengist to Castiza, Vortiger's widowed Queen, declaring,

\[
\text{Nay to approve thy purenes to posteritie} \\
\text{The fruitfull hopes off a faire peacefull Kingdom} \\
\text{Here will I plant} \\
\text{.... and to the ffirmness} \\
\text{Of Truths plantation in this Land for ever,} \\
\text{Whch always grones vnder som Curse wth out it,} \\
\text{As I begine my rule with the distuction} \\
\text{Of this ambitious Fagan, so shall all} \\
\text{Wh his adulterate faith distaind, and solld,} \\
\text{Either turne Christians, dye, or liue exild.}
\]

The date of the play's composition (between 1616 and 1620) will in part account for the dearth of patriotic sentiment — there was not the sense of national unity under James that had existed under the later Elizabeth. At least the sentiment of the Jacobean court was not as often that of the populace — witness the Spanish match. But what patriotism is in the play may partly have owed its origins to the faint influence of one aspect of the Tudor myth of history. Anxious to make his claims to the throne

24 Putting Vortiger beside Constantius in the first two acts of the play is Middleton's old trick of contrasting the Virtue figure with the embodiment of vice. Of this technique W. A. Armstrong in "The Influence of Seneca and Machiavelli on the Elizabethan Tyrant", Review of English Studies, vol. 24 (January, 1948), p. 19, says, "Tudor literature exhibits a well-established convention of setting portraits of the ideal king — the speculum principis — in calculated contrast to the accompanying portraits of the sinful tyrant."

25 Bald, "Introduction" to Hengist, King of Kent, pp. xiii - xvii, where 1619 - 20 is preferred.
legitimate, Henry VII had sought to promote the myth that he was *Arthurus redivivus*. Arthur's Saxon enemies would, accordingly, be England's enemies. Historians like Hall and poets like Spenser encouraged this myth, and it might not be amiss to see in Middleton's treatment of the Saxons in *Hengist* a vestigial survival of the Tudor attitude. Partly, too, the patriotism in the play, such as it is, stems from conventional Elizabethan notions of order and loyalty. But the absence of any strong note of patriotism is likely the result of the fact that *Hengist* is not— if the expression be permitted in connection with such a mongrel type as the history play—a pure dramatic mode. The chronicle pattern of the main action is wedded to both *de casibus* tragedy and to an intrigue plot of lust and ambition, and Middleton failed to conceal this structural bigamy. Moreover, he further complicated and disjointed his play by adding long scenes of comic relief.

The debt of the entire Elizabethan drama to the medieval has frequently been pointed out, but whereas Renaissance comedy had Plautus as a model, and tragedy Seneca, the chronicle play had to work out its own patterns assisted by what principles of order the medieval drama could supply and by modes of organization contributed by non-dramatic literary

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26 Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 30. Tillyard shows that the Tudor myth of history was exceptionally, not usually, a part of the chronicle play. Shakespeare, of course, is the main exponent of it in drama.

27 Farrott and Ball, *A Short View of Elizabethan Drama*, p. 166, call it a "curious medley of history, tragedy, and farce."

forms, the medieval de casibus conception of tragedy, for instance. The forms of chronicle plays were likely, then, to be eclectic; and despite the disciplined examples of Edward II and Richard II, most chronicle histories have ramshackle structures, serious episodes being strung like beads on a thread of narrative, with comic episodes displaying their livelier colours at random in the necklace. This looseness of structure, ultimately traceable to the Miracle play, is a convention of the chronicle history observable in Hengist, King of Kent.

The main action of the play concerns the attempts of Vortiger to seize and keep royal power and to rid himself of Castiza in favour of Roxena for whom he lusts. After forcing Constantius to take the throne, Vortiger persuades the new king to leave to him the business of government. But Vortiger is satisfied with absolute power only; he has Constantius murdered, making use of the recently landed Saxons to maintain order. Soon he repudiates his wife in favour of Roxena, the daughter of Hengist, leader of the Saxons. The Britons revolt against Vortiger because of this marriage, and crown his son, Vortiner, king. Vortiner being poisoned by Roxena, Vortiger reasserts the throne only to meet with Hengist's treachery which, however, permits Vortiger his liberty. But Constantius's brothers, Aurelius and Uther, besiege Vortiger and Roxena in a Welsh castle which is thereupon fired. Roxena dies in the flames; Vortiger perishes at the hands of Horsus who had all the while been cuckolding him; Hengist is captured by the British princes, and the action ends with Aurelius in control of the throne.

Had Middleton dramatized the action thus summarized, he would
probably have produced a more tightly knit play, but many of the events just described are merely sketched by means of the spectacular miming of the dumb-show or baldly narrated in the octosyllabics of Raynulph, the choric presenter.

Half-way through Act I the first dumb-show mimes the bestowal by Fortune on Hengist and Horsus\(^2\) of the leadership of the surplus Saxons. Shown in dumb-show, too, is the parting of Roxena from her father and from Horsus. The choral speech of Raynulph which immediately follows the mime explains this action, but identifies only Roxena. Dumb-shows and presenters\(^3\) were stock structural resources of the Elizabethan dramatist seeking to organize his material, but Middleton falters in his use of these resources. The gravest structural flaw is that the characters presented here are not related to the preceding or the following action; it is not until the second scene of Act II that Hengist and Horsus enter and are announced as "newly Landed" and begin to take part in the action. A further flaw, mentioned above, is that though the audience might guess their identity from the title of the play, neither of these Saxons is named in the dumb-show or in Raynulph's explication. This fact cancels the utility of placing the dumb-show and chorus in the middle of Act I as a preparation for the entry of Hengist and Horsus one act later. The dumb-show and chorus thus have the effect of irrelevance. The only defence that Middle-

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29 Variously spelled Hersus and Horsus in the play.

30 Shakespeare had used Gower as the chorus and presenter of *Pericles*, Heywood employed Homer thus in the *Golden, Silver and Brazen Ages*, and Fletcher and Massinger were to resort to a similar Chorus in *The Prophetess*. See Bald, "Introduction", p. xvii.
ton might have made of his arrangement would be that the Saxons needed sufficient time to voyage to Britain and the long interval between their appearances would, according to the laws of dramatic illusion and the time conventions of the Elizabethan stage, establish the sense of sufficient time. But the argument is weak since there was no need in any case to notify the audience that the Saxon fleet had left Germany. It would appear that Middleton conventionally enough with this genre, was trying to get as much of his sources (principally Holinshed but also Fabyan) into his chronicle history as possible.

The second dumb-show and attending chorus appears between II. i. and II. ii. Here, four events of great importance to the main action are hastily sketched in: the murder of Constantius, the execution of the murderers at the behest of the hypocritically horrified Vortiger who had hired them, the forced marriage of Castiza to the newly crowned Vortiger, and the flight of Constantius's two brothers, Aurelius and Uther. Raynulph gallops his explanatory octosyllabics over this huge stretch of narrative in breathless haste, and then II. ii. opens, resuming the more leisurely pace of scenic action.

A similar telegraphic precis of important events appears between the second and third scenes of Act IV. The dumb-show here displays the crowning of Vortiner as a result of Vortiger's marriage to the pagan, Roxena, her suborning two Saxons to murder Vortiner, Vortiger's restoration by the Britons after "swareing him against ye saxons", Hengist's amazement at Vortiger's betrayal, and finally the establishment of a

31 Bald, Hengist, King of Kent, pp. xxxvii - xxxviii, 104 - 105.
seeming truce between the Britons and the Saxons. Raynulph's choric commentary compresses these events into fourteen rapid lines.

Even to an audience familiar with Fabyan and Holinshed, these summary sketches of many crucial episodes in the Vortiger - Hengist story must have been bewildering. Middleton had dramatic practice to appeal to in compressing his material in this way, but the masters of the chronicle play (Shakespeare was one of the few) selected and organized their subject-matter with much greater skill than this. For loading every rift with story Middleton must take full responsibility.  

Another structural weakness - again a consequence of the Miracle play's influence on the pattern of action of Elizabethan chronicle dramas - is the excessive elaboration of comic episodes that are, because of their very loose tonal and thematic connections with the main plot, contributory to the play's disjointedness. Again Middleton must assume responsibility for this defect. With the exception of those of the petitioners in I. ii., the humours of Simon the tanner are the obtruding elements in the tragic action, although Simon's clowning "is in the conventional manner of comic relief". Such relief the clowning does afford, but not only is the comic action almost totally divorced from the main plot, it

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32 The explanation for the clumsiness in the organization and presentation of his material might seem to lie in Middleton's rewriting an old play, some of which gets into his own version. Bald, "Introduction", pp. xvii - xx shows that there is good reason for believing this to be the case, Henslowe's diary for 1596 mentioning a play variously referred to as "valteger" or "henges". But revising an earlier drama does not release Middleton from the responsibility of retaining dramatic conventions that make for incoherence.

33 Bald, "Introduction", p. xli. It need scarcely be added that I agree with Bald's judgment that the Simon scenes, taken alone, are "a particularly happy mingling of humour and farce" (p. li.).
also occupies a disproportionate number of the play's lines. The ratio of the comic lines to the tragic is more than one to three. That Middleton inflates even the only real link the Simon episodes have with the main plot may be seen in II. iii. 30 – 139 where the hide-trick, told by Fabyan in a hundred-odd words and by Holinshed in much less, is padded out by Simon's rustic dialogue into ninety-nine lines. And the later long scenes figuring the election of the Mayor of Queenborough (III. iii.) and his gulling by the cheaters at his celebration of Hengist's visit (V. i.) are whole-cloth additions that run respectively to 343 and 405 lines.

The action of these dropsical scenes of comedy is miles removed from the main plot, but Middleton may have made a feeble attempt to relate them to the Vortiger - Hengist story. The treachery of Oliver, the Puritan fustian weaver to Simon, the Mayor of Queenborough, in V. i. is something of a comic parallel to the treachery of Hengist to Vortiger at the parley between the Saxons and the Britons in the previous scene, and the festivities Simon holds in honour of the visit of the King of Kent (V. i.) is a similar parallel to Hengist's wassail at which Vortiger is guest of honour in the second scene of the fourth act. Perhaps, too, the mayoralty election scene (III. iii.) is a lampooning of those serious scenes and dumb-shows which tell of the wilfulness of the fickle mob in raising leaders to great place and then hurling them down. All these parallels, however, are such slight things that it cannot really be said that Middle-

34 There are 673 lines devoted to Simon's activities and 2024 to those of Vortiger et all. The dumb-shows and choric speeches have been omitted from this count.

35 Bald, Hengist, King of Kent, pp. 108 - 9.
ton exercised much artistic conscience by way of unifying his play; or at any rate he docilely trod the way sanctioned by loosely constructed histories, double action comedies, and two-plot Fletcherian plays. And that the comic sub-plot convention of the chronicle play could produce jarring effects when the author sought to link the two at some point in the action may be illustrated in Hengist by the conclusion to Scene One in Act Five. After observing Simon's discomfiture at the hands of the cheaters, Hengist is violently wrenched from witnessing a situation of farcical hilarity to suddenly devising strategy for rescuing his daughter since the Gentleman who has just rushed in has cried, "arm arme my Lord"

\begin{verbatim}
Wth swiftest speed,
If ever youle behold y\textsuperscript{e} Queene yo\textsuperscript{r} daughter
Alike agen


Their Besidgd
Aurelius Ambrose & his brother Vther
Wth numbers infinite in Brittaine fforces
Besett there Castle, & they Cannot scape
Wthout yo\textsuperscript{r} speedy succour
\end{verbatim}

With these words the simple innocence of Simon's world vanishes and the audience is forcibly propelled into a very different order of reality.

That order, however, is by no means novel to Middleton; it is, rather, characteristic, for what the audience is abruptly returned to is a story of ambition, lust, and intrigue told in realistic terms. It is, though, shaped to some extent after the pattern of \textit{de casibus} tragedy whose chief convention is the spectacle of the illustrious man being cast down by Fortune into the ignominious dust. It is a genre defined once and for all by Chaucer's Monk:

\begin{quote}
Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
\end{quote}
As olde bookes maken us memorie,
Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,
And is yfallen out of heigh degree
Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly.

(1. 1973 - 7.)

The rise to great heights of Vortiger, Hengist, and Roxena with their subsequent plummeting and miserable and wretched ends is also suggestive of the Morality which in at least one notable example depicted man being stripped of all his worldly goods and qualities. Hengist's rapid fall from the lordship of Britain to the misery of seizure in war is referred to in his words "Ye headlong fortune off my rash Captiunitye" (V. ii. 215.). But the words of Vortiger as he reviews his career in the light of the Saxon treachery may be taken as representative of the de casibus and Morality strains in Hengist.

Are these the noblest fruites & fairst requitalls
From workes of our owne raiseing;
Methinks yᵉ murder of Constantius
Speakes to me in yᵉ voice on't, and yᵉ wrongs
Of our late Queene slipt both into one Organ
Here is noe safetye for me, but what's most doubtfull
The Ranck rowt love me not, & yᵉ strength I had
This fowle devoureing Treachery has demollishd;
Ambition, hell, mine owne vndoing Lust,
And all yᵉ broode of plauges Conspire against mee
I have not a friend left me.

(IV. iii. 132 - 43.)

But Fortune has really little to do with this play, her most prominent role being confined to the first dumb-show where

ffortune is discoverd vppon an alter, in
her hand a golden round full of lotts

([D.S. i.] 1 - 2.)

36 F. N. Robinson (ed.), The Canterbury Tales in The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933. Middleton most probably did not get the de casibus conception from Chaucer - it was a commonplace to his age - but he knew "that broad famous English poet" (More Dissemblers, I. iv. 36.).
from which Hengist and Horsus extract the leadership of the Saxons.

The dominant structural pattern of this play is that of realistic tragedy of intrigue. Wily, lustful schemers, ambitious, and hungry for power and place, ruthlessly exploit opportunity to achieve their positions of pleasure and command. Their activities, though, bring about their final downfalls, for counter-intrigues are set in motion against them as a result of their evil machinations.

The principal intrigue involves Vortiger who, conventionally enough, is a self-conscious pursuer of his own interests. In the opening scene of the play he expresses his fury that the mob should have thwarted his plans. His words reveal not only a conventional Elizabethan attitude towards the common folk but also his self-awareness.

Will that wide throated Beast the Multitude
Neuer Lyn Bellowing? Courtiers are ill advisd
When they first make such Monsters:
What doe they but make head against themselvese by't?
How neere was I to a Scepter and a Crowne,
Faire power was een vpon me, my desires
Were tasting glory, till this forked rable
With their infectious acclamations
Poysoned my fortune; they will here have none
As long as Constantius three sons Suruie,
As if ye vasailles knew not how to obey
But in that line, like theire professions
That all there life time hammer out one way
Beaten into their pates with seauen yeares Bondage;
Well! though I rise not King Ile seeke the meanes
To grow as Close to one as policye Can
And choake there expectations
(I. i. 1 - 17.)37

37 We note the Machiavellian word, "policye". On the Machiavellism in this play, see pp. 159 - 160 below. It might be further pointed out that F. S. Boas in An Introduction to Stuart Drama, p. 230, says that "in Vortiger Middleton drew a figure who is a Stuart counterpart to Marlowe's Guise and Shakespeare's Gloucester. Either of them might have spoken his opening words after Constantine's death...."
This self-conscious villainy was a convention of Elizabethan drama, possibly most notably demonstrated in Shakespeare's Richard III.

Vortiger successfully schemes to get all of Constantius's powers into his own hands, only to realize that he needs the symbol of kingship as well if he is to regain Castiza's love, so he hires "2 Villaines" to slay Constantius. This accomplished, he makes use of the freshly arrived Saxons to suppress all opposition to his assumption of the throne. Thereafter, Vortiger's remaining intrigues have to do with gaining Roxena, for whom he lusts, as his queen, and thus, too, with devising means for repudiating Castiza. Horsus assists him here with the "rape" plot which enables Vortiger to put Castiza aside and enthrone Roxena. But this marriage to a pagan enrages the Britons and their rebellion ultimately occasions his death at the hands of Horsus.

Horsus and Roxena were lovers even before leaving their homeland, and all of Horsus's intriguing is directed towards keeping his share in this woman. Even when all others have abandoned Vortiger, he finds Horsus remaining by his side, but not, as Vortiger thinks, his "faithful treasure". Horsus's scheme is otherwise than disinterested friendship.

Ile follow you through ye world, to Cuckold you is his sole purpose. The depths to which he would sink in order to satisfy his passion for the woman who was his "whore in Germany" may best be observed in the dreadful intrigue scenes of Act Three where Horsus first proposes, and then ensures, that the blindfolded Castiza be "raped" by her own husband so that a charge of dishonour may be brought against her and Roxena preferred as Vortiger's queen (III. i. 116. - III. ii. 125.).
Roxena is involved in the important intrigues, too. She made
the dangerous journey to Britain to be with her secret lover but once
there attracted the lustful eye of Vortiger, who, making known his desire,
notices Horsus's deep disturbance. Roxena realizes that Horsus is danger­
ously jealous and is thereby driven to perjure her soul and to intrigue
and dissemble. When Vortiger asks, "What ayes our friend", Roxena, re­
vealing her quick resourcefulness, at once replies that she recognizes
the ailment as the epilepsy that Horsus suffered from even in Germany, and
that a virgin's right hand stroked upon his heart will give him ease. But,
she insists, it must be a genuine virgin. She offers to help him now;
Horsus at first refuses to play her game, threatening to reveal her as a
"whoore impostrous", but he relents, adding,

if thou ever failest me, I will fall
And thou shalt never get me up againe

(II. iii. 279 - 80.)

to which Roxena replies, "Agreed twix't you and I sir". Shortly after, how­
ever, mutual suspicion and Horsus's jealousy provoke another quarrel, and
the scheme which Roxena now reveals discloses her skill as a dissembling
intriguer and betrays her nature. Concerning her prospective marriage to
Vortiger she pleads with Horsus thus.

How blest are you above your apprehension
If your desire would lend you soe much patience,
To examine your adventurous Condition
Of our affections, which are full of hazard,
And draw in your times goodness to defend us:
First this bold Course of ours Cant last long
Or never does in any without shame,
And that you know Brings danger, and the greater
My father is in Blood, as hees well risen,
The greater will your storms of his rage bee,
Gainst his Bloods wronging: I have Cast for this,
Tis not advancement that I love alone
Tis love of shelter to keep shame unknown.

(III. i. 16 - 29.)

and she confirms these words by urging him to

...take but th' opinion
Of common reason, and you'll find it impossible
That you should lose me in this king's advancement
Who hearken a usurper, as he has ye Kingdome
So shall he have my love by usurpation,
The right shall be in thee still; my ascension
To Dignity is but to waste ye upward.

(III. i. 63 - 9.)

At the great banquet prepared by Hengist for Vortiger in IV. ii. in the course of which Vortiger spurns Castiza, Roxena secures her place at Vortiger's side by blithe dissembling after Horsus reminds her that the Britons

...sware by that we worship not
So you may sware your heart out, and not hurt your self.

(IV. ii. 213 - 4.)

With a terrible assurance she declares to Vortiger (who has asked her what she dare to reply to his question),

...My Lord as much
As Chastity Can put a woman too
I ask no favor, and t'approve the puritie
Of what my habit and my time professes,
As also to requite all Curteous sensure
Here I take oath I am as free from man
As truth from death, or sanctity from stain.

(IV. ii. 254 - 60.)

By winning Vortiger with this mendacious declaration, Roxena is more secure to carry on her affair with Horsus. That the Horsus - Roxena intrigue was important to Middleton may be judged from the fact that there is nothing suggesting it in the chronicles.

The fourth important intriguer in the play is Hengist. At first
he is merely the leader of a Saxon band brought by Fortune to Britain's shores. With the devising of the hide-trick (II. iii. 39 ff.) he becomes something of an intriguer, but it is not until he learns that Vortiger has betrayed the friendship of those who secured his throne for him after Constantius's murder that he begins to display the nature attributed to him rather late in the play by Horsus:

the Earle of Kent
Is Calme & smooth, like a deepe dangerous water,
He has som secret way, I know his Blood
The graues not greedier, nor hells Lord more proud.
(IV. ii. 283 - 6.)

Hengist plots with cunning the slaying of the unsuspecting Britons at the ostensibly unarmed parley, and with the success of his scheme declares,

heres an howre
Begins vs Saxons, in wealth fame & powre.
(IV. iii. 130 - 1.)

The degree of success Hengist schemed for is revealed at the end of the play when Aurelius asks,

Is this that Germane Saxon, whose least thirst
Could not be satisfied vnder a province?
(V. ii. 245 - 6.)

Hengist replies,

Had but my fate directed this bold arme
To thy Life, the whole Kingdome had bene mine
That was my hopes greate aime, I haue a thirst
Cold never haue bene full quenchd, vnder all;
The whole land must, or nothing.
(V. ii. 247 - 51.)

One further structural convention, prominent in the Fletcherian plays but not so frequently utilized in Hengist, is that of the extended rhetorical utterance of exalted sentiment. One example may be observed parenthetically here. Constantius pleads with Castiza who has been offered
in marriage to him and who has just declared herself a virgin.

Oh blessed Creature
And does to much felicity make you substeyt,
Are you in soul assured their is a state
Prepared for you, for you, a glorious one
In midst of heauen now in the state you stand in
And had you rather after much knowne miserye
Cares and hard labours mingled with a Curse,
Throng but toth doore and hardly gett a place there?
Think, has ye world a folly like this madnesse;
Keepe still that holy and immaculate fire
You Chaste Lampe of eternitye, tis a treasure
Too pretious for deaths moment to pertake,
This twinkling of short life; Disdaine as much
To lett mortality knoe you, as starrs
To kiss ye pauems, y^haue a substance
As excellent as theirs, holding yo^ pureness;
They looke vpon Corruption as you doe
But are starrs still; be you a virgin too.

(I. ii. 170 - 87.)

This passage and others in the first two acts of the play establish a
mood that is reminiscent of Fletcherian drama, though considerably dif-
ferent is the mood in the remaining three acts. They have a dry and
bitter brilliance which is entirely lacking in this powerful and noble
verse. However, this passage is directly related to the plot that follows,
even if its mood is alien.

It is fairly clear that Middleton's chief interest in this play,
structurally speaking, was in an intrigue pattern involving ambition and
lust, a pattern that had attracted him on numerous previous occasions.
But the conventions of the chronicle play, the fashions of multiple-plot
Fletcherian drama, his own dramatic habits, and the demands of his Jaco-
bean audience worked against any intention he might have had of producing
a carefully integrated realistic treatment of his material. It is true,
as Bald remarks, that in Hengist, Middleton assimilated his materials almost to the extent of taking for granted knowledge that his audience could not possess and equally true is Schoenbaum's judgment:

It becomes apparent, as we examine Hengist, that Middleton is trying to do too many things at once. In an age that had so markedly altered its inclinations, the dramatist, attempting to reproduce an outmoded dramatic form, could not possibly capture the spirit of the original, could not indeed create a completely homogeneous work. The result was a peculiar mixture - a diffuse blending of tragedy and history, melodrama and farce, in which the individual parts are for the most part very fine, but the finished product is lacking in unity of purpose.

This lack of unity of purpose is very likely the explanation of the fact that, as Bald says,

the tragic interest is insufficiently concentrated; Constantius, for instance, is the most important figure in the early scenes, and Hengist himself, though scarcely the leading character, is yet sufficiently prominent to be the titular hero. The underplot, again,... fails to emphasise the tragic theme.

Schoenbaum is even more outspoken:

Hengist lacks a hero; instead of a single

38 "Introduction", p. xl.

39 Middleton's Tragedies, p. 100 - 1. Long before Middleton essayed a play based on the chronicles of British history, Sidney had in his Apology for Poetry sanguinely spoken of "Number, Measure, Order, Proportion" as values in art he hoped had not in his time "grewne odious" (G. Gregory Smith (ed.), Elizabethan Critical Essays, vol. 1, London, Oxford University Press, 1904, p. 182.).

40 "Introduction", p. xlvi.
protagonist there are four major figures. The frequent shifts of interest and concentration - from Constantius to Vortiger, from Vortiger to Horsus to Hengist, and finally back to Vortiger - are confusing...\(^{41}\)

Typifying the uncertainty of purpose in the play is the meaning to be assigned to a phrase at the close. Raynulph, in conventional chronicle fashion the presenter-pleader of the play, calls Hengist a "story of Truth Compact". We are left wondering if this is the truth of history, the truth of tragedy, or the truth of farce.

The conventions of structure must detain us no longer for Hengist. King of Kent richly illustrates other conventions that Middleton favoured from his earliest days of dramatic composition and also ones that he adopted in conforming to changes in taste. His stock themes, characters, and stage tricks must now be examined.

Middleton's life-long interest in sex continues unchecked in this play. So anxious was he, in fact, to re-explore chastity, lust, cuckoldry and incest that one critic is led to feel that the course of the play's normal development out of its materials is abruptly turned aside; he feels that from affairs of state it makes a "sudden deviation" into sex intrigue.\(^{42}\) At any rate, Middleton's conventional sex themes appear everywhere in Hengist, the comic scenes, strangely enough perhaps, being freer than the serious from them. That an enormous amount of sex material

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\(^{41}\) Schoenbaum, *Middleton's Tragedies*, p. 100.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., pp. 79 - 87, where this deviation is said to be "especially disconcerting".
is got into this play may be seen by detailing rather fully the working
out of its sex themes. It will be observed that Middleton, powerful as
some of his scenes are, reworks ideas, attitudes, and situations that had
occupied his attention before.

Although the first dumb-show foreshadows a theme of lust, the
earliest scenic embodiment of a sex theme occurs in I. ii. where the chas­
tity motif of the play first appears. Vortiger announces to the holy
Constantius whose sole delight is religious meditation that

The peoples wills are violent
And Couetuous of succession from yo^ Loyne43
(ll. 134 - 5.)

Constantius's reply is made with emphatic assurance:

From me their Can Come none; a profest abstinence
Hath sett a virgin sele vppon my Blood
And alterd all y^ Course; the heate I haue
Is all incloed within a zeale to vertue,
And thats not fitt for earthly p togation.

(I. ii. 136 - 40.)

(We are reminded of the chaste Duchess in More Dissemblers.) Undaunted,
Vortiger promotes the "people's" choice, declaring,

A Virgin of the highest Subiects Blood
They haue pickt out for yo^ imbrace.
(ll. 146 - 7.)

She turns out to be Vortiger's own betrothed, Castiza, whom he is using
as a lure to vex power from the king's hands into his own. He brusquely
disses her attitude that this is"an vngodly way to Come to honnour",

43 It is at once apparent how reminiscent this is of the political
purpose of Gorboduc, one of the earliest of the true chronicle plays.
Hengist, of course, was composed with no such political intent.
coldly and cynically declaring,

I am not without shifting rooms & helps
For all my projects I Comitt with you!
(11. 162 - 3.)

Constantius, however, persuades Castiza to preserve her virginity since "tis a treasure/Too pretious for deaths moment to pertake" and she resolves never to marry.

The theme of chastity in conflict with ambition (reminiscent of a similar situation involving Castiza and Vindice in The Revenger's Tragedy) recurs in the play, notably in the "rape" scene in Act Three and in the trial and rejection of Castiza in IV. ii., but it is otherwise largely supplanted in favour of themes involving lust and ambition.

The "rape" scene (III. ii.), invented by Middleton or at least not found in his chronicle sources, employs a variant of the device of the substitute bride, a device that Middleton had used in one form or another in The Family of Love, The Witch, and perhaps, in No Wit, No Help, Like a Woman's in the love scenes involving Lady Goldenfleece and Kate Low-water, though here the disguise convention is certainly more apparent. Possibly Middleton used the device in these plays and later in The Changeling as a result of the dramatic sanction that Shakespeare gave it in All's Well and Measure for Measure.44 But without Shakespeare's example,

44 Whereas the unrecognized wife is the substitute bride in Shakespeare's two comedies, an unrecognized husband deceives an unwitting wife in Hengist. In Shakespeare the purpose of the wives is to establish binding matrimonial claims on the husbands, but in Hengist the purpose is to establish grounds for repudiating a spouse. Then, too, whereas Shakespeare derived the substitute bride device for All's Well from Boccaccio, his source of the story, and probably borrowed the same device from this source for Measure for Measure, written shortly after, there is no clear source for Middleton's substitute bride situation. (On Shakespeare's use of the device see Hardin Craig (ed.), The Complete Works of Shakespeare, Chicago, Scott, Foresman and Company, 1951, pp. 803 - 4, 833 - 4.)
Middleton could have derived inspiration for the stage representation of the substitute bride either from the occurrence of the situation in novella or from his interest in sex during an age that demanded the piquant situation. In Hengist the device is given a twist that accentuates the pathos and irony in Castiza's predicament, that dreadfully emphasizes Vortiger's sadistic, lustful ambition, and that reveals Horsus's cynical cunning: a man, unrecognized, "rapes" his own wife in order to bring against her a charge of infidelity which will enable him to cast her off in favour of the object of his lust.

Horsus, Vortiger's accomplice in this attempt to "ensnare her in an act of Lust", has stolen up behind Castiza and placed a blindfold about her eyes. He then makes known his purpose to enjoy her. Castiza, in vain, begs him to reconsider,

Oh sir, what ere you are, I teach my knee
Thus to requite you, Be Content to take
Only my sight as ransome for myne hono',
And where you haue but mockd myne eyes w'th darkness
Pluck em out quite, all outward light of bodye
Ile spare most willingly, But take not from me
That w'ch must guide me to another world
And leave me dark for ever.

(III. ii. 97 - 104.)

Horsus, moved though he is by this eloquent appeal, resolves to "wrastle downe all pitty", and lustful ambition bears chastity away to "rape" her.

The trial of chastity which takes place at Hengist's banquet in Thong castle and which enables Vortiger to repudiate his lawful wife in favour of Roxena, has a number of parallels in the tempted virtue scenes

45 This action is a reversal of roles observable in II. i, where Castiza repudiates her marriage contract to Vortiger as a result of Constantius's eloquent remonstrances.
of Middleton's earlier plays, most obviously More Dissemblers Besides Women, The Second Maiden's Tragedy, and The Revenger's Tragedy and it points forward to the trial of Beatrice's honour in The Changeling. In Hengist, however, not one, not two, but four women have their honesty put to trial since Middleton wished to extract the fullest possible dramatic value from the theme. First, he has Vortiger question the two sophisticated ladies of the court who cleverly avoid committing themselves by pleading disabilities that exempt them from responsibility for their actions but who by the very nature of their replies betray their erring behaviour (IV. ii. 83 - 129.). Then, in powerful contrast to the worldly equivocation of these two ladies, comes Vortiger's "oath" on Castiza's chastity.

I know ye a perfection so vnstaind
So sure so absolute, I will not pant ont
But Catch time greedilye: by all these blessings
That blowes truth into fruitfulness, & those Curses
That with their barrein Breaths Blast periurye
Thou art as pure as sanctityes best shrine
From all mans mixture, But whats Lawfull: mine.

(IV. ii. 141 - 7.)

Vortiger can speak thus not only because he has evidence to the contrary but also because he is sure that Castiza will never forswear herself, and the ensuing action confirms his appraisal of her.

tis true my Lord
I will not add a voluntary syn
To a Constraind one, I Confesse greate s°
The hono° of yo° Bed has bene abused

(IV. ii. 186 - 90.)

Castiza's attempts at extenuation are brutally derided by Vortiger who now disclaims all matrimonial ties to her and her kindred, and who then turns to Hengist's daughter, putting her to a test whose outcome he does
not really doubt.

The tender reputation of a mayde
Makes vp yo' hono', or ells nothinge Can
The oath yo' take, is not for truth to man
But to yo' owne white soule, a mighty Taske;
What dare yo' doe in this?

(IV. ii. 249 - 53.)

Roxena, fearful of this very trial, has been reminded by Horsus that the Britons

sweare by that we worship not
So yo' may sweare yo' heart out, and  nere hurt yo' selfe.

(IV. ii. 213 - 4.)

With a terrible assurance that contrasts at once with the ambiguity of the two Ladies' replies and with the ingenuous honesty of Castiza's, Roxena boldly answers Vortiger's question.

My Lord as much
As Chastity Can put a woman too
I asek no fauo', and t'approue the puritie
Of what my habitt and my time professes,
As also to requite all Curteous sensure
Heer I take oath I am as free from man
As truth from death, or sanctity from staine.

(IV. ii. 254 - 60.)

Mock chastity is a theme that also makes an earlier appearance in a scene that has an effect on Vortiger similar to that of Roxena's bold answer in the trial scene. In II. iii. Horsus falls in a seizure consequent upon the jealousy he suffers when he sees Roxena and Vortiger enter arm-in-arm and hears Vortiger create Hengist Earl of Kent. Roxena assures the shocked bystanders that she recognizes Horsus's ailment and that she knows its cure.

Oh this his Epilepsie, I know it well,
I holp him once in Germany, Comst agen?
A virgins right hand stroakt vpon his heart
Vortiger's aside at this point foreshadows his reaction to her bold answer in Act Four. He murmurs,

What a taske
She puts vppon herselfe vn-vrgd for puritie;
The proofe of this will bring loues rage vpon me

and in response to her answer in the trial scene he exclaims,

Oh thou treasure, that rauishes the posseso²,
I know not where to speed so well agen
Ile keepe thee while I haue thee.

The interest the Elizabethans took in virginity and chastity was virtually an obsession at times, and just as Shakespeare portrayed in Angelo's reaction to the chaste Isabella an aberrant response, so Middleton depicts in Vortiger's excessive reaction to Roxena's purity a disquieting attitude. But in Castiza's pursuit of virtue and in Constantius's determination to reserve his zeal for holy things the chastity theme in Hengist receives an exalted and noble embodiment. The obverse of this theme, however, the theme of lust, is treated at greater length and with at least equal insight if not poetic power.

Lust is actually the first sex theme to be announced in the play. The first dumb-show suggests the theme in this manner,

all depart saueing
Hengist and Hersus who kneele and imbrase
each other as parteners in one fortune, to them
Enter Roxena seemeing to take her leaue of
Hengist her father, But especeally priately & warily of Hersus her louver: she departs weepinge

[II. iii. 251 - 3.]

[II. iii. 254 - 6.]

[IV. ii. 261 - 3.]

[D.S. i.] 4 - 9.
and Raynulph's choric remarks are more explicit; in fact, Raynulph begins to be carried away by his consideration of female duplicity and has to cut himself short:

But that which must not be forgott  
Was Roxenas Cuning greife  
Who from y^e father like a theife  
Hid her best and truest teares  
Which her Lustfull Louer weares  
In many a stolne and wary kisse  
Unseene of father: that maydes will doe this  
Yet highly scorne to be Cald strumpetts to -  
But what they lac'k on't Ile be iudgd by yoU  

([Chor. ii.] 8 - 16.)

Horsus later confirms this picture of Roxena as a "maide lost for ever"; his desire "Has beene y^e Close Confusion of that name"; and he knows that her declaration that she followed Hengist through many dangers from Germany to Britain in order to remain in her father's sight is not the result of her infinite love to Hengist, but rather

\[ \text{tis her Cuning,} \]
\[ \text{The louse of her owne lust, wch makes a woman} \]
\[ \text{Gallop downe hill as feareless as a drunkard,} \]
\[ \text{Theirs noe true Loadstone ith world but that;} \]
\[ \text{It drawes em through all stormes, by sea or shame;} \]
\[ \text{Lifes loss is thought too small to pay that game.} \]

(II. iii. 189 - 94.)

As cynical and apparently detached an observation as this seems to be, Horsus's whole conduct is guided by his commanding desire to keep a share in this woman who was his "whore in Germany". Horsus is at once capable of assessing Roxena's nature and indifferent to rooting out his passion for her; indeed, despite his clear-sighted assessment of what she is, he makes no effort to do so. Although he is driven by a lust that, as Schoenbaum remarks, is intellectualized and rendered strangely objective,
his passion is not in his keeping. He will allow nothing to interfere with his lust for Roxena, not even his own jealousy of Vortiger (II. iii. 212 - 89 and III. i. 1 - 84.) or Hengist's ambitions for his daughter, or Roxena's desire for security. And when Vortiger falls from power, he cleaves to the betrayed king for a reason other than friendship, as he reveals in his soliloquy which concludes Act Four:

Ile follow you through ye world, to Cuckold you
That's my way now; every one has his toye
While he liues here: some men delight in Building,
A tricke of Babell & Will nere be lef,
Some in Consuming what was raysd wth toyleing
Hengist in getting honof, I in spoyleing.
(IV. iii. 159 - 64.)

Horsus is well aware that he has surrendered much in order to enjoy Roxena for he says,

I could haue liud lik hengist King of Kent,
& London yorke Lincolne & winchester
Vnder ye power of my Command, ye portion
Of my most iust desart
(V. ii. 31 - 4.)

but his enslavement to his lust vitiated his self-awareness and perhaps prompted the bitterness which often tinges his self-revelatory remarks and which goads him in the end to torment Vortiger with a disclosure of his life's commanding passion. With fierce satisfaction he makes his dreadful revelation to Vortiger,

Know thou art a Cuckold....
Roxena whom thast raisd to thyne owne ruine
She was my whore in Germany....
For her embrace wch yet my flesh sitts warme in

46 On these points see Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies, pp. 88 - 90, where Horsus's resemblance to De Flores is remarked upon.
I was thy friend & follower....
& to serve both of Lusters, I practisd wth thee
Against thy vertuous Queene....
Onely to make my way to pleasure ffeareles
Free & fluentt.

(V. ii. 119 - 38.)

The story of Horsus, of course, is not the only embodiment of
the lust theme. It naturally enough appears in Roxena's story, too, but
here the lust is reported rather than self-revealed. Not until the cata­
strophe does Roxena mention her guilt. As the flames envelop her she
cries,

See, for an arme of Lust, Ime now embracde
wth one that will destroy me.
(V. ii. 183 - 4.)

And Vortiger apostrophizes her in his death-speech thus:

oh mysticall harlott
Thou hast thy full due, whom Lust Crownd queene before
Flames Crowne her now, ffor a triumphant whore.
& that end Crownes em all.
(V. ii. 199 - 202.)

Finally, Vortiger's life displays the self-destructiveness of
lust, too. His passion for the "virtuous" Roxena brings ruin upon himself,
his queen, his "faithful" follower, Horsus, and, indirectly, upon Hengist
and his Saxons. One man's lust brings turmoil to the whole state, a con­
dition common in the chronicle play when that man was king.

Until he has Constantius murdered, Vortiger's ambitions are
foiled by external circumstances, but once he is crowned king factors with­
in himself begin to trouble his secured ease. Lust disturbs his calm. He
asks,

Haue I powre
Of life and death and Cannot Comand ease
In myne owne Blood: After I was a King
I thought I neuer shold have felt paine more,
That there had beene a ceasing of all passions
And Common stings which subjectes use to feele

(III. i. 96 - 101.)

and lust betrays his judgment which has enabled him to intrigue his way to power. Not so much as unheeding, but worse, unwitting of the effect of his desire, he brutally thrusts Castiza aside to satisfy his lust for Roxena. He finds that he must marry her to enjoy her, but his marriage proves to be his undoing for

Off Pagan Blood a Queene being Chose
Roxena hight, ye Brittaines rose

([Chor. iv.] 1 - 2.)

and soon Vortiger is saying,

Ambition, hell, mine owne vndoing Lust,
And all ye brode of plagues Conspire against mee
I have not a friend left me.

(IV. iii. 141 - 3.)

One of Aurelius's retainers enlightens Vortiger finally; he reveals that the Britons would be loyal to him still

If from that pagan woman, thoudst slept free
But when thou fledst from heauen we fled from thee

(V. ii. 71 - 2.)

and Horsus reminds Vortiger that he can thank his own passion for his predicament

twas ye Counsell
Of yoR owne Lust & blood; yoR appetite knowes it.

(V. ii. 74 - 5.)

And at the end of the play as cuckold and cuckold-maker prepare to stab each other, Aurelius's Gentleman remarks,

See sin needes
Noe more distinction then it breedes
In it owne Bosome

(V. ii. 107 - 9.)
These words not only sum up the judgment of a nameless person in the play, clearly and conventionally pointing the moral, but also present Middleton's own attitude towards unbridled passion. A conviction permeating Elizabethan society was that the wages of lust is death. But it was especially characteristic of Middleton that he should see lust as self-destructive.47

Lust, cuckoldry, adultery, rape, and even incest appear as themes relevant and irrelevant in numerous other sections of the play than those detailed above. In many cases the analyses, reflections, and expositions on these topics are put into the mouth of Horsus.

Raynulph's prolix commentary on Roxena's duplicity has already been noted, as has Horsus's cynical aside on Roxena's infinite love for Hengist. But some of the superfluous remarks and anecdotes, at best tenuously related to the action, that embellish the first scene of Act Three should now be observed since they not only illustrate Middleton's sexual preoccupation but also demonstrate the looseness of structure and anachronisms of the chronicle mode.

Having sanctioned his mistress's regal ambitions and desire for security, Horsus is led to speculate inconsequentially but piquantly on a possible result should Roxena have daughters by Vortiger, and should they follow Roxena's footsteps. Horsus soliloquizes on incest, musing,

Twill be good worke for him yt first instructs em
May be som son of mine, got by this woman too;
Mans scattered Lust brings forth most strange events,
And twere but strictly thought on; how many brothers
Wantonly gott, through ignorance of there Births

47 This point is developed in Chapter VIII below, pp. 325 - 32. See Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies, pp. 34 - 5, 97 - 8, 124 - 6, 147 - 9, 167 - 8, 189 - 91.
May match with their owne sisters.
(III. i. 89 - 93.)

Then, after catching sight of Vortiger, Horsus remarks in words strongly suggestive of the City comedies,

tis a gallants Creditt
To marry his whore brauely.
(III. i. 94 - 5.)

And he goes on to outline to the rather naive Vortiger stories about abductions and rapes, recognizing himself the irrelevance of some of his information:

And now yo^ grace shall know what nett is vsd
In many places to Catch modest women
Such as will neuer yeilde by prayers or guifts;
Now their are some will Catch vpp men as fast
But those shee fowlers nothing Concernes vs
Their Birding is at windows, ours abroad
Whair Ring-doues should be Caught, thats married Wives
Or Chaste maides, w^» ye appetite has a mind too,
Tis practisd often.
(III. i. 168 - 76.)

Horsus continues but much more relevantly, his words, we note, pointing forward to a situation in Middleton's next tragedy, Women. Beware Women, and hearkening back to the City plays:

Ye honest Gentlewoman, wheir ere she bee
When nothing will prevale, I pitty her now
Poore soule shees enticd forth by her owne sex,
To bee betrayd to man; who in som garden house
Or remote walke taking his Lustfull time
Bindes darkness on her eyes, surprizes her
And hauseing a Coach ready turns her in

48 It is at this point that Schoenbaum generalizes about the play's "sudden deviation". In his article, "Hengist, King of Kent and Sexual Preoccupation in Jacobean Drama", Philological Quarterly, vol. 29 (April, 1950), p. 190, he says, "This pre-occupation results in a total shift of emphasis as the play progresses; an historical drama becomes a melodrama of amorous intrigue, a study of ambition becomes a study of lust."
Hurryeing her where he list for ye sins safety
Makeing a rape of honor without wordes
And at ye low ebbs of his Lust, perhaps
Some three days after, sends her Coach'd agen
To the same place, and which would make most mad
Shees spoild of all, yet knowes not where she was robd
Wise deare pretious mischeife.

A spring to Catch a Maidenhead after sunsett
Clipp it and send it home againe To' th Cittie.

(III. i. 179 - 96.)

In the following scene the First Lady rejects Castiza's example
of studious contemplation, saying,

She yt has ye greene sickness and should follow her
Councell wold dye like an ass, and goe toth wormes
like a sallett; not l as long as such a Creature
as man is made, shees a foole that will not know
what hees good for.

(III. ii. 11 - 14.)

This short-sighted, calculating worldliness, characteristic of a number
of figures in Middleton's other plays, serves as a further - and final -
variation on the treatment of sex in Hengist, King of Kent. But the
nearly hysterical loathing of sexual waywardness expressed chiefly through
Vindice in The Revenger's Tragedy, and the shrill indignation voiced in
The Phoenix are absent from Hengist. The preoccupation with the theme
continues, but Middleton, it would appear, much more successfully controls
his interest in the subject by more thoroughly objectifying it in dramatic
form, and by more consistently maintaining an attitude of almost clinical
detachment. Even those irrelevant passages cited above to some extent
reinforce the tonal character of the scenes in which they anachronistically
and rather superfluously appear.

In addition to themes of sex, however, much is made in Hengist
of another favourite Middleton theme, social ambition. Social climbers
had engaged Middleton's attention in his City comedies and had been attacked in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and in such Fletcherian plays as *More Dissemblers* and *The Witch*, but the whole course of the main action of *Hengist* could be regarded as an exemplum displaying God's judgment on those who break out of the stations to which they are appointed.

Vortiger's first speech establishes the fierceness of his desire to enjoy "Faire power", and bitterly he resents the fact that his desires

Were tasting glory, till this forked rable With their infectious acclamations Poysoned [his] fortune. (I. i. 6 - 9.)

Yet he refuses to be daunted, vowing,

Well! though I rise not King Ile seeke the meanes To grow as Close to one as policye Can And Choake there expectations. (I. i. 15 - 7.)

Even Constantius's refusal to lay upon Vortiger's shoulders "the toyles and troubles, All that is Burthensome in authoritye" does not deter Vortiger, and his inability to understand Constantius's other-worldliness does not prevent him from determining to gain power.

Can this greate motion of Ambition stand Like wheeles false wrought by an vnskilfull hand, Then time stand thou too, let no hopes arieu At their sweete wishfulness till mine sett forward, Wold I Could stay this existance; as I Can Thy glassy Counterfeit in hours of sand; Ide keepe the turnd downe till my wishes rose, Then weede both rise together; What seurall inclinations are in nature: How much is he disquietted, and weares royaltie Disdainfullie vpon him like a Curse, Calls a faire Crowne the waight of his afflictions When heres a soule wold sing vnder that Burthen. Yet well recovered: I will seeke all wayes To vex authoritye from him, I will weary him
As lowe as the Condition of a hound
Before I giue him ouer, and in all
Studdy what most may discontent his Blood
Makeing my maske my zeal, to' th publique good.

(I. i. 176 - 94.)

Discovering, however, that his scheme to vex power from Constantius by thrusting Castiza upon him has resulted in Castiza's rejection of himself, he determines to lose no more time and glory, for, he cynically remarks,

that redeemd,
She that now flyes, returns with Ioy and wonder
Greatnes and Womans wish neuer keepe asunder.

(II. i. 44 - 6.)

Vortiger has Constantius murdered, assumes the throne with Castiza "constrainedly" seated beside him, and then learns that the people are in arms against him. He groans,

Oh this dreame of glorye, I Cold wish
A sting into thee; theirs noe such felt in Hell,
The fellow but to mine I feele now:
Sweete power before I Can haue power to tast thee
Must I foreuer Loose thee?

(II. ii. 5 - 9.)

The timely arrival of Hengist not only saves Vortiger's throne for him, but also provides a bride more to his taste. However, his lustful marriage to the Saxon Roxena alienates the Britons, and in ensuing treachery and counter-treachery Vortiger loses his throne, and then his life, upon which Aurelius is led to declare,

Our peace is full now
In yond vsurpers fall; nor haue I knowne
A iudgment meeete more ffearfully.

(V. ii. 203 - 5.)

By tracing the theme of ambition rather fully through Vortiger's story we see how perfectly conventional a tale it is, how the theme is embodied
in typical Elizabethan terms.49

Typically Elizabethan, too, is Hengist’s story. He is an adventurer, a parvenu, who schemes his way to a throne, balking neither at employing the humorous hide-trick to acquire land nor at repaying abandonment with treachery to gain a kingdom. In the beginning he can say of himself only that he is one of

The sons of fortune, she has sent vs forth
To thrive, by ye redd sweate of or owne merritts

(II. ii. 40 - 1.)

but soon he can cheer himself with the reflection that

A faire & fortunate Constelation raignd
When we set footeing here; from his first guift
Which to a Kings vnbounded eyes seemd nothing,
(The Compass of a hide) I haue erected
A strong and spatious Castle, yet Conteynd myselfe
With in my limits without Checke or sensure.

(III. iii. 1 - 6.)

Unlike Vortiger, Hengist does not scorn to gain the good will of the common people, for, he says,

Twere noe safe wisdome in a rising Man
To slight of such as these, nay rather these
Are ye foundation of a Lofty worke;
We Cannot build without them and stand sure;
He that ascend vp to a mountaines topp
Must first begin at foote.

(III. iii. 26 - 31.)

But like Vortiger, he does not scorn to shed blood to gain his ends. After the British lords are slain at the parley, the shocked Vortiger asks Hengist,

Here a most headstrong dangerous ambition;
Sow yo'uld ye seedes of yo'aspireing hopes

49 On the conventions in the character portrayal of Vortiger as a usurper see pp. 159 - 60.
In Blood and treason, & must I pay for em.
Hau not I raisd you to this height.

(IV. iii. 83 - 6.)

Hengist replies, "A worke of mine owne merritt...", and, after gaining
the monarchy of Kent, exclams,

heres an howre
Begins vs Saxons, in wealth fam & powre.

(IV. iii. 130 - 1.)

But Hengist soon falls, captured by the Earls of Devon and Stafford who
refer to him as "this monster of Ambition", and Aurelius asks,

Is this that Germane Saxon, whose least thirst
Could not be satisfied vnder a province?

(V. ii. 245 - 6.)

Hengist's reply reveals his voracity.

Had but my fate directed this bold arme
To thy Life, the whole Kingdome had bene mine
That was my hopes great aime, I haue a thirst
Cold never haue bene full quencht, vnder all;
The whole land must, or nothing.

(V. ii. 247 - 51.)

With mordant irony Aurelius replies in words which bring to our minds
Raleigh's Hie iacet and Tolstoy's story, "How Much Land Does a Man Need?".

A strange drowth
& what a little ground shall death now teach yo'U
To be Content wtBll.

(V. ii. 252 - 4.)

The theme of social rising also appears in Roxena's drive for
security. Roxena herself best sums up the motives that impel her ambition
when she assures Horsus that

Tis not advancement that I loue alone
Tis loue of shelter to kepe shame vndwnowne.

(III. i. 28 - 9.)

However different from Vortiger's drive for power, and Hengist's terri-
torial ambitions, Roxena's climbing is akin to theirs in its conscienceless
amorality. Her desire to enjoy her lover's embraces and yet to maintain her name's credit with the maximum degree of security steers her into the usurper's arms by means of the healing-powers-of-virginity ruse and the chastity oath, and as she becomes more deeply involved in her drive for security she "subornes two saxons to murder Vortiner" as a result of her "greate fury & discontent" over Vortiner's crowning, but is finally consumed in flames which the Elizabethans would see not only as a fitting end of a lustful woman but also as a conventional and appropriate figure of the kind of eternal torment she would suffer. Only in the presence of death does she feel compunction for her ambition.

No way to scape; is this ye end of glory
Doubly besett wth enemyes wrath and fire;
See, for an arme of Lust, Ime now embracde
wth one that will destroy me, wheir I read
The horror of dishonest actions, guile
& dissemblance.

(V. ii. 181 - 6.)

Except for her moral insights experienced in the last moments of her life, Roxena's career is very similar to Beatrice-Joanna's. Both allow selfish desire to precipitate them into the arms of men other than their real lovers; both are brought to ruin by lust. Roxena is one of Middleton's memorable studies of women.

Social climbing also appears elsewhere in the serious action of the play, by its presence reinforcing the theme as it is worked out in the careers of the major characters. For example, while expressing his fear that if Roxena accepts Vortiger's attentions he may lose her, Horsus utters words that remind us of Andrew Lethe, the upstart forgetter of friends in Michaelmas Term. With jealous querulousness Horsus says,
when y'are advanced
You woemen have a french toy in yo^2 pride
You make your friend Come Crouching, or perhaps
To bow ith hams the Better, he is put
To Complemt^ three houres with yo^2 Cheife Gentlewoeman,
Then perhaps not admitted, nay nor neuer
Thats y^e more noble fashion: fforgetfulnes
Tis the pleasingst vertue any one Can haue
That rises vp from no thing, ffor by y^e same
Forgetting all, they forget from whence they Came
An excellent propertie for obliuion.
(III. i. 36 - 46.)

And an earlier example illuminates the sort of ambition that inspired
hangers-on at court in Elizabethan days. Constantius rebukes two gentle-
men who have been ordered to attend upon him, urging them to withdraw and
find "honest buisness". The Second Gentleman thereupon asks the First,

What hopes haue wee to rise by following him?
Ile giue him ouer shortly.

And the First Gentleman replies,

Hees to nice
Too holy for young gentlemen to follow
That haue good faces and sweete runing fortunes.
(I. ii. 69 - 75.)

The final instance of the theme of social climbing in Hengist
occurs in the Simon scenes. Simon, a tanner's man, rises from being a
tanpit drudge to foreman, to owner of the yard and husband of his former
master's widow, to Mayor of Queenborough. Since Simon figures, however,
as the hero in scenes of comic relief, his fall is not from the pinnacle
of ambition but from pretentious dignity. Despite his exalted social rank
he is the clown and yokel still whose would-be dignity suffers a ludicrous
discomfiture. But this denouement leads to the consideration of the next
theme that we must examine, that of the trickster tricked.

It is apparent that there is close resemblance between the
pattern of de casibus tragedy and that of intrigue drama: in both cases the volte-face appears, often with striking effect. It should not surprise us, then, that the trickster tricked theme forms in Hengist one of the readily discernible plot motifs.

In Vortiger's unsuccessful attempt to vex Constantius by means of Castiza there appears an early instance of the biter bit theme; this reappears in his story, principally, of course, in the catastrophe where the lustful pursuer of a "virgin" is slain by his most "faithful" friend who all the while has been cuckolding him. Moreover, Vortiger in seeking to betray the Saxons but in suffering treachery in turn is a tricked trickster, as he is in being the victim of the hide-trick.

Tricking, in the City comedy sense of gulling, occurs memorably in Hengist in the play-within-the-play scene which is highly reminiscent of that in A Mad World, My Masters. Simon, become an officious, petty tyrant as a result of his election as mayor, but an incredulous yokel still, interferes with the performance of "The Cheater & ye Clowne", insisting that the Second Cheater play out his part. As a result, not only does Simon have meal thrown in his face and his purse filched but he also discovers that he has been additionally tricked. Aminadab, the clerk, breaks the news to him.

Y'ar sure Cosend sir, they are all Cheaters pfest They haue stolne 3 spoones too & ye Clowne tooke his heel w'th all Celeritye: they only take ye name of Contry Comedians to abuse simple people, w'th a printed play or two They bought at Canterbury

50 The difference between the two is that the about-face in de casibus tragedy involves a comparison of two rather widely separated moments of time, whereas in intrigue drama the volte-face, being sudden, involves two moments in immediate succession.
last weeke for six pence, & wch is worst
they speake but they list out & frible
out ye rest

(V. i. 354 - 60.)

If Simon is in many ways a typical gull and the cheaters stock
coney-catchers, they are by no means the only conventional characters
in Hengist, King of Kent. Indeed, nearly all the stock figures of
Middleton's earlier plays appear in this one.

The tyrant figure is represented in Vortiger and Hengist in
whom we see the injustice, cruelty, sensuality, ambition, impiety, and
land-hunger that the Elizabethans observed in such a ruler. In them
is represented, too, the conventions of Machiavellian villainy. They
are politic hypocrites and dissemblers, and they show no love of true
religion. Vortiger in fact openly declares to the audience,

religion
Was neuer friend of mine yett
(I. i. 166 - 7.)

while using religious prejudice to limit Hengist's ambitions. To the
Saxon's request for a small parcel of land Vortiger hypocritically ob-
jects,

But for y'are strangers in religion Cheifly,
Wch is y'e greatest alienation Can bee,
And breeds most factions in y'e bloods of men
I must not grant you that.

(II. iii. 34 - 7.)

51 W. A. Armstrong, "The Elizabethan Conception of the Tyrant", The

52 Mario Praz, "Machiavelli and the Elizabethans", Proceedings of the
British Academy, vol. 14 (1928), pp. 59 - 69, 80 - 6. Praz, pp. 63 - 9,
details the debt of the Elizabethan view of the tyrant to Senecan tragedy.
The lecherous sensuality of the conventional tyrant has already been detailed in the case of Vortiger, but it must now be pointed out that this convention, in part at least, accounts for what Schoenbaum regards as a flaw in the play's structure, its "sudden deviation" into sex intrigue from intrigue of ambition. The Elizabethan audience expected to see lust as a characteristic of the tyrant, and Middleton, as we have frequently seen, was not averse to supplying their demands. Thus it is not only to the reference in his sources (Holinshed says that Vortiger "was of nature much inclined [to] concupiscence")\(^{53}\), or to his preoccupation with sex that Middleton owed his conception of Vortiger as a lustful character. Further conventions seen in Vortiger are those of the usurper. Twice the people rebel against him, and rebellion was the conventional duty of a nation usurped by a tyrant. Moreover, in Vortiger's violent death we see the conventional end of all those who seize power in defiance of God's laws.

Other stock characters associated with the sex theme are the chastity figures (Constantius and Castiza), wantons (Roxena, the court ladies, and Horsus), cuckolds (Vortiger and Horsus - he is cuckolded in a sense by the usurper he serves), and the wittol (Horsus, after his expostulation with Roxena in III. i., becomes a contented enough sharer of her). Exemplifying other themes are the conventionalisms of the intriguer (Vortiger, Hengist, Horsus, and Roxena), the social climber (all the major figures except Horsus, though his remarks at IV. ii. 280 - 3

\(^{53}\) Bald, *Hengist, King of Kent*, p. 110.
reveal that he had his ambitions, too), the gull and the tricked trickster, and the cheaters and coney-catchers. One conventional figure totally absent from the play but present in the Fletcherian dramas and abundant in the City comedies is the disguised personage. His absence may be attributable to his scarcity in chronicle plays and to Middleton's tendency towards a more thorough-going realism in his last three tragedies. An instance of this tendency in *Hengist* is the realism with which Middleton depicts a pathological trait in Horsus's make-up, his epilepsy. The accuracy of the description of the fit that Horsus falls into in II. iii. 214 - 89 suggests that Middleton had carefully observed the normal course of this debility. Confirmation of this appears when we see that Horsus accurately dissembles the aftermath of certain types of epileptic seizure; he says,

My Lord me thinks I Could doe things past man  
I am soe renewd in vigor, I Long most  
For violent excersise to take me downe  
My ioyes so high in Blood, I am aboue frailtie.  
(II. iii. 286 - 9.)

Finally, there are two stock characters mentioned in the comic scenes of the play who merit some attention. The first is the Puritan, Oliver the weaver, whose behaviour in V. i. is strongly suggestive of that of Zeal-of-the-land Busy in the denouement of *Bartholomew Fair*. Oliver

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54 The article "Epilepsy", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th edition, 1946, vol. 8, p. 655, declares that the epileptic "awakes...occasionally in a state of excitement which sometimes assumes the form of a mania", and goes on to state that such attacks "are generally accompanied by dangerous and violent acts and appear to be more frequently associated with the milder forms of epilepsy where they either replace or immediately follow the short period of unconsciousness." If Horsus is really afflicted with the disorder, it is likely a milder form of it judging from the effects of it described in this scene and the lack of mention of it thereafter.
is a stock stage Puritan in his attitude towards the drama, in his diction, and in his hypocrisy. A rebel to Simon's mayoralty, Oliver is brought before the Tanner for justice but addresses him boldly. Simon, however, devises an ironically fitting punishment for Oliver.

Oliuer: I was not Borne to stoope but to my loome
That Ceizd vpon my stoopeing days are doon,
In plaine terms if thou hast anything to say
to me send me away quickly, this is no bideing
place, 'I understand thers players in yᵉ house,
dispatch me I charge the in yᵉ name of all the
Bretheren

Sym: Nay now proud Rebell, I will make ye staye
& to thy greater Torment see thee Playe

Oliue: Oh Devell I Coniure thee by Amsterdam.

(V. i. 167 - 78.)

Then as the horn sounds the beginning of "The Cheater & yᵉ Clowne", Oliver cries, "Oh oh that prophane Trumpett", and when Simon has Oliver's hands forced from his ears and eyes, the Puritan exclaims,

O tirrany, reveng it tribulation.

(V. i. 183.)

But when Oliver witnesses Simon's discomfiture he willingly affirms,

In Ginceritye I was neuer better edifyde at an
exersise

and when Simon, piqued by Oliver's laughter, vows to have the rebel's eyes put out for a fortnight, too, Oliver reveals his real nature.

Hang thee: myne eyes, a deadly sinn or two
Shall pluck em out first, thats my resolution.

(V. i. 404 - 5.)

55 Jonson's Zeal-of-the-land Busy is converted, too, but as a result of a conventional Puritan trait that Middleton ignores. Jonson exploits the Puritan penchant for disputation, and it is because of his defeat in argument that Busy acknowledges, "I am confuted, the cause hath failed me". (See V. iii. of Bartholomew Fair in F. E. Schelling (ed.), The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson, London, J. M. Dent, 1946, vol. 2.) For the Puritan as a stock stage figure see William P. Holden, Anti-Puritan Satire, 1572 - 1642, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1954, pp. 101 - 44.
The second conventional character in the comic action deserving study appears only in an allusion. To Hengist's generous payment for the hide Simon replies,

\[
\text{now by this light a nest of yellow whammers, what will become of me; if I Can keepe all these without hanging of my selfe, I am happier then a hundred of my neighbours: you shall have my skin into the bargaine to, willingly s}^2, \text{then if I Chauanse to die like a dogg, the labour will be saued of fleaing.}
\]

(II. iii. 73 - 9.)

Two conventional notions of the usurer occur here: his despairing suicide by hanging, and his forlorn and wretched end even if he fails to take his life.56

In concluding this examination of conventions of character in Hengist, we may note the presence of a near-convention in Horsus, that of the malcontent. A number of traits of the type Middleton embodied in earlier plays. Phoenix and especially Vindice had been particularly notable instances of men displaced from the social order, given to violent and satirical speech, and even to intrigue.57 The degree to which Horsus is a malcontent is assessed by Bald.58

As a rule...the malcontent is primarily a spectator and commentator, and his part in the


58 "Introduction", p. xlviii.
action is of secondary interest, but Horsus more than any other individual guides and controls the events which lead Vortiger to his doom. The acrid and sinister comments of Horsus may frequently recall the malcontent, but they are not, as they often are in the other stage malcontents of the time, a substitute for action; they are the complement of his actions in the expression of his personality.

The prevalence of stock character traits in *Hengist, King of Kent* does not make this a play of wooden types, performing their actions in a mechanically predictable sequence. On the contrary, Middleton has so skilfully wedded convention to individual vitality that one is justified in comparing the character of Vortiger to Macbeth's, and each of the other major figures has his compellingly individual character. There yet remains, though, a set of conventions to examine before an evaluation of the play as a whole can be made.

The conventions of staging may be reviewed quickly since with two exceptions they are of slight importance. The first exception is the spectacle of dumb-shows. Their contribution to the flaws in the play's structure has been examined, but their appeal to the eye may now be appreciated. Dumb Show i. serves as a good example of the spectacular.

*Musique Dumb show*: fortune is discouered vppon an alter, in her hand a golden round full of Lotts: Enter *Hengist* and *Hersus* with others, they Draw Lotts and hang them vp with Ioy, see all depart saueing *Hengist* and *Hersus* who kneele and imbrace each other as parteners in one fortune, to them Enter *Roxena* seeming to take her leaue of *Hengist* her father, But especially priuately & warily of *Hersus* her louer; she departs weeping: and *Hengist* and *Hersus* goe to the doore and Bring

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59 Bald, "Introduction", p. xlvi - xlviii, makes this comparison.
in their scouldiers with Drum and Collors and so
march forth.

The third dumb-show offers equal spectacle.

Hoboyes Dumb show Enter Lupus Germanus Devon Staffs: Leading Vortiner they seate him in ye throne & Crowne him King, Enter Vortiger in greate passion and submission, they neglect him, then Roxena expressing greate fury & discontent, they leade out Vortiner, and leave Vortiger and Roxena; she subornes two saxons to murder Vortiner, they swear performance and secrecie and Ex* wth Roxena, then Vortiger left alone draws his sword and offers to run himselfe thereon Enter Hersus and prevents him, then ye Lords Enter againe and Ex* Hersus, then is brought in ye Bodye of Vortiner in a Chaire dead, they all in amazemt and sorrow take Vortiger and upon his submission restore him, swearing him against ye saxons, then Enter Hengist with divers saxons: Vortiger and ye rest wth swords drawn threaten their expulsion: whereat Hengist amazd, sendes one to entreate a peaceable parly, wch seeming to be granted by laying down there weapons Exeunt severally.

Further spectacles are provided by the procession of monks (I. i. 28 ff.), the feast in Hengist’s banquet hall (IV. ii. 1 ff.), and the burning of Vortiger’s Welsh castle (V. ii. 140 ff.), luridly illuminating the stage with running wild-fire.

Apart from the extended flourishes of rhetoric in such scenes as that wherein Constantius urges chastity upon Castiza, the appeal to the ear in this play is much less frequent than in the Fletcherian dramas. Two brief songs occur, the first, "Boast not off high Birth or Blood", at I. i. 29 ff., and the second, "If in musique were a powre", at IV. ii. 52 ff. Both are dramatically related to their contexts.

Conventionally enough, most of the scenes in the play are not specifically located. Many we understand from the characters present to be at court but further localization is not given. Such a scene as the
one depicting Hengist's great banquet, of course, very obviously takes place in the castle's great hall, but apart from scenes of that kind no definite locale is required for much of the action.

The last convention of staging, the treatment of time (the second exception mentioned above), leads once more into a consideration of the major flaw in Hengist, King of Kent. By means of dumb-shows Middleton compresses considerable stretches of time. Despite the brilliance of many of the scenes of realistic action that Middleton expanded from hints supplied by the chroniclers or that he invented outright, this telescoping of time in overloaded dumb-show mars the structure of Hengist and creates the impression that Middleton did not have the courage to abandon the chronicle mode in favour of a thorough-going study in realism, perhaps inspired but not victimized by his sources or the dramatic form customarily utilizing them. Or it may be that willing as he was to supply his audience with the fashionable at any given moment, he found himself at one of those stages in the Jacobean dramatist's career so graphically described in connection with actors by Sir Bounteous Progress in A Mad World, the stage of uncertainty of what to write because of the carping of critical fools. The argumentative tone in the opening chorus at least indicates that Middleton felt it necessary to apologize for presenting his audience with a chronicle play.

Ancient storyes haue bene best,
Fashions that are now Calld new
Haue bene worne by more then yow,
Elder times haue vsd ye same
Though these new ones get ye name,
So in story whats now told
That takes not part with days of old?

([Chor. i] 10 - 16.)
Middleton's uncertainty of what might prove acceptable may then explain the structural weakness of the play; not knowing what to give his audience, he gave them a bit of everything. And yet there is a third possible explanation of the huddling of many of the important events in the plot into dumb-shows, of the change in stress from ambition to lust in the last two-thirds of the play, and of the presence of a sub-plot tonally so distantly removed from the main action. That explanation is artistic irresponsibility. Middleton may simply not have taken the trouble to try to build or unify his play as well as he might.

But whatever the cause of the play's structural flaws, the weaknesses are connected with convention: with the loose structure of chronicle drama, with the time-saving expository device of the dumb-show, and with the double-plot mechanism of such modes as Fletcherian comedy.

As in both plots of The Second Maiden's Tragedy, the powerful influence of convention in its pejorative sense disfigures the conclusion of Vortiger's story in Hengist, King of Kent. His sources told Middleton that Vortiger perished in the flames of his Welsh castle; yet the play's "hero" is made to die by stabbing, the fatal termination of a hundred tragic protagonists in Elizabethan drama. Two features partly redeem this action: first, the irony of former friends doing one another to death; second, the pathos in the cuckold being once more cheated by his cuckolder, but this time cheated with finality. These aspects of the

60 Bald, Hengist, King of Kent, p. 123.

61 If he is that. See pp. 137 - 8, above.
stabbing do not, however, relieve it of its markedly conventional nature, for, besides being a customary device in tragedy, it is to be additionally noted that violent death by this means was the stock conclusion of the wicked king in the history play of the Elizabethan age.
CHAPTER VI

WOMEN, BEWARE WOMEN

The wild-fire that purged Britain of the lustful forms of Vortiger, Horsus, and Roxena had scarcely died down in Middleton's imagination before a greater play seized on the dramatist's creative fancy.¹

So impressive a drama is it that one critic has been led to declare that in Women, Beware Women,

one of the finest plays of the whole Jacobean period, we have the apex of Middleton's unassisted, serious, dramatic efforts.²

This judgment is altogether sound, but it must not be allowed to obscure the very evident weaknesses in the play. Unlike Hengist, which has a disjuncted structure, and The Changeling, which is disfigured by an inferior and dramatically irrelevant sub-plot, Women, Beware Women is a well-built play; its plotting shows a nearly seamless continuity, and the main action is connected to the subsidiary not only by theme, imagery, and tone, and by the presence of Livia in both plots, but also by the assembly of nearly all the characters in the disastrous revels of the denouement. The weakness lies rather in Middleton's conception of the play. What begins as a domestic tragedy ends as a Marstonian butchery. Midway in his story

¹ The assumption here is that Bald's conjecture about the date of Hengist - 1619 to 1620 being his preferred period - is correct, and that the date of Women, Beware Women is 1621, the year that Baldwin Maxwell favours in his persuasive study, "The Date of Middleton's Women Beware Women", Philological Quarterly, vol. 22 (October, 1943), pp. 338 - 42.

Middleton transforms a brilliant and compelling portrayal of marital infidelity, a picture, it is true, nicely conjoining bourgeois life and court amours, into an Italianate portrait of murderous revenge. What was therefore individual, vital, and original becomes conventional, wooden, and commonplace.

The discussion in the following pages of convention and device in *Women, Beware Women* will attempt to show that in switching the mode from that of domestic tragedy to that of Italianate revenge Middleton once more succumbed to the stock demands of his age.

Ben Jonson, who evidently did not know Middleton well, if at all, denounced him in conversation with Drummond as not being of the number of the Faithfull, but a base fellow.

This remark may have sprung from professional jealousy. Jonson would have been perhaps the first to recognize that much in Middleton's City comedies was closely akin to his own realistic satire. Possibly, too, Jonson's contempt of the playwright who is not a dedicated poet, who is merely a professional writer, is behind his judgment. But perhaps, again, Jonson

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perceived in Middleton a bias of outlook that a monarch in the empire of letters would inevitably scorn. This outlook may be expressed in the words of R. C. Bald.

> It is at once Middleton's peculiar strength and weakness that he saw life entirely in terms of the life of the City to which he belonged....5

A middle class outlook is strongly evident in nearly all of Middleton's plays, and *Women, Beware Women*, which tells the story of the wife of a conscientious "factor", is no exception. Not only the Leantio-Bianca-Mother scenes at the opening of the play are middle class in spirit, but even, as Schoenbaum remarks6,

> Livia's dwelling rarely impresses us as being the palace of powerful Florentine aristocrats; it is, rather, the elegantly furnished home of a well-to-do London citizen.

Considering the play as a whole, Schoenbaum immediately adds the following observations.

> Character and incident are depicted with a total absence of romantic heightening. The tone is conversational, the pace leisurely. There is an abundance of realistic detail, and the imagery has an unpretentious, homespun quality. The sentiments and aspirations of the characters - their pretty speeches and smug platitudes, their yearning for position and preoccupation with material values - are perfectly in keeping with those standards so frequently regarded as middle class.... Renaissance Italy has ceased to be the embodiment of a poet's fantastic nightmare vision, and princely Florence, once a symbol of opulant decay, is now merely another name for bourgeois London.

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5 Bald, "Introduction", *Hengist, King of Kent*, p. xlvi.

The "prevailing atmosphere of cynical materialism", the product of the calculating sexuality of many of the characters and their social ambitions, reinforces the anti-romantic, middle class tone of the play. There is much in *Women, Beware Women*, then, that suggests domestic tragedy, so much, in fact, that the play is analyzed in an American scholar's study of the genre.

Elizabethan domestic tragedy, albeit not a numerous species, was a distinctive genre possessing identifiable conventions and characteristics that may be summed up by the following brief description.

The common man as hero...is the essential feature of domestic tragedy.... [It is a] tragedy...ordinarily set in the domestic scene, dealing with personal and family relationships rather than with large affairs of state, presented in a realistic fashion, and ending in a tragic or otherwise serious manner.... These stories of murder, rebellion, seductions, and infidelity served the same purpose as the exempla of the sermons preached every Sunday in every parish church.... The typical domestic tragedy followed a pattern, the sequence being: 'sin, discovery, repentance, punishment, and expectation of divine mercy.'

With this summary as a guidepost, the genre's conventions of theme, structure, characterization, and staging may now be illustrated at length from *Women, Beware Women*.

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The theme, the text we may call it, expounded again and again in Elizabethan domestic tragedy was, "The wages of sin is death". But sin in the typical domestic tragedy is not a simple one-deed affair; rather, it is found as a chain of vice in which the sins are often progressively more serious. The chain of vice

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Usually the chain of vice has some relatively mild sin as its first link, but this soon leads to lust and infidelity, and these to the fatal link, murder. In Women, Beware Women a congregation of sins (if we may change the metaphor) that includes infidelity and murder has its wages paid in full.

The theme of sin is embodied abundantly in both plots. Bianca's chain is a linkage of filial disobedience, ambition, adultery, betrayal, murder and suicide. Leantio's is constructed from theft (the "abduction" of Bianca), vengeful adultery, and threats of murder. The Duke and Hippolito forge their sinful links from lust or incest, and from dealing death, and these are the links in Livia's chain of vice, too, although at the
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11 "Sin" is a term that constantly recurs in Women, Beware Women, as we would expect in an example of a genre that self-consciously employs such popular theological concepts as "sin", "repentance", and "Providence". See Adams, op. cit., p. 7.

12 Ibid., pp. 118 - 9. See also p. 24.
beginning of her chain appear the sins of mendacity and pandering. Isabella's chain is made up of cuckoldry, deceit, and murder, and her lethal dissembling is found in the vengefully murderous Guardiano, too.

All these concatenated sins are paid in their proper coin, as is to be expected in a play related to so didactic a genre as domestic tragedy. The wages of sin is death, the age believed, the pulpit declared, and domestic tragedy taught; thus death strikes down every one of these sinful folk, Leantio being betrayed to Hippolito's sword, but the others meeting their just rewards in the fatal revels that conclude the play. For their entirely worldly preoccupation they pay a penalty which constitutes "the total negation of worldliness".

The theme of the wages of sin is usually connected in domestic tragedy to two other themes that exist at least as powerful undercurrents in these exemplum-plays. The first is the innate sinfulness of the man who strays from faith, while the second is the retributive justice of all-seeing Providence. Although the term, "Divine Providence", rarely appears in these plays, the notion that Divine Providence intervened in the

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13 Muriel Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy, p. 232, speaks of a new theme swelling in the last two acts, "that of death and judgment. More powerfully than in The Changeling it is given as the "punishment" and inevitable end of sinners."

14 Adams, English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy, 1575 to 1642, p. 185.

15 Ibid., pp. 10, 186, 18 ff.

16 Ibid., p. 18.
lives of men to assure the operation of divine justice?

makes itself felt everywhere, most strikingly, of course, in the denouements. Very rarely did the Elizabethan dramatist depict direct intervention by God in human affairs; and this was so not only because playwrights wished to avoid antagonizing Puritan opinion, but also because such depiction was unnecessary since the retributive justice of God's Providence, the Elizabethans believed, operated through a number of channels. A modern scholar expresses their belief thus:

God will Himself execute justice through calamity visited upon the sinner, or through justice executed by the magistrates as His agents, or through the troubled heart and uneasy conscience which are the penalty of sin.

That Middleton was thinking in terms of Providence and Its retributive justice when writing Women, Beware Women is suggested not only by the unusual occurrence of the expression, "divine providence" (I. i. 98.), and by the appearance of the word, "providence", in a religious context at I. ii. 182.; but also by Livia's remark to Guardiano at IV. ii. 59:

You do heaven's vengeance and the law just service.

17 Adams, op. cit., p. 18.

18 Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, pp. 197 - 99, points out that apart from God's thunderbolt that slays Malefort, Sr., in Massinger's The Unnatural Combat, the closest approach to such direct intervention in revenge plays was Mountfort's braining himself with the axe raised to execute Charlemont in The Atheist's Tragedy.

19 Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, Slaves of Passion, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1930, p. 23. See also Adams, op. cit., p. 20, who further says, "Any coincidence was considered by the Elizabethans an example of the workings of Providence."
Thus in *Women, Beware Women*, Middleton suggests that Providence's retributive justice works through human agency to effect the punishment of sin, but in doing this Middleton also reveals his characteristic conception of sin as being self-destructive, for his wicked folk slay one another. Indeed, at one point in the play Hippolito voices this conception that the nameless Gentleman in *Hengist, King of Kent* had made so explicit. Hippolito says, in reply to Livia's query about how he came by his "strange affection",

Even as easily
As man comes by destruction which oftentimes
He wears in his own bosom.

(II. i. 3 - 5.)

This "destruction" is, of course, man's essentially tainted nature. So long as he adhered to his religious faith, so long would Grace and Mercy protect him, but once he allowed his own nature to prompt his actions he would discover his inherent sinfulness, for it was believed that Christ was the only man who lived without sin.

But if, as H. H. Adams has remarked, the tenets of popular theology...form the intellectual and moral substance of the Elizabethan domestic tragedies,

the theme of sin's inevitably lethal payment is only one of the major motifs of these dramatic exempla. Another is the theme of repentance, since in the characteristic domestic tragedy the guilty characters are normally brought to regret their actions and this provokes a series of attitudes and events sanctioned by theology and virtually ritualistic in

Before their deaths...the murderers turn to thoughts of repentance, plead for God's mercy, and exert every effort to prepare for heaven. 21

All this, of course, occurs near the end of the typical domestic tragedy, much of it in the conventional scaffold speech 22 which normally embodied signs of the four-fold character of repentance: contrition, confession, affirmation of faith, and amendment of life. 23 But because Women, Beware Women is transformed half way through into an Italianate revenge play, the repentance theme is subsidiary to other motifs.

The theme appears most prominently in the Cardinal's remonstrance with his brother, the Duke, in Act Four. The Cardinal (escorted by servants bearing lights 24 which are left behind by the dismissed servants during the Cardinal's private colloquy with his brother) reminds the Duke that he stands in danger of damnation.

What a grief 'tis to a religious feeling.  
To think a man should have a friend so goodly,  
So wise, so noble, nay, a duke, a brother,  
And all this certainly damn'd!  
(IV. i. 188 - 91.)

He brings the Duke to a recognition of his sin by reminding him of his

21 Adams, op. cit., p. 7.

22 Ibid., pp. 17 - 8, 66, 142.

23 Ibid., pp. 16 - 7, where the "Homily of Repentance" is cited.

24 The apparent but fine symbolism here is recognized by the Cardinal at the close of his interview as he gives commands to his escort: "Take up those lights; there was a thicker darkness/When they came first" (IV. i. 264 - 5.).
mortality and the unexpected swiftness of divine justice.

... dare you look up
For thinking of a vengeance? dare you sleep
For fear of never waking but to death?
And dedicate unto a strumpet's love
The strength of your affections, zeal, and health?
Here you stand now, can you assure your pleasures
You shall once more enjoy her, but once more?
Alas, you cannot! what a misery 'tis then,
To be more certain of eternal death
Than of a next embrace!

(IV. i. 192 - 201.)

At first the Duke does not even wish to acknowledge his deed, let alone confess it, and he urges his brother to say no more. But the Cardinal is not to be deterred; he rebukes the nobleman thus.

I know time spent in goodness is too tedious;
This had not been a moment's space in lust now:
How dare you venture on eternal pain,
That cannot bear a minute's reprehension?
Methinks you should endure to hear that talk'd of
Which you so strive to suffer.

(IV. i. 230 - 5.)

The Cardinal's subsequent words change recognition of sin into repentance for it, effecting this transformation by recurring to the traditional memento mori argument involving sexual love and female beauty.25

... 0, my brother,
What were you, if [that] you were taken now!
My heart weeps blood to think on't; 'tis a work
Of infinite mercy, you can never merit,
That yet you are not death-struck, no, not yet;
I dare not stay you long, for fear you should not
Have time enough allow'd you to repent in:
There's but this wall [pointing to his body] betwixt you and destruction,
When you're at strongest, and but poor thin clay:
Think upon't, brother; can you come so near it
For a fair strumpet's love, and fall into
A torment that knows neither end nor bottom

For beauty but the deepness of a skin,
And that not of their own neither? Is she a thing
Whom sickness dare not visit, or age look on,
Or death resist? does the worm shun her grave?
If not, as your soul knows it, why should lust
Bring man to lasting pain for rotten dust?

(IV. i. 235 - 52.)

The Cardinal proves persuasive, for the Duke breaks into tears, the conventional sign of contrition, and makes a solemn declaration to reform.

Brother of spotless honour, let me weep
The first of my repentance in thy bosom,
And show the blest fruits of a thankful spirit:
And if I e'er keep woman more, unlawfully,
May I want penitence at my greatest need!
And wise men know there is no barren place
Threatens more famine than a dearth in grace.

(IV. i. 253 - 9.)

The Cardinal's reply makes use of stock Biblical allusions concerning the joy in heaven over the repentant sinner.

Why, here's a conversion is at this time, brother,
Sung for a hymn in heaven, and at this instant
The powers of darkness groan, makes all hell sorry:
First I praise heaven, then in my work I glory.

But the Cardinal's words are premature since the Duke reveals in soliloquy that in order to preserve himself from the sin of adultery he is willing to resort to murder. But even if he had merely rigged a divorce between

26 The "Homily of Repentance" states that "we must be earnestly sorry for our sins, and unfeignedly lament and bewail that we have by them so grievously offended our most bounteous and merciful God...." See Adams, op. cit., p. 16, and also compare Mistress Frankford's tearfulness in V. iii. of A Woman Killed with Kindness.

27 Luke, XV. 7., "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." See also Luke, XV. 10. It might also be noted that Chapter XV of St. Luke, verses 11 to 32, contains the Prodigal Son story that Adams, op. cit., pp. 67 - 73, shows is so important an element in the development of domestic tragedy.
Leantio and Bianca he would have forfeited his chance for divine mercy since

so long as a man clung to the material advantages his misdeeds had won for him, penitence brought no remission of sin. 28

Clearly the Duke's understanding of repentance is at best stupidly legalistic. His moral blindness is frightening. And we see in the wedding procession scene and in the denouement that his moral eyesight has been totally destroyed.

The Cardinal, encountering the Duke and Bianca as they are proceeding to their marriage, voices his great indignation and reminds the Duke of the true nature of penitence and of marriage.

Are these the fruits of your repentance, brother? Better it had been you had never sorrow'd, Than to abuse the benefit, and return To worse than where sin left you. Vow'd you then never to keep strumpet more, And are you now so swift in your desires To knit your honours and your life fast to her? Is not sin sure enough to wretched man, But he must bind himself in chains to't! worse; Must marriage, that immaculate robe of honour, That renders virtue glorious, fair, and fruitful To her great master, be now made the garment Of leprosy and foulness? Is this penitence To sanctify hot lust? what is it otherwise Than worship done to devils? Is this the best Amends that sin can make after her riots? As if a drunkard, to appease heaven's wrath, Should offer up his surfeit for a sacrifice: If that be comely, then lust's offerings are On wedlock's sacred altar.

(IV. iii. 5 - 24.)

To the Duke's remonstrance that he now treads an honest path that leads

28 Adams, English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy, 1575 to 1642, p. 16.
to lawful love since he is about to make a true wife of Bianca the Cardinal replies, asking,

Is it enough to use adulterous thefts,
And then take sanctuary in marriage?
(IV. iii. 36 - 7.)

Hard upon the churchman's caution, though, comes Bianca's terrible rebuke, where irony and hypocrisy join with devilish mockery to throw scripture back in the Cardinal's face.

Sir, I have read you over all this while
In silence, and I find great knowledge in you
And severe learning; yet, 'mongst all your virtues
I see not charity written, which some call
The first-born of religion, and I wonder
I cannot see't in yours: believe it, sir,
There is no virtue can be sooner miss'd,
Or later welcom'd; it begins the rest,
And sets 'em all in order: heaven and angels
Take great delight in a converted sinner;
Why should you then, a servant and professor,
Differ so much from them? If every woman
That commits evil should be therefore kept
Back in desires of goodness, how should virtue
Be known and honour'd? From a man that's blind,
To take a burning taper 'tis no wrong,
He never misses it; but to take light
From one that sees, that's injury and spite.
Pray, whether is religion better serv'd,
When lives that are licentious are made honest,
Than when they still run through a sinful blood?
'Tis nothing virtue's temples to deface;
But build the ruins, there's a work of grace!
(IV. iii. 47 - 69.)

Bianca no more understands genuine repentance than the Duke. Her speech is a dreadful travesty of righteous indignation. She comes dangerously close to being a scorner of religion, a doer of mortal sin, one of those rare characters in domestic tragedy to whom repentance was denied. 29 Repentance in its complete, four-fold signification never appears in Bianca's

29 Adams, op. cit., pp. 9 - 10.
career, but a recognition of her guilt, the justness of her punishment, and a rudimentary contrition do figure in her last moments. After kissing the poisoned lips of the Duke whom she has slain by misadventure, Bianca points one moral of her story in her dying, contrite words.

Thou hast prevail'd in something, cursed poison! Though thy chief force was spent in my lord's bosom; But my deformity in spirit's more foul, A blemish'd face best fits a leprous soul. (V. i. 244 - 7.)

Then, snatching a drink from the poisoned cup, she makes explicit the lesson to be learned from her career.

Leantio, now I feel the breach of marriage At my heart-breaking. O, 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. (V. i. 252 - 7.)

Yet what sense of relief we feel from the guilt and contrition contained in her words nearly vanishes with our realization that Bianca is committing the deadly sin of suicide, and she further strains belief in the possibility of her salvation by the sensuous worldliness of her final remark.

Yet this my gladness is, that I remove Tasting the same death in a cup of love. (V. i. 262 - 3.)

Like Bianca, Hippolito gets no further along the road of repentance than to a recognition of his guilt, of the fact that punishment comes to him as a result of personal involvement in sin (V. i. 187 - 207.).

30 Here is a reversal of the situation that proves so memorable in The Revenger's Tragedy. In the later play living beauty takes a lethal kiss from a dead Duke whereas in the earlier a living Duke receives a deadly kiss from a lady's skull.
Livia, too, is aware that her sins have caused her destruction (V. i. 173 - 4.), but apart from this awareness she is not on the way to repentance, not, at any rate, as it was mapped out by domestic tragedy.

The vehicle in domestic tragedy for summarizing the whole matter of repentance, for delivering warnings, and for pointing the moral was the convention of the scaffold speech, a convention which does not appear in the denouement of Women, Beware Women except insofar as the explicit, didactic exhortation and the clear statement of the moral in Bianca's "warning for fair women" (V. i. 253 - 7.) is akin to the overt moralizing and instruction directed at the beholders by the typical gallows speech.

Thus in Women, Beware Women the theme of repentance occupies a subsidiary position, largely because by Act Four where the theme is given greatest prominence the play has ceased to be a domestic tragedy and has become a tragedy of Italianate revenge. Even when repentance is treated it is shown to be abortive, a condition consonant with the spiritual bankruptcy of the society that Middleton depicts and necessary to the illustration of his view that sin is self-destroying. And with this view in mind we now must examine a theme that is characteristically associated with the view in Middleton's plays, that of sex.

Middleton's long preoccupation with sex proved useful to him in writing Women, Beware Women for the sins of fornication, adultery, and whoredom formed, with one other, the major vices exposed in domestic tragedy. Fornication and adultery were not only attacked by Elizabethan homilists because they were evils in themselves but also because, as we have already seen, they led to other sins that often culminated in the horror of that other major vice, murder. The sex themes in Women, Beware
Women must now be studied in terms of their connection with domestic tragedy.

Sexual passions degrade and destroy two marriages in *Women. Beware Women*. Although the thematic pattern of the play may be summed up as the conflict between love and mercenary selling of love, with self-destruction envisaged as the inevitable result of the spiritual suicide of lust and ambition,

in conformity with ordinary Elizabethan domestic tragedy, infidelity is the main rock on which love and marriage founder. But characteristically enough with Middleton, sexual irregularity is seen in terms of lust. Lust, in fact, is the impelling force behind most of the major characters. One critic assesses its importance to the play in these terms:

The depiction of lust...here assumes a commanding position as the mainspring of the plot and the object of the drama's moral.

Under the term, lust, we may group seduction, adultery, and incest, the former two being the shapes in which lust contaminates the first marriage in the play, that of Bianca and Leantio. In the detailed analysis that follows of the breakdown of that marriage, we shall see Middleton working with the conventions which he had employed often before but frequently in commonplace ways. Here, however, the depiction of sex takes on an irresistibly compelling validity.

The first scene of Act I and the earlier half of scene three

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present a vividly life-like portrait of young married love. The ardent desire that Bianca and Leantio feel for one another and their resolution to make their marriage successful temper the qualms of uneasiness the spectator feels about the precariousness of this alliance between an undistinguished and priggish, though conscientious, "factor" and the daughter of wealthy, watchful Venetians. Leantio's smug assurance, his gloating possessiveness, his dangerously simple moral outlook, and his "jauntily didactic" exultation appear in the opening scene of the play. Introducing Bianca, his stolen "treasure", to his mother, Leantio betrays his thoroughly middle class nature in a speech that conventionally links a memento mori motif to that of lust.

It joys me that I ever was ordain'd
To have a being, and to live 'mongst men;
Which is a fearful living, and a poor one,
Let a man truly think on't:
To have the toil and griefs of fourscore years
Put up in a white sheet, tied with two knots;
Methinks it should strike earthquakes in adulterers,
When even the very sheets they commit sin in
May prove, for aught they know, all their last garments.
O what a mark were there for women then!
But beauty, able to content a conqueror
Whom earth could scarce content, keeps me in compass:
I find no wish in me bent sinfully
To this man's sister, or to that man's wife;
In love's name let 'em keep their honesties,
And cleave to their own husbands, - 'tis their duties:
Now when I go to church I can pray handsomely,
Nor come like gallants only to see faces,
As if lust went to market still on Sundays.35

33 Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 226, uses the term "ominous" in connection with the spectator's feelings, but this term is justified only in retrospect.

34 Ibid., p. 225.

35 These last three lines to some extent remind the reader of Middleton's last two tragedies of the opening speech of The Changeling. In soliloquy Alsemero reveals, "'Twas in the temple where I first beheld her [i.e., Beatrice-Joanna]." Alsemero's intent, however, is "to the holy purpose", not to a lustful one.
The language, attitudes, and ideas of domestic tragedy are amply displayed in this speech for often such terms as "sin", "adulterers", and "lust" occur in that genre, as does a strong homiletic note, and Biblical allusion. "Cleave" is the very word in Matthew XIX, 4 - 6, which states Christ's question to the Pharisees on the indissoluble nature of marriage and which concludes: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder". Leantio's subsequent assurance to his mother that his abduction of Bianca has divine approval -

I've my pardon for't, -
'Tis seal'd from heaven by marriage -
(I. i. 44 - 5.)

is made suspect by the hubris in his exultant remark that the abduction was

the best piece of theft
That ever was committed.
(I. i. 43 - 4.)

As the scene proceeds there is, therefore, an increasing feeling that something will occur to sunder this marriage.

Three aspects of the marriage are especially significant in this respect, apart from Leantio's self-conscious underscoring of the dis-

36 In the lines that immediately follow those of Leantio quoted above, Leantio speaks in terms closely related to the repentance theme. He refers to man's essentially tainted nature, sin, confession and penitence.

I must confess I'm guilty of one sin, mother,
More than I brought into the world with me,
But that I glory in; 'tis theft....
Never to be repented, mother,
Though sin be death....
(I. i. 35 - 40.)
tinction between lustful liaisons and holy matrimony. The first is the
too-ready use that Leantio and Bianca make of moral commonplaces in vowing
to succeed in their union. Although Leantio's mother questions the pro-
priety of her son's having brought an heiress into a poor household, and
despite his commonplace belief in female cupidity and ambition (I. i. 71 -
84.), Leantio declares that Bianca is

contented
With all conditions that my fortunes bring her to;
To keep close, as a wife that loves her husband;
To go after the rate of my ability,
Not the licentious swing of her own will,
Like some of her old school-fellows; she intends
To take out other works in a new sampler,
And frame the fashion of an honest love,
Which knows no wants, but, mocking poverty,
Brings forth more children, to make rich men wonder
At divine providence, that feeds mouths of infants,
And sends them none to feed, but stuffs their rooms
With fruitful bags, their beds with barren wombs.
(I. i. 88 - 100.)

Bianca herself confirms his belief.

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'm 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 forsok friends, fortunes, and my country,
And hourly I rejoice in't. Here's my friends,
And few is the good number.
(I. i. 125 - 33.)

Turning to Leantio she vows her determination to achieve happiness in her
new circumstances, come what may;

Thy successes,
Howe'er they look, I will still name my fortunes;

37 Here is one of the rare instances of the actual use of this term in
domestic tragedy. See pp. 174 - 6, above.
Hopeful or spiteful, they shall all be welcome:
Who invites many guests has of all sorts, \(^{38}\)
As he that traffics much drinks of all fortunes,
Yet they must all be welcome, and us'd well.
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.

(I. i. 133 - 41.)

The troubling effect of this speech comes from its virtually rehearsed quality. Bianca says the right thing for the occasion. Moreover, her words have more the force of contrived image than of heartfelt conviction; and what convincing feeling is behind them is questionable: though she can promise thus in the ardour of new love, what will be her attitude when her honeymoon is over? The same question may be put to Leantio who speaks to his mother as if life has the simplicity and tractability of a child's puzzle.

I'll prove an excellent husband, here's my hand,
Lay in provision, follow my business roundly,
And make you a grandmother in forty weeks.

(I. i. 107 - 9.)

The second aspect of the first and third scenes of Act One that is significant for the state of uneasiness it arouses is Leantio's blindly smug assumption that he may secure his possession of Bianca by keeping her locked in his house, with his mother the guardian of the keys.

O fair-ey'd Florence,
Didst thou but know what a most matchless jewel
Thou now art mistress of, a pride would take thee,
Able to shoot destruction through the bloods

---

38 Such domestic images as this and Leantio's, "...she intends/To take out other works in a new sampler" (I. i. 93 - 4.), materially assist in creating the middle class tone of the play. Bradbrook, op. cit., pp. 236 - 9, discusses the relevance of the images of food and drink, treasure and jewels, plagues and diseases to the play's tone.
Of all thy youthful sons! but 'tis great policy
To keep choice treasures in obscurest places;
Should we show thieves our wealth, 'twould make
'em bolder;
Temptation is a devil will not stick
To fasten upon a saint; take heed of that:
The jewel is cas'd up from all men's eyes;
Who could imagine now a gem were kept
Of that great value under this plain roof? 39
But how in times of absence? what assurance
Of this restraint then? Yes, yes, there's one with her:
Old mothers know the world; and such as these,
When sons lock chests, are good to look to keys.
(I. i. 161-76.)

This short-sighted treatment of his wife as a valuable chattel reminds
the reader of Middleton's plays of the fearfully anxious Harebrain of A
Mad World, but it also looks ahead to Beatrice-Joanna's treatment of De
Flores, De Piracquo, and Diaphanta as if they were merely property to be
manipulated as she sees fit. The middle class tone of Women, Beware Women
is, it should be additionally noted, reinforced by Leantio's acquisitive
attitude.

The third aspect of these early scenes arousing apprehension
about the stability of the marriage is the nature of the young couple's
love. To imply that it is entirely animal, as Schoenbaum does in his re­
mark that

from the beginning the relationship between
the two is depicted as wholly sensual 40

is to exaggerate, but it is true that their love has a marked sensual
character. This quality appears in both scenes. In the first Leantio

39 The phrase, "this plain roof", neatly epitomizes the nature of the
establishment in which the typical domestic tragedy has its setting.

40 Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies, p. 117. Bradbrook, Themes and
Conventions, p. 226, speaks of "the purely sensuous nature" of the af­
fection of the two lovers.
complains thus about his duty to his "factorship".41

'Tis a bitterness
To think upon to-morrow! that I must leave
Her still to the sweet hopes of the week's end;
That pleasure should be so restrain'd and curb'd
After the course of a rich work-master,
That never pays till Saturday night!
(I. i. 154 - 9.)

He has been stirred to this outburst by the kissing and counter-kissing that have just taken place between him and Bianca who had reminded him that he had not bid her welcome since her arrival in her new home.

In Scene Three, after devoting a "day and night... to no other business/But her and her dear welcome", Leantio comes on stage torpid from sexual pleasure but still irrepressibly given to airing middle class commonplaces.

Methinks I'm even as dull now at departure,
As men observe great gallants the next day
After a revel; you shall see 'em look
Much of my fashion, if you mark 'em well.

41 R. C. Bald, in his edition of Hengist, King of Kent, p. xlvi, suggests that Vortiger is a Cockney vulgarian. More accurately, as Bald points out, can this be said of Leantio who sees duty as merely a prudent prelude to licentious pleasures. He declares,

the man loves best
When his care's most, that shows his zeal to love:
Fondness is but the idiot to affection,
That plays at hot-cockles with rich merchants' wives,
Good to make sport withal when the chest's full,
And the long warehouse cracks. 'Tis time of day
For us to be more wise; 'tis early with us;
And if they lose the morning of their affairs,
They commonly lose the best part of the day:
Those that are wealthy, and have got enough,
'Tis after sunset with 'em; they may rest,
Grow fat with ease, banquet, and toy, and play....
(I. iii. 22 - 33.)
'Tis even a second hell to part from pleasure
When man has got a smack on't: as many holy days
Coming together makes your poor heads idle
A great while after, and are said to stick
Fast in their fingers' ends, - even so does game
In a new married couple; for the time
It spoils all thrift, and indeed lies a-bed
T' invent all the new ways for great expenses.
(I. iii. 1 - 12.)

As he catches sight of Bianca and his mother at the window above, the struggle between desire and duty becomes more intense. First, he bids farewell to business; then he about-faces, and rebukes himself, for 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,
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.
(I. iii. 41 - 8.)

Bianca again bids him to stay, "But this one night, I prithee!" but Leantio forces himself away, finally employing an argument that he knows will carry weight with the rich-born Bianca.

Alas, I'm in for twenty, if I stay,
And then for forty more! I've such luck to flesh,
I never bought a horse but he bore double.
If I stay any longer, I shall turn
An everlasting spendthrift: as you love
To be maintain'd well, do not call me again,
For then I shall not care which end goes forward.
(I. iii. 50 - 6.)

Leantio departs, leaving the weeping Bianca in the hands of his aging, worldly, shallow-witted mother.

If these two scenes, I. i. and I. iii., do not produce the effect that F. S. Boas felt was there, "a charming picture of domestic bliss"42,

they are certainly as he says, "a rare thing in Middleton's plays". They constitute Middleton's sole entirely realistic portrayal in tragedy of young love. Middleton evidently took pains to create a picture that would vividly express joy in a lowly marriage because he wished to contrast this in as striking a way as possible with the coarseness, cruelty, and evil that would develop out of such a union between such people. But he was too keen a student of "the way that the mind works" and had too responsible an interest in realism, in the actualities of human behaviour, not to place in this picture of domestic joy suggestions of its subversion. Moreover, after having constructed a brilliantly substantial world of bourgeois marital happiness, he felt he could now widen that world by bringing it into relation with the great powers of the state, and could destroy it with the poisons of seduction, infidelity, and lust. The two major sins of domestic tragedy being adultery and murder, Middleton now conducts his characters by a remorseless logic into these crimes, lust, of course, being the first.

The initial mention of lust occurs in Leantio's didactic self-congratulation at the beginning of the play, and his further complacencies (I. iii. 41 ff.) and vulgarisms (I. i. 82 - 3., I. iii. 27 - 33.) keep the theme in view. But the first embodiment of it in the main plot

43 Boas, op. cit., p. 235.
44 Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 213.
45 See the passage, I. i. 28 - 34, beginning,

I find no wish in me bent sinfully,
To this man's sister, or to that man's wife....
193.

as a major motif occurs in the great chess scene of Act Two.

The Duke of Florence had observed Bianca at her window during his annual procession to St. Mark's; "one look has catch'd his heart"; and through his ambitious follower, Guardiano, the clever Livia, proud of her cunning, is engaged to trap Bianca for the Duke's pleasure. This she does by beguiling Leantio's visiting mother into a chess game while the polite, demure Bianca, also lured into the house, is conducted on a tour of Livia's "rooms and pictures". Guardiano, the guide, proves to be a pander, for he leads Bianca to where he can reveal the hidden Duke whose over-mastering desire, commanding status, and urgent appeals soon wrest from Bianca both her honour and her character of a woman who has resolved to be a quiet and decorous wife.

As will be detailed later, though Guardiano had sought to arouse her passion with "naked pictures by the way" (II. ii. 408.), motives other than lust are chiefly responsible for precipitating Bianca into the embraces of the Duke. He it is in whom lust rages. He resorts to many appeals, including threats of force, to win from Bianca his release from the prison his passion has locked him into. Bianca, terrified and at bay, asks,

My lord, what seek you?  

(II. ii. 351.)

When he replies, "Love", a dialogue in stichomythia takes place.

46 Bianca's "methought he saw us" (I. iii. 108.) is an ominous remark. See note 33, above.

47 On the middle class nature of this establishment see Schoenbaum's remarks cited on p. 171, above.
To the Duke's last remark Bianca replies in terms appropriate to domestic tragedy but which also echo the sophistry of the First Lady in the trial-of-chastity scene in *Hengist, King of Kent* (IV. ii. 118 - 23).

Nor, great lord,
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 fearfullest,
And call for strength to virtue.

(II. ii. 355 - 63.)

But the Duke's cynical worldliness is capable of placing a base construction even on an appeal to Heaven's commands.

Sure, I think
Thou know'st the way to please me: I affect
A passionate pleading 'bove an easy yielding;
But never pitied any.

(II. ii. 363 - 5.)

Before lust so vigilant, experienced, and resolute Bianca's defenses crumble.48

Guardiano's sordid comments on her capitulation are reminiscent of Horsus's remarks to Hengist ("And now yo' grace shall know what nett

48 Bradbrook, *op. cit.*, p. 228, says "Bianca's virtue simply collapses", and attributes Bianca's fall to the Duke's "determination" rather than to any specific argument used by him or weakness in her.
is vsed/In many places to Catch modest women", III. i. 168 ff.).

I can but smile as often as I think on't:
How prettily the poor fool was beguil'd!
How unexpectedly! it's a witty age;
Never were finer snares for women's honesties
Than are devis'd in these days; no spider's web
Made of a daintier thread than are now practis'd
To catch love's flesh-fly by the silver wing:
Yet to prepare her stomach by degrees
To Cupid's feast, because I saw 'twas queasy,
I show'd her naked pictures by the way,
A bit to stay the appetite.

(II. ii. 399 - 409.)

The City comedy flavour of these words further reinforces the bourgeois tone of the play; but Guardiano's obscenely matter-of-fact self-congratulation is soon opposed by Bianca's fiercely venomous rebuke which utilizes a number of the terms characteristic of domestic tragedy. But first the appalling enormity of her seduction so staggers her mind that she is driven by shock and despair to a self-disgust that issues in desperate moral suicide.

Now bless me from a blasting! I saw that now,
Fearful for any woman's eye to look on;
Infectious mists and mildews hang at's eyes,
The weather of a doomsday swells upon him:
Yet since mine honour's leprous, why should I
Preserve that fair that caus'd the leprosy?
Come, poison all at once.49

(II. ii. 425 - 31.)

Turning then upon Guardiano she berates him for being the tool of the Duke's lust.

Thou in whose baseness
The bane of virtue broods, I'm bound in soul
Eternally to curse thy smooth-brow'd treachery,

49 The imagery of disease and poison found here prefigures its use in The Changeling.
That wore the fair veil of a friendly welcome,
And I a stranger; think upon't, 'tis worth it;
Murders pil'd up upon a guilty spirit,
At his last breath will not be heavier
Than this betraying act upon thy conscience:
Beware of offering the first-fruits to sin;
After they've been abas'd, and made for use;
If they offend to the death, as wise men know,
How much more they, then, that first make 'em so!
I give thee that to feed on. I'm made bold now,
I thank thy treachery; sin and I'm acquainted,
No couple greater; and I'm like that great one,
Who, making politic use of a base villain,
He likes the treason well, but hates the traitor;
So I hate thee, slave!  

And as the scene closes, Bianca is able to hiss at her other traitor, Livia,
"You're a damn'd bawd."

The following scene, the first of Act III, depicts Bianca's resolution in action. The effect of lust on the precarious but happy marriage portrayed at the beginning of the play now begins to appear, and in place of her quietly decent determination to accept the conditions her marriage to Leantio has brought, Bianca becomes querulous and bitter, tartly demanding of the mother,

Must I live in want
Because my fortune match'd me with your son?
(III. i. 45 - 6.)

Leantio, returning from a five-day absence, is at first unaware that lust in the form of infidelity has poisoned his marriage. Thus he can revel in anticipated pleasure and can praise wedlock.

How near am I now to a happiness
That earth exceeds not! not another like it:
The treasures of the deep are not so precious

50 The language of the last four lines is noticeably close to that of Italianate revenge tragedy, though "virtue", "conscience", and "sin" relate the first part of the speech to domestic tragedy.
As are the conceal'd comforts of a man
Lock'd up in a woman's love. I scent the air
Of blessings when I come but near the house:
What a delicious breath marriage sends forth!
The violet-bed's not sweeter. Honest wedlock
Is like a banqueting-house built in a garden,
On which the spring's chaste flowers take delight
To cast their modest odours; when base lust,
With all her powders, paintings, and best pride,
Is but a fair house built by a ditch-side.

(III. i. 82 - 94.)

Leantio is as smugly didactic and as dangerously complacent as ever, too.
The irony in his subsequent words is apparent in view of the recent seduction, in view of what Bianca now is, and in view of what is about to be revealed.

When I behold a glorious dangerous strumpet,
Sparkling in beauty and destruction too,
Both at a twinkling, I do liken straight
Her beautiful body to a goodly temple
That's built on vaults where carcasses lie rotting;
And so, by little and little, I shrink back again,
And quench desire with a cool meditation;
And I'm as well, methinks.

(III. i. 95 - 102.)

But instead of "a welcome/Able to draw men's envies upon man", Bianca receives Leantio with an off-hand, "O sir, you're welcome home", and the shocked and puzzled husband, chilled by her coldness, replies in words that focus on the domestic tragedy pattern of Women, Beware Women.

Is that all?
Why, this is dreadful now as sudden death
To some rich man, that flatters all his sins
With promise of repentance when he's old,
And dies in the midway before he comes to't.

(III. i. 110 - 14.)

Bianca resists Leantio's advances and meets his objections and appeals with words that might have been extracted from the City comedies.

Is there no kindness betwixt man and wife,
Unless they make a pigeon-house of friendship,
And be still billing? 'Tis the idlest fondness
That ever was invented, and 'tis pity
It's grown a fashion for poor gentlewomen;
There's many a disease kiss'd in a year by 't,
And a French curtsey made to 't: alas, sir!
Think of the world, how we shall live; grow serious;
We have been married a whole fortnight now.

(III. i. 159 - 67.)

This, coming hard upon her remark that

'tis full as virtuous
For woman's eye to look on several men,
As for her heart, sir, to be fix'd on one,

(III. i. 146 - 8.)

and followed by an alarming knock on the door, arouses Leantio's frightened possessiveness. But his attempt to lock Bianca away from other men's eyes fails, and he now learns how determined she is to follow "the licentious swing of her own will", for to his plan to restrain her from learning of the Duke's invitation to Livia's banquet, she stingingly replies,

Now I beshrew you heartily, has he so!
And you the man would never yet vouchsafe
To tell me on't till now? you show your loyalty
And honesty at once; and so farewell, sir.

(III. i. 255 - 8.)

This wonderfully life-like scene thereupon concludes with Leantio as bitterly attacking marriage as he had praised it. In fact, his attitude is the antipodal reverse of what it had been, but the vulgarian speaks in his remarks on lust.

O thou, the ripe time of man's misery, wedlock,
When all his thoughts, like overladen trees,
Crack with his fruits they bear, in cares, in jealousies!

O, that's a fruit that ripens hastily,
And 'tis knit to marriage! it begins,
As soon as the sun shines upon the bride,
A little to show colour. Blessed powers,
Whence comes this alteration? the distractions, The fears and doubts it brings, are numberless; And yet the cause I know not. What a peace Has he that never marries! if he knew The benefit he enjoy'd, or had the fortune To come and speak with me, he should know then Th' infinite wealth he had, and discern rightly The greatness of his treasure by my loss: Nay, what a quietness has he 'bove mine That wears his youth out in a strumpet's arms, And never spends more care upon a woman Than at the time of lust; but walks away; And if he find her dead at his return, His pity is soon done, - he breaks a sigh In many parts, and gives her but a piece on't: But all the fears, shames, jealousies, costs and troubles, And still renew'd cares of a marriage-bed, Live in the issue, when the wife is dead. (III. i. 271 - 95.)

In III. ii., the play's central, assembly scene, there are many sexual motifs and allusions, but the one which perhaps best typifies to what degree capitulation to the Duke's lust has coarsened Bianca's spirit is her aside on Fabricio's question, How like you her breast [i.e. voice] now, my lord? Bianca replies,

Her breast? He talks as if his daughter had given suck Before she was married, as her betters have; The next he praises sure will be her nipples. (III. ii. 157 - 60.)

Further illustrations of her debasement appear shortly before her exit with the Duke. Although she had recently assured Leantio that I would not have a husband of that proneness To kiss me before company for a world, (III. i. 136 - 7.) she now permits the Duke that liberty before a great company (III. ii. 235.). Even worse as a revelation of her cruelty to Leantio and of her
depravity is the callous indifference to her husband's feelings and claims and to principles of morality shown by her answer to the Duke's

Come, fair Bianca,
We have took special care of you, and provided
Your lodging near us now.

(III. ii. 237 - 9.)

Unhesitantly, Bianca replies,

Your love is great, my lord.

Only now, as Bianca goes off with her seducer, does Leantio feel the extent of his loss. So keen is his anguish that he is deaf to Livia's proferred comfort. Her assurance that Bianca is a strumpet tears from him the pitiful cry,

Ha! most assuredly? speak not a thing
So wild so certainly, leave it more doubtful.

(III. ii. 275 - 6.)

Gradually, however, Leantio's despair leads him to question wedlock itself (I. 320 ff.) and to face the hopelessness of his situation with a cynical recognition of his total loss and of the need to supplant love with hatred and Bianca's affection with Livia's.

She's gone for ever, utterly; there is
As much redemption of a soul from hell,
As a fair woman's body from his palace.
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: 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: those virtuous powers,
Which were chaste witnesses of both our troths,
Can witness she breaks first.

Thus Livia is able to buy the affection of the needy and lonely "factor"
for whom she has, to her surprise (ll. 61 - 2.), suddenly "truly felt the power of love"$^{51}$; and we realize that the bankruptcy of the marriage that has so long held our attention is complete, that lust in all ways is victorious, when at the end of the scene we see Livia kissing Leantio, with her promise,

Do but you love enough, I'll give enough,

answered by Leantio's venal worldliness,

Troth, then, I'll love enough, and take enough.

(III. ii. 376.)

Lust, it must be remembered, led in domestic tragedy to murder. That is its issue in Women, Beware Women. All four of the main characters in the marriage-infidelity action just examined are involved in threats of murder or are actually stained with blood. The scenes displaying this consequence of lust may, however, be most profitably studied in terms of the conventions of revenge drama; hence the discussion of them will be deferred.$^{52}$

If the breakdown of the marriage of Leantio and Bianca forms the chief portion of the main plot of this play, the story of Hippolito and Isabella in the sub-plot constitutes the more terrible exemplification of the theme of lust since there is found here Middleton's major study of lust in its most dreadful shape - incest.

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51 Livia had declared earlier,

I should be wise by this time; and, for instance,
I've buried my two husbands in good fashion,
And never mean more to marry.

(I. ii. 49 - 51.)

52 See pp. 230 - 32, below.
The second marriage in *Women, Beware Women* that is destroyed by illicit sexual passion is the one arranged by the ambitious Guardiano and the doddering Fabricio. The former seeks to wed his feeble-witted ward to the latter's beautiful daughter, Isabella, whose love for the Ward Fabricio would compel until Livia, his sister, objects.

I must offend you then, if truth will do't,
And take my niece's part, and call't injustice
To force her love to one she never saw:
Maids should both see and like, all little enough;
If they love truly after that, 'tis well.
Counting the time, she takes one man till death;
That's a hard task, I tell you; but one may
Inquire at three years' end amongst young wives,
And mark how the game goes.

(I. ii. 29 - 37.)

The City comedy flavour of this remark is pronounced, and attitudes like this recur in the sub-plot, thereby allying it in tone as well as in theme with the main action.

Isabella is inquired after that she may view her prospective husband. Fabricio reveals where she may habitually be found.

Look out her uncle, and you're sure of her,
Those two are ne'er asunder; they've been heard
In argument at midnight; moonshine nights
Are noondays with them; they walk out their sleeps,
Or rather at those hours appear like those
That walk in 'em, for so they did to me.

(I. ii. 62 - 7.)

And as the two appear, he exclaims, using an ominously significant image,

Look you, I told you truth; they're like a chain,-
Draw but one link, all follows.

(I. ii. 68 - 9.)

Even more ominous is Guardiano's comment.

O affinity,
What piece of excellent workmanship art thou!
'Tis work clean wrought, for there's no lust but
love in't,
And that abundantly; when in stranger things
There is no love at all but what lust brings.
(II. i. 69 - 73.)

The sight of the simple-minded Ward playing at trap-stick with his significantly named servant, Sordido, prepares the reader for the arrival of one of the "stranger things" alluded to by Guardiano, as the lustfulness of the "natural" shows the reader that Middleton is once more working in a familiar vein. At the end of the silly game the lecherous Ward declares to Sordido,

I'm a dog at a hole:
I mar'l my guardianer does not seek a wife for me;
I protest I'll have a bout with the maids else,
Or contract myself at midnight to the larder-woman,
In presence of a fool or a sack-posset.
... I feel myself after any exercise
Horribly prone: let me but ride, I'm lusty;
A cock-horse, straight, i'faith!
... I'll forswear eating eggs in moonshine nights;
There's ne'er a one I eat but turns into a cock
In four-and-twenty hours: if my hot blood
Be not took down in time, sure 'twill crow shortly.
(I. ii. 114 - 126.)

Of this bestial fool Fabricio swears of Isabella,

Marry him she shall then,
Let her agree upon love afterwards.
(I. ii. 141 - 2.)

Isabella's revulsion is unmistakable.

Marry a fool!
Can there be greater misery to a woman
Than means to keep her days true to her husband,
And know no other? so virtue wills it.
Why, how can I obey and honour him,
But I must needs commit idolatry?
A fool is but the image of a man,
And that but ill made neither. O the heartbreakings
Of miserable maids, where love's enforc'd!
The best condition is but bad enough....
Men buy their slaves, but women buy their masters;
Yet honesty and love makes all this happy,
And, next to angels', the most bless'd estate.53
That providence, that has made every poison
Good for some use, and sets four warring elements
At peace in man, can make a harmony
In things that are most strange to human reason.
O, but this marriage!

(I. ii. 162 - 186.)

Although Livia had urged Hippolito to cheer Isabella up, he
betrays in soliloquy a deeply troubled attitude concerning his niece, but
it is not so profoundly rooted in conventional religious belief that a
little encouragement from her would not cancel his resolution to be silent.

I would 'twere 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. 155 - 62.)

Thus when Isabella urges her uncle to tell her what is troubling him, he
says,

Know the worst then;
I love thee dearlier than an uncle can.

(I. ii. 213 - 4.)

Since this explanation fails in its purpose, Hippolito adds,

As a man loves his wife, so love I thee.

(I. ii. 220.)

The shock of this revelation draws from Isabella a resolution and a question.

53 This last sentiment echoes the convictions of Govianus and the Lady in The Second Maiden's Tragedy, of Sebastian in The Witch, of Cleanthes in The Old Law, and has distinct connections even with Phoenix.

54 Here is the domestic tragedy word once more.
Farewell all friendly solaces and discourses;  
I'll learn to love 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. 227 - 31.)

To see her favourite brother in distress pains Livia and brings forth not only her pride in her ability to manipulate people but also her terrible blindness to the moral dangers she runs.

'tis but a hazarding  
Of grace and virtue, and I can bring forth  
As pleasant fruits as sensuality wishes  
In all her teeming longings; this I can do.  
(II. i. 29 - 32.)

She then proceeds to delude Isabella with a false story of her birth (II. i. 130 - 148.), and further shows her how marriage to the Ward might conveniently cloak an affair with Hippolito (II. i. 113 - 123.). Then after smugly remarking in aside,

Who shows more craft t'undo a maidenhead,  
I'll resign my part to her,  
(II. i. 178 - 9.)

she looses Isabella to Hippolito with a bawd's gesture, "She's thine own; go".

The only extenuation possible for the sin that Isabella and Hippolito commit is her ignorance that Livia lied about her true parentage and Hippolito's unawareness of Livia's ruse. Isabella has still a charge

55 At Livia's banquet Hippolito speaks in terms reminiscent of Horsus's situation in Hengist.

I've a strange office on't here:  
'Tis some man's luck to keep the joys he likes  
Conceal'd for his own bosom, but my fortune  
To set 'em out now for another's liking....  
(III. ii. 193 - 6.)
of fornication to answer for (and later of adultery), and Hippolito still one of incest.

If the incest scenes in this play show to what black depths lust can sink, the scene, III. iii., in which the Ward and Sordido examine Isabella for her physical soundness as a partner in marriage represents the limits of coarseness. Isabella is treated as if she were a breeding animal being poked and peered at by lewd farmers at an auction.

Although this lengthy discussion of the theme of lust in *Women. Beware Women* has suggested how vividly lifelike Middleton's realistic vision could be, it further shows that Middleton here utilizes sex themes that had long engaged his attention, but that in this play he chose to give them as marked a middle class setting as was possible in view of the limitations of his sources. This fact, allied with the fact that Middleton's morality would not allow him to invest "perversity with pathos", is consonant with the nature of domestic tragedy. Consonant with domestic tragedy, too, is the explicit didactic pointing of the moral which occurs in the final scene. Here, Hippolito, pierced with poisoned arrows in the revels celebrating the Duke's nuptials, cries,

Lust and forgetfulness has been among us,
And we are brought to nothing....
... but 'tis the property
Of guilty deeds to draw your wise man downward.
(V. i. 187 - 206.)

And the Cardinal enlarges on this in the final speech of the play.

Sin, what thou art, these ruins show too piteously:

56 For the sources see Schoenbaum, op. cit., pp. 104 - 9, 112 - 15.

57 Ibid., p. 115.
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. i. 264 - 7.)

Bulking almost as large as the theme of lust, however, is a theme that had also occupied Middleton from the start of his dramatic career, the theme of social ambition. Climbers in Middleton's plays hunger after wealth and position, but not since the City comedies, not even in Hengist, did climbing so control the lives of the characters or so determine the mood as it does in Women. Beware Women. Although social ambition forms only a peripheral theme in such typical domestic tragedies as Arden of Feversham and A Woman Killed with Kindness, its presence in Middleton's play adds so materially to its bourgeois spirit that it may be conveniently examined at this point.

Leantio's money-centred poverty has already been alluded to, as has his venality. Both the Duke and Livia manage to buy his regard, the Duke with the offer of the captainship of the fort of Rouans, about which Leantio rather sourly muses,

This is some good yet.
And more than e'er I look'd for; a fine bit
To stay a cuckold's stomach: all preferment
That springs from sin and lust it shoots up quickly,
As gardeners' crops do in the rotten'est grounds;
So is all means rais'd from base prostitution
Even like a salad growing upon a dunghill.
(III. ii. 45 - 51.)

Livia offers Leantio great wealth which she assures him is "all true sub-

stance":

Come, you shall see my wealth; take what you list;
The gallanter you go, the more you please me:
I will allow you too your page and footman,
Your race-horses, or any various pleasure
Exercis'd youth delights in....
(III. ii. 368 - 73.)
Before this, Leantio's mother so readily betrays him for the sweetmeats of Livia's banquet, that even Bianca is led to comment with wry cynicism on her alacrity:

Why, here's an old wench would trot into a bawd now
For some dry sucket, or a colt in march-pane.
(III. i. 269 - 70.)

But the most memorable instances of the purchase of loyalty and of social ambition are seen in the Duke's seduction of Bianca and in Guardiano's scheming to get Bianca into the Duke's arms.

Revealing to Livia the Duke's desire for the factor's young wife, Guardiano adds,

'Twould prove but too much worth in wealth and favour
To those should work his peace.
(II. ii. 23 - 4.)

As Livia discloses her plot to lure Bianca into her house, Guardiano exclaims,

'Tis for the Duke; and if I fail your purpose,
All means to come by riches or advancement
Miss me, and skip me over!
(II. ii. 30 - 2.)

And after Bianca's seduction, he lewdly grins,

Well, advancement,
I venture hard to find thee; if thou com'st
With a greater title set upon thy crest,
I'll take that first cross patiently, and wait
Until some other comes greater than that;
I'll endure all.
(II. ii. 409 - 14.)

The central instance, though, of the influence of offers of wealth and place is contained in the Duke's impassioned argument to Bianca as she struggles desperately to maintain her hold on her resolutions to be a virtuous, contented wife to Leantio, whose mother had expressed to
him her apprehension that Leantio had wronged "such a perfection"

To draw her from her fortune, which, no doubt,
At the full time might have prov'd rich and noble....
What ableness have you to do her right then
In maintenance fitting her birth and virtues?
(I. i. 59 - 66.)

The Duke breaks Bianca's resistance by reminding her of her impoverished condition and by promising to make her "rich and noble". He has, therefore, a ready answer to Bianca's query, "Why should you seek, sir,/To take away that you can never give?" He replies,

But I give better in exchange, - wealth, honour;
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 pluck fruit there,
She would commend your wit, and praise the time
Of your nativity; take hold of glory.
Do not I know you've cast away your life
Upon necessities, means merely doubtful
To keep you in indifferent health and fashion -
A thing I heard too lately, and soon pitied -
And can you be so much your beauty's enemy,
To kiss away a month or two in wedlock,
And weep whole years in wants for ever after?
Come, play the wise wench, and provide for ever....
(II. ii. 374 - 87.)

The morality of this, of course, is as short-sighted as any of the numerous instances of practical "wisdom" with which the play abounds, but the Duke's appeal nevertheless prevails, for Bianca, like many of the women in the City comedies and the Fletcherian plays, and like Roxena in Hengist, has the motives of an opportunist. We may judge from her surrender to the Duke at the point where his verbal blandishments rise to a climax that Bianca has in her nature a powerful streak of greed.

The final convention of domestic tragedy prominent in Women, Beware Women is the pattern of the fable. H. H. Adams has schematized this sequence of events in the following manner.
The ordinary Elizabethan domestic tragedy presented a tale of infidelity and murder. A wife falls in love with another man and plots with him to murder her husband. The crime is delayed by various circumstances, but eventually the deed is done. The wife and her lover are quickly revealed in some natural or supernatural way to the agents of justice, are sentenced to death, and pay the penalty for their crimes. Before their deaths, however, the murderers turn to thoughts of repentance, plead for God's mercy, and exert every effort to prepare for heaven.58 

Of these strands in the pattern, one minor and one major strand are missing from Women, Beware Women. The minor is the delay of the crime; Leantio is instead summarily slain by Hippolito; the latter does not wait to avenge the dishonour that the "factor" has done his sister. The major is the four-fold sequential pattern of repentance. Most of the characters in the play merely become aware of their guilt before death cuts short their careers. None pleads for God's mercy or exerts any effort to prepare for Heaven. Full repentance is truncated in this play because the conventions of Senecan revenge tragedy overtake those of domestic tragedy in the fourth act, becoming dominant in the close. Finally, a third strand may seem to be missing, too. At first sight it would appear that Bianca had nothing to do with her husband's death, but a closer examination of the tone of her betrayal to the Duke of Leantio's affair with Livia and of his spiteful threats against Bianca's "peace" (IV. i. 113 ff.) makes it plain that she is at least aware that his safety is gravely threatened. However, it is true that neither Bianca nor the Duke is directly involved in Leantio's killing. But since murder is entirely absent from so eminent a domestic 

58 English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy, pp. 6 - 7. This pattern fails to fit A Woman Killed with Kindness, it is to be noted.
tragedy as *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, it was not mandatory for Middleton to follow every thread of a pattern more appropriate to *Arden of Feversham.* Most of the main strands are nevertheless observable in Middleton's play: infidelity, murder, discovery, recognition of guilt, and punishment.

Before turning to an examination of the other dramatic mode that influenced the last two acts of *Women, Beware Women*, we must study those conventions discoverable in the play that Middleton had frequently employed in his previous work. These are the conventions of the intrigue pattern, of the trickster tricked theme, of characterization, and of staging. Some prominent devices must be examined, too.

The intrigue in *Women, Beware Women* is managed by Middleton with a skill equal to its conduct in any other of his plays, but the use of Livia as chief intriguer in both plots is a stroke of structural genius. She provides the main link between those scenes of the play that Middleton derived from the *Ducento Novelli* of Malespini and those adapted from Meslier's *Les Amours tragiques...d'Hypolite et Isabella Neapolitains.*

Intrigue figures responsible for the manipulation of the action had appeared in Middleton's other plays, even his earliest. Gerardine in *The Family of Love* was one such, as Vindice was a later example. But the difference between the intriguers in City comedy and early tragedy and Livia is the difference between a plot mechanism and a vitally alive human being managing situations for which her amorality, worldly experience, and

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59 T. M. Parrott and R. H. Ball in *A Short View of Elizabethan Drama*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943, p. 238, make this point. They state, "The link between the two actions is the widow Livia, who plays the role of intriguer in a comedy."
cleverness eminently suit her. Daniel Dodson accurately remarks,

> It is difficult to restrain our admiration for Livia's mastery in intrigue.... she is one of the most consummately artistic bawds in the history of literature.

With a skill that evokes from the intriguer herself expressions of satisfaction, Livia plays the procuress for both Hippolito and the Duke, undoing Isabella through incest and Bianca through infidelity. Later, she becomes an accomplice of Guardiano in wreaking vengeance on the men she had previously assisted.

Guardiano is thus another important intriguer in the play. An ambitious follower of the Duke of Florence, for his own profit he plots with Livia the betrayal of Bianca, like Livia commending himself for his ingenuity. Later, on learning of the incestuous passion of Hippolito and Isabella, he takes the active role in planning revenge, Livia and the Ward becoming his accomplices.

Isabella intrigues against Livia in the last two acts after Livia has revealed the "black lust" between Isabella and her uncle; and Bianca plots against the Cardinal's life for his rebukes directed at her illicit love for the Duke.

Intrigue in *Women, Beware Women*, though present in such an extraordinarily credible scene as the chess game and characteristically appearing in the conventional close, appears much more fitfully than it does in *Hengist* or *The Changeling*. This fact is explainable in terms of the dramatic mode to which the first three-fifths of the play largely belongs.

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The influence of domestic tragedy also accounts for the lessened importance of the trickster tricked theme as compared to the role it plays in such a drama as The Revenger's Tragedy. Indeed, not until the Senecan denouement of Women, Beware Women is reached does this theme receive any obvious exemplification, although it is possible to see in the upset which occurs in Leantio's plans to keep his wife locked away from other men's eyes some features of the trickster tricked volte-face. In the denouement the theme is intertwined with Middleton's notion of the self-destructiveness of sin and with the conception of the revenger as villain. All those who scheme to get revenge against the people who have brought dishonour, misery, or fear into their lives are destroyed by their own machinations, but since revenge is their motive, the study of their fall may be deferred until the discussion of those Senecan conventions mentioned below. One notable exemplification of the trickster tricked theme may, however, be illustrated at this point.

Guardiano plots with the Ward to bring death to Hippolito whose incestuous cuckolding of the Ward has deeply angered the ambitious climber. Guardiano gasps at Livia's revelation,

Was my judgment  
And care in choice so devilishly abus'd,  
So beyond shamefully? all the world will grin at me.  
(IV. ii. 77 - 9.)

His outrage at being tricked into the profitable match of his ward with the now-infamous Isabella is directed, not at the author of the incest, Livia, but at the lustful perpetrator of it, Hippolito. That Guardiano's mind should work in that way is consonant with what is known about him and with the moral outlook of all the other characters in Women, Beware Women.
Guardiano is angered that his reputation, the public side of his nature, has been exposed to contempt, not that immorality has occurred. Thus, Hippolito, the material cause of his discomfiture, is seen as the object of his revenge.

To his dull-witted ward, Guardiano outlines his plan for killing the cuckolder.

Here, take this caltrop then, convey it secretly Into the place I show'd you: look you, sir, This is the trap-door to't....
But when thou hear'st me give a stamp, down with't, The villain's caught then....
He shall lie deep...
And stick...upon those. (V. i. 5 - 27.)

But half-way through the fatal wedding masque which Guardiano hoped would cloak his plot to undo Hippolito he is himself undone by a blunder which leaves him impaled on his own device. In the confusion attendant upon Isabella's death Guardiano forgets the location of the trap-door, stamps, and falls through to his death (V. i. 167.), a turn reminiscent of The Jew of Malta and of Antonio's fate in The Witch. The trickster is roundly tricked by the scheme devised to ensnare another, but this volte-face is no more credible than the sudden about-face that so improbably concludes The Revenger's Tragedy.

Conventions of character long familiar to Middleton recur in Women, Beware Women. It is only necessary to indicate by summary what these conventional characters are to confirm their presence. The lust figures are widely represented (the Duke, Hippolito, the Ward, Isabella, Livia, and in somewhat different ways, Bianca and Leantio). The chastity figure (Bianca in the early part of the play, and the Cardinal) is another
sex personage, as are the cuckold (Leantio and the Ward) and the wittool (traces of the contented cuckold appear in Leantio, though his obsequious but sour acceptance of the Duke's grant of a captainship is the closest he gets to contentment in cuckoldry). Other stock characters are the intriguer (Livia, Guardiano, Bianca, and Isabella); social climbers (Guardiano, Bianca, and Leantio's mother); gulls (the cuckolds in the play, and Guardiano and Fabricio are gullied by Isabella and Bianca); and the fools. The Ward, Sordido, and the doddering Fabricio typify three forms of foolishness: that of the "natural", of the foil, and of the old man whose humour is a stubborn belief that love can be compelled. All these characters, moreover, with the exception of the Duke and the Cardinal, are middle class figures representative of their social origin by their interests, ambitions, and moral outlook; even their figures of speech betray their bourgeois concerns. But the Duke is a stock character of another class. He is a typical aristocratic ruler whose sense of power, lustfulness, and ruthless, immoral imperiousness relate him to those tyrants that Middleton had already sketched: the Duke in The Revenger's Tragedy, the Tyrant in The Second Maiden's Tragedy, and Vortiger.

The character of Livia has evoked much critical comment from the time of Lamb to the present day. Most critics, unstinting in their praise of the vitality with which Middleton delineates her character up to III. ii. 58., are inclined to see in her thereafter a change so great as to make a contradiction in portraiture. Lamb and Hazlitt would agree with Ellis-Fermor that the character of Livia changes abruptly after the middle of the play, losing the rich and original personality which gave it its value and becoming merely a
factor in a catastrophe. 61

About the change Boas concurs. He first outlines the admirable qualities of the seduction and the home-coming scenes. Next, he remarks thus on the change.

But the unexpected, and the unconvincing happens. Livia falls in love with him [Leantio] at first sight and offers him herself and her wealth. From this point the play takes a melodramatic turn unequal to the brilliant workmanship of the earlier acts. 62

There are several ways in which one might attempt to account for the alteration in Livia's nature. Some would see the change as

manifestly the work of a dramatist who had lost interest in his characters as soon as their emotional development - or deterioration - was complete.... 63

Or it may be that the change is brought about as a further ironic illustration of the bitter bit theme. Livia had declared to Fabricio,

I am blown, man;
I should be wise by this time; and, for instance,
I've buried my two husbands in good fashion,
And never mean more to marry.
(I. ii. 48 - 51.)

61 The Jacobean Drama, p. 130.

62 F. S. Boas, An Introduction to Stuart Drama, p. 236. The convention of love at first sight is discoverable, too, in I. iii. where the Duke glimpses Bianca at her window. It will be remembered that the Duchess in More Dissemblers had a similar experience with General Andrugio.

The amoral procuress discovers that her years and her worldly experience are not proof against love.

But another way to look at the change in Livia is to see her as a Protean character similar to Fletcher's. Such a character, as we have seen,

is subordinate to the situation and often changes radically to suit the requirements of the intricate plot. 64

If Middleton did conceive of her in this way, he was under no obligation to make her consistent. Possibly, too, Middleton had in mind the Fletcherian tragicomic convention of the "improbable hypothesis" in positing the incredible situation of the great lady of the upper circles of society falling in love with a commonplace nonentity like Leantio.

However, it is easy to stress the inconsistency of Livia, too easy, says Daniel Dodson, who believes that her "only inconsistency is that of a real human being". 65 Dodson accounts for the change in Livia in terms of Middleton's interest in the way the mind works. He says that Middleton's preoccupation with feminine psychology in Women, Beware Women and The Changeling inclined toward a repetition of the same psychic process; that of the unrealist presented with reality and the consequent degradation. In each case the heroines emerge from sequestered existences to encounter severe tests, and in each case, either congenitally or by experience they


are tragically unprepared and they fall. Only with Livia is the procedure reversed.... From the imperturbability of the realist she passes to the vulnerability of Middleton's unrealists.66

Dodson thereupon gives a detailed explanation of the nature of Livia's character change, basing his interpretation on the evidence of Livia's own words to Hippolito. Livia greets Hippolito in the play's second scene in a manner which Dodson feels is rather disturbing in the light of her customary vigorous worldliness and cynicism.

My best and dearest brother, I could dwell here;
There is not such another seat on earth,
Where all good parts better express themselves.
.... thou art all a feast,
And she that has thee a most happy guest.

(I. ii. 147 - 53.)

Later, when she learns of his abnormal passion for his niece and sees him wince under rebuke, she says,

Nay, I love you so,
That I shall venture much to keep a change from you
So fearful as this grief will bring upon you;
Faith, it even kills me when I see you faint
Under a reprehension, and I'll leave it,
Though I know nothing can be better for you.

Prithee, sweet brother, let not passion waste
The goodness of thy time and of thy fortune:
Thou keep'st the treasure of that life I love
As dearly as mine own....

(II. i. 18 - 27.)

And as she dismisses him so that she may work her dreadful lie with Isabella, she exclaims,

Beshrew you, would I lov'd you not so well!

I am the fondest where I once affect....
... you've few sisters
That love their brothers' ease 'bove their own
honesties;

219.

But if you question my affections,
That will be found my fault.
(II. i. 63 - 73.)

Dodson points out the double meaning of "honesties": moral integrity and sexual purity, and with the foregoing evidence of Livia's disturbing intensity of feeling for Hippolito in view, plus a knowledge of Livia's subsequent behaviour when she first meets Leantio, Dodson postulates his theory explanatory of Livia's character change.

I suggest that she has been nurturing an abnormal, potentially incestuous attraction for her brother Hippolito. 67

Dodson goes on to say that Livia betrays Isabella to her uncle for Hippolito's sake and also to free herself from the object of her unnatural passion. But she is not entirely liberated from her abnormal feelings until she meets Leantio. Livia, Dodson continues, "in her fallow condition" 68 sees the virile, unfortunate "factor" at the banquet. "An immediate and violent transference takes place" 69, he concludes (here openly revealing by the use of a technical term his indebtedness to Freudian psychology).

Dodson's reading is both plausible and illuminating. Moreover, it is supported by the fact that Middleton did take an interest in pathological minds. As a study of an alcoholic, Dampit, in A Trick to Catch The Old One, IV. v., is much more than a mere combination of the stock usurer and the fuddled, foul-mouthed drunkard given to Marstonian invectives.

68 Ibid., p. 380.
69 Ibid., p. 380.
He is, rather, an arresting embodiment of a pathological sickness. But Middleton examined other pathological minds, too. There is something pathological about Moll, the roaring girl; the sick compulsion of Anselmus is pronounced; the sadistic Duke in The Witch displays a near-psychosis; and Horsus suffers from a pathological disability. Hippolito's passion for Isabella, too, is a diseased proclivity, recognized as such even by Livia who comments on his "strange affection" in these words.

Is the world
So populous in women, and creation
So prodigal in beauty, and so various,
Yet does love turn thy point to thine own blood?
'Tis somewhat too unkindly: must thy eye
Dwell evilly on the fairness of thy kindred,
And seek not where it should?

(II. i. 4 - 10.)

If the change in Livia's character may be explained by an appeal to depth psychology which would discover in her covert tendencies towards incest, the explanation is therefore at least consonant with one of the major sex themes of the play as well as with one of Middleton's proclivities in character portrayal.

But is the explanation valid? On the strength of the evidence assembled above it would seem that the most that can be said in favour of the theory is that Middleton attempted to portray in Livia such an aberration in affection but that he failed to give this feature of her character sufficient attention to warrant Dodson's conclusions. As it is, the argument for the theory is inadequately corroborated by the text. A sketch for such an interpretation is all that Middleton gives us.

Suggestive, however, as Dodson's theory might be, it does not account for the artistic failure in the later presentation of Livia's character. Critics do not object that she changes, but that she changes
from a three-dimensional personage into a relatively flat and wooden convention. Hence it is not possible to see her as Dodson finally does when he says that though we no longer have sympathy for her,

Livia's change from a middle-aged woman of intensively active intellect in full control of her emotional responses, to the pathetic indulgent of a late summer passion, is a tragedy on a plane too real to be dismissed as fantastic.70

About this we must demur. Livia has ceased to be real for us, and hence we no longer have much genuine concern in her career.71

If it is difficult fully to understand the alteration in Livia or that in Bianca whose dutiful, quiet contentment is transformed by seduction into a headstrong, scoffing querulousness, it is not possible to deny the enormous vitality of these creations. As we have seen, the first three acts of the play contain scenes of extraordinary truth to life. Conventional as certain aspects of the characters are, there are no entirely wooden puppets in Acts I to III of Women, Beware Women. But even in the later acts there are moments when we feel that we are observing something "which has the air of being an immediate transcript from life"72,


71 But at least an intellectual assent can be given to Dodson's further remarks on Livia's role in the play. It is true, as Dodson says, that Livia is "the catalytic agent of all the evil which takes place in the play..." and that she is so involved in the action that she must be dragged down with the catastrophe. She cannot merely have the role "of an attendant evil genius to the falling action.... It is she who has been chiefly instrumental in the building of an edifice of unholy love, and it is she who brings it down in mortal ruin" (pp. 380 - 1.). Bradbrook agrees; she says, "Death in some form is felt to be inevitable" (Themes and Conventions, p. 233.), adding that all the main characters have destroyed themselves morally, anyway.

72 Quoted by Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies, p. 118.
to cite the words Lamb used in connection with the chess scene. The confrontation scene in the fourth act is the most significant instance.

Sumptuously clad at Livia's expense, Leantio comes to the Duke's palace. He gives his motive thus.

I long to see how my despiser looks
Now she's come here to court....

(IV. i. 42 - 3.)

But it is plain from what follows that his real reason for coming is to prove to Bianca that she is not the only person who can find someone to care for her and keep her in costly fashion.

Leantio and Bianca tauntingly comment on each other's clothes, at first drily, then with increasing bitterness and anger on Leantio's part and cold mockery on Bianca's, until Bianca remarks with mordant matter-of-factness,

Sure I think, sir,
We both thrive best asunder.

(IV. i. 61 - 2.)

Leantio's defences break at this point, and he shouts,

You're a whore!

An impudent, spiteful strumpet!

(IV. i. 63 - 4.)

and thrusting one of Livia's love-letters at Bianca, he exclaims,

And, to spite thee as much, look there; there read,
Vex, gnaw; thou shalt find there I'm not love-starv'd.

The world was never yet so cold or pitiless,
But there was ever still more charity found out
Than at one proud fool's door; and 'twere hard, faith,
If I could not pass that. Read to thy shame there;
A cheerful and a beauteous benefactor too,
As e'er erected the good works of love.

(IV. i. 66 - 73.)

Ellis-Fermor rightly assesses Middleton's insight and skill in this episode.
The sureness of Middleton's touch on Leantio's mood here is beyond comment; it is a mixture of lingering passion, jealousy and the flaunting vanity with which Leantio tries to cover the simultaneous injuries to his affection, to his manhood and to his self-esteem....

It may therefore be concluded that although conventionalisms of character occur frequently in Women, Beware Women, character portrayal, like the play's sex themes, has the persuasive credibility of life itself.

The final matter that must be examined before the Senecanisms of the play are studied is the device of the chess game. Games were a prominent feature of Elizabethan drama, and were used for both serious and comic effects, as a recent survey shows. So recurrent was their use that J. T. McCullen says that games of cards, chess, dice and backgammon became a noteworthy dramatic convention during this period.

But if they cannot be called a convention for the drama as a whole, they virtually become that in Middleton's plays, so frequently does he resort to them, Michaelmas Term, Your Five Gallants, Women, Beware Women and A Game at Chesse coming immediately to mind. Middleton, in fact, is the playwright who used games most often and most extensively in his plays.

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73 The Jacobean Drama, pp. 143 - 4.


75 Ibid., p. 7.

76 Ibid., p. 10.
And it is not surprising that he used the device in his play that is most nearly a domestic tragedy. The two most celebrated plays of this type had used games memorably. Arden of Feversham employs a game of tables in the murder scene (V. 1. 230 ff.), and A Woman Killed with Kindness presents a card game (III. ii. 119 ff.). Both plays effectively exploit the irony latent in the game situations.

The purposes of games in the drama of the time has been adequately summarized by McCullen. They served

important mechanical functions in promoting dramatic action and provided opportunities in individual scenes for the presentation of such stage stuff as appealed to audiences whose taste always craved variety.79

These purposes Middleton realized in II. ii. of Women, Beware Women, but the brilliance of his irony, the realism of his portraiture and dialogue, and the seriousness of the conflict symbolized by the chess match lift the scene from a level of mere conventional contrivance to one of superb dramatic achievement. McCullen is correct in saying,

No other scene in the play adds so much in terms of emotional depth and revealing action.80

If A Game at Chesse is superior to this scene, it is so only because it

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80 Ibid., p. 12.
is a more sustained allegory. Nowhere else did Middleton so successfully clothe convention with the illusion of reality.

Middleton's use of stage convention here is a frequently applauded instance of his skill in extracting striking theatre out of what might have been a stage commonplace. While the mother and Livia conduct their game on the main stage, Bianca struggles with the Duke "above". Livia's remarks on the progress of the chess match provide a brilliantly double-edged commentary on the course of the seduction taking place on the upper stage.

To go from this scene and the later confrontation one to the catastrophe is to move from where art is life to where it is merely artifice, for to untangle the threads of his plot and to conclude the traffic of his stage, Middleton resorts to the convention of the treacherous revels first employed by Kyd in The Spanish Tragedy, continued by Marston in his Italianate melodramas, and utilized by Middleton himself in The Revenger's Tragedy. A consideration of the conventions in the last two acts of Women, Beware Women means an analysis of Marstonian Senecanisms.

The theme of revenge gives shape and direction to the typical Italianate tragedy of blood, but since Women, Beware Women does not come under the influence of that vogue until Act Four (except insofar as the Italian setting, the theme of lust, and the novella sources of the plot exemplify the vogue), the motif of revenge organizes only the denouement and the catastrophe.

81 Fredson Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, p. 163, says, "The depiction of lust, one of the minor dramatic strands of Kydian tragedy which had become increasingly important in succeeding plays, here assumes a commanding position as the mainspring of the plot and the object of the drama's moral."
The revenge theme makes its initial appearance in Leantio's threats to Bianca in the confrontation scene where he vows,

I shall find time
To play a hot religious bout with some of you,
And, perhaps, drive you and your course of sins
To their eternal kennels. I speak softly now,
'Tis manners in a noble woman's lodgings,
And well I know all my degrees of duty;
But come I to your everlasting parting once,
Thunder shall seem soft music to that tempest.

(IV. i. 83 - 90.)

And as he perceives her indifference to his threats, he asserts that as a sightless man sometimes accidentally strikes his head on stone and feels its hardness,

So shall thy blind pride my revenge and anger....

(IV. i. 101.)

Hippolito, hypersensitive about his sister's honour, seeks to revenge Leantio's impudent betrayal of it in his open boasting of Livia's favours. In killing Leantio, of course, Hippolito also serves as the Duke's tool for, with the husband dead, the nobleman will be free to marry Bianca. This initial murder begins the series of subsequent revenges of

82 Honour, a theme popular in Fletcherian plays, was, as we have seen, a matter of intense concern to the Renaissance gentleman and courtier. Sometimes the theme received a noble expression, as in Captain Agar's attitude to honour. Hippolito's words below show, however, that his conception of honour is Italianate.

Dare he do thus much, and know me alive?
Put case one must be vicious, as I know myself
Monstrously guilty, there's a blind time made for't,
He might use only that, - 'twere conscionable;
Art, silence, closeness, subtlety, and darkness,
Are fit for such a business; but there's no pity
To be bestowed on an apparent sinner,
And impudent daylight lecher.

(IV. ii. 4 - 11.)

Livia, Guardiano, and Isabella.

Livia seeks vengeance against Hippolito for the slaying of her lover. In her grief she urges Guardiano and the two fools to call officers to apprehend Hippolito, declaring that by so doing

You do heaven's vengeance and the law just service.

(IV. ii. 59.)

But it was one of the main purposes of revenge plays with villains as heroes (and a subsidiary purpose of domestic tragedy, too) to demonstrate that vengeance belongs to God by showing that death is the reward of those who assume this divine prerogative. Hence in such plays the revengers have to be brought to their dooms like the victims of the original crimes. Middleton consequently allows Guardiano and the fools to ignore Livia's promptings. Moreover, since Middleton wished to portray in Livia another of Kyd's conventions, that of "the desperately revengeful woman" and

83 That this is a play of the type described is made clear by Fredson Bowers, op. cit., p. 165. He states that "Women, Beware Women is emphatically a villain play, and one that exploits the character of the revengeful villainess to the full," but he goes on to say that "curiously enough it is so overrun with evil characters, each with his own particular grudge to revenge, that it lacks a real villain protagonist. The popular portrayal of lust, intrigue, and villainy, however," Bowers adds, "does not overshadow the importance of revenge to the plot. The first three acts present the necessary exposition and preparation. With the start of Act IV the train of revenge is laid and the revengeful plots absorb the whole interest of the audience until the denouement. In its own form Women, Beware Women has as much right to be called a revenge tragedy as The Spanish Tragedy."

84 Bowers, op. cit., p. 163. Bowers seems to feel that Livia is the chief revenger even though the text indicates that Guardiano does most of the active planning (IV. ii. 157 ff.). On p. 163 Bowers states that "Middleton...was the first dramatist to use as many as three different revenges, each one separate from the other and yet so interdependent that the chain of cause and effect is never broken." Actually there are four revenges since Livia's and Guardiano's are not identical in motive; and how Bowers would alter the first part of his statement in the light of his mistaken dating of the play ("produced in 1613", he says on p. 163) only a careful study of revenge tragedies written between 1613 and 1621 could tell.
since, as Dodson remarks, Livia is "the catalytic agent of all the evil which takes place in the play [and since it] is she who has been chiefly instrumental in the building of an edifice of unholy love"85, Livia must take an active part in the revenge and thus contrive her own destruction. She therefore joins Guardiano in his plot to destroy Hippolito.

Guardiano, angered by the mockery that the tainted marriage he has arranged will bring upon him and furious at being deceived, vows, I'll list to nothing but revenge and anger Whose counsels I will follow. (IV. ii. 94 – 5.)

He then bids Livia to dissemble friendship to Hippolito and Isabella until vengeance can be obtained under the protection of a wedding masque, assuring her that

mischiefs acted
Under the privilege of a marriage-triumph,
At the Duke's hasty nuptials, will be thought
Things merely accidental, all's by chance,
Not got of their own natures.86

The touch of hubris in Guardiano's blind confidence is an invitation to disaster, and is like that of the typical revenger.

Isabella, too, illustrates the revenge theme. After turning from Hippolito "everlastingly", she swears,

for her
That durst so 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,


86 Vindice, in similar circumstances, thought that his disguise would give him a like immunity. His fatal complacency is akin to Guardiano's here.
I'll act it without pity. (IV. ii. 145 - 51.)

Her ruthless cruelty is a conventional trait of the stock revenger, and we may see in her determination to dissemble forgiveness to Livia until her revenge can be effected a variant on the revenger's disguise which was a convention introduced by Marston. (This variant, of course, is observable in the feigning of Guardiano and Livia, too.)

The final character exemplifying the revenge motif is Bianca. Though pretending to be surely reconciled with the Duke's brother, the Cardinal (V. i. 50 - 6.), she discloses in an aside her true feelings and intents.

But I've made surer work; this shall not blind me;
He that begins so early to reprove,
Quickly rid him, or look for little love:
Beware a brother's envy; he's next heir too.
Cardinal, you die this night; the plot's laid surely;
In time of sports death may steal in securely,
Then 'tis least thought on....
(V. i. 57 - 63.)

Delay in revenge is a convention of the tragedy of blood. Since revenge gets under way in Women, Beware Women only by the fourth act, delay is not as prominent a feature of this play as in some others, but it is there in a fairly obvious form.

Hippolito delays least of all. A night and part of a morning elapse before he is able to wreak vengeance on Leantio (IV. i. 141. - IV. ii. 3.). In Hippolito's enforced delay (he is unable to locate his victim) there is none of that cat-and-mouse sadism characteristic of the typical cunning revenger since the time of Malevole. He is more like the Colonel in A Fair Quarrel who instantly seeks redress for the slightest injury to his honour.
Guardiano, Livia, Isabella, and Bianca, however, delay somewhat in the conventional fashion. They are willing to bide their time until the ripe moment assures them maximum satisfaction. Even in their cases, though, the delay is short compared to Vindice's years-long harboured revenge (or Piero's protracted wait in Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*). Fredson Bowers explains why delay is necessarily minimized in *Women, Beware Women.*

Since lust is the predominant motive there can be no delay by the revenger to fill up the action, nor can an elaborate and intriguing course of revenge complicate the play, for the motive of lust is not sufficiently dignified for such a full treatment.\(^87\)

A Senecan convention conspicuously absent from this play is the supernatural. No ghosts prompt revengers into action, no secrets or revelations are disclosed by the spirit world, no heavenly signs are given in the shape of comets, thunder, and lightning.\(^88\) At most there may be a faint survival of the latter in Bianca's reply to Leantio's

> But come I to your everlasting parting once, Thunder shall seem soft music to that tempest. (IV. i. 89 - 90.)

With infuriating nonchalance Bianca replies,

> 'Twas said last week there would be change of weather, When the moon hung so, and belike you heard it. (IV. i. 91 - 2.)

The Italianate mode of Senecan revenge tragedy, as has been noted in the third chapter of this study, utilized the convention of Machiavellism. In terms of plot, Machiavellism meant "a treacherous way of

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88 Such portents were a notable feature of *The Revenger's Tragedy.*
killing, generally by poison". The more ingenious the manner in which the poison was administered, the more satisfying did revenge become. Thus in the masque play-within-the-play which concludes Women, Beware Women Hippolito writhes in agony from the venom which tips the arrows shot by the Cupids; Livia dies from inhaling the noxious vapours from the censer prepared by the Nymph, Isabella; the Duke takes a fatal drink from the cup offered by Ganymede, a masquer, who should have presented it to the Cardinal; and Bianca, upon realizing that her plot has miscarried, kisses the poison from the Duke's lips, adding to it a drink from the lethal cup she had intended for another. Possibly Isabella, too, dies, at the hand of a poisoner (V. i. 155 - 9.) since it is unlikely that Livia's "take that" refers to a stabbing. In any case, Machiavellian killing abounds in Women, Beware Women.

It should, however, be pointed out here that, reminiscent of Hamlet as the switch in poisoned cups might be, Middleton had what was believed to be authentic history as his source, the Itinerary of Fynes Moryson, which tells of a similar accident which befell a piece of march­pane sent by Bianca to the Cardinal who was about to accompany his brother on a hunting expedition.90

In terms of characterization, Machiavellism meant a treacherous, dissembling hypocrisy which took great delight in bringing death at a


90 Schoenbaum, op. cit., p. 112, gives Moryson's version of the accident and Bianca's subsequent suicide.
moment when the victim was experiencing great happiness. These conventions we have already seen to be present in Guardiano, Livia, and Isabella.

The final Senecan convention profitable to study in Women, Beware Women is that of the treacherous revels. The play-within-the-play was first used by Kyd in The Spanish Tragedy, but many subsequent dramatists resorted to it. Middleton himself was one of its most frequent exploiters, three of his previous dramas having used the enclosed play and more than half a dozen having employed masques. Revels of a treacherous kind Middleton had, of course, adopted for The Revenger's Tragedy, but there the nature of the masque of revengers is very sketchily given whereas in Women, Beware Women the "invention" performed in celebration of the Duke's nuptials is highly elaborate.

The various appeals to the eye in earlier parts of the play - the magnificent procession of the Duke and the "states" in I. iii., for instance - are spectacles in the older Elizabethan stage tradition, though even in the example cited, by virtue of its extraordinary gorgeousness, the influence of the newer theatrical tradition, the Fletcherian spectacular, might be seen. The stage direction at I. iii. 104 ff. gives this:

Enter six Knights bare-headed, then two Cardinals, then the LORD CARDINAL, then the DUKE; after him the states of Florence by two and two, with variety of music and song. They pass over the stage in great pomp, and exeunt.

The music and dancing (III. ii. 135 ff.) at Livia's banquet (itself a device popular with Middleton and of considerable value as spectacle), Isabella's rather indifferent though thematically apt song (III. ii. 143–51.), the Cardinal's torch-lit visit to his brother (IV. i. 180 ff.), and the wedding procession at the beginning of IV. iii. are plainly in the older tradition.

But the elaborate, carefully wrought wedding masque clearly reveals the influence of Fletcherian drama (as well, of course, of the court masque) for it is a pastoral, it deals with true love, it presents a Nymph troubled by a dilemma of choice between two equally deserving Shepherds, it shows the Nymph appealing by song and prayer to the goddess, Juno, for a decision, and it utilizes the contrivances and machines popular with the writers of courtly spectacles (Juno, attended by Cupids, is lowered from Heaven by rope and pulley). The appeal to the eye is pronounced. In what Bianca thinks is the antimasque, cup-bearers offer her, the Duke, and the Cardinal a "celestical cup" of good fortune in marriage. The stage-direction for the cup-bearers indicates what a striking sight their entrance would be (V. i. 91 ff.).

Enter HYMEN in a yellow robe, CANYMED in a blue robe powdered with stars, and HERBE in a white robe with golden stars, each bearing a covered cup: they dance a short dance, and then make obeisance to the DUKE, &c.

Almost equally striking would be the initial appearance of the nymphs (V. i. 112 ff.).

Enter two Nymphs, bearing tapers lighted: then ISABELLA as a Nymph, dressed with flowers and garlands, carrying a censer with fire
in it: they set the censer and tapers on JUNO'S altar with much reverence, singing this ditty in two parts:

"Juno, nuptial goddess...."

The descent of Juno (V. i. 144.) through clouds of incense must have been similarly spectacular.

Middleton is careful to diversify the metres of the songs and speeches in the masque, making them appropriate to the speakers and to the situations. Moreover, as in The Revenger's Tragedy, he extracts irony from dialogue, action, and situation. "But", Muriel Bradbrook points out, the masque in Women, Beware Women is more elaborately ironical. Livia, the procuress, plays the part of Juno Pronuba; and her niece Isabella, whose incestuous love and prudential marriage form the subplot, a nymph wooed by her two swains. The colourless chastity of the masque and the lewdness of the true situation are violently opposed to each other.92

Because of the evident pains that Middleton took with this masque, he cannot be charged with not knowing or caring what he did in the final act of his play. The masque is dramatic93 in its action and in its thematic and tonal relation to the main play, and brief as it is, it is as good as nearly anything he wrote of this kind.94 It is not quite true, then, that

92 Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy, p. 46.

93 "Mostly the resource of the private-theatre playwright, the introduced masque was of two kinds, the dramatic and the non-dramatic", says W. J. Lawrence in "The Persistence of Elizabethan Conventionalisms", an essay in his The Elizabethan Playhouse and Other Studies, Second Series, Shakespeare Head Press, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1913, p. 161.

Middleton wanted art; that is not the source of the failure of the last act of *Women, Beware Women*. Art is there, even lavishly. The source of the failure is that instead of there being here the kind of art that distinguishes the first three acts of the play, art so concealed that its shaping power is life, there is art that is merely artifice. The hackneyed convention of the treacherous revels receives no transforming interpretation. It is true that death is felt to be inevitable for these morally dead people\(^{95}\), but the means that Middleton employs to bring about the catastrophe are factitious. Thus, when as a consequence of the commonplace masque conclusion five bodies cumber the stage, we realize that we have not even so much been purged of the emotions of pity and terror by the presence of death, let alone been exalted by a sense of triumph in defeat; and this failure in turn results from the fact that the artificial denouement destroyed what remained of those emotions quite some time before the catastrophe occurred.

*Women, Beware Women* is a great failure. As Jump remarks, a play

containing scenes such as those of Bianca's seduction, the banquet, and Leantio's visit to his wife's lodging at court, and involving personages such as Leantio, Livia, and, above all, Bianca herself; has clearly an enduring importance.\(^{96}\)

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\(^{95}\) Bradbrook, *op. cit.*, p. 233 - 4, makes this point. "The huddle of murders may be improbable, but the overhanging atmosphere of mortality in the last act makes all the method of narrative of subsidiary importance. Death in some form is felt to be inevitable. Bianca, Leantio, Hippolito, Isabella and Livia have destroyed themselves already by destroying all moral sense, and physical death has been pronounced upon them by the Cardinal who speaks with the voice of Heaven...."

\(^{96}\) "Middleton's Tragedies" in Ford's *The Age of Shakespeare*, p. 361.
Though Jump is a little too severe in his strictures on the wedding masque (a "ridiculous holocaust", "incredible and silly", he calls it\textsuperscript{97}), his assertion that the masque

\textit{makes it impossible to praise \textit{Women Beware Women} as an entire work of art}\textsuperscript{98}

is sound. Sound, too, are his suggestions as to why convention in the pejorative sense should dominate the last two acts. As we have seen, he believes that Middleton lost interest in his characters as soon as their spiritual degradation was complete. But more specifically with reference to the hackneyed convention of the fatal amateur theatricals he suggests that the taste of the playgoers permitted such a denouement.\textsuperscript{99} With this judgment we may wholly agree, and if confirmation is required we need turn only to Schoenbaum who says,

Once again the dramatist is unable to break fully with the melodramatic tradition of his age.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{97} "Middleton's Tragedies" in Ford's \textit{The Age of Shakespeare}, p. 360.

\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 360 - l.

\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 360: "No doubt custom made this acceptable to the Jacobean audience...."

\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Middleton's Tragedies}, p. 130.
CHAPTER VII

THE CHANGELING

The audience that gathered in the Phoenix on May 7, 1622, was privileged to see the first performance of Middleton's greatest tragedy.² Although Women, Beware Women approaches it in the remorseless honesty with which the progress of human degradation is described, and even excels it in structural coherence, The Changeling far surpasses Middleton's previous work in swiftness of action, in the "ruthlessly logical sequence of every word and act"² of its central figures, and in sheer concentrated power. Most students of drama accord it a position in the front rank of the plays of its time, and many are willing to set it next to the tragedies of Shakespeare, with only the two great she-tragedies of Webster vying for position.

But applauding The Changeling as they do, nearly all critics see the sub-plot, written by William Rowley, as a serious defect in an otherwise extraordinary play.³ Their view will be defended here. It is the contention of this chapter that The Changeling, in the main plot, is freer


2 F. S. Boas, An Introduction to Stuart Drama, p. 245.

3 As will be seen below, William Empson in Some Versions of Pastoral and Muriel Bradbrook in Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy and The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy defend the sub-plot with considerable ingenuity.
from convention in the deprecative sense of the word than any other play by Middleton, but that the highly conventional and wooden sub-plot (for the presence of which Middleton must assume responsibility) mars the play.

The source of most of the action in the main plot of *The Changeling* is Book I, History iv of John Reynolds's popular homiletic, *The Triumph of God's Revenge, Against the crying, and Exceivable Sinne of Murther*....

... wherein (by the just judgment of God) we shall see Ambition bitterly scourged, Revenge sharply rewarded, and Murther severely punished....

H. H. Adams enlarges on these words by Reynolds to demonstrate how closely much Elizabethan non-dramatic literature was allied to domestic tragedy. All the "histories" in Reynolds's book, Adams writes,

are told with the idea of showing the operation of Providence. In many cases, Reynolds chooses middle-class protagonists, offering no apology for the selection. Instead he is willing to employ anyone to illustrate his conception of the Providence of God....

In the conclusion to the first "history" Reynolds states that although

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4 This is the first part of the title of the edition of 1635. Adams, *English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy*, p. 48, n. 64, cites it in full. Middleton, of course, used the 1621 edition. Adams gives the fullest readily available account of the nature of Reynolds's collection of exempla.

5 Quoted in Adams, *op. cit.*, pp. 48 - 9, where the long "s" is preserved.

murder may be concealed for a time God will in due course reveal and "severely and sharply revenge" it. But, he adds,

Gods Providence and Justice in the discovery thereof, is as different as miraculous; for sometimes he protracts and defers it of purpose, either to mollifie or to harden our hearts...yea, sometimes he makes the Murtherer himself as well an Instrument to discover, as he hath been an actor to commit Murther; yea, and many times he punisheth one sin by and in another, and when the Murtherer sits most secure, and thinks least of it, then he heaps coals of fire on his head, and suddenly cuts him off with the revenging sword of his fierce wrath and indignation.7

The relevance of all this to Women, Beware Women is apparent, and it is equally applicable to The Changeling. Yet it is not possible to see the latter play any more in terms of domestic tragedy than to see Othello in that way. Both are domestic tragedies only in a wider sense than that which proves meaningful for Arden of Feversham or A Woman Killed With Kindness( or even Women, Beware Women). The factor that sets these plays off against The Changeling is the sharp explicitness of their didactic element. They are homilies which lose no opportunity to declare repeatedly the theological and moral doctrines illustrated by their plots. Their authors are careful to point the lessons embodied in their exemplum fables, and are often willing to sacrifice such elements of drama as motivation and psychological truth in order to show the readiness of a person to fall into sin.8 Although Middleton's realistic insight forbade such

7 Quoted by Adams, op. cit., p. 49.
8 Ibid., p. 188. Adams adds, "Dramatists seemed to fear that if they made the fall of the hero plausible they would vitiate their moral lessons" (p. 188.). Does this fear, we might pause to ask, account for Middleton's failure to mention Bianca's greed prior to the seduction scene in Women, Beware Women?
inartistic short-cuts in *Women, Beware Women*, that play comes closer to domestic tragedy than does his last great play because of *Women, Beware Women*'s bourgeois character and strong didactic note. "Its themes", Bradbrook remarks, "are nearer to a thesis" than are those of *The Changeling*. And though like the earlier tragedy, there is a careful pointing of the moral in *The Changeling*, this didactic summation is merely a convention common to Elizabethan tragedy of whatever kind. The scaffold speech is conspicuously absent, as is the four-fold pattern of repentance (contrition, confession, affirmation of faith, and amendment of life).

Virtually nothing of the fragmentary repentance theme that was discoverable in *Women, Beware Women* is to be found here, nor is the middle-class tone. Only the Duke in the earlier play was noticeably aristocratic, but here the main personages are at least gentlemen in the Elizabethan sense or daughters of the governors of castles. Most of the scenes of the main plot have their setting in the castle, and even the sub-plot takes place in a home much higher in the social scale than that of Leantio and his mother.

What brings *The Changeling* near at all to domestic tragedy is what brings *Othello* close to it: the focusing of attention upon the ideas, feelings, and motives of the few characters centrally involved in the gradual break-down of a love-match. Thus, not only is *The Changeling* a psychological tragedy; it is also

a personal tragedy; the effects of Beatrice-Joanna's crime upon her father, her murdered lover's brother, their houses, and the state are entirely subordinated to the effect upon

We have seen that a shift in focus marred Hengist, but it is true of Women, Beware Women, too, that the dramatist's interest seemed to switch from Leantio to Bianca, then to Livia and the Duke, next back to Leantio and Bianca, and from them to Hippolito and Isabella, Livia and Guardiano, and then finally to Bianca. Even the ridiculous Ward played an inordinately prominent role. Much of the intensity of The Changeling, then, derives from Middleton's single-minded concentration on Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores. But so keen was Middleton's interest in the way the mind works that the very strength of his concentration of focus probably accounts for the absence of homiletics in The Changeling which only in a very general way gives support to the moral and theological doctrines of its age.

If domestic tragedy exerted only slight pressure on Middleton's final tragedy, revenge tragedy had clearly a stronger influence. It will be seen, however, that this vogue did not exercise the baleful authority here that it did for the previous tragedy.

The study of convention and device in The Changeling thus becomes largely an examination of conventions that Middleton had by 1621 made peculiarly his own. To their elucidation we now turn, first delineating those of theme, then those of character and staging. Conventions of structure will be examined last when the sub-plot is assessed. First, then, the sex themes.

The sex themes of *The Changeling* reveal a family likeness to those of many of Middleton's earlier plays, but they show the closest relationship to *Hengist* and *Women, Beware Women*. In each case the woman most prominently involved in the main action attaches herself to a man other than her initial lover in order to gain certain advantages but discovers that the liaison brings death instead. In each case the lustful partner in the liaison dies, too, as a result of his sinful desires. In each case desire leads inevitably to crime. In each, sex and pathological traits are linked. But unlike Vortiger who never really evokes our admiration, or the Duke of Florence whose conventional traits almost turn him into a stock figure, the man to whom Beatrice attaches herself in *The Changeling* is an extraordinarily fascinating person, tremendously impressive in his resolution, a man with whom there is no temporizing. His single-minded resolve to possess Beatrice achieves an intensity of determination which has scarcely a parallel in literature. Hence the study of the sex themes in *The Changeling* inevitably utilizes him as a point of reference.

The first sex theme encountered in the play is that of love at first sight, a convention that Middleton had resorted to with noticeable effect in such Fletcherian plays as *More Dissemblers besides Women* and *A Fair Quarrel*, and that had proved so significant for *Women, Beware Women*. But instead of the lecherous eye of an all-powerful Duke, there is turned on Beatrice-Joanna in the first scene the charmed gaze of a gentleman soldier of fortune whose intentions are as honourable as his nature was once impervious to love. The quality of his attitude to Beatrice and to love is important since it is against this that Middleton
will set the quality of Beatrice's love for him and of De Flores' love for her. Alsemoro reveals the temper of his mind in the opening speech of the play.

'Twas in the temple where I first beheld her,
And now again the same: what omen yet
Follows of that? none but imaginary;
Why should my hopes or fate be timorous?
The place is holy, so is my intent:
I love her beauties to the holy purpose;
And that, methinks, admits comparison
With man's first creation, the place blessed,
And is his right home back, if he achieve it.
The church hath first begun our interview,
And that's the place must join us into one;
So there's beginning and perfection too.
(I. i. 1 - 12.)

It is apparent from these words that, initially at least, Alsemoro is noble in nature, and it becomes apparent as the play proceeds that a dramatic technique that Middleton had long practised is being once more employed: the virtue figure is placed in sharp contrast with the embodiments of vice.

Love at first sight is Beatrice's experience, too. Although she bids Alsemoro reconsider in the cooler light of reason his feelings for her (I. i. 73 - 8.), her aside following close upon this advice reveals that Alsemoro has replaced her betrothed, Alonzo De Piracquo, in her affections (if he had ever really been there):

11 Phoenix, Castiza in The Revenger's Tragedy, the Lady in The Second Maiden's Tragedy, and Aurelius and Castiza in Hengist are memorable examples.

12 Most scholars assign this first scene to Rowley, but it is evident to many readers of the play that he must have worked in very close collaboration with Middleton in planning the conception and details of it. The matter is summarized by Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies, pp. 208 - 9, et seq.
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. 85 - 8.)

A comic burlesque of the love-at-first-sight convention is begun with Jasperino's determination to emulate his friend (I. i. 91 ff.). Sighting Beatrice's waiting-woman, Diaphanta, Jasperino remarks,

I meant to be a venturer in this voyage:
Yonder's another vessel, I'll board her;
If she be lawful prize, down goes her topsail.
(I. i. 92 - 4.)

Accosting Diaphanta, he banter with her, rejecting her recommendation of a local physician to cure him of his madness and announcing that he knows of a better medicine.13

I could show thee such a thing with an
ingredience that we two would compound
together, and if it did not tame the
maddest blood i' th' town for two hours
after, I'll ne'er profess physic again.
(I. i. 146 - 9.)

Obviously, these words by the bawdy Jasperino disclose yet another sex motif, the theme of lust.

Often as Middleton had embodied the theme of lust in earlier plays, never did he do so with the power of this theme's delineation in The Changeling. His success is partly the result of concentrating the focus on De Flores' desire for Beatrice, and partly of the conception of De Flores' character. Before examining the lust theme, then, some other

13 The mention of madness, of "a doctor in the city that undertakes the cure of such", and of medicines hints at the sub-plot to come and at the chastity test of IV. ii.
matters connected with De Flores' nature and with his feelings for Beatrice must be reviewed.

De Flores is irresistibly attracted to Beatrice-Joanna whom he feels compelled to love in the absence of any rational hope, and despite the fact that Beatrice loathes him as she would a deadly poison (I. i. 114.), hating his ugly and baleful presence to the extent that she refuses even to touch again the glove that she has dropped and that De Flores has picked up to offer to her (I. i. 227 - 233.). De Flores recognizes his compulsive attraction from the outset. As Beatrice throws down her other glove he remarks,

Here's a favour come with a mischief now! I know
She had rather wear my pelt 'tann'd in a pair
Of dancing pumps, than I should thrust my finger
Into her sockets here: I know she hates me,
Yet cannot choose but love her.

(I. i. 234 - 38.)

The compulsiveness of his behaviour is dwelt upon in the early scenes of the play, notably in the first scene of "Act Two where De Flores' cynicism, malcontent pride, and snatching at straws receive attention in one of the play's many asides. Seeing Beatrice, De Flores soliloquizes,

Yonder's she;
Whatever ails me, now a-late especially,
I can as well be hanged as refrain seeing her;
Some twenty times a-day, nay, not so little,
Do I force errands, frame ways and excuses,
To come into her sight; and I've small reason for't,
And less encouragement, for she baits me still
Every time worse than other; does profess herself
The cruellest enemy to my face in town;
At no hand can abide the sight of me,
As if danger or ill luck hung in my looks.

14 The sexual image here is significant not only of the quality of De Flores' mind but also of the subsequent action.
I must confess my face is bad enough,
But I know far worse has better fortune,
And not endur'd alone, but doted on;
And yet such pick-hair'd faces, chins like witches',
Here and there five hairs whispering in a corner,
As if they grow in fear one of another,
Wrinkles like troughs, where swine-deformity swills
The tears of perjury, that lie there like wash
Fallen from the slimy and dishonest eye;
Yet such a one plucks sweets without restraint,
And has the grace of beauty to his sweet.
Though my hard fate has thrust me out to servitude,
I tumbled into th' world a gentleman.
She turns her blessed eye upon me now,
And I'll endure all storms before I part with't.

(II. i. 26 - 51.)

Although his recall of the success of ugly lovers offers preparation for the subsequent action, De Flores' circumstances suggest that Middleton is depicting in the major lust scenes of the play an "improbable hypothesis".15 With great daring, the dramatist posits an unlikely situation: a beautiful, well-born lady falls in love with an ugly broken retainer for whom she has hitherto felt a disquieting, inexplicable dread, indeed, a hatred. But Middleton's command of the way the mind works was so complete and his interest in psychological realism so keen that in place of Fletcher's intentionally unreal situations, his portrayal of the transformation of hatred into love is utterly convincing. The improbable hypothesis receives entirely believable confirmation.

First, though, Middleton is concerned with making the union of De Flores and Beatrice seem as unlikely as possible. Hence he stresses such elements in their situation as Beatrice's beauty, her social position, her betrothal to Piracquo, her active choice of Alsemero, and her in-

We derive some notion of Beatrice's physical attractiveness from Alsemero's opening speech, and some from Jasperino's wonder over his friend's reluctance to continue his journey. Jasperino is certain that it cannot be love that causes the delay, as the following colloquy reveals.

**Jasperino:** I never knew
Your inclination to travel at a pause,
With any cause to hinder it, till now.
Ashore you were wont to call your servants up;
And help to trap your horses for the speed;
At sea I've seen you weigh the anchor with 'em,
Hoist sails for fear to lose the foremost breath,
Be in continual prayers for fair winds;
And have you chang'd your orisons?

**Alsemero:** No, friend;
I keep the same church, same devotion.

**Jasperino:** Lover I'm sure you're none: the stoic was
Found in you long ago; your mother nor
Best friends, who have set snares of beauty, ay,
And choice ones too, could never trap you that way:
What might be the cause?

(I. i. 26 - 39.)

We may guess from this that Beatrice must be a woman of striking beauty, indeed, as she perhaps must be in order to have attracted such a man as her betrothed, Alonzo De Piracquo, who, according to Vermandero's fulsome eulogy, is a man of very considerable parts. Vermandero describes him to Alsemero thus.

I tell you, sir, the gentleman's complete,
A courtier and a gallant, enrich'd
With many fair and noble ornaments;
I would not change him for a son-in-law
For any he in Spain, the proudest he,
And we have great ones, that you know.

(I. i. 214 - 19.)

Beatrice's instinctive loathing of her father's poor retainer, De Flores, is suggested in her sharp impatience with his spun-out announce-
ment of Vermandero's approach (I. i. 95 - 102.), an episode paralleled at greater length in II. i. where De Flores brings Beatrice news of Alonzo De Piracquo's arrival (ll. 51 - 76.). Both episodes are followed by confessions by Beatrice that the sight of De Flores provokes a strange disquiet in her. In reply to Alsemero's remark that she seems suddenly displeased, Beatrice answers,

Your pardon, sir, 'tis my infirmity;
Nor can I other reason render you,
Than his or hers, of some particular thing
They must abandon as a deadly poison,
Which to a thousand other tastes were wholesome;
Such to mine eyes is that same fellow there,
The same that report speaks of the basilisk.
(I. i. 111 - 17.)

Alsemero attempts to reassure Beatrice by pointing out to her that hers is a common experience of little consequence, and, in words which unconsciously and ironically phrase the love-hate theme in the play, adds,

There's scarce a thing but is both lov'd and loath'd,
(I. i. 127.)

urging his own "poison", a cherry, as proof of the frequency and the triviality of the phenomenon. It is in accordance with Middleton's conception of the play that Alsemero should thus be at once percipient and blind, that his explanation should be true but dreadfully irrelevant.

As Beatrice sees De Flores approaching with news of Piracquo's coming she declares in aside,

This ominous ill-fac'd fellow more disturbs me
Than all my other passions.
(II. i. 52 - 3.)

The later confession reveals an even profounder degree of disturbance; Beatrice, deeply wrought, soliloquizes:
I never see this fellow but I think
Of some harm towards me, danger's in my mind still;
I scarce leave trembling of an hour after:
The next good mood I find my father in,
I'll get him quite discarded.

(II. i. 89 - 93.)

Why she should feel this way towards De Flores Beatrice fails
to understand. Students of the play have pondered the problem, and one
of them, Schoenbaum, summarizes the matter thus.

In the early scenes Beatrice has no consciousness
of the nature of De Flores' feelings toward her,
and so there is no rational basis for her aversion. Perhaps it is, as she imagines, the spontaneous
antipathy of beauty to ugliness; perhaps - and
more likely - it is a deeply instinctual response
to the force of De Flores' obsession.¹⁶

That there is ugliness for beauty to be repelled by, the play makes abundantly evident. It is an ugliness of a corrosive and lethal kind, and it
is concentrated in the figure of De Flores who, Bradbrook writes,

is constantly referred to as a "poison", implying
I think the natural antipathy which the good
people in the play feel for him....¹⁷

We have seen above how De Flores dwelt in soliloquy on his ill-favoured
countenance, on "pick-hair'd faces, chins like witches';/Here and there
five hairs whispering in a corner", on

Wrinkles like troughs, where swine-deformity swills
The tears of perjury, that lie there like wash
Fallen from the slimy and dishonest eye,

(II. i. 40 - 5.)

but a similar masochistic display, also cynically optimistic, appears a
few lines later, immediately after Beatrice's bitter, termagant quarrel

¹⁶ Middleton's Tragedies, p. 140.
¹⁷ Themes and Conventions, p. 234.
with him:

Why, am not I an ass to devise ways
Thus to be rail'd at? I must see her still!
I shall have a mad qualm within this hour again,
I know't; and, like a common Garden-bull,
I do but take breath to be lugg'd again.
What this may bode I know not; I'll despair the less,
Because there's daily precedents of bad faces
Belov'd beyond all reason; these foul chops
May come into favour one day 'mongst their fellows:
Wrangling has prov'd the mistress of good pastime;
As children cry themselves asleep, I ha' seen
Women have chid themselves a-bed to men.

(II. i. 77 - 88.)

In the following hire scene other details of De Flores' ugliness are revealed. His pimples and his flaming skin are mentioned (II. ii. 75 - 80.), and the interview concludes with Beatrice's reference to his dog-like appearance (l. 148.), and with De Flores once more drawing attention to "this bad face" (l. 151.).

A later expression of the antipathy felt for ugliness occurs in the final act. Tomaso, searching for his brother's murderer, catches sight of De Flores and is constrained to soliloquize,

O, the fellow that some call honest De Flores;
But methinks honesty was hard bested
To come here for a lodging; as if a queen
Should make her palace of a pest-house:
I find a contrariety in nature
Betwixt that face and me; the least occasion
Would give me game upon him; yet he's so foul
One would scarce touch [him] with a sword he lov'd
And made account of; so most deadly venemous,
He would go near to poison any weapon
That should draw blood on him; one must resolve
Never to use that sword again in fight
In way of honest manhood that strikes him;
Some river must devour it; 'twere not fit
That any man should find it.

(V. ii. 9 - 23.)

Allied with the poison imagery are the animal epithets that
Beatrice reserves for De Flores. She calls him a "serpent" (I. i. 227.) and a "viper" (III. iv. 166.), terms which further suggest De Flores' repellant nature.

The improbability of there being love of any kind between such a man as De Flores - noxious in countenance, to many disquieting in personality, and broken in fortune - and such a woman as Beatrice, proudly conscious of "degree", wilful, and loathing De Flores' officious service and deeply agitated by his very presence, the unlikelihood of passion between these two is virtually a certainty. But Middleton succeeds in transforming his improbable hypothesis into an entirely credible actuality.

One factor that makes for this credibility is the intensity of De Flores' desire for Beatrice. His feeling for her cannot be called love, as Schoenbaum remarks\(^\text{1}\), but the term "lust"\(^2\) does not quite correctly describe his passion either since there is a gentleness in his response to her yielding (III. iv. 167 - 71.). "Lust", however, is the closest approximation one can conveniently employ in the designation of the feeling in such a speech as his reply to this promise of Beatrice:

\[
\text{As thou art forward, and thy service dangerous,}
\text{Thy reward shall be precious,}
\]

(II. ii. 130 - 1.)

De Flores answers in words which have altogether another meaning for Beatrice,

\[
\text{That I've thought on;}
\text{I have assured myself of that beforehand,}
\text{And know it will be precious; the thought ravishes!}
\]

(II. ii. 132 - 4.)

\(^\text{18}\) Middleton's Tragedies, p. 139.
His meaning becomes thoroughly unequivocal in the soliloquy following upon Beatrice's departure:

0 my blood!
Methinks I feel her in mine arms already;
Her wanton fingers combing out this beard,
And, being pleased, praising this bad face.
Hunger and pleasure, they'll commend sometimes
Slovenly dishes, and feed heartily on 'em.
Nay, which is stranger, refuse daintier for 'em:
Some women are odd feeders.

(II. ii. 148 - 55.)

Not only does De Flores' driving appetite for Beatrice appear here; his masochistic preoccupation with his own ugliness and his cynical, wish-fulfilling reflections on women do, too.

There is yet another significant characteristic of De Flores' attitude buried in this speech, his pride of class. He is a gentleman born, and though fallen on such hard times that he is reduced to performing servant-like attendance on Vermandero, he remains acutely conscious of his birth as the following words show.

Though my hard fate has thrust me out to servitude,
I tumbled into th' world a gentleman.

(II. i. 48 - 9.)

And his pride in his birth appears forcibly on two occasions when he and Beatrice are alone together. The first occurs in the great tricking scene of Act Three. Beatrice offers him three thousand golden florens as payment for ridding her of De Piracquo. De Flores' reply is prompt:

What! salary? now you move me.
Do you place me in the rank of verminous fellows,
To destroy things for wages? offer gold
[For] the life-blood of man? is anything
Valued too pretious for my recompense?

I could ha' hired
A journeyman in murder at this rate,
And mine own conscience might have [slept at ease],
And have had the work brought home.

(III. iv. 64 - 72.)

(Beatrice's somewhat later appeal to "the distance that creation/Set 'twixt thy blood and mine" (III. iv. 131 - 2.) merely urges De Flores to a mercilessly logical appraisal of the effect on her character of her complicity with him in Piracquo's murder.) The second noteworthy appearance of De Flores' pride of class, of, indeed, snobbery, occurs in the last act. Beatrice has foolishly trusted Diaphanta to surrender at midnight her place in Alsemero's wedding bed. When her servant fails to keep her bargain, Beatrice groans in jealous agony, but De Flores cynically and contemptuously asks, "... who would trust/A waiting-woman?" and coarsely declares that even an apothecary's daughter would have been more trustworthy and less insatiable (V. i. 14 - 22.). It is thus class pride as well as unbridled sexual appetite that impels De Flores along the road of murder and lust and death. That both pride and lust are intertwined in his relations with Beatrice we may see in his gloating assessment in Act Five of what conquest of her has meant to him.

The value that De Flores put upon the enjoyment of Beatrice's person is revealed in his penultimate speech. So high an estimate does he place upon the satisfaction of his desire that one is almost constrained to see in De Flores' career some hints of the noble theme of "all for love or the world well lost" until one is reminded that, subsequent to Beatrice's capitulation to his demands, De Flores contrives fire and murder in order to preserve the safety and continuance of what, in contumaciously rejecting Beatrice's belief that he has been actuated by consideration for her honour,
he cynically calls his "pleasure" (V. i. 49.), and until one sees that this pleasure is primarily sexual satisfaction and secondarily the appeasement of pride. His next-to-last speech discloses his fiercely obsessive appetite for Beatrice's body and his exultant satisfaction in having made the high-born Beatrice his whore:

Her honour's prize
Was my reward; I thank life for nothing
But that pleasure; it was so sweet to me,
That I have drunk up all, left none behind
For any man to pledge me.  
(V. iii. 170 - 4.)

And the value that De Flores sets on her virginity is further indicated in his scorn of her interpretation of him as a hireling:

I place wealth after the heels of pleasure;
And were not I resolv'd in my belief
That thy virginity were perfect in thee,
I should but take my recompense with grudging,
As if I had but half my hopes I agreed for.  
(III. iv. 116 - 20.)

But that De Flores' attitude is almost wholly sensual, that his experience is sensuously rather than intellectually or spiritually valued, is made clear by the frequency of his references to sexual passion in appetitive terms, as well as by the fact that there is not the faintest hint anywhere in his desire for Beatrice of wanting to possess her legally or of wishing to found a family.19 Her virginity is for him a symbol of her sexual and pride-salving values, exclusively.

The equating of sexual desire with the appetite for food and drink patently coarsens the expression of De Flores' sexual feelings for

19 Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions, p. 217, points out that the "horns" joke in the drama of the time is "a symptom perhaps of the Elizabethan preoccupation with family and legitimacy." Hence, too, the tremendous interest in virginity and chastity.
Beatrice, as Muriel Bradbrook pointed out some time ago. The use of such imagery for this purpose Middleton had skilfully demonstrated in *Women, Beware Women* but there it also strongly reinforced the bourgeois tone of the play. In *The Changeling* no such additional purpose was needed; images of food and drink in the speech of De Flores are employed almost entirely to underscore the cynical lewdness and the animal hunger in his lust for Beatrice, as the following examples will show.

In his lustfully rapturous anticipation of his precious reward we have heard De Flores remarking,

> Hunger and pleasure, they'll commend sometimes
> Slovenly dishes, and feed heartily on 'em.
> Nay, which is stranger, refuse daintier for 'em:
> Some women are odd feeders.

(II. ii. 152 - 55.)

After slaying Piracquo, De Flores, momentarily expecting his reward, exclaims,

> My thoughts are at a banquet,

(III. iv. 18.)

and, finally, having enjoyed Beatrice's "honour", he asserts,

> it was so sweet to me,
> That I have drunk up all, left none behind
> For any man to pledge me.

(V. iii. 172 - 4.)

Lust and pride drive De Flores to a sexual feast which in the end stays his appetite forever.

20 Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions*, p. 235, says that the images involving sex and food and drink "belong chiefly to De Flores and reinforce the suggestion that his feelings for Beatrice-Joanna are essentially gross". There is some contradiction between this view of the food imagery and that expressed on p. 234 where she states that the poison imagery attaching to De Flores makes "him out as opposed to the healthful and life-giving associations of food and feasts".
In no other play did Middleton embody the theme of lust with such dramatic power or penetrating psychological insight. Most of the occasions of its embodiment in the City comedies were calculated to meet the narrow interests of an audience that sought mere entertainment from the slyly provocative or the obscene. To a considerable extent this is true, too, of the early tragedies (The Revenger's Tragedy was probably aimed at a coterie audience with Marstonian taste\textsuperscript{21}), and of the Fletcherian plays which by definition had a restricted appeal. Strong as the representation of lust is in Hengist, King of Kent, the childishness in Vortiger and the uncertainty of the playwright's focus mar the presentation of the theme. The highly conventional portrayal of the Duke in Women, Beware Women, moreover, detracts from the effectiveness of the lust theme of that play. Thus it is with De Flores in The Changeling that the theme assumes its most strikingly potent form.

There are, however, other exemplifications in the play of the lust motif.

A foreshadowing of Beatrice's infidelity to Alsemero appears in her treatment of Piracquo who fails to perceive what is so apparent to his brother, Tomaso. The latter quickly notices the reserve and indifference in Beatrice's behaviour towards the man who is her betrothed, and he pleads

\textsuperscript{21} Harbage, Shakespeares and the Rival Traditions, pp. 186 - 221, describes the select clientele's taste in sex, and on p. 188 states that The Revenger's Tragedy "would seem not out of place" in the coterie theatre, adding that in his opinion The Revenger's Tragedy is the Viper and Her Brood, a play that Middleton wrote for Paul's Boys but which does not survive, at least not with that title. See H. N. Hillebrand, "Thomas Middleton's The Viper's Brood", Modern Language Notes, vol. 42 (January, 1927), pp. 35 - 8.
urgently with Piracquo to break off the match at once:

Come, your faith's cozen'd in her, strongly cozen'd: 
Unsettle your affection with all speed
Wisdom can bring it to; your peace is ruined else.
Think what a torment 'tis to marry one
Whose heart is leap'd into another's bosom:
If ever pleasure she receive from thee,
It comes not in thy name, or of thy gift;
She lies but with another in thine arms,
He the half-father unto all thy children
In the conception; if he get 'em not,
She helps to get 'em for him; and how dangerous
And shameful her restraint may go in time to,
It is not to be thought on without sufferings.

(II. i. 128 - 39.)

The City comedy flavour of Tomaso's attitude towards women reappears in De Flores' words in the next scene:

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

(II. ii. 60 - 4.)

(There is an apparent echo here of Horsus's remark in Hengist, IV. ii. 272 - 9.). Not only does De Flores' remark voice a conventional Elizabethan notion about that frail vessel, woman; it also points up one aspect of the lust-degradation pattern of Middleton's three final tragedies.

No close parallel to De Flores' compulsive and pathological feelings exists in Beatrice's for Alsemero - wilful, headstrong love is the nature of that passion - but her later fatal attraction to De Flores is rightly seen by Alsemero in terms of lust. Beatrice tries to persuade Alsemero that she is innocent of his charge of infidelity, that she is not the whore that Jasperino's evidence (V. iii. 1 - 11.) would imply, but De Flores assures Alsemero that she lies (V. iii. 108.). Thus Alsemero's
words as he abandons Beatrice to De Flores declare his absolute rejection of her and also his bitter (though conventional) loathing of her lustfulness. Like a bawd loosing a customer to a harlot, Alsemero urges De Flores in this wise:

get you in to her, sir:
I'll be your pander now; rehearse again Your scene of lust, that you may be perfect When you shall come to act it to the black audience, Where howls and gnashings shall be music to you: Clip your adulteress freely, 'tis the pilot Will guide you to the mare mortuum, Where you shall sink to fathoms bottomless. 22

As foul a transformation as Alsemero justifiably sees in Beatrice, and deeply as she must be reprehended for learning to love a man like De Flores, it is difficult to believe that in her early relations with the ugly cynic lust was her motive at first, since her career with De Flores illustrates what might be called love at last sight. Alsemero's accusation of lust is warranted only in the later stages of that career.

The case of Diaphanta is a different matter. Although she rejects Jasperino's crude advances in the opening scene, she early reveals her attitude towards Alsemero. Conducting him privately to Beatrice's apartment, she declares,

complete gentleman,
I dare not be too busy with my praises, They're dangerous things to deal with. (II. ii. 3 - 5.)

Later, she encounters Beatrice in Alsemero's apartment and hearing that

22 Although most scholars assign this scene to Rowley, the conception of it, at least at this point, is not foreign to Middleton. Here is the Virtue figure attacking Vice.
her mistress has come to look for Alsemero, she remarks in aside,

Would I had such a cause
To look him too! (IV. i. 57 - 8.)

Subsequently in this scene she gladly agrees to take Beatrice's place in her wedding bed (ll. 90 - 131.). The pleasure she experiences, however, in Alsemero's arms causes her to put off her departure from him so that only De Flores' fire rouses her. Dazed with stupor, she murmurs to her murderously jealous mistress as they encounter one another during the alarm,

Pardon frailty, madam;
In troth, I was so well, I even forgot myself.

I never made
So sweet a bargain. (V. i. 75 - 9.)

Lust in Diaphanta is apparent, but it is not of a sort calculated to evoke our loathing, as it is in De Flores or Beatrice (or as it was in The Revenger's Tragedy or Hengist), for Diaphanta is a comic figure akin to the cuckolded wives of the City comedies, and the sympathy that she stimulates strengthens by contrast our desire to see justice done to her murderers who have been drawn together by lust of a profoundly evil kind.

The sweet bargain Diaphanta made with Beatrice was dependent upon the waiting-woman's "honesty". Beatrice tested her and found her "honest", that is, chaste, but also, fortunately enough, willing. There is to be seen in Diaphanta, therefore, the kind of honour so characteristic of the wives in the City comedies. So long as the main chance, reputation, was seen to, they felt that their sexual careers could be uninhibited. But the theme of honour in conjunction with sex occurs otherwise in The
Changeling, too. Beatrice is acutely conscious of her honour. Hers, in fact, is a proud virginity. At various crucial moments in the play she makes unmistakably emphatic the pride she takes in her honour, notably in the great exclamation of shocked recognition in Act Three when she says to De Flores,

Why, 'tis impossible thou canst be so wicked,
Or shelter such a cunning cruelty,
To make his death the murderer of my honour!

(III. iv. 121 - 3.)

Almost as notable is her dying accusation of De Flores which concludes,

Mine honour fell with him, and now my life.

(V. iii. 161.)

But elsewhere Beatrice had shown concern for her honour. Much of Act Four is taken up with her attempts to prevent Alsemero from discovering her loss of virginity, and an episode in the first scene of Act Five betrays her continuing failure to appraise De Flores' motives correctly, for when she confesses,

I'm forc'd to love thee now,
'Cause thou provid'st so carefully for my honour

(V. i. 47 - 8.)

he characteristically retorts,

'Slid, it concerns the safety of us both,
Our pleasure and continuance.

(V. iii. 49 - 50.)

Although in this guise it is not connected with sex, the honour theme appears in yet another form in The Changeling. It is convenient to glance at it at this point, the form being the Renaissance gentleman's conception of honour. Two elements predominated in this conception, bravery and truthfulness. The first occurs in Act Two where Beatrice expresses her wish that there had been no such person as Piracquo, to which Alsemero
replies that he knows of "one good service" by which to rid her of him, explaining that this service is

The honourablest piece about man, valour, (II. ii. 27.)

and offers then to challenge Piracquio to a duel. (The situation here and Beatrice's subsequent reply are highly reminiscent of the scenes involving Captain Agar and his mother in *A Fair Quarrel*.) Alsemero's courage in this scene is effectively contrasted with De Flores' cowardice in the face of the challenge of the distracted Tomaso at V. ii. 25 - 42. It is Tomaso's accusations and threats which occasion the appearance of truthfulness, the second element in the Renaissance gentleman's conception of honour. Tomaso suspects Vermandero of having been implicated in his brother's disappearance, and the suspicion provokes Vermandero's anger, and in commanding his servant to discover the perpetrators of the deed so that proof of his protested innocence may be had Vermandero exclaims,

I tell thee, knave, mine honour is in question,  
A thing till now free from suspicion,  
Nor ever was there cause.  

(IV. ii. 1 - 3.)

There is clearly not the equivocation in Vermandero's use of the term, honour, that is discoverable in the sexually tainted Beatrice after Act Three.

Other themes connected with that of sex are expressed succinctly in these words by Bradbrook. *The Changeling*, she says,

may be described as a study in the conflict of passion and judgment, and of the transforming power of love.\(^{23}\)

\(^{23}\) Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions*, p. 214. The discussion of will versus reason occurs on pp. 214 - 16.
Sexual passion as a wilful force blinding the eye of judgment receives abundant exemplification. Like Bianca in **Women. Beware Women** - but in the present case from the outset - Beatrice is determined to "follow the licentious swing of her own will", but she deceives herself into believing that she understands what she is doing.

The conflict of passion and judgment is introduced in the opening scene. Alsemero assures Beatrice that although he has seen her only twice he loves her dearly. Beatrice replies,

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

(How profoundly ironic her remarks are only the future will disclose.) The tenor of these words is echoed in her praise in Act Two of Alsemero who has sent his companion, Jasperino, to Beatrice for a letter of assignation.

How wise is Alsemero in his friend!
It is a sign he makes his choice with judgment.

Beatrice then turns to self-congratulation, saying,

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 judgment,
And see the way to merit, clearly see it.
A true deserver like a diamond sparkles;
In darkness you may see him, that's in absence,
Which is the greatest darkness falls on love,
Yet is he best discern'd then
With intellectual eyesight.

(II. i. 8 - 19.)
Beatrice will soon prove how appallingly indiscreet she can be in making choice of one to partake of her thoughts, and how terribly blind is her innocence which can feel that absence is the greatest darkness that falls on love.

What precipitates Beatrice's tragedy is her headstrong wilfulness. Selfish, fiercely determined to have her way, dangerously innocent of the fact that deeds have consequences, Beatrice, like Leantio in Women, Beware Women, is smugly complacent in her belief that a few, simple moral notions committed to memory will procure safety and success. Hence she feels free to follow inclination, especially since she believes that her inclinations are the product of a now-experienced judgment. Her wilfulness is most strikingly seen, naturally enough, in contrast to her father's determination that she shall wed Piracquo. Of him Vermandero declares,

He shall be bound to me
As fast as this tie can hold him; I'll want
My will else.

(I. ii. 221 - 3.)

In aside Beatrice ominously retorts,

I shall want mine, if you do it.

(I. i. 224.)

Later, when Vermandero commands his daughter to prepare for the day that will steal upon her suddenly (II. i. 102 - 3.), Beatrice, thinking of her new lover, replies askance,

How'ev'r I will be sure to keep the night,
If it should come so near me.

(I. i. 104 - 5.)

In Beatrice appears Middleton's most celebrated embodiment of the theme of the wilful woman destroying herself in her desire to have her way. But since the later working out of this theme is most profitably examined in
connection with the trickster tricked theme, the discussion of Beatrice's subsequent career will be reserved for a later section of this chapter. A similar postponement will be made for the examination of De Flores' resolute determination.

The second theme mentioned above by Bradbrook and connected to the play's sex motifs is that of the transforming power of love. This is the dominant theme in The Changeling, as Alsemoro's summation in the denouement makes clear. All the major characters are transformed in one way or another by love's various guises.

The earliest transformation is that which takes place in Alsemero. From being a stoical, eager traveller, indifferent to women, he becomes under love's tutelage a man content to dwell in one place that he might win the woman whose beauty has altered him. That the change in Alsemero is startling is revealed by Jasperino's amazed exclamation uttered as Alsemero accosts Beatrice and kisses her in the play's first scene:

> How now? the laws of the Medes are changed sure; salute a woman! he kisses too; wonderful! where learnt he this? and does it perfectly too; in my conscience, he ne'er rehearsed it before. Nay, go on; this will be stranger and better news at Valencia than if he had ransomed half Greece from the Turk. (I. i. 60 - 5.)

Up to the time that he fell in love Alsemero was a man of action, but so thoroughly does love transform him that he uncomplainingly acquiesces in Beatrice's refusal to allow him to challenge Piracquo to a duel (II. ii. 22 - 52.), and it is only towards the denouement of the play that self-direction begins to return to him.

The transformation in Alonzo De Piracquo is similar in a sense
to Alsemero's. He, too, is incapacitated for action by love. Despite his brother's urgent appeals, he remains complacently incapable of severing his connection with Beatrice because love blinds his sight to her indifference to him (II. i. 105 - 54.). In Tomaso's comment on Alonzo's refusal to be advised appears an apt and pithy statement of one of the play's major themes:

Why, here is love's tame madness; thus a man
Quickly steals into his vexation.
(II. i. 153 - 4.)

The chief embodiment of the transformation theme occurs in the careers of Beatrice and De Flores. Beatrice is first seen in the play as a spoiled, wilful, technically virtuous woman, determined to follow the bent of her passions, and unheeding of the results that might ensue if she becomes entangled with a man like De Flores. At the end of The Changeling the proud virgin has become a "cowering adulteress"24, loving and dependent upon the man whom she had once felt to be reptilian and repulsive. As Jump has phrased it,

Beatrice's history, summarized in De Flores' assurance to her that she will 'love' him 'anon', is the history of her learning to use, to accept, and to need De Flores.25

At the end she is half-awakened to a knowledge that deeds have their inevitable consequences, but she is still blind enough to attribute to Fate the


terrible retribution which has overtaken her (V. iii. 157 - 61.).

The change in De Flores has a two-fold aspect. In one sense his transformation is rather superficial. From being a loveless, ugly retainer useful only to Vermandero he becomes an indispensable servant to Beatrice as well. But he is still ugly and still poor. From another point of view, though, he is utterly transformed. Beatrice gradually finds him increasingly attractive so that he who was once a viper to be scorned and rejected becomes "a wondrous necessary man" (V. i. 90.), in fact, "a man worthy of loving" (V. i. 75.). In his outward appearance Beatrice still perceives his deformity but it has ceased to be relevant. She puts the matter thus:

his face loathes one;
But look upon his care, who would not love him?
The east is not more beauteous than his service.
(V. i. 69 - 71.)

That his erstwhile detester should find De Flores beautiful is a measure of the depth of her degradation as well as a proof of to what terribly ironic use Middleton could put the Beauty and the Beast theme. 26

The manifold transformations present in the main plot of The Changeling are made explicit by Alsemoro in the denouement. Addressing Tomaso, the deluded husband clarifies and conciliates, saying,

What an opacous body had that moon
That last chang'd on us! here is beauty chang'd
To ugly whoredom; here servant-obedience
To a master-sin, imperious murder;

26 Dr. G. P. V. Akrigg brought to the attention of the writer of the present thesis this interpretation of the theme of love's transforming power. He also demonstrated to the writer how large a factor is pride of class in De Flores' passion for Beatrice.
267.

I, a supposed husband, chang'd embraces
With wantonness, - but that was paid before.-
Your change is come too, from an ignorant wrath
To knowing friendship. (V. iii. 199 - 206.)

As will be seen in the discussion of the sub-plot below, the secondary action also displays in abundance the theme of transformation. In this play the changeling theme is indeed writ large.

Before leaving the sex themes and those associated with them, it must be pointed out that the conventional outcome common to Elizabethan tragedy overtakes the sinners in *The Changeling*. Adultery and lust were characteristically punished by death; hence Beatrice and De Flores die in the close of this play, but they do so in a manner that leads to the discussion of the next theme - the trickster tricked.

The most brilliant exemplification of the trickster tricked theme in Middleton's plays and one of the most brilliant in the whole range of drama occurs in the third act of *The Changeling* in connection with Beatrice's gravest miscalculation about the people she tries to exploit. Three times does she miscalculate as the detailed analysis below will demonstrate, but the first trick that she plans is the one which goes most dreadfully awry for it is the one which precipitates her into De Flores' arms. The other tricks are consequent upon the first; Beatrice seeks ways to preserve the honour that she enjoys in Alsemero's eyes and therefore attempts to delude him, and fearing that she may fail in that, misjudges her man a third time in confessing her complicity in Piracquo's murder. In every case Middleton invests the trickster tricked theme with great vitality, the

life-likeness of the first treatment of the theme impressing all critics with its stunning power. To this exemplification of the theme we now turn, and because of its great importance as superb drama and as revelation of character, as well as its significance in the history of the trickster tricked theme in Middleton's plays, we shall detail this first volte-face at considerable length. Dramatic preparation for this about-face occurs in II. ii., and to this scene we initially turn, prefacing it with some informative material from an even earlier scene.

Beatrice, becoming desperate over the rapidity with which her marriage to Piracquo approaches, seeks ways to stave off the event which will rob her of her newly acquired lover, Alsemero. In soliloquy she asks with wilful asperity,

```
What's Piracquo,
My father spends his breath for? and his blessing
Is only mine as I regard his name,
Else it goes from me, and turns head against me,
Transform'd into a curse: some speedy way
Must be remember'd; he's so forward too,
So urgent that way, scarce allows me breath
To speak to my new comforts.
(II. i. 19 - 26.)
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A quarrel with De Flores now adds so much to her disturbance that she cries as she sees her father approaching with her betrothed,

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0, I was
Lost in this small disturbance, and forgot
Affliction's fiercer torrent that now comes
To bear down all my comforts!
(II. i. 93 - 6.)
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Later, during an assignation with Alsemero, Beatrice repeats her expressions of bitter frustration, but by now hatred has crept into her voice:

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How happy were this meeting, this embrace,
If it were free from envy! this poor kiss,
```
It has an enemy, a hateful one,
That wishes poison to't: how well were I now
If there were none such name known as Piracquo,
Nor no such tie as the command of parents!
I should be but too much bless'd.
(II. ii. 15 - 21.)

But as she begs Alsemero not to challenge Piracquo to a duel (his solution
to her problem), Beatrice suddenly sees the way out. She urges Alsemero
not to spill Piracquo's life since he would then be forfeit to the law.
Then from some region of half-memory and conventional moral belief there
rises in Beatrice's mind a thought, apparently innocent but in reality
freighted with dreadful consequences:

Blood-guiltiness becomes a fouler visage; -
(II. i. 40.)

and at once her mind presents her with a picture of De Flores. What this
means has been accurately assessed by Ellis-Fermor:

Beatrice has a process of thought like
that of Othello, whose judgments are rather
pictures suddenly presented to it and, once
presented, blocking out all other views.29

Hence she hastens on to rationalize to herself the choice of this man for
whom she now perceives some use. But she is terribly thoughtless of all
consequences. As De Flores' image occurs to her she muses,

I was to blame,
I ha' marr'd so good a market with my scorn;
'Thad been done questionless: the ugliest creature
Creation fram'd for some use; yet to see
I could not mark so much where it should be!
... Why, men of art make much of poison,
Keep one to expel another; where was my art?
(II. ii. 41 - 7.)

Like Livia, Beatrice is going to be destroyed by the art that she intends

29 Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama, p. 146.
for her salvation. Dismissing Alsemero, she argues with herself, revealing that she has consciously assumed the role of trickster:

Why, put case I loath'd him
As much as youth and beauty hate a sepulchre,
Must I needs show it? cannot I keep that secret,
And serve my turn upon him?

(II. ii. 66 - 9.)

There is here something of that delight that the trickster, Livia, felt in her own cleverness in Women, Beware Women. There is certainly present a terrible irony - this, partly because De Flores has already entered and disclosed that he has observed the lovers' assignation. Thus begins the hire scene which is an extraordinary display of hypocrisy, cynicism, flashing insight, and fatal misunderstanding. Middleton makes extensive use here of the convention of the aside, revealing thereby the successive stages of De Flores' growing belief that Beatrice has found favour in him, and disclosing therein Beatrice's private feelings. Throughout the interview Beatrice, wholly taken up with her plan to rid herself of Piracquo and with manipulating De Flores, fails to perceive the significance of the effect on De Flores of her proferred "friendship". This blindness is seen by the audience at once. She calls De Flores to approach her. He obviously starts, and exclaims in aside,

Ha, I shall run mad with joy!
She call'd me fairly by my name De Flores,
And neither rogue nor rascal.

(II. ii. 70 - 2.)

Beatrice then begins to apply her skill as a trickster; dangerously innocent of the broken gentleman's nature, she rather coyly asks,

What ha' you done
To your face a' late? you've met with some good physician;
You've prun'd yourself, methinks: you were not wont
To look so amorously. (II. ii. 72 - 5.)

As she then bids De Flores draw nearer for her inspection, his asides betray the delirious excitement he feels at being thus treated. (His words and situation, it might be noted, are increasingly a kind of horrible travesty of the conventions of courtly love: the lover's agitated and keyed-up condition, his absolute loyalty and devotion to his lady, his preoccupation with thoughts about her, his secrecy. 30) De Flores' over-wrought feelings are revealed in successive asides which culminate in a figure of speech perfect in its dramatic propriety. To Beatrice's command, "Come hither; nearer, man", De Flores, unheard, replies,

I'm up to the chin in heaven! (II. ii. 79.)

As Beatrice examines his face, he exclaims with rapturous wonder,

Her fingers touch'd me!
She smells all amber. (II. ii. 81 - 2.)

And then her promise to cure his pustulous countenance herself draws from his obsessed mind the brilliantly appropriate and revelatory image,

'Tis half an act of pleasure
To hear her talk thus to me. (II. ii. 86 - 7.)

Beatrice now concludes her flattering enticement with a remark that is loaded with irony:

When we're us'd
To a hard face, it is not so unpleasing;

30 The thirty-one rules of courtly love as formulated by Andreas Cappel-lanus in his De Amore are listed in Thomas A. Kirby's Chaucer's Troilus, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1940, pp.
It mends still in opinion, hourly mends;  
I see it by experience.  

(II. ii. 87 - 90.)

De Flores' following aside ("I was bless'd/To light upon this minute;  
I'll make use on't") is at once a commentary on his resolute seizure of  
opportunity and a mirror of Beatrice's exploitation of him, an exploitation  
hinted at in her next remark which begins to broach the manner in which De  
Flores will prove useful to her:

Hardness becomes the visage of a man well;  
It argues service, resolution, manhood,  
If cause were of employment.  

(II. ii. 92 - 4.)

Eagerly De Flores seeks the meaning of Beatrice's sighs, until the coy  
hypocrite forces him to his knees where he begs that he might be of service  
to her (II. ii. 118.). Still does she half play with him, though, in her  
desire to test the honesty and strength of his offer. She says,

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

(II. ii. 119 - 21.)

When De Flores assures her that anything she might employ him to do would  
be inexpressibly sweet to him, she perceives his eagerness to serve but  
misconstrues his motive, speculating in aside,

Belike his wants are greedy; and to such  
Gold tastes like angel's food.  

(II. ii. 126 - 7.)

Seizing on this explanation for his insistence on remaining on his knees  
until she delivers her commission to him, Beatrice gives De Flores money  
to encourage him, promising him that with the fulfilment of his task his  
reward will be precious. De Flores replies that he has considered the
matter, that the thought of his reward "ravishes". But fiercely intent on her own desires, Beatrice fails to perceive the tone of De Flores' reply, and thus instantly hisses her command,

Then take him to thy fury!

Alonzo de Piracquo.

(II. ii. 134 - 5.)

De Flores, rising, swears,

His end's upon him;
He shall be seen no more.

(II. ii. 135 - 6.)

Then occurs another of those profoundly ironical unconscious foreshadowings as Beatrice dissemblingly exclaims,

How lovely now
Dost thou appear to me!

(II. ii. 136 - 7.)

Success in trickery apparently so pleases Beatrice that De Flores' answers to her cautions of prudence go virtually unheeded. "Be wondrous careful in the execution", she urges. De Flores asks in reply,

Why, are not both our lives upon the cast?

(II. ii. 140.)

to which Beatrice's fatal innocence prompts this naive, almost childishly unknowing reply,

Then I throw all my fears upon thy service.

(II. ii. 141.)

Again the irony is nearly unbearable. That the whole interview has taught her nothing significant about De Flores' nature is painfully evident from her next remark and her ignoring the tone of De Flores' brusque rejoinder. Beatrice says,

When the deed's done
I'll furnish thee with all things for thy flight;  
Thou may'st live bravely in another country.  

(II. ii. 143 - 5.)

De Flores waves this promise aside with

Ay, ay:
We'll talk of that hereafter.  
(II. ii. 146 - 7.)

And the hire scene closes with the dissembling trickster congratulating herself in an aside as she makes her way off-stage:

I shall rid myself
Of two inveterate loathings at one time,  
Piracquo, and his dog-face.  
(II. ii. 146 - 8.)

But De Flores thereupon breaks out in soliloquy with his feverish imaginative anticipation of the voluptuous pleasure Beatrice's body will afford him. The scene then ends with the apt coincidence of Piracquo's entrance.

That Beatrice has set in motion a force that she cannot control becomes dreadfully evident in the fourth scene of Act Three where Middleton's most artistic embodiment of the trickster-tricked motif receives its most persuasive expression, as II. ii. displays the most striking preparation for the theme in showing us the trickster entangling the dupe in the coils of intrigue.

The climax of *The Changeling* is III. iv., perhaps the most memorable scene of Middleton's plays. Certainly the *volte-face* which concludes *The Revenger's Tragedy* does not surpass the about-face here in dramatic impact, and this fact is the result of the utter credibility with which the trickster is tricked in the later play.

At the beginning of the scene, Alsemero is seen to have come into high favour with Vermandero so that Beatrice is prompted to soliloquize,
So wisdom, by degrees, works out her freedom
(III. iv. 13.)
as her nemesis enters to remark in an aside,
My thoughts are at a banquet; for the deed,
I feel no weight in't; 'tis but light and cheap
For the sweet recompense that I set down for't.
(III. iv. 18 - 20.)

De Flores then discloses to the eager woman that Piracquo is no more.
Beatrice's reaction is immediate:
My joys start at mine eyes; our sweet'st delights
Are evermore born weeping. 31

There next occurs one of those incidents which give a glimpse of Beatrice's mind, which show her to be fatally deficient in imagination. De Flores states that he has a token for her, adding,
But it was sent somewhat unwillingly;
I could not get the ring without the finger.
(III. iv. 28 - 9.)

Taken aback, in fact shocked, by what she sees, Beatrice gasps in startled wonder,
Bless me, what has thou done?
(III. iv. 30.)

Bradbrook accounts for Beatrice’s reaction thus:

31 How characteristic this view is of Middleton may be seen in this line from The Phoenix:
Our joy breaks at our eyes; the prince is come!
(V. i. 56.)

and these from The Old Law:
I've a joy weeps to see you, 'tis so full,
So fairly fruitful.  (IV. ii. 35 - 6.)
She is horrified, for she had not visualised the murder; DeFlores the hired assassin was to stand between her and the dirty business of the stabbing. 

Ellis-Fermor confirms this interpretation. She says of Beatrice that

The quality of her limitation is to realize nothing that is not pictured in her mind. The moment DeFlores shows her the dead man's finger she sees the murder as an actual thing.

DeFlores, it is scarcely necessary to relate, takes a much less disturbed view of his act, and his callous matter-of-factness, it would seem, restores Beatrice to a calmer condition so that she can consider the disposal of the objects before her. She speaks:

> I pray, bury the finger, but the stone
> You may make use on shortly; the true value,
> Tak't of my truth, is near three hundred ducats.

(III. iv. 42 - 4.)

Callous as he is, however, DeFlores is much more clear-sighted about the nature of his deed, and this in conjunction with his quick perception that Beatrice may be treating him as a mere hireling, urges his reply,

>'Twill hardly buy a capcase for one's conscience though, To keep it from the worm, as fine as 'tis....

(III. iv. 45 - 6.)

Beatrice notes DeFlores' suspicion but mistakes its cause, and is thus led to declare that the ring was "not given/In state of recompense" and to assure DeFlores that giving offense to him would procure misery in her. But she again fails to understand the tone of DeFlores' reply,

I know so much, it were so; misery

32 Themes and Conventions, p. 218.
33 The Jacobean Drama, p. 147.
In her most sharp condition.

(III. iv. 60 - 1.)

As a result, her words that immediately follow this threat -

Look you, sir, here's three thousand golden florens;
I have not meanly thought upon thy merit

(III. iv. 62 - 3.)

- not only shock De Flores with their insulting impercipience but also confirm him in his suspicion that he has all along been to her merely a hireling killer. Outraged, he demands,

What! salary? now you move me.

Do you place me in the rank of verminous fellows,
To destroy things for wages? offer gold
[For] the life-blood of man? is anything
Valued too precious for my recompense?

(III. iv. 65 - 8.)

And to her bewildered, "I understand thee not", he angrily explains,

I could ha' hired
A journeyman in murder at this rate,
And mine own conscience might have[slept at ease],
And have had the work brought home.

(III. iv. 69 - 72.)

Frightened but still blind to De Flores' drift, Beatrice reveals in aside that she would "fain be rid of him", and foolishly offers to double the sum, to which De Flores replies,

You take a course
To double my vexation, that's the good you do.

(III. iv. 74 - 5.)

Now thoroughly alarmed and thoroughly uncertain how to satisfy this angry, inexplicably insistent murderer, Beatrice makes a last appeal to payment:

For my fear's sake,
I prithee, make away with all speed possible;
And if thou be'st so modest not to name
The sum that will content thee, paper blushes not,
Send thy demand in writing, it shall follow thee;
278.

But, prithee, take thy flight.  

(III. iv. 77 - 82.)

De Flores' answer is the beginning of Beatrice's awakening to the kind of man she is dealing with, for he declares, "You must fly too then", and adds, "I'll not stir a foot else". When she asks, "What's your meaning?" he replies,

Why, are not you as guilty? in, I'm sure,  
As deep as I; and we should stick together:  
Come, your fears counsel you but ill; my absence  
Would draw suspect upon you instantly,  
There were no rescue for you.  

(III. iv. 84 - 8.)

To this the slowly awakening Beatrice is forced to confess to herself, "He speaks home!" but she is still blind to the fulness of his demands since when he continues,

Nor is it fit we two, engag'd so jointly,  
Should part and live asunder  

(III. iv. 89 - 90.)

she haughtily retorts,

How now, sir?  
This shows not well.  

(III. iv. 90 - 1.)

But De Flores will have none of this, insisting,

What makes your lip so strange?  
This must not be between us.  

(III. iv. 91 - 2.)

And though Beatrice now cries, "The man talks wildly", De Flores speaks more "wildly" yet:

Come, kiss me with a zeal now.  

(III. iv. 93.)

Beatrice cannot fail to perceive something of De Flores' drift after this remark, and her "Heaven, I doubt him!" indicates that a dreadful light has
begun its dawn. In desperation she urges,

Take heed, De Flores, of forgetfulness,
'Twill soon betray us.

(III. iv. 95 - 6.)

But he counters with

Take you heed first;
Faith, you're grown much forgetful, you're to blame

(III. iv. 96 - 7.)

and speaking out more boldly still, declares,

I have eas'd you
Of your trouble, think on it; I am in pain,
And must be eas'd of you; 'tis a charity,
Justice invites your blood to understand me.

(III. iv. 98 - 101.)

Now striving frantically not to understand him, Beatrice gasps in reply,

"I dare not", and in attempting to push back full realization even implores him not to voice his desire:

Speak it yet further off, that I may lose
What has been spoken, and no sound remain on't;
I would not hear so much offence again
For such another deed.

(III. iv. 103 - 6.)

De Flores' come-back is as immediate as its meaning is plain:

Soft, lady, soft!
The last is not yet paid for: 0, this act
Has put me into spirit; I was as greedy on't
As the parch'd earth of moisture, when the clouds weep:
Did you not mark, I wrought myself into't,
Nay, sued and kneel'd for't? why was all that pains took?

You see I've thrown contempt upon your gold;
Not that I want it [not], for I do piteously,
In order I'll come unto't, and make use on't,
But 'twas not held so precious to begin with,
For I place wealth after the heals of pleasure;
And were not I resolv'd in my belief
That thy virginity were perfect in thee,
I should but take my recompense with grudging,
As if I had but half my hopes I agreed for.
(III. iv. 106 - 120.)

Beatrice, horror-struck, at bay, awake at last to the significance of De Flores' overmastering demands, even yet resorts to language which, though once appropriate to her lips, is now an ironic, unconscious mockery of what she has come to be. With shocked indignation she exclaims,

Why, 'tis impossible thou canst be so wicked,
Or shelter such a cunning cruelty,
To make his death the murderer of my honour!
Thy language is so bold and vicious,
I cannot see which way I can forgive it
With any modesty.

(III. iv. 121 - 6.)

To this there is only one possible reply, and De Flores makes it:

Push! you forget yourself;
A woman dipp'd in blood, and talk of modesty!

(III. iv. 121 - 2.)

Beatrice now feels something of the "misery of sin", but she still strives desperately to hold De Flores off by resorting to what in other circumstances would be a powerful appeal:

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

(III. iv. 131 - 2.)

Again the pitiless honesty of De Flores' intellect forbids any palliation or sentimental conventionality of view:

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

(III. iv. 133 - 41.)
"With thee, foul villain!" Beatrice exclaims; "Yes, my fair murderess", De Flores replies, going on to show her that she is a whore in her affections, and vowing that her latest love, Alsemero, shall never enjoy her, and that

She that in life and love refuses me,
In death and shame my partner she shall be.

(III. iv. 154 - 5.)

Now it is Beatrice's turn to kneel and sue. She makes her last and greatest bid:

Stay, hear me once for all; I make thee master
Of all the wealth I have in gold and jewels;
Let me go poor unto my bed with honour,
And I am rich in all things!

(III. iv. 156 - 9.)

But De Flores' imperious will is deaf to any plea, and the finality of his reply is conclusive:

Let this silence thee;
The wealth of all Valencia shall not buy
My pleasure from me;
Can you weep Fate from its determin'd purpose?
So soon may [you] weep me.

(III. iv. 159 - 63.)

Here, at the verge of the destruction of all her hopes, Beatrice perceives the inexorable working of the moral order. She phrases her dearly purchased wisdom, so different from the wisdom that she had congratulated herself on possessing at the scene's beginning, in terms reminiscent of Women, Beware Women:

Vengeance begins;
Murder, I see, is follow'd by more sins.

(III. iv. 163 - 4.)

The scene concludes with a further reminiscence of Women, Beware Women and with a prediction by De Flores that proves disastrously true:

Come, rise and shroud your blushes in my bosom;
Silence is one of pleasure's best receipts:
Thy peace is wrought for ever in this yielding.

'Ias! how the turtle pants!\(^{34}\) thou'lt love anon
What thou so fear'st and faint' st to venture on.
(III. iv. 167 - 71.)

The sudden gentleness in De Flores' voice is surely
one of Middleton's most daring and most
perfectly managed modulations of feeling....\(^{35}\)

But the striking reversal of fortune in Beatrice's career de-
picted in this fourth scene of Act Three is as surely Middleton's finest
study of the theme of the trickster tricked. In so far as it is possible
to analyze an artistic triumph, we may account for Middleton's superb
achievement here in terms of his penetrating insight into the way the mind
works, his grasp of a dramatically effective situation, and the simplicity
and "fierce reticence"\(^{36}\) of his language. Not a word too many attenuates
the action; no flights of rhetoric, bombast, or fustian are there to dis-
figure it. Perhaps the chief reason, though, why we feel that the biter
bit theme here is so completely credible is that the logic of character
operates with compelling validity. An \textit{ad hoc, deus ex machina} solution

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\(^{34}\) As the Duke struggles with the surprised Bianca in the earlier tra-
gedy, he says,

\begin{quote}
  Prithee, tremble not;
  I feel thy breast shake like a turtle panting
  Under a loving hand that makes much on't:
  Why art so fearful?
\end{quote}

(II. ii. 325 - 27.)

\(^{35}\) Bradbrook, \textit{Themes and Conventions}, p. 219.

\(^{36}\) Arthur Symons, "Middleton and Rowley", in \textit{The Cambridge History of
produces the final peripety in The Revenger's Tragedy, but here the reversal of fortune is the inevitable and necessary consequence of character. Thus, what was merely a theatrical plot convention in the early tragedy becomes in the later play a thematic means to the highest reaches of dramatic art.

There are, however, two other episodes in The Changeling that embody the trickster tricked theme and that involve Beatrice's miscalculations: the episode of the substitute bride, and Beatrice's confession to Alsemero of her complicity in Piracquo's murder.

The substitute bride motif in this play has a two-fold aspect. There is first the chastity test, and secondly the substitution trick. Both are devices that Middleton had utilized in previous plays, the former most notably in The Revenger's Tragedy and Hengist, King of Kent, and the second in The Family of Love, The Witch, and Hengist. But in The Changeling Middleton links the two devices to the career of the heroine and makes them highly significant elements in the story of her degradation and in the play's catastrophe. Although one device in the play leads directly into the other, they will be examined separately here.

Having tricked her father out of his plan of her marriage to Piracquo but having been dreadfully beguiled into the liaison with De Flores, Beatrice now seeks means to conceal from Alsemero, whom she has just married, the loss of her virginity. In his empty apartment to which she has wandered alone Beatrice voices in soliloquy her fear of discovery.

Never was bride so fearfully distress'd:
The more I think upon th' ensuing night,
And whom I am to cope with in embraces,
One who's ennobled both in blood and mind,
So clever in understanding, - that's my plague now -
Before whose judgment will my fault appear
Like malefactors' crimes before tribunals;
There is no hiding on't, the more I dive
Into my own distress: how a wise man
Stands for a great calamity! there's no venturing
Into his bed, what course so'er I light upon,
Without my shame, which may grow up to danger;
He cannot but in justice strangle me
As I lie by him, as a cheater use me;
'Tis a precious craft to play with a false die
Before a cunning gamester.

(IV. i. 2 - 17.)

But the solution to her problem lies at hand, for, opening Alsemoro's
closet, Beatrice discovers a copy of The Book of Experiment, called Secrets
in Nature in which she reads of a test for virginity which runs,

A merry slight, but true experiment: the
author Antonius Mizaldus. Give the party
you suspect the quantity of a spoonful of
water in the glass M, which, upon her that
is a maid, makes three several effects: 'twill
make her incontinently gape, then fall into a
sudden sneezing, last into a violent laughing;
else, dull, heavy and lumpish.

(IV. i. 47 - 52.)

Just as she completes the reading of this experiment, she sees her waiting-
woman, Diaphanta, enter the apartment and this instantly suggests to Bea-
trice her salvation. "Seeing that wench now,/A trick comes in my mind...",
she says, and pretending to Diaphanta a great fear of losing her virginity,
affirms,

I'd give a thousand ducats to that woman
Would try what my fear were, and tell me true
To-morrow, when she gets from't; as she likes,
I might perhaps be drawn to't.

(IV. i. 75 - 8.)

Diaphanta can scarcely credit her ears, but when Beatrice states that the
woman who offers to take her place must be a maid, she asks her mistress,
285.

Madam, what say you to me, and stray no further?
I've a good mind, in troth, to earn your money.

(IV. i. 92 - 3.)

This offer is precisely what Beatrice wants, and when Diaphanta protests her virgin state, Beatrice asks,

I'm glad to hear't; then you dare to put your honesty
Upon an easy trial?

(IV. i. 98 - 9.)

When Diaphanta cheerfully agrees, Beatrice subjects her to the test with glass "M" and is at once gratified to observe the complete success of the experiment. Assured of Diaphanta's maiden state, Beatrice leads her out of the apartment to discuss the substitution ruse, warning Diaphanta, however, that

About midnight
You must not fail to steal forth gently,
That I may use the place.

(IV. i. 126 - 28.)

The test of Diaphanta serves another purpose than the determination of her chastity. Beatrice needs confirmation of the experiment's results so that when Alsemero puts her to a similar trial (and she rightly anticipates his doing so) she will be able to react favourably. Alsemero's trial of her comes very soon for Jasperino discloses to him that he has overheard a conversation between De Flores and Beatrice,

and words pass'd
Like those that challenge interest in a woman.

(IV. ii. 102 - 3.)

Alsemero's reaction is immediate:

0, were she the sole glory of the earth,
Had eyes that could shoot fire into kings' breasts,
And touch'd, she sleeps not here!

(IV. ii. 106 - 8.)
He then bids Jasperino to fetch glass "M" from his closet. Beatrice enters; and then Jasperino returns with the vial which Beatrice instantly recognizes. Upon Alsemero's insistence, Beatrice then drinks after murmuring in aside,

I'm put now to my cunning: th'effects I know,
If I can now but feign 'em handsomely.
(IV. ii. 138 - 9.)

Dissembling a gape, a sneeze, and a laugh Beatrice successfully deludes her husband who embraces his wife of a few hours with

My Joanna,
Chaste as the breath of heaven, or morning's womb,
That brings the day forth! thus my love encloses thee.
(IV. ii. 149 - 51.)

And the trickster walks off in the arms of her dupe.

The conclusion of her trickery is not yet, however, for we next see Beatrice pacing a gallery of the castle in an agony of fear and jealousy over the delay of the substitute bride in abandoning Alsemero's bed. Diaphanta had gained admittance under the cloak of darkness, as we learned was to be the case from Alsemero's soliloquy in IV. ii. There he revealed that

not an hour since
Her woman came pleading her lady's fears,
Deliver'd her for the most timorous virgin
That ever shrank at man's name, and so modest,
She charg'd her weep out her request to me,
That she might come obscurely to my bosom.
(IV. ii. 117 - 22.)

Now we see a result of the miscalculation that Beatrice makes in selecting the hot-blooded Diaphanta to deputize for her on her bridal night. Beatrice is driven to a murderous jealousy. As a clock strikes in the darkness, she groans,
One struck, and yet she lies by't! O my fears!  
This strumpet serves her own ends, 'tis apparent now,  
Devours the pleasure with a greedy appetite,  
And never minds my honour or my peace,  
Makes havoc of my right; but she pays dearly for't;  
No trusting of her life with such a secret,  
That cannot rule her blood to keep her promise;  
Beside, I've some suspicion of her faith to me, Because I was suspected of my lord,  
And it must come from her [clock strikes two]: hark! by my horrors,  
Another clock strikes two!  
(V. i. 1 - 11.)

Aware that her trickery has back-fired, Beatrice turns to De Flores who has just entered and reveals the delay. When De Flores asks, "... who would trust/A waiting woman?" Beatrice pathetically and rather helplessly replies, "I must trust somebody", but De Flores rejects this, out of his cynical knowledge declaring in what is a rebuke of Beatrice's bungling,

Push! they're termagants;  
Especially when they fall upon their masters  
And have their ladies' first-fruits; they're mad whelps,  
You cannot stave 'em off from game royal; then  
You are so rash and hardy, ask no counsel;  
And I could have help'd you to a 'pothecary's daughter  
Would have fall'n off before eleven, and thank'd you too.  
(V. i. 16 - 22.)

And with characteristic efficiency De Flores proposes to "force a rising" of the household by setting fire to Diaphanta's chamber. His further schemes are disclosed to Beatrice thus:

I aim  
At a most rich success strikes all dead sure:  
The chimney being a-fire, and some light parcels  
Of the least danger in her chamber only,  
If Diaphanta should be met by chance then  
Far from her lodging, which is now suspicious,  
It would be thought her fears and affrights then  
Drove her to seek for succour; if not seen  
Or met at all, as that's the likeliest,  
For her own shame she'll hasten towards her lodging;
288.

I will be ready with a piece high-charg'd,
As 'twere to cleanse the chimney, there 'tis proper now,
But she shall be the mark.

(V. i. 35 - 47.)

That Beatrice is incorrigible in her self-regarding concern is made plain in her reply to this plan:

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

(V. i. 47 - 8.)

De Flores' retort is equally characteristic:

'Slid, it concerns the safety of us both,
Our pleasure and continuance.

De Flores now assumes full control of the situation and goes off to effect his plans. His celerity draws from Beatrice that praise of his "beauteous" service that we have already seen to be so significant of her degradation. All too soon De Flores accomplishes his purpose to return in hypocritical tears shed in the presence of an awakened and assembled household for the "burnt" Diaphanta. His reference to her as "poor virginity", a verbal disguise of her role as a substitute bride, is the sort of devilish irony possible to him alone. But completely successful as the substitute bride plot has turned out to be as a result of De Flores' skill in intrigue, the last trick in this scene is reserved for Beatrice. She recommends to her father that since De Flores discovered the fire he should be rewarded. Even De Flores recognizes the audacity of this suggestion for he exclams in soliloquy,

Rewarded? precious! here's a trick beyond me:
I see in all bouts, both of sport and wit,
Always a woman strives for the last hit.

(V. i. 123 - 5.)

In her two main tricking attempts, foiling Vermandero of his plan
to marry her to Piracquo, and deceiving Alsemero about her virginity, Beatrice does succeed, though not without terrible cost to herself. But in her third and last major attempt she miscalculates fatally. She had gravely misjudged De Flores in hiring him to murder Piracquo, and had been dangerously wrong to trust Diaphanta to leave Alsemero's bed at the appointed time. But now her failure to perceive the kind of man that Alsemero is leads her to her death.

The last scene of the final act opens with a dialogue between Jasperino and Alsemero which reveals that they have overseen an assignation between De Flores and Beatrice in the castle gardens. In his interview with his wife, Alsemero comes to the point quickly. He asks her to resolve him one question: is she honest? When Beatrice tries to evade a direct answer first with humour, then with the query,

Say I should strain a tear to fill the vault,
Which would you give the better faith to?
(V. iii. 27–8.)

Alsemero swiftly replies,

'Twere but hypocrisy of a sadder colour,
But the same stuff; neither your smiles nor tears
Shall move or flatter me from my belief:
You are a whore!
(V. iii. 29–32.)

In words which sound the changeling theme Beatrice thereupon exclaims,

What a horrid sound it hath!
It blasts a beauty to deformity;
Upon what face soever that breath falls,
It strikes it ugly: 0, you have ruin'd
What you can ne'er repair again!
(V. iii. 32–6.)

As proof of his allegations Alsemero first asks her,

How comes this tender reconcilement else
'Twixt you and your despite, your rancorous loathing, De Flores? he that your eye was sore at sight of, He's now become your arm's supporter, your Lip's saint!

Worse, your lust's devil, Your adultery!

(V. iii. 50 - 5.)

And then Alsemero declares that all this was witnessed by Diaphanta. With cool effrontery Beatrice asks, "Is your witness dead then?" And Alsemero replies,

'Tis to be fear'd
It was the wages of her knowledge; poor soul,
She liv'd not long after the discovery.

(V. iii. 58 - 60.)

It is now that Beatrice makes her fatal mistake; misjudging Alsemero's reaction Beatrice boldly declares,

To your bed's scandal I stand up innocence,
Which even the guilt of one black other deed
Will stand for proof of; your love has made me
A cruel murderess.

(V. iii. 63 - 6.)

She then proceeds to outline the story of the hiring of De Flores for the killing of Piracquo, but in great revulsion Alsemero exclaims, "O, thou art all deform'd!" to which Beatrice makes the insistent rejoinders,

Forget not, sir,
It for your sake was done....

Remember, I am true unto your bed.

(V. iii. 78 - 83.)

But Alsemero in loathing can only reply,

The bed itself's a charnel, the sheets shrouds
For murder'd carcasses.

(V. iii. 84 - 5.)

He then locks Beatrice into his closet while deciding what course of action to take. At this juncture, however, De Flores appears and soon Alsemero's
worst suspicions are confirmed. He can now do no more than agree with De Flores' request to be allowed into the closet with Beatrice, and shortly after Vermandero's arrival with most of the other surviving participants in the action, he witnesses the final episode in the trickster's career.

Out of the closet De Flores drags the bleeding Beatrice whom he has stabbed and the terrible sight provokes from Vermandero the cry, "Joanna! Beatrice! Joanna!" but she forestalls his approach with words that reveal that at last she understands something of her degradation:

O, come not near me, sir, I shall defile you!
I am that of your blood was taken from you
For your better health; look no more upon't,
But cast it to the ground regardlessly,
Let the common sewer take it from distinction....

(V. iii. 152 - 6.)

Turning then to her husband she confesses,

Alsemero, I'm a stranger to your bed;
Your bed was cozen'd on the nuptial night,
For which your false bride died.

(V. iii. 162 - 4.)

And finally, after De Flores has stabbed himself to death, she begs her husband's pardon for her deeds,

Forgive me, Alsemero, all forgive!
'Tis time to die when 'tis a shame to live.

(V. iii. 181 - 2.)

Conventional as much of this denouement is, Middleton and Rowley conduct it to its close with an unflagging insistence that the outcome of the trickery should conform to the logic of character and event, that it

37 Although the language of this final scene is Rowley's, the planning of the action, like that of I. i., was surely an affair of collaboration. See Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies, pp. 208 - 9, for a summary of scholarly opinion on the authorship of this scene.
should not end with the factitious bitter biter bit reversal that concludes *The
Revenger's Tragedy*. It is this artistic conscience that makes *The Changeling*
worthy to be ranked near to Shakespeare's greatest performances. Indeed,
in his study of Elizabethan revenge tragedy, Fredson Bowers says that in
artistry *The Changeling* is to the plays of its time what *Hamlet* was to
Kylian revenge tragedy. 38 There could scarcely be higher praise.

The reference to Bowers serves as a reminder that *The Changeling*
has other themes for our consideration, those of revenge and of delay in
revenge. It need hardly be pointed out, however, that these themes do not
play the prominent role in this play that had been their fortune in *The
Spanish Tragedy* or *The Revenger's Tragedy*; their function here, in fact,
is perfunctory. In any case, the theme of lustful intrigue had long since
begun to supplant that of revenge as the controlling motif of revenge drama
or of plays associated with it 39, pushing the older motifs into the back­
ground from which they occasionally emerged to give an old-fashioned flavour
to later plays. Otherwise, when revenge assumed primary importance, it did
so to point up the revenger as a villain or to illustrate the growing dis­
approval of revenge.

In *The Changeling* the revenge theme does not get under way until
the second scene of Act Four. Alonzo De Piracquo has disappeared, his in­-

38 Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, p. 204.

39 Ibid., p. 163. Despite the fact that Bowers includes an analysis of
*The Changeling* in his study of revenge tragedy, it would be more helpful
to designate the play in some such way as Henry W. Wells does. In his
*Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights*, New York, Columbia University Press,
1939, pp. 39 - 41, Wells discusses *The Changeling* under the rubric of "The
Tragedy of Evil".
tended bride has been wedded rather suddenly to Alsemero, and to Tomaso, the murdered man's brother, there seems to be a conspiracy of silence concerning Alonzo's fate. Tomaso has badgered Vermandero about the disappearance and has, in fact, cast suspicion on his honour. In an interchange, which here and there echoes the Laertes-Claudius colloquy in the mob scene of Hamlet, Tomaso demands of Vermandero some accounting of Alonzo's absence. He cries, "I claim a brother of you", to which the castle's governor replies, "You're too hot; / Seek him not here." The choleric Tomaso thereupon insists,

Yes, 'mongst your dearest bloods,
If my peace find no fairer satisfaction:
This is the place must yield account for him,
For here I left him; and the hasty tie
Of this snatch'd marriage gives strong testimony
Of his most certain ruin.

(IV. ii. 19 - 24.)

Angered by these ill-veiled threats, Vermandero orders Tomaso thus,

I warn you
That this place no more see you.

(IV. ii. 35 - 6.)

To this Tomaso replies,

The best is,
There is more ground to meet a man's revenge on.

(IV. ii. 36 - 7.)

Later, encountering Alsemero, Tomaso reveals that he takes no pleasure in the groom's happiness:

I'm none of those, sir,
That come to give you joy, and swill your wine;
'Tis a more precious liquor that must lay
The fiery thirst I bring.

...................................................

Time and our swords
May make us more acquainted; this the business.
I should have [had] a brother in your place;
How treachery and malice has dispos'd of him,
I'm bound to inquire of him which holds his right,
Which never could come fairly.
(IV. ii. 65 - 74.)

But Tomaso respects Alsemero's solemnities so far as to postpone the duel until their next meeting, and then makes his exit, Alsemero remarking on the ominousness of a quarrel broached on his wedding day.

Revenge in The Changeling is thus, conventionally enough, blood revenge, and equally conventional is the close tie of kinship between the revenger and the victim. Conventional, too, is the presence of the theme of the revenger's delay. Like Hamlet, Tomaso delays from a lack of sufficient information, and, again like Hamlet, the delay produces some derangement of his mind. Indeed, some readily perceptible echoes of Hamlet's language appear in Tomaso's speeches:

I cannot taste the benefits of life
With the same relish I was wont to do:
Man I grow weary of, and hold his fellowship
A treacherous bloody friendship; and because
I'm ignorant in whom my wrath should settle,
I must think all men villains, and the next
I meet, whose'er he be, the murderer
Of my most worthy brother.
(V. ii. 1 - 8.)

As one might expect from a play that Middleton had a hand in, the next person that Tomaso meets is his brother's slayer, for at this point De Flores enters. And although Tomaso had formerly regarded the gentleman-retainer as "honest" and had treated him with jocular friendliness (IV. ii. 38 - 59.), we perceive the depth of the revenger's melancholic distraction by the manner in which he now greets De Flores. Sighting him, Tomaso growls,

What, again?
He walks a' purpose by, sure, to choke me up,
T' infect my blood.
(V. ii. 23 - 5.)
He then proceeds to strike De Flores and rail at him, calling him a poisoner, a slave, and a coward. Conscience-struck, De Flores removes himself, leaving Tomaso to declare,

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

(V. ii. 43 - 8.)

Although the apparent solution to Tomaso's problem is at hand - Vermandero, entering, reveals,

Two of the chiefest men I kept about me
I hide not from the law of your just vengeance -

(V. ii. 59 - 60.)

Antonio and Franciscus will prove not to be Alonzo's murderers, and a novel twist is given the conventional revenge conclusion: the revenger is cheated of his revenge by the suicide of the guilty.40

We may sum up the revenge theme in The Changeling by appropriating these words of Fredson Bowers:

Revenge...is not a simple requital of blood for blood exacted by a duty-bound revenger despite the counterplots of his opponents, as in the early plays; neither does vengeance fall from Heaven or result from the hidden workings of divine retribution. Middleton and Rowley rise in psychological perception far above any other Elizabethan dramatist except Shakespeare and Webster in their treatment of the problem so as to show that life carries its

40 Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, p. 204, after listing the stock situations in The Changeling, adds, "Yet to these standard situations a new expression is given, for the revenger is thwarted by the suicide of the guilty persons themselves who have found that the results of their crimes were more than they had reckoned."
own vengeance for crime. 41

Revenge drama in England frequently displays two other motifs besides those just discussed; these are the notions that omens and portents appear for the wise man's benefit at certain significant moments in life, and that behind the facade of a man's career operates the mysterious power of Fate. Both notions entered Elizabethan drama from the Senecan revenge play.

Omens are mentioned in the first speech of the play. Alsemero notes that it was in the temple that he first beheld Beatrice and that now he has seen her there again. He wonders what may be signified by such a coincidence - "... what omen yet/Follows of that?" (I. i. 2 - 3.) - but then quickly dismisses all gloomy forebodings. In the last scene, however, Alsemero has cause to remember the prophetic sign that he had glimpsed in church. Beatrice confesses to him her complicity in Piracquo's murder with the result that Alsemero groans in recognition that there had been an omen for him in the coincidental meetings,

O, the place itself e'er since
Has crying been for vengeance! the temple
Where blood and beauty first unlawfully
Fir'd their devotion and quench'd the right one;
'Twas in my fears at first, 'twill have it now....
(V. iii. 73 - 7.)

Beatrice herself in the denouement, penitent and dying, realizes that her original reactions to De Flores' presence were an omen whose warning she has fatally overlooked; pointing to De Flores she says,

Beneath the 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 believ'd:
Mine honour fell with him, and now my life.
(V. iii. 157 - 61.)

41 Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, p. 204.
Finally, Alsemero refers to a portent akin to the blazing star of The Revenger's Tragedy. He begins his summation of the changeling theme, as it has worked out in the careers of all the principal characters, with these words,

What an opacous body had that moon
That last chang'd on us!  
(V. iii. 199 - 200.)

However divinatory the conception of the universe that such belief in portents reveals, the conception did set the life of man in a cosmic context, every element of which had significance for humanity. The Senecan convention of omens and portents therefore served one of the objects of tragedy: viewing man's fate against the backdrop of the universe.

It is not surprising (despite the growing influence in Elizabethan England of Calvinism with its fatalistic doctrine of election widely current as a parallel notion) that the classical conception of Fate did not exert a very powerful influence on the drama of the time. Christian views of God's providence and Medieval notions of Fortune were understandably much more influential. Thus it is that Fate entered Renaissance thought chiefly through the medium of classical literature and that the plays of Seneca mostly provided such inspiration for survivals of the conception as Elizabethan plays contain. In The Changeling the idea of Fate assumes a more prominent role than it does in any other of Middleton's compositions, with the possible exception of The Revenger's Tragedy, and we may attribute this fact to the vogue to which The Changeling partially belongs - Senecan revenge drama.

Two suggestions of Fate's operations are displayed in the first two acts of the play. In Beatrice's conviction about Alsemero, "This was
the man was meant for me" (I. i. 87.), something of Fate's role in the
conception of romantic love may be evident. Fate, too, may be felt to be
behind both De Flores' compulsive attendance upon Beatrice and her strange
dread and revulsion for him. In any case, as the main plot unfolds it is
seen that Fate does have, in the views of the characters involved, a major
part to play in drawing and destroying the triangle of love.

At one point of the triangle is De Flores, who assures Beatrice
of the fixity of his purpose to enjoy her with these memorable words,

Can you weep Fate from its determin'd purpose?
So soon may you weep me.

(III. iv. 162–3.)

At a second point is Beatrice. In her mouth is put a statement which sums
up the baleful operation of Fate in The Changeling and which betrays a
significant weakness in her character. Dying, she points to De Flores and
exclaims to her father,

Beneath the 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 believ'd:
Mine honour fell with him, and now my life.

(V. iii. 157–61.)

It is characteristic of Beatrice that she should attribute to a force ex-
ternal to herself the cause of her degradation. But Alsemero, the third
point of the triangle and the most clear-sighted of the main personages,
refuses to blame Fate for defects of character, except insofar as his re-
ference to the portent of the "opacous moon" (V. iii. 199ff.) suggests some
belief in Fate's power.

The Senecanisms present in The Changeling have by no means been
exhausted by the above discussion. The remaining conventions of this kind,
however, will be examined in the ensuing remarks on character, staging, and structure. To the first of these we now turn.

The conventions of character observable in *The Changeling* may be initially detailed in a manner similar to the summaries found in earlier chapters of this thesis, and then the more significant aspects may be investigated at greater length. At the outset it must be declared that these conventions are, in *The Changeling*, merely discernible elements within the wholes of vital characters, since none of the characters in the main action of the play is merely a hackneyed stereotype. The list of stock figures discernible in the portraits of the personages in the main plot would therefore include the domineering father (Vermandero), the wilful daughter (Beatrice), the gallant (Alonzo De Piracquo, Alsemero, and Jasperino), the bawdy serving-woman (Diaphanta), the broken gentleman (De Flores), the lust figure (De Flores, Diaphanta, and Jasperino), the virtue figures (Alsemero, and Tomaso), the "humour" character (De Flores), the intriguers (Beatrice, De Flores, and to a lesser extent, Alsemero and Diaphanta), the callous murderer (De Flores), the revenger (Tomaso), the gull (Vermandero, Alsemero, Beatrice and Diaphanta), the cuckold (Alsemero), the unfaithful wife (Beatrice), the pathological character (De Flores), and the melancholic (Tomaso). In both De Flores and Tomaso traces of the malcontent also appear.

Although much was said above about De Flores' character, two further traits in his nature now require attention: his likeness to Iago, that arch-villain of Elizabethan tragedy, and his pathological obsession. Both traits help to make him one of the most striking figures in the whole range of dramatic creations.
Like Iago, De Flores is repeatedly referred to as "honest" and like him earns the epithet partly from the frank realistic cynicism of his outlook and speech. Certainly in Iago's and possibly in De Flores' case, the playwright thought of this aspect of his character in terms of the conventional stage soldier with his bluff honesty. Like Iago, too, De Flores is proudly conscious that he is a gentleman and that his merits have not been recognized. Both, then, have traces of the malcontent figure in them. Again like Iago, De Flores does not scruple to murder in order to effect his desires. Both De Flores and Iago are opportunists, in this respect, too, being similar to dozens of stage villains. Both are covert villains, maintaining the secret of their true natures to the last moments of their careers, revealing their villainy only to tool-confidantes who are put to dreadful uses and who die for the knowledge they possess. Iago, however, from the nature of his grievances and the action that he sets going is not obliged to be quite so confiding with his dupe, Roderigo, as De Flores is with his "gull", Beatrice; the hypocrisy of Othello's evil angel is thus more profound than is De Flores' dissembling. De Flores, moreover, has a trait which is "an index and obscure prologue to the history of lust and foul thoughts" - his ugliness. As Parrott and Ball express it,

His ugly visage is the sign-manual of his distorted mind.42

His villainy or at least the evil passion which motivates him is thus perceived or at least half-felt by a number of people, despite his reputation for honesty. But more significant still as a trait differentiating him from

42 A Short View of Elizabethan Drama, p. 236.
Iago is the nature of De Flores' motive. Iago is driven chiefly by injured pride, but the intellectual pleasure that he derives from manipulating people as well as his jealous suspicions of Othello's and Cassio's behaviour with Emilia also prompts his actions. With De Flores the matter is much simpler. He has one commanding desire, one paramount motive for acting as he does - to copulate with the proud, high-born Beatrice for the satisfaction of his passion and pride. He is, to a degree not true of Iago,

wholly dominated by one master passion,
a humour in Jonson's sense turned to dreadful tragic purpose.43

In fact, so exclusive is his preoccupation with his morbid desire for Beatrice, so profoundly compulsive his need to be near her, that Schoenbaum is surely right in asserting that

De Flores is clearly a pathological type,
a study in abnormal sexuality.44

There can be no doubt that De Flores is Middleton's "most remarkable exploration in abnormal psychology".45 There is, however, a trait in De Flores that makes him a more human and a more sympathetic character than Iago. Though he dies unrepentant, De Flores does have a conscience. His reactions to Alonzo's ghost and to Tomaso prove this.

Senecan revenge drama frequently employed ghosts - often the spirit of the villain's victim - to prompt revenge after making the necessary

43 Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 236.
44 Middleton's Tragedies, p. 140.
revelations about the guilty to the revenger. Middleton had utilized this stock character in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* but the fact that he put it to somewhat unconventional use - the Lady does not actively encourage revenge but acts instead as a choric commentator and tutelary spirit - suggests that Middleton preferred more mundane causal sequences of human action. At any rate, in *The Changeling* the Senecan ghost again prompts no revenge. Instead, it is used here to stir De Flores' conscience. The ghost of the murdered Alonzo De Piracquo makes its brief first appearance in the dumb-show that opens Act Four. As De Flores smiles cynically at Beatrice's mimed wedding procession,

ALONZO'S ghost appears to him in the midst of his smile, and startles him, showing the hand whose finger he had cut off.

*D.S., 11.10 - 12.*

Earlier, De Flores had declared,

for the deed,

I feel no weight in't; 'tis but light and cheap
For the sweet recompense that I set down for't.

*(III. iv. 18 - 20.)*

But after his lust is somewhat eased by Beatrice's surrender, De Flores begins to be troubled by the deed, for when he encounters Tomaso who would treat him affably De Flores confesses in aside,

I'd fain get off, this man's not for my company,
I smell his brother's blood when I come near him.

*(IV. ii. 41 - 2.)*

And as he leaves on a pretext - "I'm call'd, I think, sir" - he murmurs,

His company even overlays my conscience.

*(IV. ii. 57.)*

Of the ghost itself De Flores is not afraid, or at least he pretends fearlessness. As he is about to effect his plans to set fire to
Diaphanta's room the ghost of Alonzo enters. Though De Flores starts, his self-control and cynicism soon assert themselves:

Ha! what art thou that tak'st away the light
Betwixt that star and me? I dread thee not:
'Twas but a mist of conscience; all's clear again.
(V. i. 58 - 60.)

That his reaction is to a considerable extent bluster is made plain by his subsequent response to the choleric, agitated Tomaso who has renounced "all league with mankind". Tomaso picks a quarrel with De Flores who confesses askance,

I cannot strike; I see his brother's wounds
Fresh bleeding in his eye, as in a crystal.
(V. ii. 32 - 3.)

After craveley dismissing Tomaso's injury to him, De Flores, perplexed but conscience-struck, says in aside,

Why this from him that yesterday appear'd
So strangely loving to me?
0, but instinct is of a subtler strawl
Guilt must not walk so near his lodge again;
He came near me now.
(V. ii. 38 - 42.)

The presence of conscience in De Flores not only humanizes him, making him a more sympathetic figure than many of the cruel, lustful, cynically witty villains of Jacobean drama, but also shows us Middleton extending his realistic portraiture from the rather superficial technique of the City comedies to the point where it becomes the means for creating characters of the most convincing life-likeness and vitality. The use to which he puts the old Senecan convention of the ghost is an illuminating instance of his enriched and deepened realism, for in De Flores' reaction to the spirit as if it were "but a mist of conscience" we see Middleton turning away from an exploitation of a sensational Senecan trick for evoking terror to a
discovery of one more means for disclosing the nature and quality of De
Flores' mind. De Flores is Middleton's most triumphant dramatic creation.\textsuperscript{46}

Since much was said in the above analysis of the trickster tricked
theme about the character of Beatrice we can only briefly pause here to
discuss her nature. Beatrice is one of Middleton's fiercely self-determined
women, but instead of directing her resolution to the service of virtue
she channels it into the service of self. Thus it is that her wilfulness,
conjoined with a spoiled nature and a dangerous innocence, leads to her
death. She is not a Castiza of \textit{The Revenger's Tragedy} nor a Lady of \textit{The
Second Maiden's Tragedy}, except in her intense self-determination. She is
certainly not the worldly opportunist that the Roxena of \textit{Hengist} was. She
is much more like Bianca of \textit{Women Beware Women} who after her seduction
resolves to follow "the licentious swing of her own will". But unlike
Bianca, Beatrice never awakens fully to a sense of her own responsibility
for what she has become. Bianca would agree with Hippolito that

\begin{quote}
Lust and forgetfulness has been amongst us,
And we are brought to nothing.....
\end{quote}

\textit{(V. 1. 187 - 8.)}

\textsuperscript{46}\textit{The De Flores of Reynold's "history" is a very different person from
the one in the play, a young gallant, well-favoured, and a lover of Beatrice
only after she has married Alsemero. Middleton's De Flores may very well
have been inspired by the substitute bride story that Bertram Lloyd, in "A
Minor Source of 'The Changeling'", \textit{Modern Language Review}, vol. 19 (1924),
pp. 101 - 2, showed was from Leonard Digges' translation of Gonzalo de
Cespedes y Meneses' novel, \textit{Gerardo the Unfortunate Spaniard}. Ernst G.
6 (1945), pp. 187 - 95, postulates that in \textit{The Changeling} the murdered
substitute tale "achieved genuine significance by occasioning the dramatists'
conception of De Flores...[for] out of the weak original De Flores and the
love-crazed Biscayner [of the tale] came a third thing, the villain of the
play, loathsome and passionless in his crimes, but tender to Beatrice, and
fascinating both to her and to his audience."}
Beatrice, on the other hand, must blame Fate for her degradation and death. Yet we feel more sympathy for her than for Bianca who chose to push her contamination to its limits. If we cannot, like Beatrice, attribute to Fate her transformation from beauty into ugly whoredom, we at least feel that her innocence and ignorance, something over which she had only partial control, rendered her incapable of coping with the forces that her wilfulness released. Thus we can agree with T. S. Eliot who has finely said,

The tragedy of The Changeling is an eternal tragedy...the tragedy of the not naturally bad but irresponsible and undeveloped nature, caught in the consequences of its own action... the immoral nature, suddenly trapped in the inexorable toils of morality - of morality not made by man but by Nature - and forced to take the consequences of an act which it had planned light-heartedly.47

Eliot adds (after declaring that "Beatrice is not a moral creature; she becomes moral only by becoming damned")48 two trenchant remarks on the nature of Beatrice's tragedy:

But what constitutes the essence of the tragedy... is the habituation of Beatrice to her sin; it becomes no longer merely sin but custom... The tragedy of Beatrice is not that she has lost Alsemoro, for whose possession she played; it is that she has won De Flores.49

In concluding this discussion of character in The Changeling one should note that as in Hengist the disguised personage is totally absent


48 Ibid., p. 91.

49 Ibid., pp. 92 - 3.
from the main action. Middleton's City comedies were rife with disguises, and disguising appeared in the early tragedies and in many of his Fletcherian plays. But except for the masque in *Women, Beware Women* where disguise figures naturally appear, Middleton avoided this convention in his three final tragedies. Only the substitute brides bear some resemblance to the disguised personage in these plays. No doubt the increasingly realistic portrayal of human character and passions which distinguishes Middleton's later dramatic achievement accounts for the absence of this stock figure. Middleton now preferred to present disguising in terms of human duplicity and to portray unmasking in terms of the revelation of hidden motives and suppressed desires.

Finally, then, before examining the conventions of staging, we may turn to Schoenbaum for a general assessment of the subordinate characterization in *The Changeling*:

> Although the entire action centers upon Beatrice and De Flores, one must not overlook the dramatist's skill in delineating the subsidiary characters. Only a few lines of dialogue are needed for the portraits of the lovesick Alsemero, the lecherous Diaphanta, and the somewhat sinister Tomaso; yet these figures emerge quite clearly, quite convincingly.50

Only two conventions of staging need detain us prior to turning to the final group of conventions in this play, those of structure. The two stock techniques of staging are those of the dumb-show and of the telescoping of time. First, the dumb-show.

> At the beginning of Act Four, before the first scene gets under

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way, the following dumb-show takes place:

Enter Gentlemen, VERMANDERO meeting them with action of wonderment at the disappearance of PIRACQUO. Enter ALSEMERO with JASPERINO and gallants; VERMANDERO points to him, the gentlemen seeming to applaud the choice. ALSEMERO, VERMANDERO, JASPERINO, and the others pass over the stage with much pomp, BEATRICE as a bride following in great state, attended by DIAPHANTA, ISABELLA, and other gentlewomen; DE FLORES after all, smiling at the accident....

The dumb-show concludes, as we have seen, with the appearance of Alonzo's ghost. Though widespread in the drama of the time, dumb-shows were an especially frequent structural convention of Senecan revenge drama, and the presence of the ghosts in them was by no means unusual. It was the purpose of most dumb-shows in Elizabethan drama to carry forward the action of the plot, with the main characters as the miming participants, in a more compressed and swifter manner than spoken dialogue allowed; the dumb-show is thus an integral part of the play, indeed a silent scene characterized by somewhat more spectacle than the ordinary one but nevertheless contributory to the main action.51 It is plain that the dumb-show in The Changeling fulfills these structural functions.

It is equally plain, however, that by means of this convention, the time it would normally take to present the action is considerably reduced. Thus the convention of the telescoping of time is observable in this dumb-show as well as in the memorable, later scene in Act Five where Beatrice is shown almost distraught with fear, jealousy, and suspicion over

Diaphanta's protracted stay in Alsemoro's bed. In the space of sixty-six lines of dialogue in V. i. two hours pass, for as the scene opens a clock in the castle strikes one, and then as Beatrice, keyed up even more by De Flores' dangerous plans of arson and by the haunting presence of Alonzo's ghost, vows a thousand deaths on Diaphanta, the clock tolls a terrifying three. The skilful syncopation of time in this scene, contributing as it does to the suspense and nervous agony of the situation, is Middleton's most masterly handling of a stage convention that had received a striking treatment so many years before in the final scene of Dr. Faustus.

As a result of the authors' failure to solve their chief artistic problem, masterly handling is missing, however, from the structure of The Changeling. The problem of this play is the problem of any work of art produced in collaboration: forging a coherent whole out of separately composed parts. Ever since P. G. Wiggin published nearly sixty years ago her study of the authorship of the Middleton-Rowley plays, a careful survey which confirmed Fleay's more conjectural views, scholars have agreed to assign about 985 lines of The Changeling to Middleton and about 1220 to Rowley, that is ascribing to Middleton all but the first and last scenes of the main plot, while giving Rowley I. i. and V. iii. and the whole of the sub-plot.52 It is primarily the sub-plot which disfigures The Changeling.

There are, though, some patent structural flaws in the main plot, too. Schoenbaum suggests two of them thus:

Indeed, the first two scenes of Act Four, those succeeding upon Beatrice's terrible awakening and involving the virginity test, display a marked falling-off in dramatic power which seems to suggest exhaustion in the playwright after his brilliant achievement in III. iv. Some relaxing of tension was necessary, but what Middleton gives us is the rather hackneyed device of a tired dramatist resorting to a piquant situation - the trial of the virgin - that had engaged his attention before but in more persuasive terms. Actually, Middleton never again in The Changeling reached the heights achieved in the great trickster tricked scene of Act Three.

Perhaps the nature of his story forbade the rescaling of this peak, however. Not only the degradation theme that the story embodies, but also the intrigue pattern associated with this theme and with that of the trickster tricked would tend to shift the most highly dramatic scene - the trapping of Beatrice - nearer to the middle of the play than to the end. There can be no doubt that an intrigue pattern similar to those in many of his earlier plays is present here in Middleton's masterpiece, and it is akin to those other patterns of intrigue in the early tragedies and in Hengist and Women, Beware Women in showing the self-destructiveness of sin, and akin to two of these plays in demonstrating that revenge-intrigue brings death to the intriguer, though with the variance here that the revenger and

53 Schoenbaum, op. cit., p. 147.
the intriguer are not identical. Bowers sums up the matter well. He says,

> It is...entirely in keeping with Middleton's conception that revenge should not come from an outside force, the revenger of blood, but should result from the mutual destruction of the criminals.\(^{54}\)

Since for Middleton the death of virtue or of potential virtue apparently held precedence over physical death as far as its being material for drama was concerned, the intriguing which culminates in Beatrice's destroying her soul by her alliance with De Flores' would be the more attractive part of the story and therefore would receive the most careful treatment.

It is time, however, to examine the main flaw in *The Changeling*, the sub-plot. Although the subsidiary action comes entirely from Rowley's pen, Middleton by virtue of his willingness to collaborate must assume a large measure of responsibility for its presence in the play. As the subsequent discussion will show, there are too many relations and correspondences between the plots to exonerate Middleton on the grounds that he was unaware of the nature of what Rowley was writing; indeed, the play itself brings out at various points, albeit especially in Rowley's concluding scene, the close connections between plot and sub-plot. The suggestion has been made that these relations may be accounted for by assuming that Rowley revised a play by Middleton to make it accord with the younger actor-dramatist's dexterity in comic roles.\(^{55}\) If Rowley did revise it, even if

\(^{54}\) Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, p. 206.

\(^{55}\) W. D. Dunkel, "Did Not Rowley Merely Revise Middleton?" *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, vol. 48 (September, 1933), pp. 709 - 805. Dunkel's case is not at all persuasive since it depends heavily on such arguments that because there were satirical portraits of physicians and jealous husbands in Middleton's City comedies, we may ascribe the Alibius-Isabella-Antonio triangle to Middleton. See Schoenbaum, *Middleton's Tragedies*, p. 214.
the entire sub-plot is an interpolation, Middleton may still be held responsible for what was done to the play in view of his silence about the matter. And if his objections were voiced, since nothing to make us think so has survived, much blame for the flaw in his masterpiece remains with Middleton. In the absence of evidence to the contrary and in the light of internal evidence which demonstrates close collaboration between the two dramatists, the presence of the disfiguring sub-plot in a play in which Middleton had so large a hand must clearly redound to the older (and greater!) playwright's discredit. To assume otherwise is to abandon one's artistic conscience.

The relations between plot and sub-plot in *The Changeling* are both clear and numerous. This is not to say that the two plots display the degrees of relatedness discoverable in *King Lear* or even in *Women, Beware Women*; only that the connections are real and that they must have been, for the most part, consciously intended by the dramatists. The denouement's very explicit cataloguing of the various embodiments of the changeling theme makes this clear, but many other features do, too. For one thing, the story-patterns of the two plots are similar in that both are concerned with the attempts of secret lovers to gain possession of the women they desire; in both cases the lovers are disguised, either as madmen or by duplicity which conceals a sexual obsession verging on mania, and both lovers reveal themselves unexpectedly to the women of their devotion. The story-patterns' more specific details of relatedness are perhaps most

56 Many of these relations were first clearly detailed by William Empson in his study, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1935, pp. 48 – 52.
striking, though. They include the conventional eavesdropping episodes so useful to the Elizabethan drama: as De Flores by chance overhears the assignation of Beatrice and Alsemero and determines to profit by his knowledge (II. ii. 57 - 64.), so Lollio accidentally sees the "madman", Antonio, addressing love to Isabella and attempts to exploit her sexually because of it (III. iii. 185 - 258.). And as De Flores commits murder to enjoy Beatrice, so murder is threatened in the comic under-plot. Isabella rejects the lecherous advances of the blackmailing eavesdropper, Lollio, thus:

Sirrah, no more! I see you have discover'd
This love's knight errant, who hath made adventure
For purchase of my love; be silent, mute,
Mute as a statue, or his injunction
For me enjoying, shall be to cut thy throat....

(III. iii. 251 - 5.)

As De Flores had been regarded by Vermandero as a loyal follower to be entrusted with waiting on Beatrice, so Lollio was felt by the jealous Albius to be so trustworthy that he could place the guarding of his wife into his servant's hands. The misplaced trust in the one plot results in the cuckolding of Alsemero; in the other, in the near-cuckolding of Albius.

Then, too, as Vermandero's guest, Alsemero, had engaged in intrigue which his host would denounce, so Antonio and Franciscus, the "guests" of Albius, scheme against their host. The trickster tricked pattern is thus as prominent in the sub-plot as in the main action.

Not only is the disguise theme discoverable in both plots, but the themes of transformation and deformity are, too; they appear even in

57 E. E. Stoll, Art and Artifice in Shakespeare, New York, Barnes and Noble, 1951, p. 3.
the imagery. In the madhouse scenes we may see this in Antonio's words to Isabella after he has revealed himself:

Look you but cheerfully, and in your eyes
I shall behold mine own deformity,
And dress myself up fairer: I know this shape
Becomes me not, but in those bright mirrors
I shall array me handsomely.

(III. iii. 194 - 8.)

The concluding half of this remark could have come from De Flores.

The main action's theme of love-blinded judgment has its parallel in the sub-plot in the insanity theme. Indeed, in the main plot Tomaso refers to Alonzo's stubborn refusal to see Beatrice's coldness as "love's tame madness" (II. i. 153.), thereby allying the two plots in a direct thematic fashion. Isabella's lovers, Antonio and Franciscus, disguised as a fool and as a lunatic, are tamed by Lollio's whip as well as by their desire to keep their love secret, but their passion very nearly betrays them to Tomaso's vengeful sword when it is learned that their disappearance from the castle coincided with Alonzo's vanishing. But the connection between the madhouse scenes and the main plot has another aspect, too, though still one intimately associated with the love-blinded judgment theme.

William Empson, in detailing this other aspect, concludes,

So the effect of the vulgar asylum scenes
is to surround the characters with a herd
of lunatics...one step into whose company is irretrievable....

Beatrice takes that step, but Isabella (like Alsemero in the main plot, one of the few clear-sighted individuals in the play) sensibly refrains from doing so. Alonzo De Piracquo also steps into the company of madmen,

58 Some Versions of Pastoral, p. 52.
as Tomaso observes. But De Flores is yet another figure who joins the herd of lunatics since his insane lust drives him, heedless of the consequences, into murder and suicide.

The discussion of the relations between plot and sub-plot may be concluded with noting Alibius's commission from Vermandero to present at the castle a masque of madmen in honour of Beatrice's wedding. Isabella, Antonio, and Franciscus, as well as the genuine lunatics take part in the spectacular rehearsal of the dances which occupies much of IV. iii. Of this masque (which is not given a final performance), Empson says,

This was not merely a fine show on the stage but the chief source of the ideas of the play.59

And Bradbrook picks up Empson's subsequent mention of the antimasque to assert that the sub-plot acts for the main plot

as a kind of parallel or reflection in a different mode: their relationship is precisely that of masque and antimasque, say the two halves of Jonson's *Masque of Queens*.60

Recently, Bradbrook has reaffirmed her view that the two actions of *The Changeling* are both intimately associated and complementary. She writes,

The unity of its plot and subplot which is immediately seen in the acting, depends on the theme - the irrational swamping the rational, overbearing 'the pales and forts of reason'.61

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59 Some Versions of Pastoral, p. 51.

60 Themes and Conventions, p. 221.

It is not the case, then with The Changeling that the principal and the subsidiary actions are tenuously related like those of The Second Maiden's Tragedy. Rather, the two plots are linked (although to a much greater degree) like those in Hengist, King of Kent: characters in both plots come together in episodes that have important bearings on the action as a whole. We must, therefore, look elsewhere for the weakness in the structure of The Changeling.

Before we look for this flaw we must examine one further matter connected with the sub-plot - Rowley's intention in portraying Alibius and his madhouse. It has recently been shown that Rowley very apparently had Bethlehem hospital in mind when he composed these scenes, and that the sub-plot represents a satire of that institution and of its corrupt medical officer, Dr. Hilkiah Crooke, and his equally corrupt steward. Why Rowley should have chosen to satirize (or at least parody) such objects may be accounted for thus:

So intense is the tragic action of The Changeling that some type of interspersion was essential; and by Jacobean theatrical standards nothing could have been more appropriate as a "second attraction" than the intrigues of persons confined to a madhouse.

But what disfigures Rowley's portrayal of madness - and at this point we reach the flaw in the sub-plot - is the ease with which he slips into commonplace burlesque and into the use of all the stock phrases and cliches


63 Ibid., p. 47.
of the conventional stage lunatic. Even Franciscus, the more interesting of the two sham madmen, is very obviously a spoof of the typical romantic lover whose wits have become deranged. We must, then, agree with Reed who says,

If, as a work of literature, Middleton's great tragedy has succeeded, it has done so in spite of its mad scenes.  

Two other difficulties connected with the sub-plot are, we might finally note, considered by Jump. Of the subsidiary action he writes,

One obstacle in the way of its appreciation today is that readers are unlikely to think lunacy a laughing matter. But even if, by a flight of the historical imagination, this obstacle is overcome, it may still be felt that there is much merely tedious fooling to be endured. When, in I. ii, the jealous husband Alibius says, 'I am old, Lollio', and Lollio retorts, 'No, sir, 'tis I am old Lollio', one can respond only with a wondering pity for the author who thought such backchat worth ink and paper.

It is difficult to see how these views could elicit disagreement. Plot and sub-plot in The Changeling are related, there is no question about it. There certainly is a question, however, about the quality of Rowley's performance, and it is apparent to nearly all students of the play that Rowley's work is gravely inferior to the brilliant performance of his collaborator. It is this inferiority, this artistic failure, that produces so great a jar in the reader as he switches from plot to sub-plot, and that

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64 Bedlam on the Jacobean Stage, p. 47.

seriously impairs the structural integrity of the whole. We must therefore conclude that Middleton's crowning dramatic achievement is disfigured by a subplot conventional and wooden in nature, and miles removed from the superb artistry of the story of Beatrice and De Flores. **The Changeling** will live because of the genius of Middleton, not because of Rowley's showmanship.66

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66 Louis B. Wright, in "Madmen as Vaudeville Performers on the Elizabethan Stage", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 30 (1931), p. 54, would account for the inartistic theatricality of the mad scenes in Elizabethan plays on the grounds that "frequently the mad scenes are mere variety show amusements, inserted to please an audience that sought entertainment, not "art"."
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

About a dozen years ago E. M. W. Tillyard wrote of Elizabethan drama that

people are beginning to perceive that this drama was highly stylised and conventional, that its technical licences are of certain kinds and fall into a pattern, that its extravagant sentiments are repetitions and not novelties; that it may after all have its own, if queer, regulation.\(^1\)

When he composed these remarks Tillyard quite probably had in mind the studies of such scholars as Schüicking, Stoll, Bradbrook, and Bowers, each of whom in the decades between the wars had produced works of fundamental importance to the elucidation of dramatic conventions in the Elizabethan era. Really, it was unnecessary for Tillyard to have pointed out then the presence of convention in that era's plays, and it is even less necessary to do so today. Indeed, the highly stylised and conventional nature of Elizabethan drama is now so much a cliché of criticism that an investigation of convention and device in Middleton's plays becomes virtually a conventional undertaking, and its conclusions subject to the dangers of the tautology that Middleton's stereotyped drama is rife with convention.

Since we naturally wished to avoid such a conclusion, this thesis has had

as its purpose the elucidation of the role of convention and device in the

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1 E. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, London, Chatto and Windus, 1943, p. 7. Tillyard is perhaps overly-cautious in using such a phrase as "beginning to perceive". Many scholars had long perceived the fact.
plays of Middleton so that his stature as a tragic artist might be assessed. It is to be hoped that the foregoing pages have adequately detailed Middleton's more significant conventions of structure, theme, characterization, and staging, though a summary here will not be amiss. There then remains the two-fold task of sketching the conception of tragedy that will be adopted in this chapter, and of measuring in terms of it Middleton's handling of conventions and thus of gauging his performance as a tragic artist.

The main conventions of structure discoverable in Middleton's plays are those of the intrigue pattern with its concomitant disguisings, reversals, and revelations, of revenge plots provoking counter action, and of dumb-shows, plays-within-plays, and masques. When the occasion demands them, such structural conventions as the de casibus pattern and the sin-repentance-punishment sequence are utilized, too. The chief conventional themes - sex, revenge, the trickster tricked, and the self-destructiveness of sin - are, understandably enough, closely associated with those of structure, and with those of characterization, too. Middleton's more important stock characters are tricked tricksters (the gulls and dupes of the City comedies belong here), cuckold, wittols, lechers, adulterers, and lust-ridden schemers, representatives of virginity and chastity, wily intriguers, resolute, Machiavellian revengers, wilful women, ambitious climbers, gallants, malcontents, and pathological personages. Finally, the conventions of staging include the exploitation of spectacle, the syncopation of time, and the neutrality of space. But against this summary of convention in Middleton's plays must now be set the conception of tragedy which will serve as the standard for measuring Middleton's performance in tragic drama.
The Elizabethan conception of tragedy, largely the product of Medieval notions of Fortune, the Sixteenth Century's taste for Seneca, and Renaissance misunderstanding of Aristotle's *Poetics*, does not prove very helpful in evaluating Middleton's tragedies though it does provide data for determining the climate in which he worked.

Sir Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* indicts in a famous passage the failure of English romantic plays to observe the rules outlined in humanist interpretations (chiefly Castelvetro's and Minturno's) of the *Poetics*. Sidney was able to praise *Gorboduc* as a tragedy that "obtaines the very end of Poesie" by being

\[
\text{full of stately speeches and well sounding Phrases, clyming to the height of Seneca his stile}
\]

but deplores the fact that

\[
\text{it is faulty both in place and time, the two necessary companions of all corporall actions.}
\]

The misconceptions of England's most famous Renaissance critic were matched by the mistaken theories of two of her most famous playwrights. Ben Jonson desired to write tragedies displaying not only the "Aristotelian" unities but also what he took to be the classic correctness of truth of argument, dignity of persons,
gravity and height of elocution...fulness and frequency of sentence.  

And in the epistolary dedication to The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, George Chapman defines the "soul, limbs, and limits of an autentical tragedy" as material instruction, elegant and sententious excitation to virtue, and deflection from her contrary.

Both definitions betray the powerful homiletic and rhetorical bias in Renaissance theories of literature, and both are friendly to the tragedy of Seneca, in Renaissance eyes the ideal classical dramatist.

There was, however, some critical hostility to the scholars' principles and preferences, in addition to the disagreement and indifference implied by the hundreds of plays written in a more romantic fashion. Perhaps, though, the finest expression of a playwright's reaction against critical dogma came from Jonson himself who was ordinarily almost idolatriously appreciative of the ancients. With reference to them he said of his generation that

we should enjoy the same license, or free power to illustrate and heighten our invention, as they did; and not be tied to those strict and regular forms which the niceness of a few, who are nothing but form, would thrust upon us.

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7 See the introductory scene to Every Man Out of His Humour in Schelling, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 65.
Nevertheless, Jonson's belief in the virtues of the unities and his ponderously detailed attachment to the ancients in Catiline and Sejanus found as little general acceptance as Chapman's seeming conviction that tragedy should be a platform for Stoical philosophy, and it is probably safe to say that most of the theatre-goers then shared the feelings of Middleton's own Vindice in The Revenger's Tragedy who said that

When the bad bleedes, then is the Tragedie good.  \(^3\)

(III. v. [216])

Such a stunted, indeed, debased, conception of tragedy as this conviction reveals, though it betrays an abiding prejudice of Elizabethan playwrights - the insistence on poetic justice - is unworthy as a standard for measuring Middleton's own achievement even in The Revenger's Tragedy, and is no more help to an assessment of his stature than are the critical formulations of Sidney, Jonson, or Chapman. Perhaps, then, it is more profitable to measure him against the yardstick of tragedy's generic nature.

Whatever else a tragic drama may be, it is at least a serious play.  \(^9\) Macneile Dixon describes its defining bias in remarking that tragedy is preoccupied with the more serious, enigmatic or afflicting cir-

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8 Nicoll's edition of Tourneur's plays is, of course, the text cited here.

323.

cumstances of life.\textsuperscript{10}

Because it is the more serious aspects of life that are dealt with in tragedy, A. N. Whitehead was able to say that the essence of dramatic tragedy is not unhappiness. It resides in the solemnity of the remorseless working of things.\textsuperscript{11}

In part this necessary seriousness springs from another essential ingredient of tragedy, the presence in it of calamity of one kind or another which overtakes the hero. In part, too, the seriousness arises from the suffering hero's attitude to his circumstances and misfortune. He refuses to accept his fate resignedly or cynically but struggles against it. Then again, the serious mood of tragedy springs from a sense that tremendous issues are at stake, ones that involve not the superficialities of life but rather its fundamental character. For as Sewall puts it,

what distinguishes tragedy from other forms which bespeak this cosmic sense... is its peculiar and intense preoccupation with the evil in the universe, whatever it is in the stars that compels, harasses, and bears man down. Tragedy wrestles with the evil of the mystery - and the mystery of the evil.\textsuperscript{12}

Thus, tragedy shows the hero coming through conflict into significant relations with himself, with society, and with the cosmos.\textsuperscript{13} It is, however,

\textsuperscript{10} Dixon, \textit{Tragedy}, p. 11. This emphasis on its serious character is, of course, Aristotle's point, too. See p. 1460 of the edition of \textit{The Poetics} cited in n. 9 above.


\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 349 - 58.
essential to tragedy that the hero be overwhelmed in this conflict, but equally essential that some redeeming quality, some "sense of triumph in defeat" remain. A. S. P. Woodhouse has put the matter succinctly:

Disaster and some mitigation of our sense of disaster are alike essential to tragic effect.\textsuperscript{15}

And the effect of tragedy is not to perform the medical function that Aristotle's "catharsis" signifies - "The theatre is not a hospital," F. L. Lucas reminds us\textsuperscript{16} - but to exalt and exhilarate.\textsuperscript{17} Tragedy performs this function and achieves this redemption by plucking from the heart of failure that conviction that "we are greater than we know\textsuperscript{18} or at least that there is "a world in which all questions could be answered.\textsuperscript{19} There is, therefore, mitigation for the spectators' charged hearts and minds and for the tragic protagonist's suffering:

In the defeat or death which is the usual lot of the tragic hero, he becomes a citizen of a larger city, still defiant but in a new mood, a 'calm of mind', a partial acquiescence. Having at first resented his destiny, he has lived it out, found unexpected meanings in it,

\textsuperscript{14} Dixon, \textit{Tragedy}, p. 225.


\textsuperscript{16} Tragedy in Relation to Aristotle's 'Poetics', p. 29. (See also Dixon, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 127.) Lucas further remarks about tragedy's effect that "we go to have the experience, not to use it" (p. 55.).

\textsuperscript{17} Dixon, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 127, 159, 201.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 200.

carried his case to a more-than-human tribunal. He sees his own destiny, and man's destiny, in its ultimate perspective...There has been suffering and disaster, ultimate and irredeemable loss, and there is promise of more to come. But all who are involved have been witness to new revelations about human existence, the evil of evil and the goodness of good. They are more 'ready'. The same old paradoxes and ambiguities remain, but for the moment they are transcended in the higher vision. 

It is the nature of his higher vision that so conspicuously sets off the tragedies of Thomas Middleton from those of William Shakespeare, the noblest of his contemporaries. What Middleton gives us is much less profound, much less resonant, for the closest that he comes to Shakespearean vision is to affirm that there is a moral order in the universe, but in Middleton this order is presented in terms of the theological and moral commonplace which had it that sin is self-destuctive, that lust and murder bring upon the sinner's head the inevitable consequence of death. This view receives its most explicit statement, we have seen, in the words of the nameless retainer in Hengist, King of Kent:

See sin needes
Noe more distraction then it breedes
In it owne Bosome

(V. ii. 107 - 9.)

and Hippolito in Women, Beware Women expressed the matter in similar terms in saying that he came by his incestuous passion for Isabella

Even as easily
As man comes by destruction, which ofttimes

20 Sewall, Essays in Criticism, vol. 4 (October, 1954), pp. 357 - 8. Lucas, op. cit., p. 54, suggests that the vision that tragedy offers us is rather stern and forbidding, though Stoically bracing. He says that tragedy's "only consolation is [its] utter truthfulness: we have seen for an instant through its mists the sheer mountain-face of life."
He wears in his own bosom.

(II. i. 2 - 4.)

This view is implied in the whole conduct of the main action of The Changeling, too, and insofar as the sinners in The Revenger's Tragedy and The Second Maiden's Tragedy contrive their own doom, the early tragedies also exemplify the outlook.21

That sin should be self-destructive was a conviction not only of Elizabethan theology or daily life but also of literature. The drama of the time frequently illustrates it, as may be seen in so characteristically Elizabethan a play as Shakespeare's Richard III where the condemned Buckingham exclaims,

That high All-Seer that I dallied with
Bath turn'd my feigned prayer on my head
And given in earnest what I begg'd in jest.
Thus doth he force the swords of wicked men
To turn their own points on their masters' bosoms....

(V. i. 20 - 4.)

It is not in any originality of view, therefore, that Middleton makes a significant contribution to tragedy's requirement of vision, but rather it is the consistency with which he sees sin as fatal to itself that constitutes one of the main strengths of his tragic view of life. Again and again he presents to his audience the spectacle of evil generating its own nemesis, of sin blindly spinning the net in which it at last becomes fatally entangled. Again and again sinners unwittingly contrive their own

21 See Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies, pp. 34 - 5, 97 - 8, 124 - 6, 147 - 9, 167 - 8, 189 - 91, and passim. Antonio's words in The Witch (V. i. [1830 - 1.]) also plainly state this view:

I doe but thinck how each mans punishment proves still a kind of Justice to himself.
deaths. More consistently than many of his contemporaries, Middleton sustains a tragic vision which posits the presence in the world of a moral order inexorable in its working. Herein is quite certainly one of his chief contributions to the literature of tragedy.

One of the chief weaknesses, however, is intimately connected with this vision. Nowhere does Middleton's presentation of sin as self-destructive reveal any new insights into the nature of evil or of good, any enlarged or wider vision. Everywhere the Elizabethan demand for poetic justice prevails. Everywhere the convention that the wicked must perish is found (death being the conventional end of any Elizabethan tragedy). Thus Vindice and Guardiano are killed off by the dramatist in a manner wholly unacceptable to later belief; in fact, nearly all of Middleton's tragedies are marred in their denouements by the presence of those conventions associated with the deaths of the main personages in Elizabethan plays. The deaths of the Tyrant in The Second Maiden's Tragedy and of Vortiger and Horsus in Hengist, King of Kent are as conventional as those in Women, Beware Women. Only in The Changeling is the denouement free of these flaws, though some of the conventions even there - the self-justifying summations, the repentant speeches, the couplet conclusions - verge on mere commonplace. No fresh moral insights lift the dying onto a higher plane. What they finally recognize instead is the truth of what they


23 For these conventions see Theodore Spencer, Death and Elizabethan Tragedy, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1936, passim.
already knew but what in their wilfulness was lost sight of. Hippolito, fatally pierced with envenomed arrows, expresses the typical recognition which comes at last and too late to Middleton's tragic personages:

Lust and forgetfulness has been amongst us,
And we are brought to nothing....
(V. i. 187 - 8.)

Actually, these words are not far removed from Vindice's

Tis time to die, when we are our selves our foes
(V. iii.[1544])
or Beatrice's perception,

Vengeance begins;
Murder, I see, is follow'd by more sins....
(III. iv. 163 - 4.)

And the couplet that Rowley devised Beatrice's final speech conforms wholly with Middleton's conventional moral outlook:

Forgive me, Alsemero, all forgive!
'Tis time to die when 'tis a shame to live.
(V. iii. 181 - 2.)

What these personages already know but what they lose sight of was one of the fundamental moral notions, one of the most widespread religious convictions, of the Puritan middle class in Elizabethan England: God's creatures cannot escape the consequences of their own acts, for God holds each man responsible for his deeds. Moreover, in meting punishment God frequently makes the sinner the agent of his own fatal undoing. Though he normally only implies God's role in the moral histories of his characters, it is precisely these conventional middle-class beliefs and doctrines that Middleton repeatedly embodies in his tragedies. Despite his keen insight into the way the mind works, he nowhere gives evidence of having arrived at any deeper understanding of the moral order. His tragedies, with the
possible exception of *The Changeling*, are *exempla* illustrating the moral commonplace: the wages of sin is death.

Ministering to the theme of the self-destructiveness of sin is the theme of the trickster tricked. Skilfully as he had utilized it to evoke dry, ironic and sometimes farcical laughter in his City comedies and to produce startling surprise in his Fletcherian plays, it is in tragedy that Middleton puts the theme to its most brilliant use, for here, conjoined with the motif of sin's suicidal nature, it serves not only as a plot pattern and a technique of irony, but also as a revelation of and a commentary on the characters involved in the main action. In *The Changeling*, we have seen, this theme reaches the heights of masterpiece. But the convention was not always so brilliantly employed. *The Revenger's Tragedy* ends on a contrived improbability, a reversal of fortune so startling as to turn Vindice abruptly from the avenging hero into a villain-revenger. Although such an incredible *volte-face* is missing from *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, the Machiavellian poisoning of the scheming Tyrant in the main action of that play and the Senecan butchery of the tricksters in the sub-plot is only slightly less disfiguring. In *Hengist* the tricksters and the tricked finally experience reversals which are like those of dozens of other ambitious and lustful personages in the history plays of the time. In *Women. Beware Women* Guardiano's strikingly improbable accidental death, consonant as it is with Elizabethan demands for poetic justice and with Middleton's pervasive irony, is yet so akin to Vindice's *volte-face* that it is merely the most glaring instance of the inartistic uses to which convention is put in portraying the tricking of
tricksters in Act V of that play. There is, however, a felt inevitability in the deaths of most of the other characters in Women, Beware Women, and even something of that inevitability in the catastrophe of Hengist. To this extent both later tragedies are superior to the earlier story of Vindice. But The Changeling surpasses all of Middleton's other tragedies in the skill with which the theme of the trickster tricked is employed for there it is made so inseparable a part of character portrayal that the play is gravely misinterpreted if it is seen as primarily one more illustration of a much-tried theme. But before the relations of the conventions of character drawing to Middleton's tragedies can be assessed, we must examine another theme that bulks very large in all of Middleton's plays, that of sex.

It has often been noted that Middleton not only found in sex a fascination which sometimes approached obsession but also that he had a peculiar flair for handling sexual complications....

We have seen that it served his purpose to place the theme of chastity against that of lust, and we might now observe that usually this was done in terms analogous to a literary and dramatic convention that traces its origin to the Medieval period. This convention is that of the mirror. We have seen that

Tudor literature exhibits a well-established convention of setting portraits of the ideal king - the speculum principis - in calculated contrast to the accompanying

24 F. S. Boas, An Introduction to Stuart Drama, p. 245.
portraits of the sinful tyrant.25

In Middleton the contrast of chastity and lust is normally secured by means of what might thus be called the speculum amoris, a variant on the convention of the speculum principis. Occasionally, Middleton presents by this technique views on sex which were novel to his age. F. S. Boas, for instance, finds the following passage from The Witch one of the earliest expressions of the Platonic love doctrine which was increasingly to influence Stuart drama.26

The passage concerns Sebastian's conviction that his union with Isabella has a higher sanction than mere earthly marriage bestows. Sebastian declares,

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 Man in awe
from starting from their Wedlocks, the knot publique,
'tis in our Soules knit fast, and how more precious
the Soule is, then the Body, so much judge
the sacred, and celestial Tye within us,
more then the outward fforme, which calls but Witnes
here upon earth, to what is done in heaven.

(IV. ii. [1492 - 1502.])

But usually Middleton is attracted to a much more conventional sex theme, that of lust, a theme that not only commanded the attention of most Jacobean playwrights, but which, it would seem, was a standard one for the


26 Boas, op. cit., p. 228.
private theatres for which Middleton wrote. The extent to which lust is prevalent in his plays has been indicated in preceding chapters of this thesis, but it is probably once more necessary to affirm that Middleton saw it from a commonplace point of view. His moral judgments on lust are the conventional judgments of his age. Indeed, one may generalize by stating that however much he was preoccupied with sex, Middleton's tragic world almost nowhere presents sexual passions as educative, humanizing, or liberating forces capable of releasing greatness. Never could he say, "All for love, or the world well lost", for his attitude to sex was commonplace: sex is either sinful lust or, much less frequently in his plays and then only by implication, a divinely sanctioned privilege of holy wedlock. As lust, sexual desire in his plays is the judgment-blinding passion which brings its victims to their ruin. But like the theme of the trickster tricked, Middleton's treatment of the theme of sex was tied with increasing­ly greater skill to characterization, and it is to his handling of character portrayal that we must now turn.

If it was one of Middleton's signal contributions to the literature of tragedy to have embodied so consistently the belief in sin's self-destructiveness, his primary achievement was the wedding of this belief to the delineation of character. Repeatedly he affirms that evil natures breed their own doom, that the sinner, however unwittingly, brings punishment on his own head as an inevitable consequence of what he is. Schoenbaum

27 Harbage, *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions*, pp. 67 - 71, 186 - 221. Of the plays composed for these theatres Harbage writes (p. 71.) that "the theme is sexual transgression, coupled in tragedy with treachery and murder, and in comedy with cupidity and fraud."
has put the matter well:

Driven by impulses and passions which they are unable to master, which indeed they can scarcely understand, Middleton's men and women gradually disintegrate as moral beings, discovering too late that they wear destruction within their own bosoms.28

And the objectivity and detachment with which his ironic observations of human behaviour were made has been finely expressed by Ellis-Fermor who at the same time recognized in Middleton's realism a preoccupation with this world:

In comedy he early developed the ironic detachment which only a potential tragic sense can give, and into tragedy he carried the habit of clear, single-minded observation learnt during almost a lifetime's practice in naturalistic comedy. No mist of sentiment confuses the delicate outlines in which he sparingly defines the processes by which a mind gropes, discovers, recoils from and is engulfed in the events with which it has entangled itself. No rush of passionate identification of himself with its fate drives athwart his judgment or opens up vistas of perception into worlds beyond normal experience. All his concern is with its experience in contact with a present actuality, and however deep or however rare be that experience he finds in it nothing which passes comprehension, never resigns into the hands of a circumambient mystery that soul upon which he has focussed so steady and so dry a light.29

There is thus in Middleton's tragedies little or no intimation of man's relation to the cosmos, except insofar as conventional moral and religious

28 Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies, p. 150.
notions in the denouements rather mechanically relate man to a wider sphere.

Except for the half dozen virtuous figures like Govianus and his Lady in The Second Maiden's Tragedy, Castiza in The Revenger's Tragedy, Constantius in Hengist, the Cardinal in Women. Beware Women and Alsemoro in The Changeling, Middleton's characters are self-seeking pursuers of pleasure, often calculating, sometimes wilfully heedless, and until disaster afflicts them always blind to the fact that they are contriving their own deaths. But though they may be intensely incarnate spirits of revenge like Vindice, lust-demented figures like the Tyrant, calculating and resourcefully ambitious climbers like Vortiger and Hengist, greed-driven, faithless wives like Bianca, headstrong, selfish women like Beatrice, or resolute villains like De Flores, none of these characters reaches the heights of the heroic titanism that Tamburlaine had achieved or that Lear (more credibly) attained. Even Vindice's passions are not maintained at an exalted level of intensity, and De Flores' cynical and gross views of womankind and his matter-of-fact self-appraisals reduce the expression of the keen edge of his lust and his pride to a human level. Though there are baroque qualities in Middleton's tragic personages - extraordinary intensification of emotion, bizarreness and fantasticality of nature, a partiality for the majestic or the self-exalting attitude^30 - it is true that as he progressed in writing tragedy Middleton tended to bring his characters closer and closer to daily life. What Schücking said of Shakespeare may, therefore, be adapted by a change of name to suit Middleton:

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... although ... the extravagant is given a prominent part in his art, Middleton is on the whole always to be found on the side of the natural — the word being used in a relative sense — as opposed to the mannered or artificial.31

Both Bald32 and Schoenbaum33 have spoken of Middleton's proclivity to tone down or even avoid the heroic note in tragedy, and they would attribute this tendency to the dramatist's middle-class outlook and his realistic technique. Perhaps Ellis-Fermor, though, makes the best summary of how character portrayal, attitude, and technique contribute to Middleton's conception of tragedy:

What results is as clear of pathos as it is of colour or incidental poetry. It terrifies by the scientific clarity with which it reveals the operation of natural laws about the inevitable destruction of those who unawares have broken them...what is left at the end is above all else the sense of passionless and ineluctable law, smooth, unhurried, lucid in its processes, dwarfing the men it overthrows to something below the status of tragedy as they are dwarfed by those other great operations of nature, flood and earthquake and pestilence. We attend, as we rarely do in Jacobean drama, the destruction of a soul, not the gigantic triumph of the human spirit in uttermost physical catastrophe. No one in these plays cries 'I am Duchess of Malfi still'. No one speaks over the dead or dying those tributes which Shakespeare, Webster, Ford put in the mouths of the bystanders, often even of the very foes who have destroyed them. Their lives are indeed 'a black charnel' but they do not redeem themselves in death; their deaths are of a piece with their lives and become them no

32 "Introduction", Hengist, King of Kent, p. xlvii.
33 Middleton's Tragedies, p. 149 - 50.
better. It is in this pitiless abstemiousness that Middleton stands alone in Jacobean tragedy, suggesting again and again to the reader of a later age that here was in germ the Ibsen of the seventeenth century. Faithful to his observation and to the record of underlying psychological laws which it revealed to him, he is untouched by the heroic, the romantic and the pathetic mood, to the very belittling of those human figures which his contemporaries, even to Ben Jonson himself in tragedy, exalt.34

If vision appears in the denouements of Middleton's tragedies only in the sense that sin is shown to bear ever-fertile seeds which produce ever-lethal flowers, it is also the case that there is little of that triumph in defeat and even less of that state of exaltation necessary to tragic effect. No nobility of soul redeems the stricken protagonists, unless we care to see in their brief last-minute recognition of guilt a noble quality. And instead of being exalted by the manner in which the protagonists meet catastrophe, the spectator of Middleton's tragedies will more likely feel that the world is well rid of such creatures. The Tyrant and Vortiger die as cowards, Vindice rather flippantly meets his doom, Horsus and De Flores perish proclaiming the pleasure that lust has brought them, and Bianca makes her exit from life with a kiss that poisons a body whose spirit is already deformed. There is a certain desperate courage in Bianca at this point but it is so brief in appearance and so entangled with the "licentious swing" of her will that it can scarcely be said to redeem her from her degradation. Only in The Changeling do the tragic personages leave some reverberations of grandeur ringing in the spectator's

34 Una Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama, p. 152.
consciousness. The success of De Flores' single-minded resolution to possess Beatrice rises to the eloquence of

Yes, and her honour's prize
Was my reward; I thank life for nothing
But that pleasure; it was so sweet to me,
That I have drunk up all, left none behind
For any man to pledge me.

(V. iii. 170 – 4.)

And Beatrice's awareness of her contamination and of her fated but disastrously mismanaged association with De Flores tears from her the contrite, dying cry of warning to her father,

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

(V. iii. 152 – 61.)

Neither of these speeches, however, is Middleton's since the final scene of The Changeling was composed by Rowley. Even if it be argued, then, that V. iii. was written under Middleton's direction, we may nevertheless conclude that normally in Middleton the triumph in defeat is not one wherein the protagonists achieve some positive, admirable success in the face of disaster but rather one in which a moral postulate of theology is vindicated. A principle triumphs, not a quality of soul. And the effect on the spectator is not one of exaltation but of satisfaction and persuasion, satisfaction that the guilty should be punished, and persuasion consequent upon a convincing demonstration. For these reasons perhaps, as well as for the realistic, cynical, dispassionate, and ironic qualities of the
tragedies, Schoenbaum was able to conclude his summary of Middleton's contribution to the literature of tragedy by saying,

> The appeal of such plays as these is to the intelligence rather than to the emotions, and, perhaps for this reason, they have never achieved the widest popularity.\(^{35}\)

All too often, moreover, the characters in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, *Hengist*, and even *Women, Beware Women* are stock figures serving the purposes of a thesis, so that, except for his contribution to *The Changeling*, it is true of Middleton what has been asserted about Chapman:

> His tragedy is often more akin to the old moral play: there are moments in it when the human lineaments dissolve and the blank face of the hypostasis looks through, when the allegorical abstraction blots out the analogy of art... The shift from mask to face and back again induces a shudder in the action, a momentary lack of focus while the audience adjusts itself from the homily to the warmer contemplation of men in action.\(^{36}\)

It may, however, be said in defense of Middleton that the tendency in the portrayal of character in his tragedies is towards a more thorough-going realism so that by the time that he came to write the main scenes of *The Changeling* convention appears in the characters as traits contributing to their compelling vitality. Indeed, it might be argued that the very commonplace of Middleton's moral views served him well in portraying

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35 *Middleton's Tragedies*, p. 150.

character in tragedy. By accepting the conventional notions of his age he was not only provided with a sense of security in being able to take for granted the fundamental relations of man to man and of man to God, but was therefore also able to concentrate on what he was so supremely well-equipped to do - analyzing the motives and processes of wayward human minds. For however conventional his moral outlook, Middleton was not prevented by it from achieving a psychological penetration, a probing of states of soul, so profoundly acute that only comparison with that of Shakespeare does justice to it. Moreover, however conventional the trickster tricked theme is in the drama of his time, however mechanical or adventitious its use in character portrayal in the City comedies, and however irresponsible its employment in the Fletcherian plays, Middleton demonstrates with triumphant conclusiveness in *The Changeling* that he could put this convention to superb and brilliant use. Wedded to his psychological realism, the theme of the trickster tricked here becomes an artistic ingredient in Middleton's outstanding dramatic achievement, the portrayal of the characters of Beatrice and De Flores.

Conventions of structure show a similar tendency. Whereas the intrigue pattern of *The Revenger's Tragedy* depended heavily on the artifice of the *volte-face*, on such Senecan conventions as the plot motif of delay in revenge, and on the use of Marstonian disguise, the intrigue structure of the main plot of *The Changeling* displays a Shakespearean artistry, for there event is for the most part so intimately related to character that the two are distinguishable only by analysis. The two major flaws in this part of the play are not fully Middleton's responsibility. The rather
ridiculous episode of the virginity test is his, but the "superfluous sensationalism"\(^3\) of the conclusion is Rowley's work. Rowley's, too, is that much graver flaw, the sub-plot. And yet Middleton was as capable as Rowley of disfiguring his plays with structural conventions inartistically handled. The sub-plots of The Second Maiden's Tragedy and of Hengist are not significantly related to the main actions; the intrigue patterns of The Revenger's Tragedy and of Hengist are rather too complicated; Women, Beware Women makes too ready a use of the Kydian revels. Furthermore, the denouements of all the tragedies tend to be hurried. Justification for this fact may be sought in what Ellis-Fermor said of Middleton's comedies:

> The last acts...are usually taken at a gallop so that a certain amount is left inconclusive. This is due not so much to carelessness on the part of the author as to an understanding of the psychological condition of an audience at the end of a comedy intrigue. Once they have foreseen the end they only want it sketched, not expounded. So that a kind of short-hand technique, understood alike by audience and dramatist, comes into use and settles into different conventions at different periods.\(^3\)

But what is a swift conclusion in The Changeling is a hasty reversal of fortune in The Revenger's Tragedy, a too-sudden de casibus fall in Hengist and an improbable huddle of murders in Women, Beware Women. Altogether, it would seem that, despite the pervasive intrigue pattern in his plays,

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38 *The Jacobean Drama*, p. 133, n. 1.
"Middleton had no clear-cut convictions about dramatic structure"\textsuperscript{39} and that his plays are often "case-histories, put together in whatever way the data accumulate".\textsuperscript{40} Only the first four acts of \textit{Women, Beware Women} and the main action of \textit{The Changeling} redeem Middleton from some of the force of this charge.

The latter play, however, is the sole one which redeems him from the charge of exploiting gratuitous spectacle, though possibly even here only knowledge that Rowley was exploiting spectacle in the sub-plot restrained the senior playwright's hand. Both \textit{The Revenger's Tragedy} and \textit{Women, Beware Women} conclude with the hackneyed convention of the revels masque; \textit{The Second Maiden's Tragedy} makes superfluous use of tombs, corpses, and ghosts; and \textit{Hengist} of dumb-shows.

Except for those signs of haste noticed above in connection with the management of the intrigues at the denouements, Middleton shows a sureness of touch in handling the stage conventions of time and place only in his last two tragedies. This is not the case with time in \textit{Hengist}, as we have seen, or possibly with place in \textit{The Second Maiden's Tragedy} where there is some question as to the location of the setting of the sub-plot.

There is likewise no consistent sureness of touch in the treatment of devices. The device of the trial of chastity is worth instancing at this point. One may be permitted to say immediately that this device


\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 567.
receives a much more plausible, a more dramatically effective embodiment in Middleton's first tragedy than in the last. The trial of Castiza in The Revenger's Tragedy is distinctly superior as dramatic art to the third-rate handling of the virginity test in The Changeling where the unevenness of the playwright's performance is made the more striking by the incomparable and masterly handling of the great tricking scene which immediately precedes it.

This unevenness, this lack of sureness of touch is symptomatic. All too often Middleton the busy purveyor of fashionable entertainment betrays Middleton the dispassionate artist. All too often convention in the pejorative sense finds easy employment in his plays. Whatever artistry and conscious shaping there is in his plays is in large part a working within the dramatic conventions of his age. But much too frequently Middleton failed to employ these conventions to secure that organic unity that critics have regarded, at least since the time of Coleridge, as an indispensable element in a work of literary art. Shakespeare was often highly successful in giving coherence to his plays, even if he did not consciously aim at that ideal; Marlowe's scorn of "such conceits as clown-age keeps in pay" and Jonson's disdain of the absurdities of chronicle drama signal other but conscious attempts to secure order and form. But these men are exceptions since there was no great pressure put on the Elizabethan playwright to adopt an artistically responsible posture towards his work. Had this pressure existed, and had it made itself felt in the case of Middleton, we would probably not have to conclude of him as we must do, namely, that he had a tragic view of life, but that he was not a wholly
successful tragic artist. For this Middleton must be held responsible since, as a recent critic prescriptively puts it,

despite all the artist owes to tradition and convention his is an inner travail still. 41

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