

2018 SAA Seminar: The New *Changeling* 1
Leaders: Gordon McMullan, King's College London
Kelly Stage, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Seminar Respondent: Professor Suzanne Gossett, Loyola University Chicago

Seminar summary

It is ten years since the publication of Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino's landmark Oxford Middleton edition – time, we feel, for reflection on the impact of the edition and of other recent developments in Middleton studies, as well as in early modern drama more generally, on the study and teaching of *The Changeling*, the most frequently taught play in the Middleton canon and thus a valuable test case.

Our working premise is that critical fields, especially in respect of plays prominent in the teaching canon, tend to change more glacially than we might wish, and our plan for the seminar is to assess the current state of play in Changeling studies. We aim to provoke new work in light of developments over the last decade, both those prompted by the Oxford edition and those that are freestanding by virtue of being under way before 2007. The former include Annabel Patterson's elegant introduction to the Oxford edition and a range of related engagements with the play by, e.g., Tanya Pollard, Michael Neill, Carol Thomas Neely, Courtney Lehmann, Pascale Aebischer and Barbara Ravelhofer, as well, most recently, as essays by Jay Zysk, Brad Ryner and Jennifer Panek rethinking issues of embodiment, sexuality and religion that were hallmarks of an earlier phase of Changeling criticism. The latter include, inter alia, David Nicol's Middleton & Rowley (2012), which directly addresses the collaborative nature of the play and throws down the gauntlet to critics' persistent tendency to ignore collaboration or downplay the scenes thought to be Rowley's.

This seminar invites papers addressing *The Changeling* and its afterlife from any angle: canons, authorship, genres, histories, spaces, sexualities, performances, editions. What are the impacts of editing and criticism on performance (and vice versa)? Have “castle plot” and “hospital plot” become standard terms of analysis? What difference does it make to read the play in the context of all the texts created by Middleton and his collaborators? What futures can be imagined for *Changeling* criticism?

Emma Katherine Atwood, University of Montevallo

Spatial Problems and Impossible Architecture in *The Changeling*

In Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling*, the audience is introduced to a number of prominent architectural sites: the temple where Alsemero sees Beatrice Joanna for the first time (cited in the opening line of the play); Vermandero's castle, equipped with secret passageways and forbidden closets; and Alibius's madhouse with its nesting doll effect of cages within cages. These specific sites operate as metaphors throughout the play; as Vermandero states, “our citadels are plac'd conspicuous to outward view, on promonts' tops; but within are secrets.”

Given the fact that the play is clearly invested in the ability to police architectural sites and the

2018 SAA Seminar: The New *Changeling* 2
Leaders: Gordon McMullan, King's College London
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“secrets” within them, it is worth noting that, dramaturgically, they collapse. When confronted with the realities of early modern staging practice, these sites—impregnable fortresses and strong castles—are shown to be neither impregnable nor strong. For instance, in act three, the catacombs are too narrow to accommodate weapons but must be represented on the open stage. In act five, Alsemero’s closet spills out onto the main stage while an entire wing of Vermandero’s castle simultaneously burns to the ground offstage. Characters who are unable to recognize these dramaturgical paradoxes do not survive. This paper suggests that these spatial problems are purposeful, and that the impossibility of depicting architectural enclosure mirrors the impossibility of domestic control more broadly.

With more frequent productions of *The Changeling* in recent years, my attention to the play’s spatial problems can be applied directly to contemporary staging choices, from questions of set design to the degree of comfort with “unlocalized” staging.

Sarah Dustagheer, University of Kent

Indoor Theatre and the Proxemics of Asides: *The Changeling*

In this paper I want to examine the dominance of the asides in Thomas Middleton and William Rowley’s *The Changeling* and the sensory and spatial experience for audiences in its first performances at the indoor playhouse, the Phoenix. Throughout the play characters, especially Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores, present a public and acceptable face in their heard dialogue, while their asides represent a ‘corrupted private language’ (Sara Eaton). Analysis of asides has informed much of the rich criticism on the play, especially its intense morbid psychology, defiled sexual interactions and sense of enclosure. But how did early modern audiences experience these asides under the physical conditions and distances of the Phoenix playhouse? In what ways did the practicalities of performing this dramatic convention contribute to the play’s themes? Drawing on recent work in early modern emotions, senses and audiences, as well as recent productions of the play at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse (2014) and the Young Vic (2012), this paper will re-examine *The Changeling*’s asides in order to explore links between text, playhouse and audience.

José Manuel González, Universidad de Alicante

A Mediterranean setting for *The Changeling*. An ecological reconsideration

Like other Jacobean dramatists, Thomas Middleton and William Rowley found inspiration in Spain for the setting and source material of *The Changeling*, whose action takes place in the Spanish seaport of Alicante. Departing from Dale B. Randall’s seminal contribution, I would like to look for other clues that could explain their choice, as there must be a reason for it beyond the immediacy of the retake of the original story that appears in Book One of John Reynolds’s *The Triumph of God’s Revenge* (1621). Though a realistic perspective might be traceable to that source, I shall argue that a setting is not only a geographical place but also a state of mind and a way of life, shaped by fantasies and textured by beliefs and fears as a materialization of the external world. As Barbara Fuchs suggests, I propose the Mediterranean

2018 SAA Seminar: The New *Changeling* 3
Leaders: Gordon McMullan, King's College London
Kelly Stage, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Sea as a more general and significant location for a deeper understanding of the play today. This paper will explore the symbolic, ideological, ecological and poetic geography of the Mediterranean setting, how its imagined world relates to the play and the world around it, and how an intertheatrical geography is created through the common literary imaginary which operated within early modern Mediterranean drama.

Eric John Griffin, Millsaps College

“Hail, bright Titania!”: *The Changeling*, Political Elizabethanism, and Jacobean Hispanophobia

Thomas Middleton and William Rowley launched *The Changeling* into the most turbulent geopolitical waters England had known since the Anglo-Spanish War of 1588-1604. With the 1621 expiration of the Twelve Years' Truce between the Spanish Empire and the Dutch Republic, a phenomenon referred to quite explicitly in the play, England's "puritan" and "Spanish" parties drifted toward increasingly polarized perspectives, a situation exacerbated by King James's desire to bring about a long-desired Spanish Match for the Stuart dynasty.

While considering the rather explicit anti-Hispanism of Middleton's tragic plot in relation to the nationalistic evocation of Elizabeth implied in Rowley's comic scenes, this paper explores *The Changeling's* relationship to these contemporary geopolitics. As they participate in the rejuvenation of Armada-era ethno-poetics at a moment in which Protestant nostalgia for the glories of Elizabethan nationalism was trumping Jacobean attempts to broaden Britain's role in international affairs, Middleton and Rowley project inherent incompatibilities onto England's sometime ally, sometime enemy, Imperial Spain. In doing so, they effectively predict the foreign policy "triumph" that will occur with failure of James I's attempt to secure an Anglo-Spanish dynastic alliance.

Fran Helphinstine, Morehead State University

Directors Romp Far from the *The Changeling* Text

Although the Oxford editors' placement of staging notes and additions does influence the meaning of Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* and the publication of The Oxford 2007 *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* has led to increased production of *The Changeling*, directors rely on their individual vision and actors begin rehearsals with a series of improvisations around the text. As explained in the educational sessions at The Stratford Festival (Ontario) directors, actors, dramaturgs, and stage managers make changes before and during rehearsals.

Long before the Oxford edition, Tony Richardson marketed his 1961 production of *The Changeling* for the English Stage Company at Royal Court as the first on a professional stage since 1668. As Nora Williams points out, he used Goya's Spain as set and eliminated the heavy Jacobean use of asides to have those lines spoken directly to other characters. In 1985, Robert Brustein, American Repertory Theatre, altered the text to portray a predatory hell on earth. In

2018 SAA Seminar: The New *Changeling* 4
Leaders: Gordon McMullan, King's College London
Kelly Stage, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

leather reptilian costume; “DeFlores crawl[ed] out of corners and slither[ed] across the stage like an Old Testament serpent.” In 2006, prior to release of the Oxford text, Declan Donnellan directed a dark Cheek by Jowl traveling production. The actors in the main plot replace the asylum inmates in the subplot. In 2012, at the Young Vic, director Joe Hill-Gibbins exaggerated everything for comic effect. In 2017 at the Stratford Festival (Ontario), director Jackie Maxwell moved Middleton’s setting to contemporary Spanish Civil War era. Her program notes indicate the play is a “complex and disturbing exploration of the terrifyingly thin line between choice and lack of control.” A text, new or old, is just one of the complex pieces of a production a director must bring into a unified whole- script, actors, set, costuming, lighting, sound and music.

Mark B. Kaethler, Medicine Hat College

**“Catch the last couple in hell!”
Middleton and Rowley’s Game of Barley-Break in *The Changeling***

Near the end of *The Changeling*, Deflores announces that he and Beatrice-Joanna have been playing “barley-break” and are now “left in hell,” and Gary Taylor takes this reference as emblematic of “the climax of *The Changeling*” (5.3.162-63; 46). This mention is not reserved for *The Changeling* alone, however. In another Middleton collaboration, *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* (1604), Bellafront references the game of Barley-Break as the plot nears its end (15.347-48). In both cases, two plots involving couples intertwine near the end to conclude the play. While Ann Pasternak Slater has offered sustained discussion of barley-break in *The Changeling*, her argument overlooks the collaborative implications of using the game as well as accounts other than Sir Philip Sidney’s. The Middleton and Rowley collaboration must also give us pause, for the playwrights have used games to frame their previous plot for *The World Tossed at Tennis*. Though less explicit, *The Changeling*’s integration of a game seems to have operated as a means to establish unity in plot and to reflect and accentuate the events of the text, a technique Middleton possibly picked up from working with Dekker. Reflecting upon my previous work with Middleton’s use of games in *The World Tossed at Tennis* and *A Game at Chess* and expanding upon Slater’s previous thoughts, my investigation will consider the authors’ potential to blur the rules of the game, especially since multiple variations of gameplay coexisted at the time, to suit their plotline; the ways in which the game facilitated their own collaboration; and the game’s implications for commenting upon structures of governance with which the play’s language is clearly preoccupied.

Karen Sawyer Marsalek, St. Olaf College

Phantom Limbs

Beatrice-Johanna’s gloves--the “favour with a mischief” that DeFlores retrieves (1.1.235)--and the related prop of Alonzo’s severed finger are my focus in this essay. Connected through the phallic imagery that many critics have commented on, these props are also linked as skin-covered yet disembodied limbs, appendages that can no longer sense, but which remain charged and “active” on the stage. While the gloves are frequently read as metonymic for Beatrice-Johanna’s body, penetrated by DeFlores in advance of his later sexual conquest, I follow and

2018 SAA Seminar: The New *Changeling* 5
Leaders: Gordon McMullan, King's College London
Kelly Stage, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

extend (or stretch, to use the language of leather) Patricia Cahill's argument that the scene "stages something more dynamic" than symbolic rape. As extensions of Beatrice-Johanna's hands, the gloves function as prosthetics that replace DeFlores' own skin, which she wishes they will strip off. The gloves make him into another pair of hands, supplying the deficiencies she claims to lack when she laments, "Would that creation...had formed me man," and enabling her to follow through on her claim that "In a work of cure / I'll trust no other" than her own hands. (2.2.108-9 and 86).

The material presence of the gloves also highlights several theatrical prostheses needed for the play: Alonzo's ringed finger that suffers post-mortem amputation, and the bodily technology--possibly a four-fingered glove--used in the disability drag of the actor performing his maimed ghost. My analysis considers the practical implications of these properties, how they might stage the dis/abled bodies of the characters, and help us to re-member the bodies of the early modern players Middleton and Rowley wrote for. Finally, this anatomization of the play's phantom limbs suggests the complexity of the playwrights' collaboration as presented by David Nicol, a process of both handing off and working hand in glove.

Avi Mendelson, Brandeis University

The Pleasure of Your Bedlam: *The Changeling's* Reason Dismantling Madnesses

In an essay that tries to rescue *The Changeling's* subplot from a history of critical scorn, Susan Mayberry notes that the play interrogates traditional distinctions between reason and madness: "We [the audience] are drawn into a nightmare where people who exhibit unconventional but relatively harmless behavior are deemed insane while those who deliberately lie, deceive, commit adultery and murder but maintain a conventional appearance are not. The very structure of the drama asks us to question who belongs in the madhouse." My paper elaborates on Mayberry's point by exploring some ways the play pressures us to scrutinize the criteria for confinement and institutionalization.

Firstly, *The Changeling* uses the instability of "madness" to lampoon medical profiteering that seeks to turn illness into business. Secondly, the play paradoxically normalizes madness - both by suggesting madness is a consequence of Original Sin and by linking mundane lovesickness to criminal pathology. Thirdly, the play claims not only that anyone can easily trick doctors by feigning madness - physicians lack foolproof diagnostic tools - but also that diagnosing madness would be difficult regardless since theatrical renderings of insanity might look identical to authentic mental disease; these critiques of diagnostic possibility depend on a recycling of Shakespearean images of madness.

By analyzing *The Changeling's* disruption of madness/reason binaries, I ultimately ask whether the play can help us reevaluate modern Disability Studies that - evoking "madness" as personal embodied impairment - are at odds with the play's strategic use of the term to question the medicalization of seemingly aberrant psychic experience.

David Nicol, Dalhousie University

**“Exit at one door and enter at the other”:
The Fatal Re-entrance in *The Changeling* and other Phoenix Plays**

This paper studies *The Changeling* alongside the other plays with which it would have been in repertory at the Phoenix playhouse (also known as the Cockpit) in the early 1620s. In so doing, it reveals the presence of a recurring trope in Phoenix plays that I label the ‘fatal re-entrance’. When Deflores takes Alonzo down into the depths of the castle to murder him, the characters perform an ‘immediate re-entrance’ (they exit at one door and then immediately re-enter at the other to indicate their movement to a new location). This awkward device is extremely rare in English Renaissance drama, and yet a remarkable cluster of examples is found within five plays performed at the Phoenix: *All's Lost by Lust* (c.1620), *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), *The Changeling* (1622), *The Spanish Gypsy* (1623) and *The English Traveller* (1624). I propose that there was a fashion for immediate re-entrances in Phoenix plays of the early 1620s, and, what is more, that they were always associated with the same imagery of devils and of fate that can be found in the scene from *The Changeling*. I further argue that these ‘fatal re-entrances’ became so familiar to Phoenix audiences that the final two examples toy with the audience’s expectations to produce surprising effects. Locating *The Changeling* within its Phoenix context thus reveals its central position within a group of plays that use immediate re-entrances to emphasize the sense that characters are descending toward a fated destiny in Hell.

Jaime Paris, Corpus Christi College, British Columbia

The Black Mask: On the Fragility of Whiteness in Middleton’s and Rowley’s *The Changeling*

Early modern scholars Kim F. Hall in *Things of Darkness* (1996), Peter Erickson in “The Moment of Race in Renaissance Studies” (1988), Arthur Little Jr. in *Shakespeare’s Jungle Fever* (2000), and Ian Smith in “We Are Othello” (2016) have called for critics to deconstruct the role of whiteness in early modern criticism and early modern plays. This paper responds to these early modern critical race theorists by addressing how Thomas Middleton’s and William Rowley’s *The Changeling* (1622) shows the deconstruction of phenotypic whiteness into metaphorical “blackness.” The play reveals the underlying fragility of whiteness in the early modern world, and the associations of “blackness” with immorality and the demonic, and “fairness” with Christian virtues. Before Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores are revealed as murders and adulterers, they are not discussed in racial or colour terms by the other characters in the play. Their whiteness is invisible. After they are discovered, Alsemero declares that Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores have worn a “black mask” (5.3.3), and he laments how Beatrice-Joanna’s “black...deeds” have “deformed” her (5.3.63, 77). Why are these “tropes of blackness” (Hall 6) used to describe white characters? Middleton and Rowley see phenotypic whiteness or fairness as a mask that can obscure the evil intentions of fair-faced characters. Beatrice-Joanna’s and De Flores’s whiteness becomes visible as a mask that obscures their underlying amorality, but also makes associations of whiteness and virtue unstable.

Katy Reedy, Lake Forest College

**“Guarded with French amulets”:
Poison and Disease in Middleton's and Rowley's *The Changeling***

When Beatrice-Joanna decides to use De Flores to murder her fiancé, Alonso de Piracquo, in Middleton's and Rowley's *The Changeling*, she compares herself to “men of art”: medical authorities who use poison to “expel” other poisons. Both Middleton and Rowley draw upon the powers and properties of this spreading and corrupting substance in their respective scenes, finding either a pharmakon of poison and cure or a totally-pernicious force that must be fully expelled. Critics have explored these mixed pharmacies and occult attractions within this play of “secrets” that is filled with scientific and magical books, tests, and potions. Yet the medical use of poison and its connection to contagion long fascinated Middleton, from his first collaborative plague satires on through his city comedies and tragedies. In exploring Middleton's preoccupation with poison as a protective “amulet” throughout his prolific career, this essay unpacks his satirical and deeply troubled views on corrupted female sexuality and male-executed punishment in *The Changeling*. Middleton and Rowley restage the “French amulet” dynamic of feminine venereal poisons and masculine collective plagues, yet subversively reveal the uncanny resemblances between Beatrice-Joanna's poison and other seemingly pure measures and substances. The poisonous exchanges of *The Changeling* finally reveal the limits of language and the hidden motives guiding courtship, attraction, and sex.

Gregory M. Schnitzspahn, Fisher College

“Ten Times Worse”: Numbers, Female Flesh, and Patriarchal Anxiety in *The Changeling*

Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling* generates its dramatic tensions by suggesting the fundamental instability of patriarchal order and civilization. More specifically, the play depicts the failure of symbols and technology that would ostensibly control the “grotesque” reality of corporeal existence. Since Marjorie Garber's 1995 piece on the “Insincerity of Women,” most readings of *The Changeling* agree that the virginity test in Act Four alludes to Frances Howard's first marriage and related concerns about the unreadability and unknowability of female sexual histories. But few critics stop to consider that Alsemero's pregnancy and virginity tests come in glasses marked with *numbers*. Indeed, upon first discovering them, Beatrice even declares that she will know Glass C “from a hundred” (4.1.36) and that Glass M “is ten times worse” (4.1.40). Surely the alphanumeric markings on these tools for reading a woman's body, for uncovering the *Secrets in Nature*, also resonate with De Flores's exponential understanding of female sexual appetites: “for if a woman / Fly from one point, from him she makes a husband, / She spreads and mounts like arithmetic: / One, ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand— / Proves in time sutler to an army royal” (2.2.60-64). This essay contends that *The Changeling* connects with an early modern patriarchal anxiety about the potential unreliability of numbers and other technologies for measuring, reading, and otherwise mastering the terrifying disorder of the natural world—a world that is emblemized, for patriarchy, by female flesh.

Michael D. Slater, SUNY Brockport

“Shameless Collaboration”: Mixture and the Double Plot of *The Changeling*

This essay will reconsider the culminating episode of Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* in light of various early modern and modern printings of the text. Whereas modern editions tend to foreclose certain interpretive possibilities by regularizing the final scene's grammar, all of the earliest editions leave insistently undetermined the full significance of two major characters' final gestures and speeches on stage, those of Isabella and Alibius. Whereas Isabella is often thought to represent a counterpoint to the sexual transgressions of Beatrice-Joanna, I suggest here that she instead functions more properly as a double—a character poised to violate the same social norms and potentially to incur a similar fate. Her final lines in the play threaten to commit adultery, a threat she claims will remain empty only so long as Alibius himself performs the play's promised final change. Far from vowing to satisfy her demands in the early printings, though, Alibius instead threatens to catch her and, presumably, to punish her. This “unedited” conclusion thus has significant implications for both genre and for how scholars have traditionally understood the play's collaborative authorship, the respective contributions of Middleton's “tragic pen” and Rowley's “comic pen.”

Katherine Schaap Williams, New York University Abu Dhabi

Out of form: *The Changeling* and the Passionate Madman

My paper takes up *The Changeling*'s conjunction of deformity, ugliness, madness, and folly—visible registers of difference that are understood to warrant punitive behaviors—to consider how the play helps us rethink the knotty problem of consent. The play stages medical experimentation, institutional confinement and controlled mobility of fools and madmen, disfigured bodies and disfiguring sexual desire, to highlight a few of the thematic concerns that are underscored through the exemplary status of the play, given the frequency with which it is taught and performed. I am interested in returning to the play through lens of disability theory and especially the problem of consent, as both an early modern phenomenon of distributed adjudication for non-normative bodies, and as a problem of the play's futures, in order to understand how the jolting stakes of the comic continue to shape critical narratives and performance trajectories. The comic elements register at the level of character, generic plot, and collaborative authorship (in the most extreme version of one pole of the critical narrative, Rowley's comedy disrupting Middleton's tragedy), and contemporary productions have found these elements, especially the hospital plot, difficult for a modern audience to swallow (turning to examples from performances at the Wanamaker in 2015 and Stratford in 2017). Ultimately, I suggest that the queasy laughter *The Changeling* prompts—and the problem of consent it foregrounds—indexes a form of the theatrical contract.