

Women and the Gaze: Sexual Knowledge and the Fatal Woman in *The Changeling*

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Introduction

Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622) is a Jacobean tragedy that dramatizes Renaissance fears about female sexuality. The play's heroine, Beatrice-Joanna, plots the murder of her husband-to-be, the man chosen for her by her father, in order to marry the man of her own choosing.² A great deal of anxiety is provoked by the male playwrights who represent women as desiring subjects. Although there are only three women in *The Changeling*, and one of these, Isabella, is the chaste wife of Lollio in the play's subplot, the play, overall, showcases the changeability of women's bodies, 'their ability to change shape and hide secrets',³ and man's inability to know women. Although there are a number of fantastical moments in the play, the likelihood of which can be questioned (for example, the bed trick and C-M potion, which serve to exacerbate male anxieties regarding women's unknowability), the drama as a whole exists at a heightened and highly charged level of reality, in which Beatrice-Joanna undertakes acts that place her far beyond acceptable conventions of womanhood in the early modern period.

Beatrice-Joanna can be meaningfully interpreted as a Renaissance fatal woman, a *femme fatale* type figure who lures men into danger, destruction and even death by means of her overarching seductive charm.⁴ The parallels between these two figures—an aversion to the institution of marriage and the instigation of murder to attain one's desires—suggests an underlying cultural continuity with the implication that both the *femme fatale* of 1940s and 1950s *film noir* and the fatal woman of the Renaissance spring from the same psychological and ideological roots. That is, the common root lies in masculine anxieties that are relatively independent of historical period and social structure. While the anxieties that have elucidated the figure of the fatal woman may have existed perennially, there are certain socio-historic factors that coincide with the fatal woman's presence in the Renaissance era. Changes to the institution of love and marriage during the period contributed to women's changing status in society. During the sixteenth century, there was an increasing tendency towards companionate marriage (marriage for companionship and affective ties) at the expense of arranged unions (marriage for social and economic reasons).⁵

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² Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, 'The Changeling' in *Three Jacobean Tragedies* (ed. Gamini Salgado) (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965).

³ Lisa Hopkins, *The Female Hero in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.12.

⁴ Virginia Allen, *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon* (New York: The Whitson Publishing Company, 1983), p.viii.

⁵ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), pp.86-102.

The right of veto implied by the former entails the existence of romantic feelings prior to consummation and, as such, strongly implies social and legal recognition of the possibility that sexual desire might uneasily coexist with romantic idealization out of wedlock. A distinction must necessarily be drawn between the power of veto based on a woman's amorous response to a man's proposal and female agency of desire implying active initiation. From a male point of view, the former continued to stress wives as objects of desire. It supposed that women only had the power to respond to male instigation of sexuality and romance. However, in *The Changeling*, the male playwrights experimented with the idea of women as subjects with agency, who aggressively pursued their desires.

Theorizing the fatal woman

Romantic or companionate love was a derivative of the courtly love tradition, prevalent in the eleventh century.⁶ Courtly love allowed certain liberation of the individual to choose his or her lovers and to pursue pleasure for its own sake. Although the courting process often concluded with marriage, these unions were formed on the basis of overpowering mutual attraction alone.⁷ As an ideological position, this represented a threat to the traditional ways of the nobility (among whom arranged practices dominated) and their property, since the choice of a mate was so intimately bound up to the future of patrimony.⁸ The problem here is not the knowledge that women have sexual desires but the threat that new cultural practices might mean a loss of male control over the legitimate expression of desire. In *The Changeling*, the male playwrights depict the formation of a marital union by the couple themselves. The problem with this representation of marriage is that it is initiated, firstly, against the will of the parents and, secondly, by the woman herself. That the dramatists allowed the expression of female desire only to subsequently chastise and punish women for their actions suggests a certain uneasiness regarding the possibility of female agency. The men in the plays fail to overcome the cultural biases that often lead them to view strong women with suspicion following the possibility that a woman may woo and choose a man for herself. Furthermore, the possibility that women might initiate a sexual union invoked male anxieties regarding the woman who possessed desires of her own, who was an active agent in her own fate, rather than a submissive object at the dictates of men.

⁶ Jacqueline Sarsby, *Romantic Love and Society: Its Place in the Modern World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.17.

⁷ James Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p.xxii.

⁸ Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: London, University of Chicago Press, 1991), p.185.

I contend that there is a fatal woman on the Renaissance stage who combines adultery, murder and insubordination. This figure embodies the same characteristics as the twentieth century's *femme fatale*, because she is similarly drawn from an archetypal pattern of male anxieties regarding sexually appetitive women. Furthermore, the method I have used to demonstrate the presence of the fatal woman in Renaissance theatre—using techniques extracted from cinematic studies of the *femme fatale* in *film noir*—involves the reworking of cinematic concepts, such as the gaze, for application to Renaissance theatre.

Laura Mulvey formulated a theory of the gaze as gendered masculine. Using the concepts of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, she argued that the cinematic apparatus of classical Hollywood cinema inevitably placed the spectator in a masculine subject position, while the woman on screen was rendered the object of desire. In her groundbreaking article, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Mulvey claims that the gaze is characterized by the taking of the female body as the quintessential and problematic object of vision.⁹ Tania Modleski's conceptualization of the gaze is similarly grounded in terms of the shot/reverse shot formation in which men look at women who look. According to this formulation of the gaze, a shot of a woman is followed by a shot of a man, who is a surrogate for the male spectator, who is also looking at her.¹⁰ This flickering of perspectives from the woman to the man is deliberately structured in such a way that it is the man who gets the last look. The woman's look is returned and contained by an all-powerful, overarching, male gaze.¹¹ Mulvey and Modleski's perspectives closely resemble Jean Paul Sartre's notion of voyeurism. In *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre claims that the voyeur has his ear to the door and looks at others through the keyhole. The observer hears footsteps and knows that someone is looking at him/her. The gaze destroys the look, annihilates it, and casts the subject who is looking into the position of being looked at. According to Sartre, the gaze is analogous to the search for knowledge. That is, Sartre envisages the relationship between knower and known as a violation by sight, in which the subject of the gaze seeks to discover (be it sexually) the object of their vision.¹² Although Sartre provides the groundwork for subsequent theories of the gaze, unlike Mulvey and Modleski, he did not necessarily posit a male subject/female object dichotomy. The significance of his theoretical position, in terms of the possibility of a male or female bearer of the gaze and his claim that it is analogous to

⁹ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' *Screen* 16 6,3 (1975), p.619.

¹⁰ Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1998), p.52.

¹¹ Modleski, *Women*, pp.52-3.

¹² Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (London: Methuen, 1957), pp.259-61.

the search for knowledge, is crucial to my reconceptualization of the gaze in Renaissance theatre.

While Mulvey's and Modleski's gaze is a literal phenomenon, which manifests in the physical act of looking at someone, I claim (and in so doing, invoke Sartre's notion of the *voyeur*) that the possession of knowledge is concomitant with the possession of the gaze in Renaissance theatre. Whoever has knowledge has power, which in turn implies control of the gaze. With minimal reworking of the parameters that constitute the gaze, specifically, its reformulation as concomitant to the possession of knowledge, it will be shown that the gaze is applicable to media other than cinema. That is, I will demonstrate that a version of the gaze operates in the Renaissance theatre and that the woman who appropriates the gaze is the fatal woman.

Mulvey and Modleski have provided the terms of the debate, which have profoundly influenced my application of the gaze to Renaissance theatre. I propose that the gaze in Renaissance theatre contains three aspects: knowledge; masquerade and desire. The fatal woman *knows* about female enjoyment. However, in order to conceal knowledge pertaining to women's status as subjects of *desire* for men, the fatal woman *masquerades*, playing along with the rules of the game in a bid to hide her own subjectivity. Taken in isolation, these three elements present us with three different figures. Knowledge regarding sexual satisfaction belongs to the wanton or strumpet while the feminine performance of masquerade is a feature of the coquette or coveted woman. On the other hand, the woman who desires, who has control over her own body and destiny is the shrew. As such, it is only when all three characteristics are taken together that the figure of the fatal woman emerges and, on the Renaissance stage, Middleton and Rowley's Beatrice-Joanna is the embodiment of the fatal woman.

The unknowable Beatrice-Joanna

Beatrice-Joanna localizes contemporary fears and fantasies about women, sexuality and marriage. I look at Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* and the play's central protagonist, Beatrice-Joanna, in light of a dialectics of control in which the male gaze tries to objectify women. In order to discuss the ways Beatrice-Joanna adheres to my construction of the fatal woman, I will employ Tania Modleski's contention regarding the need of 'man' to control the gaze and the ways in which female desire evades such control. I will explore, in particular, the C-M potion as a manifestation of anxieties regarding men's inability to understand women's bodies. Beatrice-Joanna's discovery of the C-M potion and the manuscript that documents how to fake virginity contributes to her indelible knowledge

regarding female sexual enjoyment and the attendant control over the gaze that this knowledge implies. The C-M potion makes explicit early modern anxieties regarding women's unknowability and exemplifies Beatrice-Joanna's status as a fatal woman.

Modleski asserts that the greatest threat the *femme fatale* poses for the male relates to his fear of castration. In classical film, this anxiety is alleviated by the shot/reverse shot formation, a filmic technique that guarantees male possession of the gaze because he is habitually given the last look.¹³ The problem in *The Changeling*, however, is that the men do not possess Beatrice-Joanna at all. On the contrary, she is posited within the diegesis as all-seeing and is never sutured in as the object of man's look. In Middleton and Rowley's play, Beatrice-Joanna's father, Vermandero, arranges her marriage to Alonzo de Piracquo but she is in love with Alsemero. The latter would also be a suitable match so long as Alonzo was out of the way. Beatrice-Joanna, therefore, employs the use of her servant De Flores (whom she despises) to kill her intended. He does as instructed and brings back her dead fiancée's finger as proof of the deed, expecting for his services, a reward of a sexual nature ('Never was man/Dearlier rewarded' (2.2.138-40)) and not of the gold Beatrice-Joanna offered him.

Having surrendered her virginity on the eve of her wedding to Alsemero, the most obvious example of Beatrice-Joanna eluding the male gaze resides in her frustration of Alsemero's attempt to ascertain whether or not she is in fact a virgin. She agonizes that she will be found out by Alsemero on her wedding night: 'Never was bride so fearfully distressed... There's no venturing/Into his bed, what course so'er I light upon,/Without my shame' (4.1.2-13). At the exact moment when Beatrice-Joanna feels most exposed to Alsemero's penetrating gaze, her eyes fall upon the cabinet of secrets: 'Here's his closet,/The key left in't' (4.1.17-8). The key to Alsemero's closet enables her to 'beguile the master of the mystery' (4.1.39), when she uncovers a manuscript entitled 'The Book of Experiments,/Called Secrets in Nature' (4.2.24-5). This climactic scene epitomizes the operation of the gaze in Renaissance theatre. Following her sexual rendezvous with De Flores, Beatrice-Joanna acquires ineradicable knowledge about the experience of female pleasure and this knowledge is heightened by her discovery of the manuscript, which documents how to stimulate the throes of passion and how to 'fake it'.

The fatal woman of the Renaissance possesses an indelible knowledge about female sexuality, which denotes female appropriation of the gaze. The ideal woman of the early modern period, however, is the object and not the bearer of the gaze. When writers theorize the female gaze and apply a connection between sight and desire to women, it becomes, as

¹³ Modleski, *Women*, p.52.

Jean Marsden observes, a source of consternation, a harbinger of social disintegration.¹⁴ This is undoubtedly because the desiring female recalls representations of the shrew, the woman-on-top, whose open display of sexuality is inappropriate to her status as a woman. Excessive female desire is the source of moral chaos in these Renaissance plays. Henceforth, the problem with Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling* is that she usurps the male prerogative of control over the gaze and instead becomes the bearer of the gaze. In finding the *Book of Experiments*, she surpasses Alsemero's knowledge of female sexuality and claims a special knowledge of women that men lack—how to 'fake it'.

Beatrice-Joanna, having found the book of secrets, proceeds to read the manuscript that is accompanied by the subtitle, 'How to *know* whether a woman be with child or no' (4.1.26) and the procedure used to ascertain if a woman is pregnant, which involves feeding her two spoonfuls of the white water contained in glass C. If she is pregnant, 'she sleeps full twelve hours after' (4.1.34-5). Upon finding the pregnancy test, Beatrice-Joanna instigates her plan to outwit Alsemero: 'None of that water comes into my belly:/I'll know you from a hundred. I could break you now,/Or turn you into milk, and so beguile/The master of the mystery.' (4.1.36-9). It is not this practice outlined in folio forty-five that gives rise to Beatrice-Joanna's great consternation, but rather 'that which is next is ten times worse' (4.1.40)—the chapter in Alsemero's book entitled 'How to know whether a woman be a maid or not' (4.1.41)—that makes the pregnancy test redundant. The procedure outlined entails that the suspected party be given 'the quantity / of a spoonful of the water in the glass M' (4.1.46-7). The potion 'twill make / her incontinently gape, then fall into a sudden sneezing, last into a violent laughter' (4.1.49-50). If the woman does not exhibit these symptoms then she is not a virgin.

Having discovered the book and potions, Beatrice-Joanna persuades her waiting-woman, Diaphanta, to take the potions so that she may see its effects and mimic them if necessary: 'Now, if the experiment be true, 'twill/praise itself/And give me noble ease' (4.1.105-7). Diaphanta does not 'question what 'tis, but take[s] it' (4.1.104). She duly gapes, 'there's the first symptom' (4.1.108), sneezes, 'and what haste it makes / To fall into the second' (4.1.108-9), laughs and falls into melancholy. Thus instructed, Beatrice-Joanna is equipped with the ability to feign the symptoms of virginity. After Jasperino confides in Alsemero his suspicion that Beatrice-Joanna is not the virgin she claims to be, Alsemero is given a motive to try the M potion on her. Beatrice-Joanna muses: 'I am suspected...I'm put now to my cunning; th' effects I know/If I can but feign 'em handsomely' (4.2.132, 136-7).

¹⁴ Jean Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality and the English Stage, 1660-1720* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp.67-8.

Beatrice-Joanna's usurpation of Alsemero's 'most admirable secret' (4.2.110) frustrates his police prerogative over her body, and her possession of this secret (how to 'fake it') attests to women's privileged position in relation to knowledge and, therefore, female control of the gaze.

In *The Changeling*, Beatrice-Joanna fears that Alsemero will detect her deflowered condition. Marjorie Garber contends that Glass M, 'How to know whether a woman be a maid or not' (4.1.41), represents the fruits of a male fantasy, of a male doctor/lover who is at once inventor and investigator of female pleasure. He will attempt to elicit signs of sexual pleasure from a woman in their most manifest form.¹⁵ However, rather than disempowering women, Beatrice-Joanna's ability to fake orgasm allows her to control her personal relationship with Alsemero and enjoy the effects that her faking has on him.¹⁶ That is, in relation to a dialectics of control, Alsemero assumes the position of the male gaze in an attempt to objectify women. The problem Alsemero encounters is that having observed the potion's effects, Beatrice-Joanna has learnt how to respond to Glass M and so exhibits the appropriate symptoms—gaping, sneezing, laughing and melancholy—in the appropriate order.

Beatrice-Joanna has evaded the gaze that Alsemero wielded to control her sexuality and usurped his position as master of the mystery. In light of her performance, Alsemero is won over, convinced that she is 'chaste as the breath of heaven' (4.2.149-50). Garber notes that Beatrice-Joanna learns what every woman knows, how to 'fake it'. She produces the symptoms that delight her husband and confirm his apparent mastery of her.¹⁷ Beatrice-Joanna's ability to 'fake it' leads us inevitably to the notion of female masquerade as a means to evade the male gaze by feigning virtue and virginity and thus retaining her status as desirable to men. Beatrice-Joanna's masquerade conceals her sexual experience and hides the inevitable truth of female deceitfulness from the men in the play, which makes manifest the theme of women's unknowability.

Alsemero imagines that his scientific experiments will allow him unlimited access to the hidden secrets of women's bodies. Given Renaissance fears about female unknowability, this would represent an attractive fantasy to male audience members.¹⁸ Alsemero believes that he is in possession of an infallible means of prying into the last secrets of women and thus exercises an unchallengeable control over them. However, Beatrice-Joanna's

¹⁵ M. Garber, 'The Insincerity of Women' In *Desire in the Renaissance*, (eds Valeria Finucci and Regina Schwartz), (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p.26.

¹⁶ Garber, 'Insincerity', p.8.

¹⁷ Garber, 'Insincerity', p.27.

¹⁸ Hopkins, *The Female Hero*, 15.

preemptive discovery of the manuscript injures the position of superiority he would have otherwise possessed. The potions and philters in Alsemero's pharmacy have been designed to decipher and thus to control women's bodies and women's pleasures; but by learning to fake the response of pleasure, by masquerading as a virgin, Beatrice-Joanna takes control of the relationship and possesses a knowledge of sex that men do not.

The Changeling is a play about the pleasure and danger of women's desire. Beatrice-Joanna's ruse to employ De Flores to dispatch her inconvenient fiancé leads to a relationship in which loathing and desire are intertwined, and finally beyond her control. In the play, Garber notes that both the insincerity of concealing sexual responsiveness and the sincerity of faking it, elicit fear and excitement concerning a woman's sexual pleasure. If you can 'fake it', you have got it made.¹⁹ After all, women's sexuality is a dark continent—the unknown and unknowable, the less masterable and controllable answer to the question, what do women want? What is most disconcerting for men is the possibility that women are in control of the sexual rhetoric of desire and, furthermore, that women may act on and pursue these desires.²⁰ In *The Changeling*, the scene in which Beatrice-Joanna drops her glove and De Flores retrieves it for her emits an angry response on the part of the heroine: 'Mischief on your officious forwardness!/Who bade you stoop? They touch my hand no more/Take 'em and draw off thine own skin with 'em' (1.1.225-8). The point of the glove episode, however, is to announce that women do desire and that in dropping the glove, Beatrice-Joanna exercised her right to choose a partner, to act on her desires. Needless to say, the conflation of *The Changeling's* heroine with the notoriously fatal woman is inevitable.

Beatrice-Joanna has, until now, been permitted to look freely. She has appropriated the male gaze that sought to control women and usurped the privileged position of men as subjects of the gaze. We must now look at why Beatrice-Joanna is finally removed from the play, whilst her accomplice and would-be-assassin, goes free. *The Changeling* is structured in such a way as to denounce that the object women cannot know or possess relates to sex. Thus, in this play, women's acquisition of sexual knowledge is dangerous and deadly to men because he, in contrast, knows nothing. Following her experience of the sexual act, Beatrice-Joanna learns about female sexual pleasure and how to 'fake it'. Although the manifestation of enjoyment is externally perceptible, this pleasure can be feigned or performed to give the illusion of satisfaction even if, internally, Beatrice-Joanna experiences none. Such knowledge is unavailable to the men in the play because they are unable and unwilling to penetrate the surface and uncover the desire beneath as this would point to an inability to satisfy women,

¹⁹ Garber, 'Insincerity', p.28.

²⁰ Garber, 'Insincerity', p.30.

and Beatrice-Joanna in particular, and suggest, moreover, the possibility of his being lacking or castrated.

According to Modleski, the *femme fatale* is inevitably subject to 'brutal devaluation and punishment' by the conclusion of the narrative. She notes the ways in which this usually pertains to an investigation of the female body,²¹ the likes of which are employed by the men in *The Changeling*, as Jasperino attests to when he announces, 'tis not a shallow probe/Can search this ulcer soundly, I fear you'll find it/Full of corruption' (5.3.7-9). The manuscript entitled 'The Book of Experiment,/Called Secrets in Nature' (4.2.24-5) is a kind of key that will potentially unlock the truth of Beatrice-Joanna's virginity. Not only does Beatrice-Joanna discover the truth about women's ability to 'fake it' when she stumbles upon Alsemero's potions, but her subsequent masquerade of femininity, 'there was a visor/O'er that cunning face' (5.3.46-7), and her performance as a chaste virgin to please Alsemero suggests that she, likewise, possesses an ineffaceable knowledge that femininity is a construction that women put on for men. The fatal woman desires and it is part-and-parcel of this desire to see and to know. In the case of the male protagonist in these texts, however, fetishism is born out of a refusal to see and know. The fatal woman will never show her true intentions to anyone, especially not the hero she has inveigled, even if this entails his and her own death.²² This is likewise the case with Beatrice-Joanna who, only at the very end, will admit that she instigated the murder of Alonzo, 'your love has made me/A cruel murd'ress' (5.3.64-5), to get the man she wanted. However, she follows her confession of murder with a denial of the accusation of adultery against her: 'To your bed's scandal, I stand up innocent' (5.3.63).

It seems only reasonable to question why Beatrice-Joanna would refute claims of adultery whilst readily disclosing her part in the more severe crime of murder. Beatrice-Joanna 'discover[s] her freedom in the moment of her embrace of the inevitability of causation'.²³ The unconscious motivations that have driven her throughout the narrative—the desire to desire—are only attainable in death. Beatrice-Joanna realizes that her insistence on freedom is a delusion and that she has all along been fated to die. She therefore turns, according to Elizabeth Bronfen, 'what is inevitable into a source of power'. Beatrice-Joanna does not contest the murder charge because a guilty verdict and punishment of death will grant her the freedom she has sought unwaveringly since the beginning of the play. She finally apprehends that in early modern society, there is no appropriate outlet for

²¹ Modleski, *Women*, p.53.

²² Elizabeth Bronfen, 'Femme Fatale: Negotiations of Tragic Desire' *New Literary History* 35,1 (2004), p.106.

²³ Bronfen, 'Femme Fatale', pp.105-106.

her unabashed independence and that her union with Alsemero, although preferable in her opinion to a marriage arranged by her father, will nevertheless require her subjection in the patriarchal institution of monogamous matrimony. Although the dangerous female is finally contained within the patriarchal narrative, we can still debate whether she is punished and removed from the play because of her sexual transgressions or whether, in the words of Stanley Cavell, she comes to perform tragic acceptance, 'an enactment not of fate but of responsibility, including the responsibility for fate'.²⁴

In Renaissance thinking, there was a tendency to conflate the first act of sexual intercourse with the emergence of an insatiable female appetite and desire for sex. If a woman's knowledge and desire for sex was aroused by the man with whom she first engaged in the act of copulation, the subsequent anxiety ensued that from the moment the woman attained this sexual knowledge, she would be compelled to act in pursuit of her own desires. It is De Flores who takes Beatrice-Joanna's virginity from her claiming that 'thou'lt love anon/What thou so fear'st to venture on' (3.4.171-2), which subsequently catapults her pursuit for the satisfaction of desire. Beatrice-Joanna already knows about sex and female enjoyment, following her lovers tryst with De Flores; however, when she stumbles upon the *Book of Secrets in Nature*, she acquires additional knowledge about women's capacity to fake sexual pleasure. The symptoms that Alsemero's book describes, gaping, sneezing, laughing and melancholy, clearly parallel a description of female orgasm. In trying the potions on Diaphanta, she too acquires an understanding and knowledge about sex that eludes the men in the play, particularly Alsemero who, despite being in possession of the *Book of Secrets*, is unable to detect a true virgin from a woman who is 'faking it' and, in turn, finds himself on the receiving end of a bed-trick. Beatrice-Joanna's father, Vermandero, likewise finds the sound of a woman's passion indecipherable and frightening. He asks, 'What horrid sounds are these?' (5.3.141) When Diaphanta takes the place of Alsemero's wife in the marriage bed he is similarly unable to distinguish between the two women. It is no coincidence that both Diaphanta and Beatrice-Joanna should die, as both women possess a knowledge that is unknowable and unattainable by men: sex and female enjoyment.

Diaphanta's acquisition of knowledge about female sexual enjoyment begins in the first scene of act four, when Beatrice-Joanna coerces her to take a swig from 'a glass inscribed there with the letter M' (4.2.114). Diaphanta exhibits the symptoms that confirm her maiden status and upon discovering that the potions effects are 'so pleasurable!' (4.1.15) she asks Beatrice-Joanna for 'but one swig more' (4.1.16). Diaphanta's accrument of

²⁴ S. Cavell, 'The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of King Lear' in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (ed. Stanley Cavell), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.310.

knowledge confirms Renaissance fears that women's desire is excited from the moment she first experiences the throes of passion, which is confirmed in Diaphanta's admission that 'I love the burthen' (4.1.125). She relishes the opportunity to enjoy Beatrice-Joanna's 'first night's pleasure' (4.1.87) in her place and so conceal the latter's deflowered state. Diaphanta, like Beatrice-Joanna, possesses her own lusts and desires. Having constructed the elaborate bridal substitution, Beatrice-Joanna waits in fury outside the bridal chamber as she realizes that Diaphanta is enjoying herself instead of coming out 'about midnight' (4.1.126) as instructed: 'One struck, and yet she lies by! O my fears! / This strumpet serves her own ends.../Devours the pleasure with a greedy appetite' (5.1.1-3). When Diaphanta eventually emerges from the bridal chamber when 'three struck by Saint Sebastian's' (5.1.77), and admits that, 'in troth I was so well, I ev'n forgot myself' (5.1.75), Beatrice-Joanna's anxieties are affirmed.

The bed-trick complicates the relationship between inner intention and external behaviour. The moral of the bed-trick is that a wise man should not trust what he sees. He must learn to penetrate the veneer of appearances to grasp the hidden reality. The alienation of surface from depth means that a person's thoughts and passions are not immediately accessible to others.²⁵ Surfaces of the body are capable, as we have seen, of being theatricalized, so that while they can be made to seem absolutely trustworthy, they never actually are so. We remain aware and it is continually insisted upon that fakery is possible.²⁶ The bed-trick merely reinforces the notion of woman as mimesis, highlighting her unknowability, while she, in turn, possesses knowledge about female pleasure that is commensurate with woman's possession of the gaze.

Conclusion

While the men in *The Changeling* are finally granted narrative ownership of women, they are not granted the visual correlatives of possession, knowledge, and control. The men in *The Changeling* are ultimately denied knowledge and the control of the gaze that this implies. Garber notes that once Beatrice-Joanna learns to stimulate the throes of passion from Alsemero's own pharmacy, she is in control.²⁷ Her ability to pursue her own desires and 'fake it', with no one the wiser but herself, undermines the 'technicians of pleasure' who solicit for their science, according to Linda Williams 'further confessions of the hidden

²⁵ Katharine Maus, *Inwardness and Theatre in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.4-5.

²⁶ Maus, *Inwardness*, p.130.

²⁷ Garber, 'Insincerity', p.28.

secrets of female pleasure'.²⁸ In an ideal world, the male physician's quest for certainty and power is attained by observing women's symptoms. Following the detection of her secrets, he shares this knowledge with his male friends. However, as is made manifest in *The Changeling*, so long as women do not reveal that they have 'acted', or stimulated the spasms of pleasure in bed, they maintain a trust shared between every female in the world.²⁹ The possibility that women are indeed 'faking it' protects the privacy and control of pleasure that men attempt (or purport) to elicit.

²⁸ Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), .53.

²⁹ Garber, 'Insincerity', p.30.