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The Five Structures of The Changeling

A. L. and M. K. Kistner

The Changeling is probably unique among Jacobean plays in its number of internal structures and in the complexity of their interconnections. The structures are a means of organization which give the play its overall design and meaning. They are, in fact, indivisible from its meaning, for they exist to present, vary, develop and emphasize themes, and the complexity of the world and world-view that Middleton and Rowley have constructed in *The Changeling* could only be adequately presented by the intricacy of several interrelated structures.

The Changeling has five distinguishable frameworks that combine to form its whole. The first and most obvious organizational structure is the two plot levels, main plot and subplot, which are indicated by the division of the play's characters and action into two locales, castle and asylum. Each locale is nominally presided over by a ruler who has abandoned his authority to a subordinate: the asylum is headed by Alibius, the mental doctor who cannot cure, the castle by Vermandero, the governor who cannot rule. Alibius directly places Lollio in charge of his wife and his madmen and fools while he absents himself. Vermandero, indirectly and by default, places De Flores in command of the castle and its inhabitants and disappears, for all practical purposes, for the remainder of the play. Just as Lollio holds the keys to the fools' and madmen's wards and exhibits them to Isabella, De Flores keeps the keys to the castle and does the honors as host to the unsuspecting Alonzo.

The prized possession of both asylum and castle is a woman—Alibius' wife, Isabella, and Vermandero's daughter, Beatrice—yet the two men of authority also abandon these “jewels” to their lieutenants. Alibius' desertion puts Lollio in a position to help Isabella to her disguised lovers and to “put in for my thirds”; Vermandero's blindness permits De Flores, by assisting Beatrice in manipulating her suitors, to demand not just thirds, but her virginity.

In the scenes set in the asylum, there is frequent mention of the division of the madhouse into two wards—one for madmen, one for fools. At first these comments seem meaningless, but as reference piles upon reference it becomes apparent that the division is meant to extend to the world at large, which Middleton and Rowley maintain is also composed of fools and madmen.¹ This is the second structure, an outgrowth of the two plot locales, which bifurcates the world of the play like the world of the asylum (and by implication the macrocosm as well) into fools and madmen. This structure cuts across the castle-main plot/asylum-subplot division and supersedes that structure by uniting the two worlds, and as a result, the play.

The distinction between the two types of patients in the asylum is introduced by Lollio's comment that “we have but two sorts of people in the house . . . that's fools and madmen” (I.ii.45-55),² and it is quickly

extended to the presumably sane inhabitants of the hospital when he assures Alibius that any gallants who come to view the insane need not think to look at his wife, for “if they come to see the fools and madmen, you and I may serve the turn” (I.ii.58-59).³

The fool/madman dichotomy is then carried yet another step—from the asylum’s patients, to their keepers, to the world at large. Lollo explains to Isabella that her husband thinks she has no need to leave the hospital:

Lollo.

He says you have company enough in the house, if you please to be sociable, of all sorts of people.

Isabella.

Of all sorts? Why, here’s none but fools and madmen.

Lollo.

Very well; and where will you find any other, if you should go abroad? There’s my master and I to boot too.

Isabella.

Of either sort one, a madman and a fool.

(III.iii.12-17)

Moreover, the universality of the division is stressed again when Isabella sarcastically reminds her husband, “Y’ave a fine trade on’t: / Madmen and fools are a staple commodity,” and he replies, “Just at the lawyers’ haven we arrive, / By madmen and by fools we both do thrive” (III.iii.270-74).

Thus, the microcosm of the asylum is separated into two wards, one housing fools, the other madmen, and the outside world is also divisible into these same two groups. But what is the difference between them? The asylum scenes point out that the fool is a harmless, curable fellow, whereas the madman is incurable and prone to violence. There is no hope of recovery for the Welsh lunatic who lost his cheese, but Lollo promises great improvement to Antonio; the distinction is between the “incurable mad of the one side and very fools on the other.” Furthermore, the madmen continually raise a ruckus in their ward and must be subdued with whips; by contrast, the “fools’ college” is seldom even locked, and one can walk among them without fear. The distinction is made most graphic in the characterizations of Antonio and Franciscus. When Lollo exhibits Tony to Isabella, he is harmless and amiable, but Franciscus, when displayed in his madman’s role, grows violent and beats Lollo. In keeping with the love and transformation theme, however, Tony is altered into a madman when he believes he has lost all chance of possessing Isabella. Upon becoming mad, he also becomes violent (Iv.iii.129-42).

Finally, this bifurcation of the world is related to the theme of delegated authority when Lollo laments, “Would my master were come home! I am not able to govern both these wards together” (III.iii.163-65). Later Lollo again extends the specific to the general, paralleling his problems in governing his master’s realm to a situation prevalent in the outside world:

I would my master were come home; ’tis too much for one shepherd to

govern two of these flocks, nor can I believe that one churchman can instruct two benefices at once; there will be some incurable mad of the one side and very fools on the other.

(III.iii.198-202)

It is not, then, only the unfortunate inmates of the asylum who can be so dichotomized. The world at large and particularly the world of the castle and its inhabitants are shown to be also divisible into two wards—in one, the curable fools, such as Alsemero and Tomazo, who, as we shall see, temporarily lose their reason and can be restored to sanity; in the other are De Flores and Beatrice who by completely submitting to their passions, take the irretrievable step into madness. They are so overwhelmed by their own wills that they become violent in the drive to satisfy them and finally transgress too far ever to return to sanity, thus reflecting the turbulent disorder and irreclaimable condition of Alibius' madmen. The madness of the asylum inmates serves to emphasize and define this metaphorical insanity of the main figures by reducing their condition to its lowest, most literal level of meaning.

The third organizational device is verbal structure, consisting of the repetition of words and concepts with various meanings to reflect and develop themes. We will not investigate each of these in this paper, but repetition of *blood*, *service*, *sweetness*, *act*, *deed*, *performance*, and images of food and hunger, the castle, the madhouse, sight rings, animals and jewels all cast shafts of light onto the meanings of the play. The multiplication of writers who have found the play's themes summarized in different images is an indication of the complexity of *The Changeling's* verbal structures.⁴ One of the locales of the two plot levels, the castle, is part of this framework, as through an elaborate system of *double entendre*, it represents the "jewel" of the castle, Beatrice, as well as the physical setting.⁵ The metaphor is first suggested when, after Alsemero has expressed his interest in Beatrice, she says to her father, "I find him much desirous / To see your castle" (I.i.154-55). Beatrice is dissembling to her parent in order to further her desire for Alsemero, but Vermandero's answer is true on both the literal and metaphorical level. "Our citadels," he explains to Alsemero, "Are plac'd conspicuous to outward view / On promonts' tops, but within are secrets" (I.i.159-61). The secrets are, perhaps, most hidden from himself, for he insists that Alsemero, who wisely seeks to leave when hearing of Beatrice's betrothal, visit them: "You must see my castle / And her best entertainment ere we part" (I.i.197-98). (The gender of the possessive pronoun selected for the castle also suggests its equivalence to Beatrice.) Alsemero accepts the invitation to see the castle, but queries, "How shall I dare to venture in his castle / When he discharges murderers [small cannon] at the gate?" (I.i.218-19). His aside is of particular thematic significance, for it emphasizes that Alsemero has been forewarned by the "murderers," the information that Beatrice is betrothed, and is well aware that he should broach neither the castle literal nor the castle metaphorical. The warning of her engagement discharged by the cannon should be sufficient to send him on his way had not his reason been overpowered by his passion. He knows what he should do but submits to

the compulsion of his will: "But I must go on, for back I cannot go" (I.i.220).

Once inside the fortress, Alsemero becomes acquainted with some of its secrets as Diaphanta leads him along concealed corridors to and from a meeting with Beatrice, a rendezvous which, in view of her engagement, is as illicit as the routes used to arrive at it. And with smug satisfaction Beatrice reflects, "I have got him now the liberty of the house," that is, the liberty of its secret passages and freedom of access to herself (III.iv.12).

Like Alsemero, Alonzo too is lured by desire to see the building; he requests De Flores to show him "the full strength of the castle," which De Flores, who has already been commissioned by Beatrice to do away with her fiancé, is only too willing to do. When they meet for the tour, De Flores triumphantly announces that he now has all the keys to the fortress:

Yes, here are all the keys; I was afraid, my lord,
I'd wanted for the postern: this is it.
I've all, I've all, my lord; this for the sconce.

(III.i.1-3)

Through Vermandero's dereliction he already keeps the keys to the physical castle, and he now, with the upcoming murder of Alonzo, holds them to Beatrice as well. The postern, whose key he had been lacking, is "a back door; a private door; any door or gate distinct from the main entrance" and "an entrance other than the usual and honourable one" as well (*OED*, *postern*, 1 and 2b). In this context, in addition to its literal meaning, it has both a sexual connotation and a metaphoric significance—the dishonorable entrance into Beatrice to which Alonzo's death is the key. When Beatrice yields her virginity to De Flores in payment for the murder, "the master of the workings of the literal fortress becomes the master of the metaphorical one."⁶

After this climactic yielding of the castle, uses of the metaphor are less concentrated. Tomazo insists that the castle "is the place must yield account" for his missing brother (IV.ii.21), and it is true both that the murdered Alonzo is still hidden in the castle and that Beatrice must finally answer for his death. Revelation of her guilt comes about through Jasperino's and Alsemero's discovery of her in "a back part of the house" with De Flores, from which she takes "the back door" when leaving, the secret, non-public portions of the castle corresponding to the private part of Beatrice's life which must be hidden from even so "public" a gaze as her husband's. Finally, when the truth about De Flores and Beatrice is revealed, Vermandero exclaims, "An host of enemies enter'd my citadel / Could not amaze like this" (V.iii.148-49). Vermandero's surprise is the amazement of Fabritio and the Duke of *Women Beware Women* when they view the final massacre of the masque; it is Middleton and Rowley's final irony that those whose business it is to rule and guide are the last to understand what has taken place in their demesnes. Vermandero is morally responsible for the defense and protection of the castle and Beatrice, yet the latter citadel was entered, taken and destroyed by the enemy without his knowledge.

The fourth structure is a person-by-person organization that compares the motives and actions of almost every character in the play, and then compares and contrasts the outcome of their actions. This structure develops the chief themes, the necessity for man's reason to curb passion and his transformation to madness when passion blinds his reason. In examining this structure, we still cannot abandon the dual plot structure because the subplot characters, while embodying thematic concepts in their own rights, frequently retain their subplot qualities as literal manifestations of perceptions largely metaphorical in the more realistic main plot. And even in the character-by-character approach, it is necessary to treat the two plot levels individually, considering first the themes as exposed by figures of the main plot before analyzing how the charades of the subplot characters recreate the themes.

Perhaps of all the characters, Alsemero exhibits the play's precepts most clearly and fully. As the play opens he is defying an omen and trying to convince himself that the sacrilege implicit in falling in love in church does not really exist (I.i.1-12). He knows, as he again acknowledges at the play's conclusion (V.iii.73-77), that lust which usurps the time set aside for holy worship is wrong, but he excuses himself with his "good intention" of marriage. The entry on the scene of his friend, Jasperino, reveals to the audience that Alsemero has undergone a transformation, that one who used to be impervious to women's charms has become a gallant lover. The symbol of change, the weathervane, is used to emphasize both Alsemero's alteration and the fact that he is proceeding in defiance of moral obstacles: Although the wind is right for the planned sea voyage, Alsemero claims that the temple's vane has turned against him, presumably indicating a change of direction corresponding to his own, but also symbolizing the immorality of the undertaking he is about to embark on.

Alsemero's second warning that he is proceeding amiss comes, ironically enough, from Beatrice herself, who explains to him that one's eyes can often blind one's judgment, and that it is the responsibility of judgment to overrule and correct the sight (I.i.68-73). In addition to these two warnings, Alsemero receives what should be another when he witnesses Beatrice's blatant lie to her father that Alsemero told her he wishes to see the castle. And finally, Vermandero's revelation of her engagement is such a deterrent that even the passion-blinded Alsemero realizes that he should leave; he makes his apologies to Vermandero and tries to depart, but then accedes to his will to see Beatrice and remains. The news of her engagement is a double warning, for it discloses both that she is legally and morally bound to another, thereby destroying his excuse that his intentions are honorable, and it reveals that Beatrice is not precisely honest in encouraging him under the circumstances. By the end of the first scene, then, Alsemero has allowed his reason to be blinded by his lust for Beatrice and has been transformed to one of love's tame madmen, a fool.

In the later acts, Alsemero is again warned—this time that something is afoot between Beatrice and De Flores. He tries Beatrice with his virginity test but is deceived by her response. He allows himself to be blinded to the truth by his faith in his medical tests just as he permits himself to be deceived by his faith in his eyesight and what he considers to

be his judgment. He is ironically contrasted to De Flores, who is sure of her virginity without tests (III.iv.117-20), just as he is sure of her potential whoredom when he sees her leaning from Alonzo to Alsemero, a sight which Alsemero also observes but without drawing the logical conclusion.

Alsemero's judgment is finally restored by the sight of Beatrice and De Flores meeting together; this spectacle destroys his love and allows his reason to regain its ascendance. Learning that she is responsible for Alonzo's death, he realizes that he should have heeded the warning of the temple (V.iii.73-74). He at last understands that it was "blood," that is, lust, aroused by her physical beauty and not judgment that inspired his actions. And then with the final revelation of her unchastity, he recognizes his blindness that accepted her beautiful appearance for the hidden, hideous reality (V.iii.109-110). Thus, Alsemero is first transformed by love to a tame madman, an alteration which is reversed when his love ends and his reason is restored. His major transformation, however, is from a blind man who thinks he sees to a seeing man who knows he was blind.

In his brief appearance in the play, Alonzo shows himself to be like Alsemero—blinded by his passion and unwilling to heed the voice of reason, personified by his brother, Tomazo, who admonishes him that Beatrice no longer loves him (II.i.106 and 127-39). Alonzo refuses to listen; and displaying how thoroughly his reason has been overwhelmed by passion, he declares that he "should depart / An enemy, a dangerous, deadly one / To any but thyself that should but think / She knew the meaning of inconstancy" (II.i.144-47). Tomazo can only shake his head and summarize Alonzo's transformation: "Why here is love's tame madness; thus a man / Quickly steals into his vexation" (II.i.153-54). Unfortunately, Alonzo's abrupt ending prevents his ever regaining his sanity.⁷

Tomazo's own grip on sanity and reason is weakened with the unexplained disappearance of his brother, and he grows obsessed with new passions, anger and desire for revenge. He first attacks Vermandero as the instigator of the crime and demands, "I claim a brother of you . . . [I seek him] 'mongst your dearest bloods" (IV.ii.18-19). He wrongly assumes that some of the young bloods of Vermandero's court must be responsible for carrying out the deed, but "your dearest bloods" has an ironic accuracy, for it is the dearest of Vermandero's blood, or family, that is guilty of the crime. Tomazo's passion has so overcome him that he refuses to listen to Vermandero's reasonable presentation of his side of the story; and gaining no satisfaction from Vermandero, he confronts Alsemero, quarrels, and threatens that they must settle the dispute on the field of honor.

At his next appearance, Tomazo has degenerated even further into insanity. He is obsessed by his wrongs and able to think of nothing else (V.ii.1-8). His sudden hatred for De Flores, whom he had previously regarded as "honest De Flores," "kind and true one," the possessor of "a wondrous honest heart," has even less reason than his outraged feelings for Vermandero, the supposed master of the castle and its inhabitants, and certainly less justification than his suspicion of Alsemero, who apparently gained most from Alonzo's disappearance. Tomazo wildly claims that De Flores "walks o' purpose by, sure, to choke me up, / To infect my blood" and insanely strikes De Flores when he approaches him (V.ii.24-25).

Tomazo's reference to infecting his blood is a continuation of the imagery of venom and poison in association with De Flores that Tomazo, like other characters, has been using; in addition, it indicates that Tomazo's blood, his passionate anger, is aroused by the sight of De Flores and by nearly everyone else who comes near him. His abandonment of reason has reduced him to the condition of the springtime snake which, after losing its skin, strikes out in blindness at everything that approaches.

Immediately after Tomazo's assault on De Flores, Vermandero tells him that the murderers, Antonio and Franciscus, have been discovered. The madness displayed by Tomazo in his greed to learn whom to wreak his vengeance on is paralleled to that of De Flores when seeking his commission to murder Alonzo. De Flores exclaims, "Oh, blest occasion!" when presented with the opportunity to be of service to Beatrice and kneels before her, expressing a "reverence" to receive her orders. He insists, "I thirst for him," the yet unknown target, and upon hearing Alonzo's name declares, "His end's upon him; he shall be seen no more" (II.ii.113-35). In a graphic parallel expression of his desire, Tomazo kneels to Vermandero, promising "reverence" to him for revealing the murderers, and hearing their names, exclaims, "Oh, blest revelation!" Echoing De Flores' eagerness to kill, he cries, "I thirst for 'em; / Like subtle lightning will I wind about 'em / and melt their marrow in 'em" (V.ii.63-87). The scene ends on these lines, with Tomazo prepared to take what Beatrice and De Flores already have taken, the final, violent step into irrecoverable madness and damnation—murder.

The revelation of the true murderers forestalls Tomazo's destruction; and when he sees his "injuries lie dead before" him, the satisfaction of his desire for justice restores his reason. In his relationship with Alsemero and Vermandero, he is altered "from an ignorant wrath / To knowing friendship" (V.iii.203-204). Like Alsemero, his recovery from temporary madness has improved his sight and transformed him to a more rational man.

The person-by-person structure extends from these lesser figures to the two key characters as well. De Flores is another whose judgment has been overclouded by passion. When he is first introduced he has already succumbed to his lust for Beatrice, although he expects to gain nothing but abuse for his persistent efforts to see her (I.i.97-101 and later in the scene, II.231-33). He is a man who must have his will regardless of anyone's opposition, and so completely has he submitted to that will that he has become a wise madman who uses all of his many resources and experience only to feed his compulsion.

With his characteristic insight, De Flores is aware that his conduct is less than rational. He questions, "Whatever ails me?" that he should persist in seeing her only to be insulted and abused. And he asks,

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.

(II.i.77-81)

His “mad qualm” is an accurate description of the force that sends him to Beatrice’s side despite her derision. It is knowledge of the irrational quality of his own passion that probably prompts his belief that he, too, may hope to be “belov’d beyond all reason.”

When Beatrice finally calls him to her, he exults, “Ha, I shall run mad with joy” (II.ii.70); and the ease with which he convinces himself that he and she have in mind the same reward for Alonzo’s murder is attributable to the abeyance of his reason before his passion. A person merely reading the text might subscribe to De Flores’ superficial logic that concludes it is possible that a delicately-reared woman might chide herself to bed with him. But faced on stage by the hideous malignity that De Flores is supposed to be, he might realize that only utter irrationality could expect such an outcome and only in madness could it come to pass. There is a tendency among critics to assume that part of De Flores’ superior insight is his ability to realize, even before he sees Beatrice’s affection shifting to Alsemero, that she may someday come to love him. His “realization” is, on the contrary, another indication of his complete lack of reason, and the fact that he is correct in his guess only an indication of her final madness as well.

Beatrice’s ultimate madness and final damnation are not apparent at the start of the play; De Flores has already submitted to the passion which now controls him, but Beatrice is only at the beginning of the road which he has taken. Her difference from him is conveyed visually by her beauty contrasted to his ugliness, and at this time, her beauty is not a mask for her vice but a symbol of her innocence. Yet to be tried, she is still not guilty of sin.

Her first trial, Alsemero’s advances, evokes a response which not only introduces the major theme (the need to curb passion with reason) but also gives evidence that Beatrice is aware, intellectually at least, of the need to rule physical urges with judgment. She cautions Alsemero:

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

(I.i.69-73)

It is typical of Middleton to put wise or moral messages on unlikely lips, perhaps for just this purpose—to show that the speaker knows right from wrong, but Beatrice does not convince us that she genuinely understands what she says. Her insight seems to be compartmentalized as an intellectual exercise, the sort of “a penny saved is a penny earned” adage that a child might be taught without ever grasping its significance. The impression that she knows not what she says is created in part by the glibness of her pronouncements and in part by her subsequent rationalizations that what she wants is truly the dictates of judgment. Only seven lines after she has lectured Alsemero on the need for judgment to rule the eyes she is arguing to herself that her eyes, which five days earlier told her Alonzo was her one and only, were wrong at that time and are now correct in

assessing Alsemero as “the man meant for me” (I.i.80-82). She further rationalizes her switch in affections by the sophism that a man who chooses his associates well has good judgment, that Alsemero’s own wisdom is proved by his choice of Jasperino as a friend, and that therefore she is wise in choosing Alsemero. “Methinks I love now with the eyes of judgment,” she concludes this false syllogism (II.i.6-14). She knows that reason should rule emotions but hastily convinces herself that it is on the basis of reason that she prefers Alsemero to Alonzo.

Nevertheless, in a variety of ways, Beatrice is shown to be well aware that her conduct is wrong. For example, she feels it necessary to dissimulate to both Alsemero and her father. She conceals her engagement from Alsemero as long as she can and lies to her father about the tenor of her conversation with Alsemero. She meets her new lover in secret, an indirect confession of guilt, and when the idea of doing away with Alonzo arises, she knows that such an act becomes a foul visage, not a fair one. Her very concealment of the murder plans from Alsemero betrays her as knowing right from wrong and willfully electing the latter. Thus, Beatrice is conscious that her course of conduct is not moral. She herself is not amoral; she, like Alsemero, allows her passion, her will to have her new love, to rule her judgment.

A much more telling warning to Beatrice than her intellectual knowledge or even the feelings of guilt that prompt dissimulation is her instinctive reaction to De Flores. His physical appearance, for which she feels such repulsion, is a symbol of his submission to passion, or his madness. As Beatrice remarks when trying to cajole him, his ugliness is caused by the heat from his liver, the seat of passion. Her loathing is both a reaction to a person who is passion-dominated and a fear of her own pressuring emotions. Moreover, it is a warning to her to beware of this man and of the unruly passions that can dominate reason and control one’s life. It is ironic that she apologizes for being unable to give any reason for her hatred, for her fear and loathing are based on an instinct stronger and truer than reason. When her end is upon her she admits her mistake in not heeding these warnings (V.iii.157-58), and she is indeed following her own better instincts when she plans to catch Vermandero in a good mood and plead for De Flores’ dismissal.

Beatrice, then, stands in relation to her passions as she does in relation to their symbol, De Flores. They bother her, upset and irritate her, but she is still in control of them. She is the mistress; they (and he) the servants. Her downfall begins and she takes her first step down De Flores’ own path of madness when she assumes that De Flores can be used to further her own ends (discarding Alonzo and marrying Alsemero). She is, at the same time that she approaches De Flores, submitting to her emotions, her will to have Alsemero. She believes that she can utilize De Flores and then dismiss him just as she believes that by following her will to marry Alsemero, she can make the course of passion the course of judgment.⁸ Beatrice momentarily reflects on the horror of employing De Flores but thrusts aside these feelings of foreboding:

Why, put case I loath’d him
As much as youth and beauty hates a sepulcher,

Must I needs show it? Cannot I keep that secret
And serve my turn upon him?

(II.ii.66-69)

She is confident that she can control De Flores just as she believes her judgment controls her conduct.

When Beatrice makes this fatal error of yielding to her desire for Alsemero, she transforms her servant, who, like her emotions is supposedly beneath her and governed by her, into her master. In submitting to her unreasoning will, she also yields to the living symbol of the irrational. The reversal of Beatrice's and De Flores' relative positions is visually symbolized when, before the murder, De Flores kneels to her to beg for the opportunity to serve her and, after the deed, she kneels to him to beg to be spared the consequences of her crime. But as Middleton points out in this and other plays, the fatal step is irrevocable. The moment cannot be recovered, and the deed once done transforms the doer. De Flores makes plain to Beatrice (and to the audience) the fallacy of a woman dipped in blood talking of modesty, and when she appeals to "the distance that creation set 'twixt thy blood and mine," De Flores, now with the force of the inexorable destiny that Beatrice herself has set in motion, tells her of her transformation:

Push, fly not to your birth, but settle you
In what the act has made you; y'are no more now.
You must forget your parentage to me;
Y'are the deed's creature; by that name
You lost your first condition, and I challenge you.
As peace and innocency has turn'd you out
And made you one with me.

(III.iv.135-41)

The fate which Beatrice cannot weep from its determined purpose is that which she herself elected when she brushed aside the dictates of reason and of her own better nature and stepped into the irrational, chaotic world of De Flores.

In this mad and violent world, her better instincts are soon forgotten; lust and that which she once loathed become not only acceptable but loved. After their sexual and spiritual union, Beatrice exclaims of De Flores, "I am forc'd to love thee now" and "How heartily he serves me! 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.47, 70-72). The sexual connotation of service places before the reader's mind how thoroughly Beatrice has surrendered to lust, and the extent of her transformation and madness is revealed by her belief that De Flores is "a man worth loving," "a wondrous necessary man" (V.i.76,91).

Beatrice's oneness with De Flores, the transformation which madness has wrought in her, is discovered by Alsemero, who finally penetrates the beauty which is now become a disguise for a reality as hideous as the appearance of De Flores. Alsemero reacts with the revulsion which earlier characterizes her attitude toward De Flores—"Oh, thou art all deform'd"—and locks up Beatrice, and then De Flores, like the madmen that they

have become.⁹ When he calls them from the closet, “Come forth, you twins of mischief,” he emphasizes what De Flores has already proclaimed—their equivalence. Together they have been caught in irrecoverable madness and condemned to hell.

Beatrice at last realizes and admits that she has been transformed from her original identity. She tells Vermandero that she is “that of your blood was taken from you / For your better health . . . Let the common sewer take it from distinction” (V.iii.151-54). Moreover, she understands that the outcome of her life was not fated had she but heeded the warnings. Had she heeded rather than ignored her hatred of De Flores, she might have plucked her fate from him, since it was not the unchanging, all-governing stars that controlled her destiny, but only “yon meteor,” whom she might have avoided (V.iii.155-59).

Repeating the diction of the subplot’s madmen, De Flores summarizes the pair’s punishment for their sins: “I coupled with your mate / At barley-break; now we are left in hell” (V.iii.63-64). Others have run through the circle of barley-break—Alsemero, Tomazo, Isabella, Antonio and Franciscus—but Beatrice and De Flores, through their complete submission to passion, their commission of irreversible acts of lust and violence, are caught in madness and in hell.¹⁰ Thus, Beatrice’s initial alteration in affection, her “giddy turning” from Alonzo to Alsemero, is only a prelude to her transformation from hatred of De Flores to love for him, from innocence to guilt, from master to servant, from the cossetted daughter of Vermandero to the vicious creature of the deed, from sanity to incurable madness.

As part of the person-by-person structure, even the least major figure of the main plot, Vermandero, is shown in his willful insistence on having his desires. He is not a particularly well-developed character, but there are indications that he is another whose will controls his reason in his own asseveration that “I’ll want my will” if Beatrice does not marry Alonzo and in Beatrice’s assurance,

[My father’s] blessing
Is only mine as I regard his name;
Else it goes from me and turns head against me,
Transform’d into a curse.

(II.i.20-23)

Vermandero, then, is like Fabritio in *Women Beware Women* in insisting that he have his “will” in regard to his daughter’s marriage despite warnings—Beatrice’s marked coolness to Alonzo and her desire to postpone the wedding—that his desire is unreasonable and contrary to hers.

The characters of the subplot, like so many comic figures in Middleton’s plays, are designed to restate in a simpler form the themes of the main plot. We have already seen that Alibius’ actions caricature Vermandero’s dereliction of authority, and in addition, the two would-be lovers, Antonio and Franciscus, approximate Alonzo, Alsemero and De Flores in being transformed by their lusts into fool and madman. Their

alterations, in contrast to the mainplot figures' metamorphoses, are literal as well as metaphorical; they don the costumes of idiot and maniac in order to have access to Isabella, who contrasts not simply with Beatrice but with all the major characters as one whose judgment overrules her passion. Isabella mirrors the actions of other characters in being tempted to succumb to her interest in Antonio; but she ultimately sees through the love which he swears is based on an accurate judgment of her attributes to the underlying lust, and she is then able to check her own passion.

In addition, the turns of the subplot are couched in simpler, more direct phraseology than that used in the main, and this less metaphoric diction similarly helps to define the play's theses. When, for example, Antonio casts off his fool's disguise for Isabella, he tells her,

Cast no amazing eye upon this change. . . .
This shape of folly shrouds your dearest love,
The truest servant to your powerful beauties,
Whose magic had this force thus to transform me.
(III.iii.116-20)

His lines, combined with his disguise, flatly state that he has been transformed to a fool by her "beauties." The same overt statement is made of Franciscus' transformation. Reading a love letter from Franciscus, Isabella describes his transformation by passion as well (IV.iii.1-4, 11-16, 21-24). She reads from the letter, "'Sweet lady, having now cast off this counterfeit cover of a madman, I appear to your best judgment a true and faithful lover of your beauty,'" and Lollio declares, "He is mad still," indicating that in or out of his disguise, Franciscus has been turned mad by love (IV.iii.11-16). Franciscus' letter goes on to say that Isabella's distance from him is the cause of his transformation to madness and her nearness could return his sanity. His passion has turned him mad, but its satisfaction can cure him. To Lollio he is a "mad rascal still." These exchanges, then, provide direct and obvious statements of theme.

Finally, the action surrounding Isabella's temptation and ultimate reassertion of judgment over lust is depicted as a farcical parody of the play's themes. When Isabella is first fascinated by Antonio's revelation of his identity and resists Lollio's suggestion to return the fool to his ward, the offstage madmen chorus, "Catch there, catch the last couple in hell," defining the inevitable fate of those who yield to illicit lust. Similarly, when Antonio presents his Alsemero-like address to Isabella's perfection (III.iii.178-86), the madmen parade over the upper stage imitating birds and beasts and reflecting the irrational, bestial reality beneath Antonio's honeyed romanticism. Momentarily checked but not completely discouraged by this exhibition, which is "of fear enough to part us," Isabella disguises as a madwoman, which she is in danger of becoming, in order to escape Lollio and to see Antonio. He, however, rebuffs the misshapen hag, and Isabella recognizes the cruel reality beneath the romantic guise (IV.iii.129-33). Antonio is revealed to be once again like Alsemero, unable to see beyond surface appearances; he is not a quick-sighted lover but one

whose eyes of judgment are blinded by those of lust. Isabella fortunately learns how shallow his love and her own attraction to him are, heeds the warning and departs. Like Beatrice, she has run through the circle of barley-break, but she has not allowed herself to be caught by her lust and passion in that hell.

The refusal of Vermandero, Beatrice, Alsemero, Antonio, Franciscus and the others to rule their wills with reason is a parallel to Vermandero's and Alibius' abdication of authority over their domains. Middleton repeats this theme of abandonment of one's moral responsibility on three levels: On one is Vermandero's and Alibius' turning over the government of their realms to their servants, De Flores and Lollo. On the second is the various characters' forsaking control of their conduct to their emotions. Instead of ruling their lives with judgment, they turn them over to their passions, who should be servants rather than masters. On the third level is Beatrice's specific yielding of her responsibilities, her chastity and ultimately her soul, to the servant, De Flores. (It is significant that De Flores' role as a servant is a change from Middleton and Rowley's sources, in which De Flores is a gentleman garrisoned in the castle.)¹¹

These three levels are the skeletal basis for the play's world-view. They are the fifth structure, a hierarchy of moral responsibility which is almost unstated verbally, but which is shown as essential to the play's highest meaning. This hierarchy organizes the world of *The Changeling* according to the moral obligations of its members. Like the bifurcation of madman and fool, this structure cuts across all others and encompasses them. It indicates that each person in the social order has a realm of moral responsibility. Each is charged (presumably by God) with the conduct and control of his person and with the preservation of his soul. To some is also given the higher responsibilities of the protection of other people and the government of groups of people. Thus, in this system, Isabella, Franciscus, Antonio, Tomazo and Alsemero temporarily defect from their charges, some of them almost losing their souls and sanity in the process; Beatrice and De Flores completely fail to control their realms and must suffer damnation for their failure; Alibius fails in governing his realm and its inhabitants, but they take the responsibility for themselves; and Vermandero not only falls short of governing his own will, but also fails in his higher responsibilities for his daughter, his castle, and its inhabitants. His dereliction is brought home to him when he sees that his "citadel" has been breached, and it is appropriate that he whose lack of control over himself and his dependents has done so much to allow the tragedy to occur feels the confining circle of hell about him and echoes De Flores' words, "Now we are left in hell," with "We are all there, it circumscribes here" (V.iii.165).

These five structures—subplot/mainplot, madman-fool dichotomy, verbal, person-by-person, and moral hierarchy—organize, support and convey the meanings of the play. They divide the play into its components and reveal the relationships between the parts that create the whole. Without perception of the structures, it is nearly impossible to see the play in its masterful, complex entirety, but broken down to its structures, it displays the craftsmanship of its authors and illustrates several of

the means of formal organization seen in other Tudor, Elizabethan and Jacobean plays as well.

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NOTES

1. Richard Levin comments on this division in the subplot but assumes that it "has no functional significance" (*The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971], p. 46 n. 20); and Irving Ribner suggests that "there may be also in the division of Alibius' house into fools and madmen a suggestion that the entire world is so divided and that these are the elect and the damned of Calvinist theology" (*Jacobean Tragedy* [London: Methuen, 1962], p. 136).
2. Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Changeling*, ed. George W. Williams (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1972). All references to *The Changeling* are to this text.
3. It has sometimes been suggested that Lollo immediately penetrates Antonio's disguise because he responds to Pedro's assurance that Tony is a gentleman, "Nay, there's nobody doubted that; at first sight I knew him for a gentleman, he looks no other yet" (I.ii.113-14). It is more likely, however, that, first, Lollo's statement is intended as a joke at the expense of gentlemen, for Tony was doubtless dressed in a misshapen, clown-like costume and probably wandered about the stage during the interview between Lollo and Pedro with his mouth hanging lax and engaging in a great deal of farcical, foolish behavior; and second, the statement has the more serious effect of reinforcing the idea that not all fools are locked up in wards, that sometimes the fool and the gentleman are indistinguishable.
4. See Christopher Ricks, "The Moral and Poetic Structure of *The Changeling*," *EIC*, X (1960), 290-306; Dorothea Kehler, "Rings and Jewels in *The Changeling*," *ELN*, 5 (1967), 15-17; Michael C. Andrews, "'Sweetness' in 'The Changeling,'" *Yearbook of English Studies*, 1 (1971), 63-67; Edward Engelberg, "Tragic Blindness in *The Changeling* and *Women Beware Women*," *MLQ*, 23 (1962), 20-28; and Normand Berlin, "The 'Finger' Image and Relationship of Character in *The Changeling*," *English Studies in Africa*, 12 (1969), 162-66.
5. See Thomas Berger's article, "The Petrarchan Fortress of *The Changeling*," which differs in detail from our explication of the castle imagery (*Renaissance Papers* 1969), 37-46.
6. Berger, p. 42.
7. M. C. Bradbrook notes that Alonzo "refuses to recognize her [Beatrice's] very plain dislike of him, since love has overpowered his judgment" (*Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960], p. 215). Similarly, N. W. Bawcutt calls Alonzo "another of the play's self-willed, obstinate characters who refuse to recognize any obstacle to their desires" (*The Changeling*, ed. N. W. Bawcutt [London: Methuen, 1970], p. xlix).
8. Her shallowly rationalized desire is like that of *Women Beware Women's* Duke, who likewise tries to hallow his lust by marriage after an opposing person has been disposed of.
9. See Bawcutt, p. lxxv.
10. See Ribner, p. 134, and Williams, editor, *The Changeling*, p. xxiv.
11. See Bawcutt, Appendix A, pp. 122-23.