

# The Conflict Between Emotions And Reason In Thomas Middleton And William Rowley's *The Changeling*

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**Abstract:** *The Changeling* is a joint theatrical work by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley. The play is a revenge tragedy full of erotic passion and sexual obsession. Consists of two plots; Thomas Middleton wrote the main plot of the play, while Rowley wrote the sub-plot. The events of the play take place in the Italian city of Alicante in the 17th century. It revolves around the resounding fall of an aristocratic lady as a result of her pursuit of lustful love. The protagonist suffers from the authority of her servant, who robbed her of her virginity and involved her in the ropes of his plots and crimes, resulting in a tragic ending. The subplot was used to provide a comparison between the world of Isabella, a virtuous lady who is content with her luck in marrying a man older than her, and the man who has a psychological disorder. She maintains her chastity despite the attempts of some lurkers, such as Lollo, Antonio, and Francisco, to trap her and take off her honor, and Beatrice-Joanna, a lady from high society who falls into the swamp of marital betrayal and vice.

**1. Introduction:** There is no doubt that Thomas Middleton, who was born in 1570 and died in 1627 enjoyed a good early education, though there is nothing specific about his biography before entering Gray's inn in 1593. He had extensive knowledge of the legal profession, references to which were noticeably present in his literary works. His wife was a daughter of an employee working in the courts. Middleton was appointed to position of Historian of London, where he held this position from the year 1620 until his death. He was imprisoned in 1624 because of his critical play of political regime, a *Game at Chess*, this satirical play arose as a result of futile attempts to unite the royal families of England and Spain, it received wide spread attention, but it was banned at the request of the Spanish ambassador. (Brawley, 1921, 111-112).

His works are distinguished by their strength, diversity and ease. He surpassed his peers in field of comedy of manner due to his keen consideration of public taste. He has many successful plays such as "A Trick to Catch the Old One" in 1606, "Women Beware Women" in 1612 and "A Chaste Maid in Cheapside" 1612-13. In addition to his wonderful theatrical works, Middleton is also a wonderful dramatic poet. (ibid, 113).

The *Changeling* is a Jacobean tragedy play by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley (Antonio, 1). The

Jacobean drama is a term given to theatre written during the reign king James 1. The term Jacobean comes from "Jacob", the Latin form of James. After the death of Queen Elizabeth, the Society in England witnessed major changes in the social, economic, political and religious fields. Human relations declined, no one thought in terms of principles and rules, and the rule of chaos and terrorism began to appear to a large extent, which led to the collapse of the economic situation (Srivastava, 2019, 1).

The Jacobean playwrights tried to satisfy the desire of the public, but they failed so there was a decline in drama (ibid, 2019, 2). The works of this period are talking about the themes of corruption, vengeance, and violence (Mukherjee, 2023, 1).

The *Changeling* tells the story of the fall of Beatrice, a noble lady whose lusts and desires led her to fall as a victim under the power of her hideous servant, who exploited her in the most horrific ways, taking her virginity and making her his prostitute (Hang Lui, 2018, 1313). The play highlights Renaissance concerns about female sexual relationships (Antonio, 1).

In the European Renaissance, marriage was the only social path through which sexual desire could be fulfilled for men and women, as a woman's virginity was an area in which paternal authority extended, and

the unmarried daughter was generally viewed as the property of the family, so the family must preserve her until she is able to climb the social ladder and is able to marry. Engle says "The Changeling richly represents institutions of social control run by fathers, husbands, and masters in order to prevent or contain change"<sup>1</sup> (Hang Liu, 2018, 1314).

## **2-Plot and Secondary Plot**

Most modern plays contain several plots, several places, various characters, and different interests, and the play of changeling did not deviate from this tradition, as it has two plots. The first is the main plot, which focuses on the main heroes and the important and central event, such as the story of Beatrice-Joanna, De Florence, and Alsemero, and the other sub-plot is supportive of the main plot. It is the story of Isabella, Alibius, Lollo, and Isabella's disguised pursuers. In most performances, the secondary plot is excluded from the play to save time and expenses, considering that the focus on the main plot is more important and that the tragedy is more important than the comedy. But the truth is that the plot characters are no less important than the main plot characters, so both groups have their own problems, emotions, motives, and ambitions (McMullan, 2024, 80).

Isabella, the wife of the doctor in the asylum, the heroine of the secondary plot, is a central character and has a major role in the play. She reflects the normal and correct behavior of sex, marriage, and the traditions of society, in contrast to Beatrice, the daughter of aristocratic society. Although Isabella falls outside critical concerns, she, in contrast to Beatrice, is able to control her body as Object of interest of the opposite sex (ibid, 2024,75).

Some people interested in literary affairs point out those critics have not succeeded in finding a real link between the two plots. That critics' focus on the main plot reduces interest in the secondary plot, and in many cases the secondary plot is excluded from the work. The failure to pay attention to the secondary plot is explained by some because Rowley's writing is less good than Middleton's writing, but despite this, the secondary plot remains an important accessory part of the play, even if there is no direct connection. There is an important thing that must be realized that the main plot was not understood except through the secondary plot. This is one thing. The other thing is that the play is an integrated dramatic work that explains foolishness and madness and makes the reader distinguishes between what is normal and what is abnormal (Daalder, 1988, 1).

## **3-The Characters**

### **3.1-Vermandero**

Beatrice Joanna's father and a ruler of Alicante. He is a man who fails to see what is going on around him and has no knowledge of the troubled and corrupt life of his daughter Beatrice (Will, 1).

### **3.2-Beatrice-Joanna**

Beatrice-Joanna is the main character. She is Vermandero's daughter. She embarrasses herself with the deadly plans of emotions and envious (Will, 1). Beatrice is described by Alsemero as a beautiful woman. She falls in love with him and regretted getting engaged to Alonzo a short time ago (G.S, 2011, 4).

The name of the heroine of the play, Beatrice, is taken from the Latin language, which means graceful, which brings happiness to the hearts of others. However, when we follow Beatrice's behavior, we see that the name is misleading or contradictory to the truth. The heroine does not give happiness to anyone but herself. As for her second name, "Joanna", Which means beauty. This indicates her feminine external appearance, but she does not contain anything beautiful. The name also has biblical evidence that means sacrifice. This is the other thing as well. There is no sacrifice in her behavior. On the contrary, she sacrificed everyone for the sake of her desires (Budekhin& Others, 2019, 703).

### **3.3-De Flores**

De Flores works as a servant to Vermandero. He was a gentleman but difficult circumstances forced him to work as a servant. No one knows anything about his previous life. He is considered as a villain. People believe that he is an honest man and Vermandero values him very much. He has a sexual obsession, but he is wiser and more experienced than Beatrice. After killing Alonzo, he ignored Beatrice's attempts to buy him, and insisted that he would not be satisfied unless he had sexual pleasure with her. He allowed his lusts to control his thoughts and actions, as he is a slave to his strong desire. He is looking for an opportunity to see Beatrice despite her hatred for him (Aubrey, 1).

### **3.4-Alsemero**

Alsemero is a nobleman from Valentia. He first meets Beatrice in church. Alsemero falls in love with her at first sight, despite not having enough information about her family, character, and customs. He even has to cancel his sea voyage to Malta in order to stay with her. The first scene shows us the deep love between them, but later the play ends with betrayal and death (Ueshima, 2003, 50)

### **3.5-Alonzo de Piracquo**

He is Beatrice's fiancé and Tomazo's brother, but he fell as a victim to betrayal and jealousy (will, 1).

### **3.6-Jasperino**

Jasperino is Alsemero's friend (Ueshima, 2003, 50). He decides to seduce Diaphanta when he is surprised by the relationship between Alsemero and Beatrice-Joanna (Daalder, 1991, 15).

### 3.7-Diaphanta

She is Beatrice's waiting maid. She gives us an example of a woman who having knowledge of the attractiveness of desire (in contrast to Beatrice) but she is destroyed by it (in contrast to Isabella. (Daalder, 1991, 21).

### 3.8-Alibius

Alibius is a psychiatrist who runs a psychiatric clinic in the city. His personality is somewhat shaky and he suffers from psychological complexes. He suspects that his wife is cheating on him, so he makes his servant Lollo a guard over her room and watches the inmates and visitors. His servant is fully aware that the fault is not in his modest wife, Isabella, but rather the fault is in him, as he is immoral and has Psychological sensitivity and doubts. (Daalder, 1992, 22).

### 3.9-Isabella

Isabella is characterized as an honest, obedient, and conservative woman. She glorifies the institution of marriage and the importance of a faithful wife, but she cannot avoid being attracted to others because of her sexual instincts. She notices Franciscus when she is bored and turns to Antonio to amuse herself, but she does not lose control of herself when Lollo says "Cuckoo, Cuckoo" referring to Isabella and Antonio, but her common sense makes her remain faithful to her husband and their marriage vows (G.S, 2011, 9).

### 3.10 Lollo

Alibius's servant at the madhouse. He takes care of Isabella. (Daalder, 1988, 3).

### 3.11 Franciscus and Antonio

Two characters sneak into an insane asylum disguised as a madman and an idiot and try to seduce Isabella (MCNAMEE, 2020, 2).

## 4-The Theme of Change in the Play

The word "change" was repeated frequently, about nineteen times in the play. The writer perhaps wanted to show the transformation in the life of the characters of the play. Alsemero, the rigid soldier and voyager, who was not interested in women turns into fervent anxious uncomforted lover, and Beatrice who committed reckless criminal acts tries to appear helpless victim unable to choose her life partner by her will because she suffers from the authority of unbearable father at the end of the play. De Flores also accuses Beatrice of shifting her affection from Alonzo whom she reluctantly accepted as a husband, to the

newcomer Alsemero (Bawcutt, 1975, 5).

The metaphoric change occurs through Alonzo's cut finger, when De Flores kills Alonzo at Beatrice instigation, and cut off his finger on which he wears the ring then he presents this finger to Beatrice as an evident of completion of the deal. The ring here is a symbol of Marriage which means there is a change of Beatrice's husband occurs, De Flores becomes the husband instead of Alonzo (Budekhin, 2019, 703).

The two plots (the main and subplot) may seem far apart, some critics view that the secondary plot useless and annoying addition to the text, while others see that the subplot important to understand the main plot. In facts the two plots come so near in the last scene of the play, to sum up all the changes and transformations that occurred to each character in the play. The noble Beatrice becomes an adulterous and is involved in murders, her servant, De Flores becomes hired killer, Diaphanta becomes a surrogate in Beatrice's marital bed. There are many changes take place in the asylum for the doctor , Antonio and Franciscus . The play leaves an open question, Are there more changes? The events of the last scene reveal the identity of its title retrospectively. (Taylor& Lavangnino, 2007, 1633).

## 5-The Theme of Virginity in the Play

One of the most important theme of the play is virginity which is often repeated in Middleton's works as well as theme of exploiting this sexual aspect of woman to achieve economic and social benefits to the woman and her family. Beatrice's father, Vermandero prefers Alonzo to Alsemero even though they are both from noble families, but the fortune of the former is much greater than the later, so virginity is the precious prize for the eligible suitor. Beatrice offers a huge sum of money which makes a servant like De Flores salivates for it, only to save her virginity, but he rejects the money and insists on getting her virginity because he thinks that a half of his sexual pleasure in this thing. Likewise, Alsemero who is indifferent to women falls in love with Beatrice for her sexual purity as a condition to end his fast of women. It is not surprising that Middleton is obsessed with the subject of virginity which has become an important part of many of his works. This theme is the main subject of the works of many male writers such as Geoffrey Chaucer, John Milton, Thomas Hardy and many others, but Middleton may have wanted to mock the society excessive interests in this subject. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth literary works were filled of topic of virginity and all these works were closely linked with the virgin Queen, furthermore, some began to promote the sanctification of the virgin Elizabeth like the sanctification of Virgin Mary, Middleton explains the

importance of virginity in the society (Kim, 1).

Perhaps the idea of virginity or losing it that Middleton employed in his play "The Changeling" was inspired by the public divorce incident that took place in 1613, in which Frances Howard denied her arranged marriage to the Earl of Essex and claimed that she was still virgin. The court assigned a jury group of women to perform a physical test to prove this claim or deny it. Many critics believe that this incident inspired many lively and realistic moments of "The Changeling". The incident and the literary works that were inspired by it became a source of nuisance that disturb the strict patriarchal society; people believe the frank speech of Howard and Beatrice-Joanna could help some women to pretend to be virgins. Virginity was considered as a reliable brand in the marriage market. The above incident also may have inspired Middleton to switch Diaphanta and Beatrice in the marital bed (Lufftering, 2011)

### 6-The Changeling

Beatrice-Joanna meets Alsemero and falls in love with him. She realizes that he is the right man for her and decides to marry him, especially after learning that he is talented in science and arts, but unfortunately she is engaged to Alonzo a short while ago.

Beatrice: {Aside} I wish we could turn the clock back five days! Certainly, my eyes made a mistake: This man was meant for me. The timing was almost perfect but now the chance has gone! (Ueshime, 2003, 50).

In order to get rid of Alonzo, she sought the help of her ugly servant, who demanded her that he takes her virginity after he completed the mission, and when she refused, he threatened her and took her by force (Hermann, 2011, 84).

Beatrice complains that she cannot choose her husband, and that she must submit to her father's will (G.S, 2011, 5). She shows her approval of Alonzo's marriage, but secretly she tries to get rid of him. Instead of rebelling against the norms of Elizabethan women and running away with her lover, as Jessica did in Shakespeare's play "The Merchant of Venice" when she disobeys her father. On the contrary Beatrice incites her servant to kill Alonzo in exchange for giving up her chastity. She is described as a devil, she can be likened to Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's play "Macbeth", as both women have the ability to persuade men to fulfill their desires, but the difference between them is that Lady Macbeth seeks power, while Beatrice seeks love and the free will to choose her husband, and in both cases sex is the means to achieve their goals. Both characters are described as a "dark lady" (ibid, 6).

The murder of Alonzo is of great importance to

understand the development of the events, as the heroine loses the aura of innocence that she had distinguished herself with, which was like an intangible barrier. Beatrice becomes a partner with De Flores from now. She shares with him the crime and descends to his level through her actions. Beatrice gets rid of her credulity and carelessness that were her previous characteristics, and this is a turning point for her, and she began to realize the ugliness of her present state, because the scandal of one of them leads to the downfall of the other

Vengeance begins;

Murder, I see, is followed by more sins.

Was my creation in the womb so curs'd?

I must engender with a viper first?

{The Changeling, III, VI} (Budekhin, & others, 2019, 704).

Beatrice's moral deviation, her lack of courage to reject her father's will, and her lack of knowledge of the intentions of the people around her made her believe that the only way to get rid of Alonzo was by killing him, which led to her tragic end (Karim & Others, 2015, 174).

De Flores is defined by his appearance from the beginning. He is described as a cruel, arrogant, and dishonest person. He has an ugly and hateful appearance and Beatrice describes him as a kind of snake or toad. His ugliness contrasts with Beatrice's beauty. De Flores embraces the role of a villain in Shakespeare's play Iago (The Play of Othello) and the character of Aaron in "Titus Andronicus". These characters lost their position in life and they are obliged to serve.

Though my hard fate has thrust me out to  
Servitude,

I tumbled into Th' world a gentleman.

[The Changeling, II, I]

The three characters are willing to take revenge on anyone in their society (Budekhin & Others, 2019, 702).

In order to maintain her position, Beatrice devised a plan to make Alsemero believe that she was still a virgin (Herrmann, 2011, 84). She offers her maid the money and to sleep with Alsemero on the wedding night. Diaphanta answers Beatrice:

Would you resign?

Your first night's pleasure, and give money too?  
(Daalder, 1991, 18).

Later, Beatrice decided to kill Diaphanta when she discovered that Diaphanta had begun to love Alsemero

and that she might reveal the secret of her virginity. De Flores took on the task of killing the maid by setting fire to the room and then killing her, but in the end, Beatrice's plan was exposed and the evil duo commits suicide together (Herrmann,2011,84).

Beatrice receives the news of her maid's death with relief and a degree of victory. Thus, Beatrice ignores the voice of morality and does not regret the actions she has committed. Therefore, her fate is known, as she plunges into the depths of vice with her seducer (Budekhin &Others, 2019, 704).

The character of Diaphanta appears in act 1, scene 1when Jasperino decides to seduce Diaphanta after seeing Alsemero's sudden change when he falls in love with Beatrice. The events of the play show us the difference in relationships. The relationship between Alsemero and Beatrice is different from that of Jasperino and Diaphanta. Alsemero and Beatrice are people who control their emotions, While Jasperino and Diaphanta confess them deliberately (Daalder, 1991, 15).

Beatrice continues her relationship with De Flores after she used to hate him, where this hatred turns into an emotional attraction. There is a great similarity between the corruption present in the Changeling and the image of evil which presents "Women Beware Women", where both characters Bianca and Beatrice-Joanna are ignorant of the consequences of the actions they committed that led to their destruction (Herrmann, 2011, 86).

Beatrice's inability to control her emotions through her intense love for Alsemero, her refusal to marry Alonzo, and her intense hatred for De Flores, who later became her lover, indicate her free will in her wrong decisions, which led to her tragic end at the hands of De Flores (Will, 3).

The Changeling can be seen as a tragedy of revenge, although the character of Tomazo appears as a secondary character but he seeks revenge for the death of his brother. The authors distract attention from the inquiry of Alonzo's death by other events. Alonzo's death is similar to the death of Hamlet's father, as the character is not intended to have any meaningful emotional impact on the audience. Therefore, no one cares about Alonzo's death except his brother Tomazo. Alonzo's death only serves to evolve the plot as it represents Beatrice's retreat from her principles (Budekhin & Others, 2019, 702).

In the fifth chapter, Alsemero is convinced that Beatrice is involved in the murders and adultery, as Beatrice and her partner De Flores confess to their crimes, and De Flores shows no remorse after confessing to killing Alonzo. He says:

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 (Daalder, 1991, 225).

The sub plot introduces the character of Alibius., a jealous doctor who believes that his long absence from home is causing his wife to commit an adultery, so he asks Lollo to monitor her and not let her go out, but Lollo disagrees with him

We have but two sorts of people in the house, and both under the whip, that's fools and madmen; the one has not wit enough to be knaves, and the other not knavery enough to be fools. (44 – 47)(Daalder, 1988, 2).

The sub plot is very clever means created by the writer to make a comparison between the world of crazy people and the world of normal people. In fact, madness lies outside mental institutions not inside them; the madness is practiced by normal people who claim to be sane. The inmates of mental institution, with the exception of Franciscus, Antonio, Alibius, Lollo and Isabella don't make any significant harm, so Isabella lives in safest place in the world. The real danger lies outside asylums, in the world of Beatrice and De Flores .one of important paradoxes that the subplot explains is Isabella who lives in a world full of madmen , has rational behavior and thoughts , while Beatrice who live in the world of normal people, has crazy , lustful and criminal actions(Daalder,1988,7).

Isabella's character can be likened to Portia in Shakespeare's play "The Merchant of Venice", as both characters show blind obedience to their superiors. Portia abides by her father's will even after his death, and Isabella shows her obedience to her husband's orders and to his servant who watches over her in her husband's absence by not allowing her to communicate with strangers.

(Isabella)

"Is it your master's pleasure or your own?

To keep me in this pifold?"

Lollo

'Tis for my master's pleasure, lest, being taken in another man's

corn, you might be pounded in another place."

(Isabella)

""Tis very well, and he'll prove very wise."(III.ii 7-13)(G.S, 2011, 10).

The difference between the two main characters, Beatrice and Isabella, is that it is not that Beatrice is a

sexual woman and Isabella is an honorable woman, but rather that the difference between them is that Beatrice is unconscious of her lust that led her to an unhappy ending, while Isabella is aware and rational enough in her decisions (Daalder, 1991, 21).

Some critics have found the subplot unnecessary in the play, but recent studies of Middleton have shown that it is useful in showing the contradictions between the two plots. The aristocracy living in Vermandero's castle, represented by Beatrice, has followed a path of vice and evil, contrasting with the characters in the asylum, represented by Isabella, who has put up with her greedy husband and has maintained her morals. The asylum is like the Sabbath in "The Witch", so Rowley's contribution was essential (Herrmann, 2011, 87).

The mental nature of both Beatrice and Isabella contributes to explain their behavior. There is a close relation between ethics and psychology through which an important observation can be realized; that is madness often is associated with good, while reason associated with evil, the play concentrates on psychological side. Isabella is not an angel, simply she is a truthful human who can control her desires and sexual tendencies and does not give free rein to her whims as Beatrice does. Isabella has a strong self-control and knows well how to fortify herself against other's temptations., while both Beatrice and Diaphanta surrender to their desires and their lust become the leash that direct their behavior (Daalder, 1992, 22).

### **CONCLUSION**

The Changeling that is written in collaboration between Thomas Middleton and William Rowley considers one of the wonderful revenge tragedies. It is a domestic tragedy that tells the story of transformations that occur to people under certain circumstances. Some people are carried away by their whims and desires, while others remain calm and balanced facing the difficulties of life. The writer may want to analyze the behaviors heroin of the play through a comparison between her and another female character from a less community but suffer the same chains that are imposed by a Patriarchy society. The doctor's wife who plagued by an old and immoral husband who suffers from mental disorder keeps her honor and chastity, despite some people who try to lure her. While the noble heroin, can't resist her lust then get lost to fall in the swamp of vice. The play witnesses a series of transformations .Thus the idea of change remains the distinctive feature of the play.

### **Notes**

1Chien-Hang Liu. Illusory Control: Female's Sexuality and Male's Fantasy in The Changeling. Vol. 8, No. 9,

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