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Macbeth and *The Changeling*: greed, murder and the destructive power of guilt

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Abstract

Macbeth and *The Changeling* are two early modern tragedies in which the characters are led by their desires and passions towards an awful end. Ambition is a feature owned by Macbeth, but it is his wife's greed that persuades him to taint his hands with the blood of a king in order to achieve the crown. This murder, together with Lady Macbeth's manipulative nature and blind avidity, has devastating consequences on both the Macbeths. Similarly, Middleton's characters fall victim to their own impulses. Beatrice-Joanna's infatuation for Alsemero makes her hire the repugnant De Flores for the homicide of the man she is betrothed to, but a series of murders, a dangerous partnership and De Flores's devious cruelty in forcing Beatrice into sexual submission result in the couple's damnation.

The parallels between Lady Macbeth and Beatrice-Joanna emerge not only in the active role they play in the plotting of the barbarous homicides, but also in their ways of managing the situation, especially when they have to deal with their guilt, a destructive force that consumes them with its unbearable pressure.

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Introduction

The first chapter is focused on the consequences of the characters' greed and in particular on Lady Macbeth. Inspired by the prophecy of the Three Witches, Macbeth fuels his ambition with the hope that sooner or later fate will give him Duncan's crown. There is no intention in Macbeth to pre-empt destiny, but he undoubtedly owns a devotion towards his cunning wife who is not willing to share with her husband the confidence that eventually he will obtain the throne without interfering with fate. Lady Macbeth thus does not reflect her husband's ambition, but rather shows a blind greed that encourages her to manipulate and persuade Macbeth, a man that is introduced as an honourable and good subject, praised by Duncan. The theme of regicide is equally important: it underlines the seriousness of planning Duncan's death as it recalls the Gunpowder Plot that took place on 5 November 1605 and the atrocious consequences for the failed attempt at murdering King James I.

Particular attention is given to the character of Lady Macbeth, a woman who is tempted by the alluring perspective of occupying a privileged place and change her social status, something that can only happen if Macbeth becomes the new king. The murder of Duncan is achieved by Macbeth primarily thanks to his lady's power of persuasion and manipulation. Lady Macbeth undoes the image of women as socially restricted and weak that was typical during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, revealing instead a ruthless determination and self-confidence that Macbeth initially lacks. Her masculine behaviour, opposed to Macbeth's tenderness, and her abominable request to the spirits ("unsex me here / And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty." *Macbeth*, I.v.39-41) give relevance to the issue of "unsexing" and "unmanning". The Macbeths undergo a transition that makes them exchange roles, but only until the reality of their deed becomes unbearable.

Guilt represents an essential theme; it inevitably develops after the murders and it starts tormenting the characters with its devastating power. It takes the shape of blood

that taints Lady Macbeth's hands and of loneliness and desperation for Macbeth. The relevance of physical act as a means through which Lady Macbeth's remorse surfaces is emphasized by the desperate and ferocious way in which she rubs her hands in order to get rid of the spots of blood. These, however, are only hallucinations, and so are the ones of Macbeth that faces the ghost of Banquo, the result of guilt that is slowly dragging the lady towards a state of madness and the tyrant king towards anguish and despair.

Even the Macbeths' partnership is subjected to the consequences of their deed: the change in their relationship is evident. The first chapter explores the alteration of their initial bond, once based on complicity; Lady Macbeth with her firmness is clearly the pillar of her husband, but in the end such bond turns into something different that does not reflect their original union.

The second chapter deals with Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*, aiming at inspecting how the central features analysed in *Macbeth* are introduced through the characters of Beatrice-Joanna and the servant De Flores. Greed, passion and desires are the driving forces behind the murder of an innocent man whose love for Beatrice is not reciprocated. The attempt at manipulating the repugnant De Flores with the hope of imposing on him only the whole guilt for the homicide of Alonzo suggests that Beatrice is the female villain of the play. However, the wicked character of De Flores and his poisonous nature that makes him resemble a deadly basilisk turn Beatrice into a victim of her own plan.

The tragedy offers both differences and similarities with the events and behaviours described in Macbeth, creating especially a connection between the two female characters. The central theme is indeed the way in which they plot the murder and manage the situation, what are the motives behind their plans, what forces them to act as they do and what are their divergent approaches to the men with which they create a partnership. The role played by the two women is certainly different, a feature that in the chapter is explained through the analysis of their dealing with their femininity and the restraints of society. Patriarchy is an aspect that appears in both tragedies, but not with the same impact.

The second chapter also takes into account the peculiar relationship between De Flores and Beatrice and how it develops, representing a partnership that begins after the servant forces her into submission. The ambiguous bond between them arises contrasting

opinions amid critics regarding the chance that Beatrice's repulsion towards the servant might be instead the expression of an unconscious attraction. Guilt works differently for the couple of *The Changeling*, which does not reflect the one experienced by the Macbeths. Particular space is given to the importance of physicality, which is introduced with De Flores's revolting ugliness and intensified by the representation of the body as mere flesh, but also with its inevitable reactions to the circumstances. Physicality is also emphasized by sexual coercion and the murder-suicide that ends the play. The sub-plot is equally important in the tragedy. It behaves as a secondary plot, but the chapter emphasizes the essential parallels between the two settings. The madhouse and the theme of madness actually play a central role, underlying above all the contrast between the real insanity of the madmen and the one from which the characters of the main plot suffer because of lust and passions. The sub-plot also explains the fundamental meaning of the term "changeling" and how it may be applied to the real one, the fake fool Antonio. He manages to enter the madhouse and tries to seduce Isabella, who does not surrender, representing the clever English woman in contrast with Beatrice's Spanishness. The term "changeling", however, applies to the other characters as well, representing their transformation throughout the play.

In a tragedy where murders, innocents unfairly killed and evil as a constant shadow that haunts the culprits are the main themes, religion is an essential aspect. The third chapter inspects the presence of religious symbols in *Macbeth*, namely the struggle between evil and good related to God. Evil in particular is manifested by the atrocious actions of the characters, but it continuously reminds the audience of its existence through some key elements such as blood, storms and the Witches themselves. The Three Sisters that awakens Macbeth's ambition with their prophecy play indeed a relevant role.

Some critics take into account the several references to Christ's passion. Some of these references regard the figure of Judas and the similarities of his lines with the ones of the Witches and especially of Macbeth. The importance of Macbeth's guilt is expressed through the meaningful episode of the guards talking in their sleep and Macbeth's failed attempt at replying "Amen", an event that testifies to the corruption of his soul and the consequent unworthiness to receive God's blessing. The repercussions of the horrible deeds committed emphasize the relevance of free will.

Religious symbols permeate *The Changeling* as well, a tragedy which gives a special emphasis to the awareness of the characters of the human condition after the Fall from the state of beatitude before the original sin. The allusions to Eden and especially to the lost unfallen state are displayed through the holiness of marriage and its power to restore such state, through the images of the serpent to which De Flores is compared and through Beatrice's loss of his privileged state once she becomes the "deed's creature" (III.iv.136). The temptation that betrayed the first humans seems to follow the main characters of both plots, but only Beatrice surrenders to it, while Isabella manages to resist. Beatrice and De Flores's destiny is to reach hell together. Just like evil, hell is another aspect that permeates the play with its presence, as highlighted by the mentions to the "barley-break" game and its conversion into a brutal reality: the only end that Beatrice and De Flores can expect for their murders, for their sexual affair and for their wickedness. The references to religion and the opposite ways in which Beatrice and Isabella act are apparently based on Middleton's Calvinism and Rowley's Pelagianism, two different points of views that have specific effects on the main female characters and their reactions to the suitors. Finally, the play seems to suggest that temptations and sins do not try to persuade the characters only, but all the humans, as everyone is inevitably exposed to dangerous desires and impulses.

CHAPTER 1

1.1 Ambition and greed

Ambition emerges as one of the main themes of Macbeth. It is the motive behind the immoral way in which Lord and Lady Macbeth act throughout the play and is the fulcrum around which the events revolve, so strongly supported by overwhelming greed. The complicated relationship between ambition and greed, which is evident from the start of the play but develops and becomes clearer as the plot progresses and the two main characters begin to show their nature, is the object of the analysis of this first part of the chapter. It is important, first of all, to fully understand the exact meaning of these two terms that might seem similar but actually differ significantly from one another and that play a crucial role in the tragedy. There is indeed a considerable distinction that needs to be defined in order to better understand the events that occur in *Macbeth* and that makes a special focus on Lady Macbeth necessary: ambition is commonly used to refer to the desire of changing one's position and taking advantage of one's abilities to reach such a change, usually through hard work, whereas greed has a negative connotation, referring to an insatiable craving for something, such as more possessions, power and wealth than actually needed.

The effect of ambition on the main characters and in particular on Lady Macbeth can be observed since her first appearance in Act 1, scene 5, when she is introduced while reading the letter that her husband Macbeth, current Thane of Glamis and general belonging to the army of King Duncan, sent to her:

> They met me in the day of success, and I have learned
> by the perfectest report they have more in them than mortal
> knowledge. When I burned in desire to question them further,
> they made themselves air, into which they vanished.
> Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it, came missives from
> the King, who all-hailed me Thane of Cawdor; by which
> title before these Weird Sisters saluted me, and referred me
> to the coming on of time with, 'Hail, king that shalt be.'

> This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner
> of greatness, that thou mightest not lose the dues of
> rejoicing by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee.
> Lay it to thy heart, and farewell (I.v.1-12)[1].

The delightful news of her husband's new title and the striking and enthralling prophecy of the Witches have an immediate impact on the woman, eliciting her instantaneous need to take advantage of the situation. Macbeth's response to the fortunate event makes it possible to assume that his belief and hopes are placed exclusively on fate, which according to his unambiguous viewpoint will presumably do everything that is needed to make him become the new king, while he will not have to do anything at all except waiting for the promised fulfilment of the prophecy, an approach that shows since the very beginning the evident contrast between Macbeth and his wife on the matter:

> Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
> What thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy nature:
> It is too full o'the milk of human-kindness
> To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly
> That wouldst thou holily, wouldst not play false,
> And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'dst have, great
> Glamis,
> That which cries, 'Thus thou must do' if thou have it,
> And that which rather thou dost fear to do
> Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither
> That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
> And chastise with the valour of my tongue
> All that impedes thee from the golden round
> Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
> To have thee crowned withal (I.v.13-28).

Unlike her husband, Lady Macbeth suddenly manifests her great ambition towards the idea of a brighter future and her inclination to adopt a strategy in order to get rid of Macbeth's weakness by means of her persuasive speech and the audacity of her tongue, together with a wickedness that Macbeth clearly lacks, as suggested by the absence of any reference in his words to a possible attempt at taking advantage of the three Sisters' prediction. Macbeth's ambition is, before his spouse is able to force her control on him, almost pure and understandable for a man who seems indeed destined to succeed. Since Duncan shows respect for his kinsman and subject, Macbeth's ambition does not necessarily involve murder and betrayal.

[1] All quotations from *Macbeth* are taken from A. Lombardo (a cura di), W. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*. Testo originale a fronte, Milano, Feltrinelli Editore, 2018, [I ed. Milano, Feltrinelli Editore, 1997].

Quite the opposite is the nature of Lady Macbeth's ambition, a woman who is aware of her husband's spirit and who fears, as she herself admits that Macbeth's softness will make him delude himself into thinking that he can satisfy his aspiration while behaving as a good man, an attitude that Lady Macbeth is not willing to accept. She therefore reveals without the tiniest hesitation the intent to erase Macbeth's uncertainty about the idea of doing mischievous acts in order to achieve what does not belong to him, a scene that establishes the active role of Lady Macbeth as a manipulative and clever character. If Macbeth feels anxiety about wickedness ("as his host, / Who should against his murderer shut the door, / Not bear the knife myself", I.vii.14-6), Lady Macbeth feels repulsion towards his passiveness and nature filled with a human kindness that certainly does not embrace the inclination to "catch the nearest way", which can help her to become the wife of the soon-to-be King. She is more than willing to help him overcome his hesitation and obtain the crown that was promised, without taking into account the potential reverberations of these acts upon themselves.

The divergence between Macbeth's ambition and the greed shown by his wife, together with her desperate attempt at satisfying it, represents the point of no return towards a series of disgraceful actions and the inevitable succession of unpleasant consequences. This sequence begins with Lady Macbeth and her desire to fulfil her greed, strongly supported by the belief that both fate and witchcraft are indeed plotting to put the crown on the head of Macbeth. It is Lady Macbeth the mind behind the plan, the one that feels the future getting nearer and nearer, already blinded by her determination that explicitly emerges in the significant scene in which she entrusts, with a devilish behaviour, the task of killing Duncan to Macbeth:

> To beguile the time
> Look like the time, bear welcome in your eye,
> Your hand, your tongue; look like the innocent flower,
> But be the serpent under't. He that's coming
> Must be provided for; and you shall put
> This night's great business into my dispatch,
> Which shall to all our nights and days to come
> Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom (I.v.61-8).

Her striking lines evoke the image of the deadly serpent hidden under an apparently innocent flower. Lady Macbeth's evil emerges and her greed glows under the light of the promised glory that she is certain they will reach once Macbeth will dispose of Duncan, committing a regicide that clearly represents a loathsome felony.

In order to analyse the significant impact of the planned killing of king Duncan, it is necessary to take into account the importance of regicide, which emerges as another main theme of the tragedy. It was a crime that during the Jacobean era in particular was considered abominable and could be severely punished, based on the assumption that kings received their right to reign directly from God[2]. As a consequence, murdering a monarch was considered both a sacrilegious act and a crime also towards God himself:

> Shakespeare deals more perfunctorily […] with Macbeth's cruelty, choosing rather to explore the extreme psychological tension between the loyalty of the 'subject' and the impulse to rebellion that is paradoxically generated by the ambition that the fact of quasi-feudal subservience generates. […] Indeed, as many commentators on the play have observed, the act of regicide, the events leading up to it and its devastating consequences are central to the dramatic action[3].

The importance of regicide being perceived as an unjustifiable deed is emphasized by an exemplary and remarkable event involving an attempt at murdering a monarch that took place on 5 November 1605. During the Gunpowder Plot a group of English Catholics led by the infamous Guy Fawkes intended to assassinate King James I, who was "known to have shared [...] the 'divine right' of kings" [4], by blowing up the Parliament House. The plan failed and the consequences for Fawkes and the other members were brutal: after the confession of the leader, cruelly tortured in order to force him to reveal the names of his companions, they were all captured, then hanged, drawn and quartered, according to the statutory penalty for whoever was pronounced guilty of high treason.

Duncan is a valorous king deeply loved by his people. Consequently, nothing can justify the decision of Lord and Lady Macbeth or make their fault less horrible. The murder they are plotting and are about to accomplish becomes even more repugnant as the unacceptable result of Macbeth's wavering ambition and his wife's thirst for power. Still not completely confident of what he has to do, Macbeth is constantly persuaded and reassured by his wife who seems perfectly resolute and tenacious and her manipulative nature is underscored by the words she uses to induce her husband to accomplish the murder. She only expects to feel in her hands the "night's great business" (I.v.66) and the consequent reign, creating expectations that Macbeth feels the urge to satisfy for her:

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[2] S. Farzana, "Kingship as Divine Right in Shakespeare's King Richard 11", *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, Vol.4, No.2, pp. 40-49, February 2016, p. 41.
[3] J. Drakakis, "Introduction", in J. Drakakis, D. Townshend (eds.), *Macbeth: A Critical Reader*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013, 1-17, pp. 6-7.
[4] *Ibidem.*

> If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
> It were done quickly. If the assassination
> Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
> With his surcease success - that but this blow
> Might be the be-all and the end-all! - here,
> But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
> We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases
> We still have judgment here - that we but teach
> Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
> To plague the inventor. This even-handed justice
> Commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice
> To our own lips. He's here in double trust:
> First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
> Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
> Who should against his murderer shut the door,
> Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office, that his virtues
> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
> The deep damnation of his taking-off;
> And pity […]
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
> That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
> To prick the sides of my intent, but only
> Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
> And falls on the other (I.vii.1-21, 24-8).

Macbeth's soliloquy in Act I, scene 7 emphasizes the hesitation he feels towards the gruesome deed he is about to perform. It is the last moment in which he is still able to evaluate the situation with a cold mind and use his reason to compare the ferocity of the consequences with the worth of what he will receive after Duncan's death. He offers the image of the hands of justice that draw the same poisoned chalice to the lips of those who took advantage of it and giving proof of being able to at least recognize the difference between good and evil, just as the interior conflict that torments him shows that he is not guided by the same cruel greed owned by his lady. The tragical quality of this speech is also aggravated by his rational awareness that success will carry tremendous outcomes, as crimes cannot remain unpunished. What causes him measureless anguish, as an addition to his clear hesitation, is knowing that Duncan put his trust in him, his kinsman and subject, which is a more than valid reason not to commit a despicable action towards him. Furthermore, Duncan trusts Macbeth to the point that he feels safe with the idea of spending the night in his castle, while Macbeth is planning to shut the door and bear the knife, resulting in a vile crime. As the victim is a king capable of good actions and virtues, there is no chance that this deed will remain invisible and that Duncan's death will not shock everyone.

Recognizing the price of his ambition, Macbeth understands that it is too risky to rely on it. When he is about to convince himself that the only right thing to do is to give up the whole plan and leave his soul untouched and free from such sin, preserving his genuine spirit, Lady Macbeth starts a significant quarrel:

> MACBETH
> We will proceed no further in this business.
> He hath honoured me of late, and I have bought
> Golden opinions from all sorts of people
> Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
> Not cast aside so soon.
> LADY MACBETH
> Was the hope drunk
> Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since?
> And wakes it now to look so green and pale
> At what it did so freely? From this time
> Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
> To be the same in thine own act and valour
> As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
> Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
> And live a coward in thine own esteem,
> Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would',
> Like the poor cat i'the adage?
> MACBETH
> Prithee peace.
> I dare do all that may become a man;
> Who dares do more is none (I.vii.32-47).

He tries to put an end to the whole folly, counting out aloud the honours that Duncan gave him, thanks to which he gained respect from everyone and managed to build a good reputation that he is not ready to get covered in mud. Lady Macbeth does not accept his hesitation and suddenly attacks him where she knows she can hurt: she accuses him of being a coward who is not able to change his position because is too scared of what would happen, consequently denying himself the glory that would derive from his actions. In order to make sure that through her speech she hits the target, she compares his lack of courage to his lack of love, highlighting her wicked spirit dominated by greed and ruthless determination in doing not only all that is accessible to a man, but even more. Macbeth's statement underlines his morality and judgment through the assumption that whoever dares to do more is no man at all. Significantly, as already remarked, Macbeth does not allude to a potential murder in the letter that he sent to his spouse; despite his ambition, he does not take into account the option of achieving the crown with a homicide. He apparently believes that if he is supposed to actually become a king, it simply will happen; that does not mean that he needs to kill Duncan, while Lady Macbeth, on the contrary,

suddenly reaches this exact conclusion since her first appearance, unable to wait for fate to do what both of them can do faster.

Lady Macbeth has a clear influence on her husband, and her firmness and need to satisfy her greed do not quiver; there is no space for tenderness, and with just one final speech she destroys Macbeth's last possibility to save himself from an indelible blame. The plan suggested by Lady Macbeth appears flawless, which contributes to persuade a weak Macbeth whose previous dread about the possibility that they fail now begins to fade away. Yet Macbeth keeps showing his human senses and virtue, starting in fact the play as a moral man, capable of separating noble actions from unfair ones, certainly ambitious but not greedy. Such observation is relevant to understand what kind of impact the character of Macbeth has on the audience and what sort of perception he creates, not to mention that giving the impression of being a moral man puts him under a different light in comparison to Lady Macbeth. His admirable hesitation is, however, only a temporary condition, gradually destroyed by Lady Macbeth's dominant spirit of persuasion. On this point, Sandra Clark reports the views of the essayist William Hazlitt about the initial integrity of Macbeth, described as a man that unlike his wife is characterized by a moral advantage, "cruel 'from accidental circumstances' rather than nature and driven to criminal acts by a conspiracy of 'fate and metaphysical aid', creating for him an 'evil destiny' that he cannot escape"[5].

One of these circumstances is undoubtedly represented by the prophecy of the Witches. It has the power to arouse Macbeth's spirit and his desire of prestige, presumably because they "surprise Macbeth in the moment of intoxication of victory, when his love of glory has been gratified"[6]; their flattering words, just like the entire situation, represent a valid reason for Macbeth to develop a generous amount of motivation and consequently begin to succumb "to the forces of evil and subsequent tormented despair"[7].

The clear contrast with Lady Macbeth in this case shows the two different starting points of both characters, the woman's ruthless obstinacy and lack of principles against the wavering attitude of Macbeth, torn between morality and his own ambition reinforced by the effective influence of his wife. Once Duncan is in their castle, however, they become equally villains as soon as they let their own cupidity overcome them, getting

[5] W. Hazlitt, in S. Clark, "The Critical Backstory", in Drakakis, Townshend (eds.), op. cit., 18-54, p. 31.
[6] Schlegel, ivi, p. 32.
[7] Clark, "The Critical Backstory", p. 32.

what Thomas De Quincey calls the "murderous mind"[8]. The triggering cause that will lead them to their collapse is a strong and dangerous ambition whose negative effects, when this approach is sided with uncontrollable greed for the throne, are mentioned in several scenes of the tragedy. The theme of ambition and its relevance on the play is also taken into account with specific attention by Charles Lamb, as being even more important than the consequences of this strong ambition that engulfs the main characters:

> Macbeth is, along with Iago and Richard III, one of Shakespeare's 'great criminal characters', though Lamb submits that the crimes are less important than 'the ambition, the aspiring spirit, the intellectual activity which prompts them to overleap those moral fences'"[9].

Although ambition can sometimes be seen as a quality of men who want to improve their knowledge and work hard to achieve their goals, it is immediately introduced as a damaging force that motivates Lady Macbeth in particular to commit immoral actions such as organizing with extraordinary cleverness a regicide:

> ROSS
> Ha, goof father,
> Thou seest the heavens, as troubled with man's act,
> Threatens his bloody stage […].
> Is't known who did this more than bloody deed? […]
> 'Gainst nature still!
> Thriftless ambition that will raven up
> Thine own life's means! (II.iv.4-6, 22, 27-9).

In Act II, scene 4, Ross, Thane of Scotland, after the discovery of Duncan's stabbed body covered in blood, reflects on the atrocity of the event that took place in the castle by the hand of a mortal, so unnatural and more than bloody that the heavens are perturbed by such shocking act. Malcolm and Donalbain, the sons of Duncan, are suspected of being the culprits after they run away. The reason that might have tempted them to kill their father, as it was initially believed, is thought to be their ambition, which is so lethal that consumes life itself, therefore extremely dangerous:

> MACDUFF
> This avarice
> sticks deeper, grows with more pernicious root
> Than summer-seeming lust; and it hath been
> The sword of our slain kings (IV.iii.84-7).

[8] T. De Quincey, *ibidem.*
[9] C. Lamb, *On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with Reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation*, quoted in Clark, "The Critical Backstory", p. 31.

Ambition that turns into cupidity and its harmful effects are also mentioned in Act IV, scene 3 by Macduff who compares avarice to damaging roots, even more deleterious than lust. It acquires the connotation of a sword that killed kings; greedy ambition is like a plague that gets control of the characters and makes them blind, unable to recognize the unjustified cruelty of their end. It is the primary impetus of the whole tragedy, the impelling force that fosters Lady Macbeth to follow her desire and succeed together with her husband, which condemns Macbeth to a progressive, irreversible decline from a virtuous and good man to a murderer. There is no hesitation in her, not even a passage in which she wonders whether obtaining the crown is worth infecting her and her consort's soul with the murder of a worthy man. This amiable affection is openly shown by king Duncan when he is welcomed in the castle by Lady Macbeth, asking to be conducted to his deeply loved Macbeth; Lady Macbeth's unwavering ambition does not withdraw and she is untouched by Duncan's pleasantness.

Agostino Lombardo advises not to consider *Macbeth* exclusively "the tragedy of ambition" because it would prevent the audience from fully understanding the genius of the writer and the complexity of the whole work. There are other themes, such as the undeniable love between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, corruption, manipulation, folly, betrayal and also solitude which, according to Lombardo, represents one of the causes at the base of what will be the inevitable final condition of the main characters. Another essential aspect of the play is evil, a concept that permanently follows the characters in constant development together with the planning of the murder, taking advantage of every means to penetrate into humans and force them to create their own nightmare by pushing them to make a wrong use of their ambition and forces. Evil covers every aspect of the play; it patiently creates the path towards the characters' destruction and, more importantly, it plays a central role in the fight against good, producing a never-ending conflict and ambiguity that according to Lombardo affects the way in which life is represented in Shakespeare's tragedy, with its fragmentation, consequences and anxiety[10]:

> Macbeth is a play not so much about Macbeth's and his Lady's murderously gaining of the power of kingship and the exercising thereof as it is about their nervous consciousness of the enormity of their action of regicide – and about how they perceive themselves and are perceived by others after the regicide of Duncan and Macbeth's accession to the throne. Both Macbeth and his Lady strain constantly to re-unite the shattered elements of language, action and thought, once they give

[10] A. Lombardo, "Introduzione", in A. Lombardo (a cura di), W. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*. Testo originale a fronte, Milano, Feltrinelli Editore, 2018.

> themselves over to the consequences of the deed of regicide, and this is registered in the persistent and debilitating but shared consciousness of what they have done. And yet they draw others and audiences to the through the sheer magnetism of their tortured self-consciousness[11].

The topic of ambition mistaken as the cardinal theme, although unquestionably predominant, is also explored by Laury Magnus, who rather than focusing on the practical acts of the plotting and accomplishment of the main murder, the gaining of the crown and kingship, takes into account other significant aspects. She explores Lord and Lady Macbeth's insidious and agonizing ride towards their fall, the increasing awareness of the atrocity of their deed and the effects it has. Magnus also includes how the Macbeths start seeing themselves and how their reputation changes, in a disastrously shift from respected and moral nobles into malignant tyrants. The play undeniably offers a variety of themes and issues that mostly give prominence to the cruel minds of the characters, the brutality of their actions and the astonishing reactions that such deeds elicit from Macbeth and especially Lady Macbeth, resulting in a tragedy with a strong impact that initially caused the play to be seen negatively, as highlighted by Clark:

> Early critics thought Macbeth lacking in poetic justice, since 'the Guilty and the Innocent perish promiscuously; as in the cases of Duncan and Banquo, and Lady Macduff and her Children[12]. […] Gildon, in his *Remarks on the Plays of Shakespeare* […] felt it undeserving of praise because 'the Plot is a sort of History and the Character of Macbeth and his Lady are too monstrous for the stage'[13]. But positive features soon began to emerge and the capacity demonstrated in the play for arousing terror made for favourable comparisons with classical tragedy[14].

Due to such positive features, which are the despair and the anguish it causes on readers and audience, the extremely frightful consequences that follow unfair actions based on blind ambition and greed, *Macbeth* has been often praised for the lessons that are taught through the atmosphere of terror and for being morally instructive, actually "the most instructive tragedy in the world"[15], as Clark declares quoting the 18th century writer James Beattie. *Macbeth* can be described as a tragedy that strongly suggests how not to yield to immorality, betrayal, wickedness, corruption, selfish desire for glory, "fascinating power, and insensible progress of Vice"[16], and, according to William Richardson, it functions as a warning against unchecked ambition:

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[11] L. Magnus, "Performance History", in Drakakis, Townshend (eds.), op. cit., 55-94, pp. 60-61.
[12] J. Dennis, *An Essay upon the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare*, quoted in Clark, *The Critical Backstory*, p. 21.
[13] C. Gildon, *ibidem.*
[14] Clark, "The Critical Backstory", p. 21.
[15] J. Beattie, *Essays: On Poetry and Music*, ivi, p. 22.
[16] N. S., "Remarks on the Tragedy of the Orphan", *ibidem.*

> By considering the rise and progress of a ruling passion, and the fatal consequences of its indulgence, we have shown how a beneficent mind may become inhuman, and how those who are naturally of an amiable temper, if they suffer themselves to be corrupted will become more ferocious and more unhappy than men of a constitution originally hard and unfeeling[17].

The play has not only been admired for its moral lesson, but also for the rise and fall of the characters in their constant struggle between good and evil, a perfect balance that can be seen especially in the sequence in which "Macbeth's rise takes place against the fall of Banquo, culminating in his murder in III.iii; after this turning point, Macbeth falls as Macduff rises"[18].

Another interesting issue is the introduction of supernatural elements, symbolized by the frightening Witches, the recurring spirits and a strong sense of superstition. Worth mentioning is also the captivating repetition of images that evoke the continuous presence of blood, the heavy atmosphere ruled by fear, violence and especially the alternation of light and darkness[19], both expressed through words and poetic language, a field that caught the attention of many critics. Therefore, considering *Macbeth* a mere tragedy of ambition, although it undoubtedly plays a central role together with all the factors that contribute to deepen and justify this ambition, would be reductive.

1.2 The destructive power of guilt and remorse

If the tragedy starts with the apparently indestructible ambition of Lady Macbeth and her husband's agreement to commit the regicide that is supposed to give them the crown and the throne they demanded, the path that leads them towards the end is full of obstacles. They find themselves in a thorny condition that will soon become unbearable, a condition that takes form when they begin to face the cruellest judging force; their own conscience.

Once Duncan is asleep and Macbeth gets ready for the accomplishment of the plan, waiting for the arranged signal given by the bells, it becomes clear that from now on there is no coming back. He cannot disappoint his spouse and therefore he cannot back out. Yet, the initial uncertainty that had been partially overcome both by his ambition and

[17] W. Richardson, *A Philosophical Analysis of [...] some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters*, *ibidem*.
[18] Clark, "The Critical Backstory", cit., 2013, p. 39.
[19] *Ibidem*.

Lady Macbeth's convincing words comes back and this time Macbeth's worry becomes tangible right before his eyes in the shape of a knife, created by a sparkle of pure, sudden regret for having agreed at perpetrating a crim that will tarnish his soul forever:

> Is this a dagger which I see before me,
> The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee –
> I have thee not and yet I see thee still!
> Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
> To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but
> A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
> Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
> I see thee yet, in form as palpable
> As this which now I draw.
> Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going,
> And such an instrument I was to use.
> Mine eyes are made the fools o'the other senses,
> Or else worth all the rest. – I see thee still;
> And, on thy blade and dudgeon, gouts of blood,
> Which was not so before. There's no such thing.
> It is the bloody business which informs
> Thus to mine eyes. Now o'er the one half-world
> Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
> The curtained sleep. […]
> Thou sure and firm-set earth,
> Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
> Thy very stones prate of my whereabout
> And take the present horror from the time
> Which now suits with it (II.i.33-51, 56-60).

Clearly hallucinating and unable to discern reality in the false vision created by his mind, he realizes that the knife with the handle toward his hand is revealing in advance the murder he has to carry out. The images that Macbeth offers through his speech, referring to his feverish brain and to his own mind mocking him with such bloody apparitions, make his hesitation for that horrible deed stand out. The dread at the idea that he can no longer trust his eyes, since he catches sight of new spots of blood suddenly covering the dagger, and the awareness that this vision is the reflection of the forthcoming "bloody business" to be completed as soon as Macbeth reaches Duncan's room, inevitably reinforce his anxiety caused by guilt. What emerges from this passage is devouring terror. Macbeth begs the earth to prevent its stones from alerting everyone that his steps are directed towards the king's room, showing his weakness and his tendency to give up on repentance even before the murder is committed. He struggles between the need to accomplish his task as Lady Macbeth is expecting him to do and the guilt that is clearly afflicting him:

MACBETH
[…] I go, and it is done; the bell invites me.
Hear it not, Duncan, for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven or to hell.
LADY
That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold;
What hath quenched them hath given me fire. – Hark! –
Peace!
It was the owl that shrieked, the fatal bellman
Which gives the stern'st good-night […].
Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done't (II.i.62-4, II.ii.1-4, 12-3).

Although Macbeth eventually accomplishes the murder, in this scene he manifests his awareness that he has just given up once and for all his chance to save himself from the consequences of such a ferocious action. He is the first one to suffer the effects of guilt on his mind and conscience. Lady Macbeth's approach is completely different and truly astonishing. She is filled with ardour, as her speech clearly highlights, at the idea that she managed to drug the guards who fell in a sleep so deep that their appearance makes them look like dead. This vision she manages to portray as delightful, the first step towards her possibility to feed that same manipulating greed that led her to subjugate her husband and make him agree to kill Duncan. Even after the murder, Lady Macbeth shows only cold-minded self-confidence, aggravated by her reference to being able to kill the king herself had he not reminded her of her own father.

She owns a strong will and resolute spirit that behave as Macbeth's only pillar and encouragement not to let their deed overcome him when an unexpected event (the guards talking in their sleep) deepens Macbeth's guilt. An interesting aspect linked to the last line of Lady Macbeth referred to her father is pointed out by John Drakakis, who argues that her reluctance in accomplishing herself the murder, "prevented from acting by virtue", is due to "a residual patriarchal imperative"[20] that inevitably affects her in this scene. As it will become clearer in the following paragraphs, this is the only passage in which Lady Macbeth shows some hesitation:

MACBETH
One cried 'God bless us' and 'Amen' the other,
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.
Listening their fear I could not say 'Amen'
When they did say 'God bless us'.
LADY
Consider it not so deeply.

[20] Drakakis, "Introduction", p. 10.

MACBETH
But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen'?
I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen'
Stuck in my throat […].
Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep – the innocent sleep […].
LADY
Who was it that thus cried? Why, worthy thane,
You do unbend your noble strength, to think
So brain-sickly of things. Go, get some water,
And wash this filthy witness from your hand (II.ii.26-33, 35-6, 44-7).

Remorse in Macbeth develops almost instantly. He feels the burden of his action, of which the blood on his hands is an abominable proof, while shock and guilt are emphasized by Macbeth's startled behaviour. He is too focused on trying to understand what the episode with the sleeping guards might mean and especially what his own reaction, that is his incapability at replying might signify. Macbeth clearly considers it a bad sign, in contrast to Lady Macbeth's reaction, much more practical and cool-headed than her husband. She regards that peculiar event as meaningless and proves to be more than ready to go on with their plan.

Clark draws attention to an interesting aspect of Macbeth's struggle in replying, a circumstance that highlights the power of imagination that characterizes him and that represents a "'violent disturbance both of mind and body'[21], yet also a moral faculty, keeping him in touch with his better nature. His reactions after the murder of Duncan are those of a man petrified by an 'imagination [which] presents to him the parching of his throat as an immediate judgement from heaven'"[22].

MACBETH
I'll go no more.
I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on't again I dare not.
LADY
Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures. 'Tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil […].
MACBETH
Whence is that knocking?
How is't with me when every noise appals me?
What hands are here! Ha – they pluck out mine eyes!
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather

[21] A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, quoted in Clark, "The Critical Backstory", p. 40.
[22] A. C. Bradley, *ibidem.*

> The multitudinous seas incarnadine
> Making the green one red.
> […] To know my deed 'twere best not know myself.
> *Knock*
> Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst! (II.ii.50-5, 57-63, 73-4)

As the scene reveals, Macbeth's anguish over the murder intensifies to the point that washing his hands until they are clean again will not be easy at all. The blood that is covering them, and above all the terrible crime it represents, are greater than the ocean, which would never be able to wash the red liquid away. Furthermore, in the last line Macbeth's desperation surfaces through his desire that the knocking might wake Duncan; this wish cannot turn into reality, and the weight of guilt that afflicts him because of his performance against a good man and loved king becomes tangible.

The discovery of Duncan's dead body by Macduff marks an initial change in Macbeth's behaviour that helps him find a sort of confidence due to which he manages to act as if the news of the king's death has truly shocked him, catching him off guard: "Who can be wise, amazed, temperate and furious, loyal and neutral, in a moment? No man. The expedition of my violent love outrun the pauser reason" (II.iii.105-8). He conveys all his turmoil caused by guilt without arousing suspicion. Both his anguish and violence towards the guards seem flawlessly justified by the affection that he felt for Duncan and that triggered his impetuous fury. This scene introduces a new aspect of Macbeth who slowly becomes affected by the consequences of the homicide that he has carried out. His change, intensified by Banquo's involvement in the prophecy, is thus rendered:

> To be thus is nothing;
> But to be safely thus! – Our fears in Banquo
> Stick deep, and in his royalty or nature
> Reigns that which would be feared. 'Tis much he dares,
> And to that dauntless temper of his mind
> He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
> To act in safety. There is none but he
> Whose being I do fear; and under him
> My genius is rebuked […].
> They hailed him father to a line of kings.
> Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown
> And put a barren sceptre in my grip,
> Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
> No son of mine succeeding. If it be so,
> For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind,
> For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered,
> Put rancours in the vessel of my peace,
> Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
> Given to the common enemy of man,
> To make them kings, the seeds of Banquo kings!

Rather than so, come fate into the list
And champion me to the utterance! (III.i.47-55, 59-71).

Macbeth's soliloquy in Act III, scene 1 displays, through the words full of dread that he uses to describe Banquo's valorous nature that makes him a fearsome opponent and a threat to his reign, his inclination to take into account the possibility to murder again in order to dispose of every obstacle. He realizes that the tremendous homicide he has performed might be vain, and consequently gives this new planned deed the opportunity to continue to corrupt his soul. Yet, this time in his soliloquy there is no trace of Macbeth's initial hesitation and concern. He begins to appear more confident and quickly develops a vicious tendency to destroy every menace, not only to make sure that the achievement of Duncan's murder does not becomes worthless, but also because, as Clark puts it, "he has already begun his surrender to evil before the witches get to work on him, and he takes a positive delight in evil deeds"[23]. This surrender has a terrible consequence, which is the deepening of his torments that distress both his mind and soul. From now on, Macbeth becomes the ruthless murderer who will commit unfair slaughters in his desperate attempt at carrying out the prophecy once and for all, reflecting in his final lines the initial behaviour of the tempting Lady Macbeth. He turns from the hero subjugated by his wife who tried to prevent a regicide and defend his virtue into the evil character of the tragedy, worn out by guilt and paranoia:

LADY
Naught's had, all's spent,
Where our desire is got without content.
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.
[…] Things without all remedy
Should be without regard; what's done is done.
MACBETH
We have scorched the snake, not killed it;
She'll close and be herself, whilst our poor malice
Remains in danger of her former tooth.
But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer
Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
In the affliction of these terrible dreams
That shake us nightly; […]
Must lave our honours in these flattering streams,
And make our faces vizards to our hearts,
Disguising what they are. […]
Thou marvell'st at my words; but hold thee still.

[23] Clark, "The Critical Backstory", p. 37.

Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill. (III.ii.4-7, 11-9, 33-5, 54-5).

Macbeth's behaviour, troubled and tormented by thoughts that keep floating in his mind, is clearly different from the beginning: with his cold reasoning he shows that he is about to approach the world of sins and murder they entered with a new attitude that still, however, does not completely mirror Lady Macbeth's firmness and full confidence nor her greed.

The power that motivates him to kill again is the repulsion towards the possibility of living his days under the weight of terrible dreams, psychological torture and fear. Also, he is aware that what they tainted their conscience with, in killing Duncan, is treason, a despicable action among the worst evils. This thought further foments the storm in Macbeth's soul and head, pictured through a powerful and iconic image suggested by his line "full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!" (III.ii.36). His torment, to which it seems there is no end, intensifies during the scene of the feast, when Banquo's ghost with his locks covered in blood freezes Macbeth. This frightening sight literally makes it evident that remorse is devouring him as he faces the reflection of his own culprit:

MACBETH
Thou canst not say I did it; never shake
Thy gory locks at me.
[…] murders have been performed
Too terrible for the ear. The times has been
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end. But now they rise again
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
And push us from our stools. This is more strange
than such a murder is. […]
Avaunt, and quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee!
LADY
Think of this, good peers,
But as a thing of custom; 'tis no other;
Only it spoils the pleasure of the time.
[…] I pray you speak not; he grows worse and worse.
Questions enrages him (III.iv.49-50, 76-82, 92-7, 116-7).

In this delirium caused by the ghost, Macbeth is startled and once again it is up to Lady Macbeth to justify, with her firmness and self-confidence, her husband's behaviour. The way in which she diminishes Macbeth's disjointed phrases by brilliantly coming up with an illness as an excuse denotes that her strong will and ability at handling a potentially dangerous situation has not diminished. As a consequence, she manages to avoid any questions on the king's reference to the disturbing sights; Macbeth remains a victim of his own incapability at behaving with the same devilish resolution that his lady owns, easily

overwhelmed by the guilt that he is enduring.

Elizabeth Montagu analyses this lack of self-control seen as the unavoidable results of merciless guilt, together with the distress and desperation frequently shown by Macbeth in his scenes: "Macbeth's emotions are the struggles of conscience, his agonies are the agonies of remorse. They are the lessons of justice, and warnings to innocence"[24]. Macbeth, being a moral man, is inevitably afflicted by the consequences that this crime has on his conscience:

> It will have blood, they say; blood will have blood.
> Stones have been known to move and trees to speak;
> […] For now I am bent to know
> By the worst means the worst. For mine own good
> All causes shall give way. I am in blood
> Stepped in so far, that, should I wade no more,
> Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
> Strange things I have in head, that will to hand;
> Which must be acted ere they may be scanned (III.iv.121-2, 133-9).

His constant anguish and paranoia push him towards further homicides and slowly turn into the bitter awareness that, by now, being too deep in blood, giving up would mean frustrating all their actions. Macbeth has condemned himself to a pitiful and sinful end. The values and the hesitation towards the idea of accomplishing not only a regicide, but also the assassination of a beloved man, disclose the possibility to consider him not only a mere murderer but also a victim. On that account, despite the crime committed, Macbeth stands out as a man that aspires to success and wants to satisfy the desire of power of his wife by carrying out the task she gave him, yet he is not wicked enough to murder a man without suddenly regretting it. Sandra Clark, focusing on the perception of Macbeth as a man that is initially good, mentions the contributions of Montagu, author of "An Essay on the Writing and Genius of Shakespeare" (1769), William Richardson in "Characters of Shakespeare" (1774) and Thomas Whately in "Remarks on Some Characters of Shakespeare" (1785):

> Macbeth is perceived as a man with good characteristics ('valiant, dutiful to his sovereign, mild, gentle and ambitious […] without guilt'[25]) who is transformed into a heartless villain. The degree of mental torment he undergoes is stressed; Montagu asserts that 'it is impossible not to sympathize with the terrors Macbeth expresses in his disordered speech', and for her, even at the end of the play, 'the man of honour pierces through the traitor and the assassin'[26].
> The expression of the despair in which Whately sees him taking refuge 'is perhaps one of the finest

[24] E. Montagu, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare,* ivi, p. 23.
[25] W. Richardson, ivi, pp. 29-30.
[26] E. Montagu, ivi, p. 30.

> pictures that ever was exhibited […] It is presumption without hope, and confidence without courage'[27].

Although Macbeth is described as an ambitious yet tender and valorous man who is transformed into a ruthless tyrant, his guilt is more ambiguous than what befits a villain, as can be observed in the aforementioned scene in which remorse torments his conscience. More importantly, he is somehow a willing victim of Lady Macbeth's influence and dominating nature, a woman described as "sublimely terrible"[28]. Consequently, Macbeth becomes a character for whom the audience may show some compassion, no matter how many unpleasant actions he committed: due to the circumstances in which he turned into a slaughterer, such as the pressure of his lady and the awareness that he could do nothing but get rid of possible threats, the audience can continue to consider him a honourable man rather than simply a murderer.

Such positive consideration, however, is not necessarily shared by other critics. Through the years the take on Macbeth as a potentially virtuous man manipulated by his wife and affected by the circumstances who detaches himself from being a true villain, has inevitably changed: "Victorian critics were also favourably disposed towards the play, though less attracted by the heroic criminality of Macbeth"[29]. Sandra Clark reports the views of George Fletcher and Joseph Comyns Carr:

> Fletcher's views were more extreme than most, but he was not alone in regarding Macbeth as a man with an innate propensity to evil which was brought out by the encouragement first of the witches, then of his wife. [30] Although moved by 'the splendid despair of his closing hours', Joseph Comyns Carr, in *Macbeth and Lady Macbeth*, thought that Macbeth possessed 'a soul dyed in blood' before he ever set eyes on the Witches and wanted to reassess the balance between him and his wife[31]. […] To begin with they are equal in evil[32].

They suggested an opposite and definitely less flattering perspective of Macbeth that only takes into account the image of the character as already wicked and evil. This reflects at the same time the cruel spirit of Lady Macbeth and his being a man who was eventually destined to show sooner or later his tendency towards immoral and sinful deeds, only waiting for the right encouragement to fuel his predisposition.

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[27] T. Whately, *Remarks on Some of the Characters of Shakespeare, ibidem.*
[28] R. Cumberland, The Observer, quoted in Clark, "The Critical Backstory", p. 30.
[29] Ivi, p. 36.
[30] G. Fletcher, *ibidem.*
[31] J. W. Comyns Carr, *Macbeth and Lady Macbeth: An Essay*, *ibidem.*
[32] Clark, "The Critical Backstory", p. 36.

1.3 Lady Macbeth and remorse through physical act

The first half of the play is characterized by Lady Macbeth, pictured as a strong and powerful woman who is able to give up her typically feminine connotations to plot evil actions without losing her composure. She does not let her husband's worries reveal their involvement in the murders with her constant and often bitter remarks, usually involving references to his weakness and lack of manliness with the intent to elicit some brave or at least resolute reactions from him. Her never quivering nerves give the impression that nothing will upset her and that she will be able to manage the heaviness of the entire situation. Yet, following the pressure of the events, guilt starts tormenting her as well:

> GENTLEWOMAN
> Since his majesty went into the field I
> have seen her rise from her bed, throw her nightgown
> upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it,
> write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to
> bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep.
> DOCTOR
> A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once
> the benefit of sleep and do the effects of watching.
> […] How came she by that light?
> GENTLEWOMAN
> Why, it stood by her. She has light by
> her continually; 'tis her command. (V.i.4-10, 21-3).

This passage, which takes place before Lady Macbeth enters the scene, represents the tragedy's sudden fall caused by the weight of the murder. The movements she does after rising from her bed, half awake and half asleep, show that guilt is slowly driving Lady Macbeth insane. She is the victim of what the doctor describes as a "perturbation", a negative disturbance of the natural course of life that pushes her to behave as if she was conscious and sleeping at the same time, repeating every night the same actions over and over again. Her guilt is becoming so haunting that she cannot even sleep properly anymore, an oppressing presence that constantly reminds her of what she has turned into, of her murderous nature and of the figurative darkness she is falling into:

> DOCTOR
> What is it she does now? Look how she rubs her
> hands.
> GENTLEWOMAN
> It is an accustomed action with her to
> seem thus washing her hands. I have known her

continue in this a quarter of an hour.
LADY
Yet here's a spot.
[…] Out, damned spot! Out, I say! – One: two: why
then, 'tis time do't. – Hell is murky! – Fie, my lord,
fie! A soldier and afeard? – What need we fear who
knows it, when none can call our power to accompt? –
Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?
[…] What, will these hands ne'er be clean? – No more o'that,
my lord, no more o'that. You mar all with this starting.
[…] Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes
of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.
[…] Wash your hands; put on your nightgown; look not
so pale. I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot
come out on's grave (V.i.26-31, 34-9, 42-3, 48-9, 58-60).

The sleepwalking scene is undoubtedly the most significant fragment representing the devastating impact of remorse that, unlike Macbeth, falls upon her almost all at once, resulting in Lady Macbeth's wandering throughout the castle with her eyes open but completely lost, maniacally rubbing her hands in the perpetual attempt at cleaning them from Duncan's blood. This evocative gesture contains all the suffering caused by guilt, so unbearable that it becomes physical, taking the form of several spots of blood that soil her hands and are impossible to remove. Her effort aimed at removing her remorse by desperately wiping them to get rid of the blood is the consequence of their implication in Duncan's death. She pours in this gesture her anguish and desperation, imagining the blood and convincing herself that it is real and visible to everyone. Her shouting directly against the invisible spots represents the most astounding line of her delirious state, in which the agony of guilt and hopelessness emerge, together with the remains of her firmness with which she keeps scolding Macbeth, ordering him what to do and reassuring him that Banquo is dead. She is probably unaware that Macbeth is not there and that she is desperately trying to reassure herself, a change that recalls what Bernice W. Kliman, mentioned by Magnus, describes as: "'chiasmus interpretations'[33], in which Lady Macbeth dominates the first half of the play alongside a less forceful Macbeth, but then in the second half Macbeth assumes control, growing stronger and more ruthless as his lady declines and falls prey to despair and madness"[34].

Lady Macbeth's development of guilt intensifies not only through sight, but also through the sense of smell, the constant, revolting stench of blood covering her hands. It

[33] B. W. Kliman, in Magnus, "Performance History", p. 58.
[34] *Ibidem.*

will not go away even with all the perfumes of Arabia, just as nothing will bring Duncan back and erase the atrocity of their deeds. Her palpable guilt creates an astounding contrast between the weak, sick victim she is now and the dominant figure introduced in the first half of the play, when she behaved as the mastermind behind the plan, the woman that takes advantage of typically masculine connotations to plan a perfect murder and satisfy her husband's ambition together with her own greed, but in the end all her fragility and vulnerability, kept well hidden behind her authoritative spirit and self-control, emerge in the cruellest way. The biting guilt that is afflicting her flows in another physical act, the conclusive one, which is death. Even though it is not clear how Lady Macbeth dies. It is assumable that being in the state she is during the sleepwalking scene, scared by every sound and everything that surrounds her, she has committed suicide:

MACBETH
I have almost forgot the taste of fears.
The time has been my senses would have cooled
To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hair
Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir
As life were in't. I have supped full with horrors:
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
Cannot once start me.
Wherefore was that cry?
SEYTON
The queen, my lord, is dead.
MACBETH
She should have died hereafter.
There would have been a time for such a word –
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (V.v.9-28)

The inversion that takes place in the second half of the play between Lord and Lady Macbeth is even more astonishing in the scene where Macbeth receives the news of his wife's death. He is now a tyrant: there is virtually no trace of that honourable man that hesitated at the idea of carrying out a regicide and kill a king he was devoted to.

Lady Macbeth's death paradoxically does not shock the king as it undoubtedly would have done in a different circumstance, before the corruption of his soul. In the end, remorse has managed to divide them and destroy their bond. In his "tomorrow, and

tomorrow, and tomorrow" speech, through his cold reaction, Macbeth seems to show that his lady's death was not unexpected. Her end is a direct consequence of their crimes; it is only another death, after which Macbeth is left alone with his despair and imminent destruction.

The tragical destiny of Macbeth and his wife is thus the result of the Lady's evil nature, a woman that emerges as a central character, that "uses her sexuality as a weapon to tempt her husband and drives him to do what he dares not to execute [and] breaks the constraints of her society through deception and manipulation because she is fearless and eager to achieve her ends"[35]. Thus, Lady Macbeth does not convey the features that are commonly considered typical of women.

1.4 Femininity in *Macbeth*

Analysing the controversial character of Lady Macbeth, one suddenly perceives the strength and determination of this woman, whose main goal becomes to help with every mean his husband to get rid of the king and become one himself. She is the one who persuades Macbeth to carry out the murder, she takes advantage of her influence on him and constantly tries to give him the courage he sometimes lacks, especially during those moments in which he starts feeling inside him the conflict between the alluring glory achieved by murder and the necessity of keeping his virtue intact. As Sandra Clark reports, "Herbert R. Coursen [...] saw in the play Shakespeare's dramatization of the 'myth' of 'the fall from a state of grace'[36], whereby Lady Macbeth plays a role equivalent to the serpent in the garden of Eden and Macbeth falls like Adam"[37].

Femininity is a central theme in the play, developed not only through female characters in general and their essential contribution to the plot, such as the ambiguous Witches, but especially through the dominating nature of Lady Macbeth. Such feature is amplified to the point of making her able to manipulate her own husband and accomplish

[35] S. Mohammed (2016). "Unsex me here" Lady Macbeth as a Disruptive Force in Macbeth. Journal of University of Human Development. 2. 479-489. p. 483.
[36] H. R. Coursen, in Clark, "The Critical Backstory", p. 44.
[37] *Ibidem.*

goals with a cold brutality that is usually typical of men. As Mohammed explains in his essay "'Unsex me here', Lady Macbeth as a Disruptive Force in *Macbeth*", ruthlessness in the period was associated with masculinity rather than with femininity[38].

Before going further with the analysis of Lady Macbeth, it is important to focus on the role that women were supposed to adopt during the Jacobean age, what their duties were and why taking account of their position in a patriarchal society is fundamental to perceive the striking impact of a character as powerful as Lady Macbeth.

The social inferiority of women during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods meant that they were restricted, limited to a position of subordination. Natalie Shainess analyses the roles of men and women during Shakespeare's time in her essay "Shakespearean women–and women today", arguing that: "a woman was a chattel, a piece of property, to be sold by her father to whomever he felt would do him the most good. True, he often gave a dowry, but he was buying something with this "bride-price" […]. Sometimes he sold his daughter into a marriage of servitude, just to save the cost of another mouth to feed"[39]. Furthermore, Shainess adds, women and especially the ones belonging to respectable families were not allowed to join troupe of players and therefore female roles were usually played by young men[40], which deepens women's lack of freedom.

Shakespeare's female characters are often put under a different light. They play crucial roles and are usually portrayed as independent, strong, smart, sometimes even ambitious and confident enough to plot a murder and coerce men. Lady Macbeth undoubtedly reflects these features, emerging as a vigorous and cunning woman. She completely alienates herself from the ideal woman of that century, typically quiet, accommodating and always ready to obey her husband. She behaves instead as a tenacious leader, capable of taking charge of a savage plan and controlling her timorous husband. She is a smart strategist that perfectly knows what she wants and is willing to use every means to achieve it without giving up. Focusing the attention on the role of Lady Macbeth as a woman living in a social system in which men represent the dominant figures, Laury Magnus emphasizes her ability at overcoming, with her behaviour, the

[38] Mohammed, *"Unsex me here"*, p. 479.
[39] N. Shainess, "Shakespearean women–and women today", *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, Vol. 58, No. 7, 1982, 640-659, pp. 642-643.
[40] Ivi, p. 645.

position of inferiority and weakness that were ascribed to women:

> Though Lady Macbeth is given hardly any soliloquies comparable to those of her husband, she is a singular, magisterial creation whose power of will is inscribed in language that is, at times, almost as memorable as his. The fact that she is a woman does not lessen her prestige or power, as is the case with other Shakespearean women, since her outspokenness, aplomb and control are never challenged in the stark, warrior-like patriarchal society to which her husband subscribes[41].

Lady Macbeth affects her husband's behaviour and convinces him to surrender to his own ambition, which has begun to arise after the prophecy of the three Weird Sisters and eventually becomes stronger as a result of her authority. Since the first lines spoken by Lady Macbeth in which she is introduced as a woman with resolute manners, she quickly comes to the conclusion that she needs to persuade her husband. The feminine power of persuasion represents an important aspect at the base of the plotted deed: at least in the first half of the play, Macbeth is at the same time guided and subjected to the leading attitude of his ambitious wife, therefore the notions of femininity and masculinity engage in a controversial relationship, a struggle that principally involves the two main characters and defines their roles. Craving and feeding this masculine nature bears some consequences: Lady Macbeth is conscious that she has to give up her femininity and all those traits that belong to this condition, such as beauty and purity which are replaced by her determination, violent instincts and ability to commit atrocious actions.

While men are portrayed as "strong willed and courageous"[42], Jacobean women typically lack the masculine ruthlessness due to their feminine features such as weakness. In the first part of the play these features are owned, if momentarily, by Macbeth, and they are the same features that his wife is ready to sacrifice, as she does in Act I, scene 5, right after reading the letter her spouse sent to her:

> The raven himself is hoarse
> That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
> Under my battlements. Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
> And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
> Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
> Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
> Wherever in your sightless substances

[41] Magnus, "Performance History", p. 63.
[42] Mohammed, *"Unsex me here"*, p. 479.

> You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
> To cry 'Hold, hold!' (I.v.36-52).

With the croak of the raven and its connotation of mystery, magic and death as her only company, Lady Macbeth summons deadly and obscure spirits and begs them to completely rip out the feminine features that might stop her from committing the murder. This is the only way to help Macbeth to become the new king, since the aspects that are habitually considered feminine do not embrace the plotting of a violent deed, especially if such crime involves regicide.

The complete detachment from her femininity is accomplished when Lady Macbeth asks these murdering spirits to infect her breasts by turning her milk, symbol of motherly care towards her baby, into bitter and disgusting gall. Lady Macbeth gives away her womanliness and the affection and kindness of a mother, an aspect which she stresses with an equally astonishing image in Act I, scene 7, too:

> I have given suck, and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me;
> I would while it was smiling in my face
> Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
> And dashed the brains out, had I sworn as you
> Have done to this (I.vii.54-9).

In order to persuade Macbeth, she once again relies on her striking harshness in pointing out her husband's lack of bravery and brutally resorts to a reference to infanticide. She would be able to give her word without backing off even though her promise involved an unnatural and monstrous crime not towards a whichever baby, but her own loved one, the baby who she is nursing. Her loss of feminine tenderness and motherly affection is particularly evident in her detailed description of how she, if so she had promised, would carry out the murder of the baby with violence and no mercy. Macbeth becomes more and more incapable of showing resoluteness and nerve compared to his lady, especially in the iconic scene of the feast in which, facing the ghost of Banquo, his appalled reaction exasperates Lady Macbeth:

> O proper stuff!
> This is the very painting of your fear.
> This is the air-drawn dagger which you said
> Led you to Duncan. O, these flaws and starts,
> Impostors to true fear, would well become

> A woman's story at a winter's fire,
> Authorized by her grandam. Shame itself!
> Why do you make such faces? When all's done
> You look but on a stool.
> […] What, quite unmanned in folly?
> […] Fie, for shame! (III.iv.59-67, 72-3).

With his cheeks pale due to fear, a condition that does not fit a man and makes himself doubt his own nature, Macbeth cannot understand how his lady, being a woman, can behold horrific sights without looking scared or upset. This results in a strong dissimilitude between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth that reveals an interesting exchanging of positions, strengthened by her accuse towards Macbeth of having become unmanned, a term that accentuates the exchange of roles of the main characters.

The concepts of "unmanning" and "unsexing" are both introduced in Lady Macbeth's lines. The importance of these two terms is emphasized in this particular context. During the soliloquy in which Lady Macbeth begs the spirits, she literally asks to be unsexed, a transition that was considered a dangerous action accessible solely to women, who could change from being female to male with no chance of reversing the process: "we therefore never find in any true story that any man ever became a woman, because Nature tends always toward what is most perfect and not, on the contrary, to perform in such a way that what is perfect should become imperfect"[43].

The only difference between unsexing and unmanning is duration: being unsexed is described as an irreversible process, while unmanning is temporary. Macbeth himself states, after Banquo's ghost has disappeared together with his fear, that he has restored his nature of man again after losing it because of the frightful appearance. Instead, his wife cannot reverse her transition: the "unsexed Lady is trapped, a dark state of madness for which physic, having no satisfactory cure"[44], suffers until she is destroyed. As to Macbeth, Lady Macbeth charges him of being unmanned:

> The full extent of Lady Macbeth's turpitude, however, lies in the fact that she breaches, violates and wilfully ignores the important conceptual distinction between unsexing and unmanning, cruelly accusing her husband of having undergone a weird sexual metamorphosis that, in both textual and historical terms, is fundamentally impossible[45].

While Lady Macbeth's requests of being unsexed is voluntary, an action that shows once

[43] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, quoted in D. Townshend, "Unsexing Macbeth, 1623-1800", in Drakakis, Townshend (eds.), op. cit., 172-204, p. 190.
[44] Townshend, "Unsexing Macbeth", p. 192.
[45] Ivi, p. 193.

again her resolute and firm spirit, the unmanning of Macbeth is unintentional, exclusively due to those feminine aspects that overcome him with terror and grief. D. W. Hardings explores the relationship between womanliness and manliness by claiming that women expected their men to show masculine features such as ambition, action, courage and aggression, while other features of "what might be the gentler and more humane aspects of manliness" [46] were not taken into account, reflecting the same disappointed behaviour of Lady Macbeth towards her spouse's tenderness.

Although Lady Macbeth plays the role of a strong woman who is capable of behaving as a man and even asks to be deprived of her womanliness, she is not explicitly introduced as an already masculine character. Her ambition and strength are not an absolute menace to her femininity. To the contrary, these qualities somehow play a remarkable role in her goal as well, pushing her to behave towards Macbeth not only as the wife she actually is, but also as a mother that fights in order to choose and accomplish, in the first place, what she thinks is best for Macbeth, and secondly knowing that acting this way she can have, through her husband, the opportunity to bathe with him in glory and power:

> Lady Macbeth is a fantasist, deluded by unsustainable dreams of ambition, punished by remorse and a death 'in suicidal agony'[47]. Hazlitt, on the other hand, sees her as 'a great bad woman' whose 'obdurate strength of will and masculine firmness' set off by contrast her husband's 'faultering virtue'. But in the end she suffers from 'an excess of that strong principle of self-interest and family aggrandisement, not amenable to the common feelings of compassion and justice'[48]. Her ambition is for her husband, not herself[49].

It is interesting to report the view, also shared by Clark, according to which Lady Macbeth would not be murderous by nature but pressured to behave the way she does mainly by her ambition for Macbeth's success, a theory also supported by Anna Jameson, author of "Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, and Historical" (1832), who states that the main reason that stimulates the Lady's fierce ambition is her desire to see Macbeth dominate and be gifted with the crown, instead of a mere selfish need to satisfy herself only. Jameson also underlines that the qualities shown by Lady Macbeth, such as determination, authority and exceptional strength of nerve, which unlike

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[46] D. W. Harding, *Woman's Fantasy of Manhood: A Shakespearian Theme*, in Clark, "The Critical Backstory", p. 45.
[47] Coleridge, *Shakespearean Criticism,* vol. 1, ivi, p. 32.
[48] W. Hazlitt, *ibidem.*
[49] Clark, "The Critical Backstory", p. 32.

other critics she does not consider unfeminine at all, are aimed at the gaining of the crown for Macbeth: "although she is intellectually superior to her husband, her ambition is directed solely towards achieving power for him, and there is a 'touch of womanhood' behind her ambition"[50].

Lady Macbeth consciously gets rid of what she considers a typically feminine weakness that might ruin all their plan; she is aware that by losing her womanly qualities, she can properly devote herself to the plotting of Duncan's death and to the consequent crowning of Macbeth. Lady Macbeth is not afraid of acquiring those features that should belong to her husband and that she actually expected from him; since he does not seem able to behave as a man, she knows that she has to take his place. She shows an unusual ability at putting her mind in the condition of plotting a violent act, also convincing the future king to trust her plan and the certainty that murdering Duncan is the only way to succeed. She is also able to control herself during stressful situations and maintain a peaceful outlook, as can be seen in the scene of the banquet and during those moments in which she has to make Macbeth control his emotions and face in order not to give them away. This includes the scene in which she is facing Duncan who has just arrived at the castle: Lady Macbeth replies to his kind words with clearly false but convincing flatteries, revealing her hypocritical attitude and confirming her strength of character in looking with devotion into the eyes the same man she knows is about to be mercilessly killed by her husband. Her lust for the crown turns her into an exceptional actress and talented deceiver that skilfully plays the role of a good wife and most kind hostess, as Banquo defines her, completely unaware of her true nature. Antonella Zapparrata compares Lady Macbeth to a Virago[51], a Latin term used to describe a physically and mentally powerful woman, owning masculine connotations that help her to act with firm and sometimes violent resolution, without completely losing part of her womanliness. A Virago is usually represented as a warrior, with all the features of a heroine and with a remarkably superior intellect. Having found the courage to strip herself from her womanhood, Lady Macbeth starts completely leading Macbeth towards a lethal path that she herself decided to build, almost forcing in him a vigorous and vicious determination that irreparably becomes the

[50] A. Jameson, ivi, p. 33.

[51] A. Zapparrata, *La scelta del male e la rinuncia all'essere donna: Lady Macbeth e Bersabee*, *in L'Italianistica oggi: ricerca e didattica*, Atti del XIX Congresso dell'ADI - Associazione degli Italianisti (Roma, 9-12 settembre 2015), a cura di B. Alfonzetti, T. Cancro, V. Di Iasio, E. Pietrobon, Roma, Adi editore, 2017. [data consultazione: 16/10/2019].

bloody attitude of the tyrant Macbeth has turned into.

The meeting with the Three Apparitions unquestionably plays a significant part in deepening Macbeth's ambition and self-confidence. They suggest him to be bloody, to act bold and resolute like a lion would. Macbeth's greed, consequently, grows with renewed courage. At the same time, as an opposite mechanism, Lady Macbeth begins to feel oppressed by the consciousness of the murders they accumulated; all her initial ambition, greed and art of persuasion vanish, leaving her with her weakness and the remains of a fatal passion that is slowly consuming her. All those womanly features she despised and refused to accept try to return and start tormenting her, making worthless all her effort to satisfy her greed and especially Macbeth's ambition:

> Everything Lady Macbeth does is for him; […] 'She has no sphere but the career of her husband'.[52] This view of the marital relationship is widely held. 'Love for him is her guiding passion', asserts William Maginn in *The Shakespeare Papers*, also referring to the significance of the sleepwalking scene in showing how much Macbeth's wife has sacrificed for him and 'how dreadful was the struggle she had to subdue'[53].

Sacrifice and a dreadful struggle lead Macbeth and his lady to their end and there is no chance for both of them to cope with the consequences; they can only watch themselves as they become the victims of their own corrupted nature caused by the crimes they committed.

The issue of femininity and gender is developed through the characters of the Three Witches as well, described by Macbeth as wrinkled and wild with skinny lips: "What are these, / So withered and so wild in their attire [...] / By each at once her choppy finger laying / Upon her skinny lips", I.iii.38-9, 43-4). They are so unnatural that they do not resemble inhabitants of the earth, because they look like women but their beards make them ambiguous and grotesque, once again clashing with the model of the ideal woman. However, at the same time they mirror the action of Lady Macbeth by adopting male appearance just like she embraces masculine manners and behavioural features. In many ways, therefore, the concepts and standard connotations of gender and femininity are repeatedly dismantled and reconstructed through some of the characters.

A remarkable aspect is the gradual and unexpected change in Lord and Lady Macbeth's relationship, which in the beginning of the play is introduced and displayed

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[52] R. Moulton, *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, quoted in Clark, *The Critical Backstory,* p. 37.
[53] W. Maginn, *ibidem.*

indeed as a solid partnership: the consciousness of the murder they planned and accomplished keeps them together and gives them the hope to overcome the entire situation side by side so they can enjoy the benefit of the crown and the throne. Such marriage based on their alliance drew the interest of many critics, but it was specifically approached and analysed by Sigmund Freud in his "Some Character-Types met with in Psychoanalytic Work" (1916), in which the characters are faithfully described as "two disunited parts of a single psychological entity"[54]. Even though their ambitious hope to escape the undesirable consequences of their deed turns into nothing more than a naive illusion, they begin to struggle against their own destroying inner force that rebels against the evils they committed.

[54] S. Freud, *Some Character-Types met with in Psychoanalytic Work*, quoted in Clark, "The Critical Backstory", p. 45.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 *The Changeling*: Beatrice-Joanna, the female villain

Macbeth's ambition constantly swings among his virtue and the powerful influence of his Virago wife, a woman blinded by greed and avidity, smart and strategic enough to plan a murder, manipulate her own husband and deal with the weight on her shoulders until her guilt becomes unbearable and slowly consumes her. It is the eternal struggle between good and evil, passion and loyalty that keep Lord and Lady Macbeth together in a sincere partnership, eventually destroyed by the sequence of events following the murders they committed: a deed that made them both equally culprits.

The purpose of the second chapter of my work is to inspect how Middleton deals with the main elements that were central in *Macbeth* and that reappear in *The Changeling*: assassination, greed and manipulation are used in order to achieve goals and complicity among the characters. I will analyse first the main remarkable similarities and differences between them, such as the plotting and the accomplishment of the murder, the way guilt starts to develop and the end to which the characters involved in the plotting of the murder are destined. I will also take into account the central role played by the two main female characters, Lady Macbeth and Beatrice-Joanna. The two women undoubtedly share some features, such as the ability to take into their hands the situation and manipulate the characters that surround them, their determination and self-confidence that push them to obstinately pursue their plan. Lady Macbeth and Beatrice fight with the same fierce motivation, both encouraged by a lustful ambition, but for different purposes and by using different means.

The Changeling takes place in the Spanish city of Alicante. Alsemero arrives from Valenza and is about to leave for Malta with his servants and his friend Jasperino, but meeting for the second time Beatrice-Joanna in the Church, Alsemero suddenly shows an

attraction to her, an attraction that Beatrice herself feels in return and that represents the sparkle due to which the characters will begin their plotting:

> 'Twas in the temple where I first beheld her,
> And now again the same; what omen yet
> Follows of that? None but imaginary.
> Why should my hopes or fate be timorous?
> The place is holy, so is my intent:
> I love her beauties to the holy purpose,
> And that, methinks, admits comparison
> With man's first creation, the place blest,
> And is his right home back, if he achieve it.
> The church hath first begun our interview,
> And that's the place must join us into one,
> So there's beginning and perfection too (I.i.1-12)[55].

Alsemero's use of the word "omen" and its reference to a warning, possibly a negative sign, seems to anticipate the event that will occur in the play. Alsemero deliberately offers himself the consolation that meeting Beatrice in a holy place can only signify that their destiny is to marry each other and, through marriage, return to a condition of beatitude that belonged to men in their original unfallen state:

> Alsemero hesitates to commit himself to his sudden and unexpected love for Beatrice because he met her in church, not an appropriate place to begin a love affair, but he manages to smother his doubt by giving the omen a favourable interpretation. […] decisions made now will be crucially significant[56].

The decision to give emphasis from the beginning of the play to the possibility that something bad, briefly perceived by Alsemero, may happen in a near future becomes even clearer in the following lines of Alsemero, of one of his servants and Jasperino. Alsemero mentions a "hidden malady" (I.i.24) that he is not able to understand; the servant refers to a smoke that "will bring forth fire" (I.i.51-2); Jasperino points out that "'tis the critical day" (I.i.49), probably meaning that there is no better day to leave Alicante and reach Malta since the wind seems favourable and everything is ready for their departure. Yet there is also another meaning behind the idea of a critical day, which is the implication that the decision of Alsemero to remain and marry Beatrice, already engaged to Alonzo de Piracquo, causes the starting point of the succession of the events[57].

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[55] All quotations from *The Changeling* are taken from N. W. Bawcutt (ed.), T. Middleton, W. Rowley, *The Changeling*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998.
[56] N. W. Bawcutt, "Introduction", ivi, p. 4.
[57] V. Viviani, «Tutto il mondo è teatro», in V. Viviani (a cura di), T. Middleton, W. Rowley, *I lunatici*, Marsilio Editori, 2004, p. 12.

Both Alsemero and Beatrice give relevance to the importance of taking the right decision and use judgement in order not to let their eyes become blind and mistake common things for wonders. According to Valerio Viviani, despite the initial self-confidence of the characters about their ability to use their judgment, Alsemero and Beatrice's encounter causes the feeling that they are not actually using their judgement correctly, thanks to an expedient that was typical of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, the probability that something bad and about to happen was indeed revealed in advance and caused by a fatal choice made by the characters[58]. Being already engaged with a man that her father Vermandero has chosen for her, the passion between Beatrice and Alsemero intensifies even further the lack of many chances that good things are waiting for them. As Bawcutt affirms, "Vermandero is determined to have his will in getting Alonzo as a son-in-law; Beatrice is equally determined to have her own will in the matter"[59]. De Flores, the unattractive and once a nobleman that is now a servant of Vermandero, is deeply despised by Beatrice that considers him repulsive because of his look. Although he is aware of how much Beatrice hates him, De Flores obstinately desires her:

> *Beatrice.* What needed then
> Your duteous preface? I had rather
> He had come unexpected; you must stall
> A good presence with unnecessary blabbing.
> And how welcome for your part you are,
> I'm sure you know.
> *De Flores. [Aside]* Will't never mend, this scorn,
> One side nor other? Must I be enjoined
> To Follow still whilst she flies from me? Well,
> Fates do your worst; I'll please myself with sight
> Of her, at all opportunities,
> If but to spite her anger. I know she had
> Rather see me dead than living, and yet
> She knows no cause for't but a peevish will. (I.i.96-108)

Beatrice is disgusted by the presence of De Flores and wants to make sure that he never forgets how loathed and unwanted he is. She plays ironically with the word "welcome", as highlighted by Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin[60] ("And how welcome for your part you are, / I'm sure you know", I.i.100-1), making clear that the only thing she feels for the servant is pure scorn. According to De Flores, such a scorn has no reason to exist, probably

[58] *Ibidem.*
[59] N. W. Bawcutt, "Introduction", pp. 5-6.
[60] N. Vienne-Guerrin, "New Directions: Loving and Loathing: Horror in *The Changeling* from Text to Screen", in M. Hutchings (ed.), *The Changeling. A critical reader*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2019, 165-186, p. 167.

unknown to Beatrice herself and considered by the servant as nothing more than an annoyed behaviour. De Flores is not discouraged by this treatment: he wants to keep looking for her and takes advantage of every chance to see her. To Beatrice, De Flores is the equivalent of a deadly poison that must be rejected. She also compares him to a Basilisk ("Such to mine eyes is that same fellow there / The same that report speaks of the basilisk", I.i.115-6), the legendary and monstrous creature similar to a reptile that is able to kill with a single glance. This definition deepens Beatrice's repulsion towards the ugly servant and reveals in advance De Flores's dangerous nature. The description of the Basilisk made by the contemporary author John Bullokar gives us the opportunity to understand even further Beatrice's aversion in describing De Flores as the mythological creature:

> Basiliske. Otherwise called a Cockatrice: the most venomous serpent that is. It breaketh stones and blasteth all plants with the breath thereof, burning euery thing that it goeth ouer; neither can anu herbe growe neere the place where it lyeth. It is poison to poison, and driueth away all other serpents, with only hissing. If a man touch it but with a sticke, it will kill him, and if it see a man a farre off, it destroyeth him with his lookes[61].

De Flores appears as "poisonous", someone potentially destructive like a monster. This connotation will become more important as the play proceeds; Alsemero takes into account the legitimate existence of imperfection: "there's scarce a man amongst a thousand sound, but hath his imperfection: one distastes the scent of roses, which to infinites most pleasing is, and odoriferous" (I.i.118-21). The author is giving a hint about a possible critical change in a near future, given the ironic link between the scent of roses just mentioned by Alsemero and the name of De Flores. Despite the insults used by Beatrice to describe De Flores, she also refers to him as a "gentleman" (I.i.135), the only one she can think of when she has to remember the ones she hates. As Vermandero invites Alsemero to visit the castle, Beatrice feels encouraged to hope that the man she desires will become more pleasant to her father than Alonzo is. Then her discourteous behaviour towards De Flores returns, once again victim of Beatrice's hateful words.

The scene in which Beatrice drops a glove and De Flores takes it up for her also emphasizes the feeling of disgust he provokes, forcing her to take off the other glove so that she does not have to wear the one De Flores touched ("Mischief on your officious forwardness! / Who bade you stoop? They touch my hand no more. / There, for t'other's

[61] J. Bullokar, *An English Expositor*, ivi, p. 171.

sake I part with this", I.i.229-231). Joost Daalder analyses the potential meaning behind this scene, taking into account the correlation between the glove and the reference to De Flores as a serpent, but also introducing the possibility that Beatrice might be unconsciously attracted to him:

> In her conscious mind, Beatrice rejects him as evil. Yet, unconsciously, she is drawn to him, and she shows this by taking off a piece of clothing which tempts him, just as, on an unconscious level, he tempts her. The image of the serpent is particularly appropriate because a serpent can lose its skin, and this process is matched by Beatrice when she peels off her glove. It is clear that she is not aware of what she has done because her father has to alert her to the fact that the glove has fallen. Significantly (to us, though not to him), Vermandero instructs De Flores to pick it up for her. This incites Beatrice to rail against De Flores, but she takes off her other glove as well, and throws that down too, urging him: `Take'em and draw thine own skin off with'em' (1.230). Having responded to the serpent by stripping, Beatrice now urges De Flores to engage in a similar act and thus to reinvigorate himself, to establish as a reality the potential to which she had reacted[62].

Viviani also considers this scene highly symbolic since Beatrice might have dropped the glove intentionally, hoping that Alsemero would have taken it instead of De Flores; according to Viviani, it represents figuratively the request that Beatrice makes to Alsemero to love her even though she is supposed to marry Alonzo. Also, the author adds that the importance of De Flores discloses the persistent involvement of the servant in Beatrice's live and affairs, hinting that she is destined to eventually fall into the clutches of this man[63]. Since his first appearances, De Flores is at the same time saddened by the way Beatrice treats him and amused by her constant rejection:

> Here's a favour come, with a mischief! Now I know
> She had rather wear my pelt tanned in a pair
> Of dancing pumps than I should thrust my fingers
> Into her sockets here, I know she hates me,
> Yet cannot choose but love her.
> No matter,; if but to vex her, I'll haunt her still
> Though I get nothing else, I'll have my will (I.i.233-39).

De Flores's stubbornness in tormenting Beatrice underlines the character's malicious behaviour. This element is also supported by obscene allusions that characterize De Flores in particular, reflecting with his persistent attitude and the grip he wishes he had on Beatrice the dangerous and negative connotations typical of the serpent he is compared to. Many critics associate De Flores's physical ugliness to his evil interiority that slowly emerges and is going to become even more ruthless. Michael Scott describes him as a

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[62] J. Daalder, 1988. "Folly and Madness in '*The Changeling*'". *Essays in Criticism*, vol.38, no.1, 1-21, p. 10.

[63] V. Viviani, "Note", in V. Viviani (a cura di), op. cit., p. 252.

man which is "in conflict with a society from which by class, position and physical disfigurement he is totally alienated"[64] and therefore tries to take comfort in the sight of Beatrice and the obstinate desire he feels for her, a girl that belongs to a superior ranks to which the same De Flores once belonged. He is not disheartened at all that she intensely despises him:

> I can as well be hanged as refrain seeing her.
> […] does profess herself
> The cruellest enemy to my face in town;
> At no hand can abide the sight of me,
> As if danger or ill luck hung in my looks.
> I must confess my face is bad enough,
> But I know far worse has better fortune,
> And not endured alone, but doted on. […]
> Yet such a one plucked sweets without restraint
> And has the grace of beauty to his sweet (II.i.28-47).

The consciousness that others with a face uglier than his own managed to attract women pushes him to desist from leaving Beatrice alone, probably hoping that somehow she will give up and love the same face she keeps insulting. Beatrice's attitude only underlines the absurdity of De Flores's expectation which is ridiculed by Beatrice's irritation on being again disturbed by "this ominous ill-faced fellow" (II.i.53) that resembles a slimy toad. Owning an ugly face does not dissuade De Flores from dreaming that one day he will be lucky enough to persuade Beatrice to love it. "Wrangling" (II.i.86) might have in some cases a pleasant end, as proved by those women who powerfully refused to engage themselves in a sexual relationship with men but eventually gave up, which is what De Flores is stubbornly trying to achieve.

An essential resemblance between Beatrice and Shakespeare's ambitious Lady Macbeth emerges in the crucial speech between Alsemero and Beatrice, who confesses her anguish at the idea of being engaged to Piracquo, a threat to her love towards Alsemero. Just as Macbeth's initial attitude was the one of an honourable man willing to achieve his title of king without corrupting his soul, Alsemero suggests a challenge to Piracquo about "the honourablest piece 'bout man, valour" (II.ii.27). Yet Beatrice, resembling Lady Macbeth's cunning and wicked nature, does not hesitate in taking into consideration, for the only purpose of satisfying her greed and her passion towards

[64] M. Scott, *Renaissance Drama and a Modern Audience,* quoted in S. D. Luttfring, "The Critical Backstory", in M. Hutchings (ed.), op. cit., 15-34, p. 29.

Alsemero, the direct assassination of Alonzo. This man has the only fault of not being loved by the girl that he should marry. He is praised by Vermandero for his manners, also respectful enough to agree to postpone the wedding so that Beatrice, pretending to be more modest than she actually is, might get used to the idea of losing her virginity. Lady Macbeth's intention is to take advantage of a brutal plan so that her husband can achieve the crown and make her a queen; Beatrice makes the decision to plot the murder of Piracquo first to avoid the consequences of Alsemero's potential victory in the challenge and secondly because she would not be able to see him anymore:

> Blood-guiltness becomes a fouler visage–
> [*Aside*] And now I think on one; I was to blame
> I ha' marred so good a market with my scorn.
> 'T had been done questionless; the ugliest creature
> Creation framed for some use, yet to see
> I could not mark so much where it should be!
> […] Why, men of art make much of poison,
> Keep one to expel another; where was my art? (II.ii.40-45, 47-8).

As Bawcutt points out, the reference to poison recalls the proverbial doctrine according to which one poison was able to neutralise another[65]. In this case it is immediately clear that the man with a "fouler visage" Beatrice is thinking of for the homicide of Piracquo is De Flores, associated in the previous scenes to a poisonous serpent. Asking De Flores for such a bloody favour is just another crucial choice that represents the imminent danger in Beatrice's fate. De Flores, who has been spying the encounter between the two lovers, mistakes the situation: his hope to seduce Beatrice becomes stronger than before, now justified by the certainty that if she is willing to marry Piracquo and become the lover of another man, she will gladly love other men too, possibly De Flores himself once her "peevish will" (I.i.108) will be vanished: "to his cynical mind a married woman who takes one lover will automatically take hundreds more"[66]. This is an essential step towards the future bond between them and especially towards De Flores's request about his reward for the deed Beatrice is about to ask him to commit:

> Though she rebukes herself for having been rude to De Flores, her tone is of immense self-satisfaction: her resolution to the problem is very much better than Alsemero's, and like his will achieve two goals simultaneously. In her delight at having found an ingenious way of escape she becomes increasingly unaware of Alsemero ('Lady, you hear not me', II.ii.48). Though she had ordered him to conceal nothing from her, she makes no attempt to share her thoughts with him,

[65] N. W. Bawcutt, "Notes", p. 62.
[66] N. W. Bawcutt, "Introduction", p. 7.

and unceremoniously gets rid of him as soon as she can[67].

The attempt at persuading a man to commit a cruel deed such as killing someone is done using the same infallible method of manipulation on which both Lady Macbeth and Beatrice rely. Lady Macbeth adopts a strategic attitude in order to convince her husband to put aside his tender nature and become a murderer. She shows her disappointment and her uncertainty about his being a man and imposes herself on him as the masculine character of the pair and questioning the veracity of his love for her ("Was the hope drunk wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since? And wakes it now to look so green and pale at what it did so freely? From this time such I account thy love", *Macbeth*, I.vii.36-39). Beatrice instead uses manipulation through a sudden change in her attitude, hoping that a gentler approach might persuade the servant to agree to murder Alonzo for her, to "serve [her] turn upon him" (*The Changeling*, II.ii.69), a statement that does not allow any doubts about Beatrice's viciousness:

> [*To him*] De Flores.
> *De Flores*. [Aside] Ha, I shall run mad with joy;
> She called me fairly by my name De Flores,
> And neither 'rogue' nor 'rascal!'
> *Beatrice*. What ha'you done
> To your face alate? You've met with some good
> physician.
> You've pruned yourself, methinks; you were not wont
> To look so amorously.
> […] Turn, let me see.
> […] *De Flores.* 'Tis half an act of pleasure
> To hear her talk thus to me.
> […] *Beatrice*. O my De Flores!
> *De Flores*. [*Aside*] How's that?
> She call me hers already, *my* De Flores! (II.ii.69-75, 79, 86-7, 98-9).

Bawcutt argues that Beatrice experiences a notable change acknowledged by De Flores, "a significant shift which he recognizes with delight"[68], showing her wicked nature and ability at managing a situation that is likely to turn into her favour. This means forcing herself to put aside her disgust and fake a totally new fondness for the man; she believes that every creature, no matter how repugnant, has a purpose. The alteration in Beatrice's behaviour can be equally seen in the sudden lack of those insulting names she often used to call the servant, falsely replaced by respectful terms, including his name:

[67] Ivi, p. 9.
[68] *Ibidem.*

De Flores. Claim so much man in me.
Beatrice. In thee, De Flores?
There's small cause for that.
De Flores. Put it not from me;
It's a service that I kneel for to you. [*He kneels.*]
Beatrice. You are too violent to mean faithfully.
There's horror in my service, blood and danger;
Can those be things to sue for?
De Flores. If you knew
How sweet it were to me to be employed
In any act of yours, you would say then
I failed and used not reverence enough
When I receive the charge on't.
Beatrice. [*Aside*] This much, methinks;
Belike his wants are greedy, and to such
Gold tastes like angels' food.
[…] I shall rid myself
Of two inveterate loathings at onetime,
Piracquo, and his dog-face (II.ii.114-126, 144-6).

Taking for granted that someone like De Flores will simply be satisfied by a generous amount of gold that will repay him for the condition of poverty he has fallen into, Beatrice erroneously convinces herself that eventually she will not only get rid of Alonzo, but of De Flores as well, who will presumably use the money to leave the country afterwards. Bawcutt affirms that Beatrice's kind attitude towards the servant has a dangerous consequence as De Flores is now even more certain of his chance to seduce Beatrice than he was before. Bawcutt also adds that she is "playing with fire", as De Flores's impatience and excitement for his task are clearly not due to his precarious financial situation[69]. Viviani takes instead into account the possibility that Beatrice might be perfectly aware of De Flores's attraction to her. The scene ends with De Flores's happiness for what he has to do, which will give him the opportunity to demand what he has been wishing for:

Oh, my blood!
Methinks I feel her in mine arms already,
Her wanton fingers combing out this beard,
And, being pleased, praising this bad face.
Hunger and pleasure, they'll commend sometimes
Slovenly dishes, and feed heartily on'em–
Nay, which is stranger, refuse daintier for 'em.
Some women are odd feeders.– I'm too loud.
Here comes the man goes supperless to bed,
Yet shall not rise tomorrow to his dinner (II.ii.146-155).

We are suddenly aware that the only reward he will ask for the accomplishment of Alonzo's murder, a deed that will be fulfilled by De Flores without hesitation and

[69] *Ibidem.*

therefore emerging as the villain of the play, is Beatrice herself, who will recompense him both with her passion and above all with the acknowledgment that she has never been truly indifferent to De Flores. Viviani draws the attention to an interesting aspect of De Flores's speech, the association between food and sexual references, according to a strong relationship between appetite and luxury[70]. Beatrice may be one of those women who are overwhelmed by passion and unusually desire uglier men, which is exactly what he thinks is happening to her. Focusing on De Flores' misinterpretation in this particular passage of the play, Bawcutt states:

> He can only assume that the long-awaited change of feeling has at last come about, and that in her voracious sexual appetite Beatrice now sees him as a source of sexual pleasure despite his ugliness. […] Underneath this is a hint of contempt towards her ("some women are odd feeders"). He may be obsessed by her, and regard possession of her as the supreme value of his life, to the achieving of which anything else will gladly be sacrificed, but his attitude towards her shows no trace of idealism, rather the reverse[71].

Particularly significant in the comparison between Beatrice-Joanna and Lady Macbeth is Beatrice's burden of being a woman in a patriarchal society with the consequent restraints this condition inevitably involves, preventing her from acting freely and accentuating the central position of feminine roles:

> *Beatrice.* Would creation–
> *De Flores.* Ay, well said, that's it.
> *Beatrice*. Had formed me man.
> *De Flores*. Nay, that's not it.
> *Beatrice*. Oh, 'tis soul of freedom!
> I should not then be forced to marry one
> I hate beyond all depths; I should have power
> Then to oppose my loathings, nay, remove 'em
> For ever from my sight.
> *De Flores.* O blest occasion!–
> Without change to your sex, you have your wishes (II.ii.107-14).

The impossible wish of having been born a man by way of opposition recalls somehow Lady Macbeth's soliloquy in which she begs the evil spirits to tear her femininity off of her, taking away her tenderness and her chance to behave as a loving mother. A woman completely overwhelmed by her greedy ambition and by the consciousness that being unsexed, Lady Macbeth makes sure that the murder she planned can be successful thanks to her strong will and her newly found masculine connotations, constantly reminding her

[70] V. Viviani, "Note", p. 257.
[71] N. W. Bawcutt, "Introduction", p. 10.

husband of putting aside his weakness and killing the king. Lady Macbeth thus vigorously tries to fight her own nature, not willing to yield to her femininity. Conversely, Beatrice simply surrenders to the awareness of being a woman with no possibilities to achieve her goals by herself and is compelled to entrust the murder of Alonzo to De Flores. With his ugly appearance, she finds him perfect for a despicable deed that will be gladly accomplished in exchange for gold. It is only after the murder is accomplished and De Flores claims his "sweet recompense" (III.iv.20), to him much more satisfying than gold, that Beatrice begins to realize that her apparently perfect plan will drag her towards her own doom.

2.2 Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores: guilt as a partnership

> *Beatrice*. 'Tis resolved, then. [*She offers him money*.]
> Look you, sir, here's three thousand golden florins;
> I have not meanly thought upon thy merit.
> *De Flores*. What, salary? Now you move me.
> *Beatrice.* How, De Flores?
> *De Flores.* Do you place me in the rank of verminous fellows,
> To destroy things for wages? Offer gold?
> The life blood of a man! Is anything
> Valued too precious for my recompense?
> *Beatrice*. I understand thee not.
> I could ha' hired
> A journeyman in murder at this rate,
> And mine own conscience might have slept at ease,
> And have had the work brought home.
> Beatrice. [*Aside*] I'm in a labyrinth;
> What will content him?
> [...] I know not what will please him (III.iv.60-72, 76).

De Flores's reference to his conscience that might have been preserved if he had not killed Alonzo for Beatrice is a mere strategy to convince Beatrice that gold cannot repay him for the murder of a human being. What he actually desires for the accomplished deed is something that is extremely precious to Beatrice, and that henceforth will inevitably belong to him. After killing Alonzo, he cuts his finger off in order to keep a ring as a meagre profit for the homicide, barely able to alleviate the weight of his remorse. It is perfectly clear that he enjoyed killing Piracquo: De Flores is now the one manipulating Beatrice, and not the other way round. According to Viviani, the anecdote of the ring

carries an important meaning: the gesture of cutting of Piracquo's finger may represent a symbolic castration just as the ring itself represents nothing less than Beatrice's virginity, which in fact should have been promised to Alonzo but is instead about to become a property of De Flores[72]:

> *Beatrice.* [...] if thou be'st so modest not to name
> The sum that will content thee, paper blushes not;
> [...] But prithee take thy flight.
> *De Flores*. You must fly too then.
> *Beatrice.* I?
> *De Flores*. I'll not stir a foot else.
> *Beatrice.* What's your meaning?
> *De Flores.* Why, are not you as guilty, in (I'm sure)
> As deep as I? And we should stick together.
> Come, your fears counsel you but ill; my absence
> Would draw suspect upon you instantly.
> There were no rescue for you.
> *Beatrice*. [*Aside*] He speaks home.
> *De Flores*. Nor is it fit we two, engaged so jointly,
> Should part and live asunder.
> […] I have eased you
> Of your trouble; think on't. I'm in pain,
> And must be eased of you; 'tis a charity.
> Justice invites your blood to understand me (III.iv.78-9, 81-9, 97-100).

As Bawcutt points out in analysing the explicit demand of De Flores, "earlier he had been prepared to share her with others, but now he will be the man to take her virginity, a factor which doubles his pleasure"[73]. He therefore inverts their initial roles as Beatrice can no longer send him away or use her superior position to treat him harshly like the abominable servant she always considered him to be. She is a victim of his ingenious trap from which she cannot escape without revealing the whole plan that involves them equally. The allusion to blood, on which Viviani focuses, underlines the clever approach of De Flores, who makes it clear that the only way available to Beatrice to repay him for the blood of Alsemero is to give him her own blood, with an obvious sexual connotation, so that his pain, which is his carnal desire, can be eased[74]. The image of blood is an essential aspect: it is able to torment the characters that tainted their conscience with brutal deeds, also recalling the speech of Macbeth "blood will have blood" (*Macbeth*, III.iv.128). Murdering a human being will eventually bring some other terrible and bloody events. Just like

[72] V. Viviani, "Note", p. 262.
[73] N. W. Bawcutt, "Introduction", p. 11.
[74] V. Viviani, "Note", pp. 262-263.

Macbeth and his spouse, Beatrice is about to pay for her plan with the blood of virginity:

> *De Flores*. […] For I place wealth after the heels of pleasure,
> And were I not resolved in my belief
> That thy virginity were perfect in thee,
> I should but take my recompense with grudging,
> As if I had but half my hopes I agreed for.
> *Beatrice*. Why, 'tis impossible thou canst be so wicked,
> Or shelter such a cunning cruelty,
> To make his death the murderer of my honour!
> Thy language is so bold and vicious,
> I cannot see which way I can forgive it
> With any modesty.
> *De Flores*. Push, you forget yourself!
> A woman dipped in blood, and talk of modesty? (III.iv.115-126).

Turned into a murderess, there is nothing left in her that might distinguish her from De Flores, including her aristocratic position since they are now both equally guilty for the murder of Piracquo: "De Flores seems to share Beatrice's assumption that moral guilt can be projected on to someone else by paying that person to perform an evil deed"[75]. As De Flores remarks, she can no longer talk of modesty:

> *De Flores*. […] You'll find me there your equal.
> Push, fly not to your birth, but settle you
> In what the act has made you; you're no more now.
> You must forget your parentage to me:
> You're the deed's creature; by that name
> You lost your first condition, and I challenge you,
> As peace and innocency has turned you out,
> And made you one with me (III.iv.133-140).

De Flores completely erases Beatrice's privileges, included her social status that once separated her from the servant, and strips her of her humanity. She is turned into a pitiless creature hardly different from De Flores. She is now sexually linked to him and they are also connected by a deed that makes them equally guilty. They are also bonded by the awareness that they can only count on each other, despite Beatrice's hate towards De Flores, who is extremely pleased at the thought that he will claim and possess the woman he desires. The very name of De Flores recalls the idea of "defloration". Beatrice is now his "fair murd'ress" (III.iv.141). Due to her guilt she is forced to give up her virginity to him, the serpent. Viviani underlines the name Beatrice often used to call him, also describing her physical union with De Flores as "the apotheosis" of vulgar and savage

[75] N. W. Bawcutt, "Introduction", p. 11.

love[76]:

> *Beatrice*. Oh, sir, hear me.
> *De Flores*. She that in life and love refuses me,
> In death and shame my partner she shall be.
> *Beatrice*. Stay, hear me once for all! [*She kneels.*] I make thee master
> Of all the wealth I have in gold and jewels;
> Let me go poor unto my bed with honour,
> And I am rich in all things.
> *De Flores*. Let this silence thee:
> The wealth of all Valencia shall not buy
> My pleasure from me.
> Can you weep fate from its determined purpose?
> So soon may you weep me.
> *Beatrice*. Vengeance begins;
> Murder I see is followed by more sins.
> Was my creation in the womb so cursed
> It must engender with a viper first? (III.iv.153-166).

Since De Flores has refused gold in favour of her virginity, Beatrice grows aware that she cannot go back and avoid De Flores. Beatrice echoes the speech ("Murder I see is followed by more sins". *The Changeling,* III.iv.164) where Macbeth ponders the inevitable and immediate consequences of murder ("It will have blood, they say; blood will have blood", *Macbeth*, III.iv.121). These consequences haunt the culprits and announce new terrible events that the murderers have to endure for what they did: "We still have judgement here – that we but teach / Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return / To plague the inventor" (*Macbeth*, I.vii.8-10). Similarly, De Flores's domination, which Beatrice describes as a vengeance, is a punishment that she cannot avoid and that provokes in her a feeling of growing remorse for her decision to involve De Flores in the murder of Alonzo. Although both women are linked by their blame, the main difference with Lady Macbeth is that Beatrice's guilt emerges once she discovers De Flores's intention. Her remorse is caused by a consequence that she does not like: it is not a form of guilt that takes place because of a turmoil in her conscience, which is instead what happens to Lady Macbeth. Guilt seizes Lady Macbeth towards the end of the play, consuming her sanity and overcoming her greed. Beatrice instead develops guilt exclusively for the immediate consequences that fall on her and not because her conscience is afflicted by knowing that she planned the murder of Alonzo. A feature that characterizes Beatrice, together with a sort of rebellious wickedness and greed, is

[76] V. Viviani, «Tutto il mondo è teatro», p. 16.

selfishness, as the only reverberation that she fears is the one that involves De Flores's demand:

> Beatrice-Joanna is the 'spoiled and sheltered child of a noble family' who views murder as 'a commodity, like anything else one buys', and her 'moral blindness' is coupled with a 'conviction that her superior rank enables her to use inferior people […] as tools'[77].

This quote underlines an interesting aspect that creates an essential difference between Beatrice and Lady Macbeth. Heinemann focuses on the childish nature of Beatrice and on her attitude, which pushes her to behave as if her social position justified the way she considers the whole plan. Beatrice's evil is strongly characterized by puerility and by a lack of that resourcefulness that was instead part of Lady Macbeth's mind. The role played by guilt becomes particularly important in the analysis of its effects on the relationship of the main characters involved in the murder, an essential aspect that surfaced in Macbeth as well and that significantly links up the two plays. They show two different ways of reacting to a stressful situation in which two characters share the awareness of having plotted and accomplished the homicide of an innocent for the only purpose of satisfying their ambition of power in *Macbeth* and passion in *The Changeling*.

The relationship between Lord and Lady Macbeth is introduced as a solid connection. It is a partnership between Lady Macbeth's dominant nature and Macbeth's agreement at pleasing not only his own ambition but above all his lady's, a mutual complicity that turns into its opposite, destroying their indissoluble bond. Lady Macbeth falls victim to her own madness, consumed by guilt and constantly hallucinating, tormented by the spots of blood that haunt her. Macbeth, left alone, agonizes in his tyrannical status, unable to stop himself from killing.

After the murder of Piracquo, Beatrice and De Flores's relationship is completely reversed. It begins with Beatrice's deep and evident hatred for the repugnantly ugly De Flores and his insolent and persistent longing for her. Guilt has not the power to separate the characters, but instead moves them closer. She can only count on him to manage the situation, especially after she is obliged to surrender to De Flores's threats. She can no longer spend the first night with Alsemero without taking the risk of revealing her loss of virginity. She has to rely on him in order to save her ostensible modesty, resulting in a

[77] M. Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the Early Stuarts*, quoted in Luttfring, "The Critical Backstory", p. 29.

relationship that is more confidential than it was at the beginning and that however does not reflect the same nature of Lord and Lady Macbeth's bond, tied together in a partnership based on reciprocal love.

In analysing the relationship between Beatrice and De Flores, Sara D. Luttfring focuses on Schoenbaum and Barker's view on the matter, pointing out that Beatrice begins to be led by De Flores after she has given herself to him:

> [Schoenbaum] views De Flores as the more interesting and complex of the two. While Beatrice-Joanna is 'a pampered, irresponsible child' and 'a moral idiot', De Flores 'is her superior', a remarkably subtle and alert intelligence channelled into the pursuit of wholly morbid objectives.'[78] […] Barker goes even further, however, depicting De Flores as a dashing leading man: 'At first ostensibly a weakling, [De Flores] develops into a really masterful figure who not only wins a mistress despite almost insuperable obstacles but afterwards protects her with a remarkable display of competence'[79].

Lady Macbeth is the powerful and manipulating woman who manages to guide her husband and persuade him to commit a murder. Beatrice begins as a clever woman who seems able to get rid of two men with one single move. Not only does she fall into her own trap: she also loses her control of the situation and discovers that she needs the help of the man she loathed, who turns Beatrice from a self-confident woman into a vulnerable lady that has no other choice but to "agree" to a sexual encounter. Their initial bond now becomes based on blackmail not only for De Flores, but for Beatrice as well. Although De Flores is described as the villain of the plot, the most sinful and immoral one of the couple, there are some passages in which the servant seems affected by sparkles of guilt. This is clear during the encounter with Tomazo Piracquo, who seeks revenge for his brother, certain that he did not simply escape but was killed by someone. His presence is the main source of De Flores's fleeting turmoil in his conscience:

> *De Flores*. [*Aside*] I'd fain get off; this man's not for my
> company;
> I smell his brother's blood when I come near him.
> *Tomazo*. Come hither, kind and true one; I remember
> My brother loved thee well.
> *De Flores*. Oh, purely, dear sir!
> [*Aside*] Methinks I am now again a-killing on him,
> He brings it so fresh to me.
> […] His company ev'n o'erlays my conscience (IV.ii.40-5, 56).

[78] S. Schoenbaum, *Middleton's Tragedies: A Critical Study*, quoted in Luttfring, "The Critical Backstory", p. 23.
[79] R. H. Barker, *Thomas Middleton*, *ibidem.*

The vile and dishonest De Flores, capable of killing an innocent and claim the virginity of a woman that openly despises him, does not seem immune from the strength of remorse that in his case emerges in front of a brother that is desperately looking for his missing relative. The meeting between Tomazo and De Flores shows the servant's weakness in his incapability at standing Piracquo's appearance. This creates so strong an impact that De Flores feels he killed Alonzo twice. He mentions a conscience that he did not seem to own when he so easily agreed to Beatrice's request. This is not the only scene in which remorse affects him. Later, at the beginning of Act IV, the description of the "dumb show" in which Beatrice marries Alsemero recalls the banquet scene in *Macbeth*: the ghost of Alonzo appears to De Flores who is immediately startled by the vision. Just as the ghost of Banquo could only be seen by Macbeth, only De Flores is able to see him now. Also interesting is the resemblance between Banquo's locks covered in blood, an image that shocks Macbeth, and Alonzo's hand without the finger that De Flores cut off. They are both signs of the burden that murderous characters have on their shoulders, even though their reactions are remarkably different, considering that De Flores does not reflect Macbeth's delirium in seeing the ghost. De Flores's remorse will emerge with major impact in Act V, once again facing Tomazo:

> He walks o' purpose by, sure, to choke me up,
> To infect my blood.
> […] I cannot strike; I see his brother's wounds
> Fresh bleeding in his eyes, as in crystal (V.ii.24-5, 32-3).

The reference to the bleeding wounds is analysed by Bawcutt: it was a "belief that a murdered man's wounds began to bleed again if the murderer came near the corpse"[80], probably meaning that De Flores's remorse is so vivid that facing the brother of the man he killed makes him feel as if he was near the dead body of Alonzo. He is also incapable of striking the honourable Tomazo, while he did not have any hesitation in killing an innocent like his brother. Beatrice, however, does not reassure him like Lady Macbeth does with her husband. De Flores himself manages not to lose control or let the events upset him to the point of being delirious. The collaboration between Beatrice and the servant proceeds without raising suspicion, made stronger by Beatrice's desperate need to avoid to be unmasked by Alsemero during their first night after their marriage:

[80] N. W. Bawcutt, "Notes", p. 121.

> This fellow has undone me endlessly,
> Never was bride so fearfully distressed;
> The more I think upon th'ensuing night,
> And whom I am to cope with in embraces–
> One that's ennobled both in blood and mind,
> So clear in understanding (that's my plague now),
> Before whose judgement will my fault appear
> Like malefactors' crimes before tribunals,
> There is no hiding on't–the more I dive
> Into my own distress (IV.i.1-10).

The consequences of the deed for Beatrice do not end at all with De Flores's seizing of her virginity. She cannot risk to reveal her defloration to Alsemero. What is even more paradoxical is that "at the beginning of Act II she had praised Alsemero's wisdom and judgement, qualities which justified her choice of him as a lover; now, in IV.i, his abilities make him a dangerous opponent who will discover her loss of virginity and condemn her for it"[81]. This completely reverses the situation: Beatrice has to find a way to safeguard herself, even though it means that she has to cheat, which eventually she does with the help of the virgin Diaphanta. The waiting-woman is manipulated by Beatrice with money and above all with the encouragement to sleep in her mistress's place on her wedding night with Alsemero, with whom Diaphanta is in love, representing her greed as an itch, an "obsessive desire to commit evil (in this case sexual)"[82]. The delay in leaving Alsemero's room after making him believe to be Beatrice in the bed-trick episode results in Diaphanta being killed by De Flores in order to wipe away Beatrice's fears and suspects about Diaphanta's trustworthiness. The bed-trick scene is one of the passages that Walter Scott describes as "horrible striking"[83] and that makes Beatrice appear as an even more immoral, wicked character, just as stated by C. W. Dilke who claims that "Beatrice can only be regarded with detestation and abhorrence"[84]. She has to entrust once again De Flores and be protected by him with the confidence and masterly attitude to which Barker, previously quoted by Sara Luttfring, alluded[85]. De Flores takes care of not only making Diaphanta leave Alsemero's bed by setting fire on the waiting-woman's room, but also plotting to kill her. Being able to manage the situation with the complicity of De Flores, due to which her consideration of him permanently and shockingly changes, Beatrice

[81] N. W. Bawcutt, "Introduction", p. 17.
[82] N. W. Bawcutt, "Notes", p. 114.
[83] W. Scott, quoted in Luttfring, "The Critical Backstory", p. 17.
[84] C. W. Dilke, *Old English Plays*, *ibidem.*
[85] R. H. Barker, *Thomas Middleton*, in Luttfring, "The Critical Backstory", p. 23.

shows an approach that is completely different from the beginning of the play:

> *Beatrice*. I'm forced to love thee now,
> 'Cause thou provide'st so carefully for my honour.
> *De Flores*. 'Slid, it concerns the safety of us both,
> Our pleasure and continuance.
> *Beatrice*. […] How rare is that man's speed!
> 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.
> […] Here's a man worth loving– (V.i.47-50, 69-72, 76).

Their partnership is now consolidated by De Flores's genius in helping. This makes him a leading man, turning Beatrice into a creature that depends on him and accentuating even further the crucial difference between Lady Macbeth and Beatrice:

> Despite the fact that Beatrice-Joanna takes the initiative in hiring De Flores to kill Alonzo, Lowell depicts her as a passive victim, comparing her to 'a child talking aloud in the dark to relieve its terrors' and contrasting her 'shrinking dread' with De Flores's 'contemptuous coolness'[86].

Lowell offers an interesting view of Beatrice as a woman who falls victim to the situation she finds herself into because of her wish to oppose her father's decision of an arranged marriage with Alonzo and greedy desire to have Alsemero. Once committed the deed and forced to face the consequences of De Flores's brutal request, she has no other chance but to follow the path that the sharp servant created for them both. Beatrice appears particularly weak and incapable of behaving with the determination that she seemed to own at the beginning: she is a woman guided by a man, "thus presenting the murderous couple in more conventionally gendered ways"[87]. Bradford also takes into account, like Lowell, the image of an infantilized Beatrice, a "sweet, foolish devil"[88] that certainly does not reflect De Flores's deliberate vileness. According to Wiggin, De Flores is a character that the audience tends to dislike: "readers are able to maintain sympathy for the play's characters (all but De Flores) in spite of their flaws"[89]. All the other characters, including Beatrice, create empathy among the audience. Scott and Dilke, instead, do not share the same consideration of Beatrice and see in her a sparkle of evilness that actually makes her "the arch villain of the play"[90].

Beatrice's weakness and De Flores's cold intellect create a relationship that is

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[86] J. R. Lowell, "The Plays of Thomas Middleton", quoted Luttfring, "The Critical Backstory", p. 18.
[87] Ivi, p. 19.
[88] G. Bradford, "The women of Middleton and Webster", ivi, p. 21.
[89] P. G. Wiggin, *An Inquiry into the Authorship of the Middleton-Rowley Plays*, *ibidem.*
[90] Luttfring, "The Critical Backstory", p. 19.

opposite to the initial one: throughout the play, her hate towards the man seems to decrease. According to some critics, Beatrice begins to feel for De Flores:

> According to Barker, Beatrice-Joanna is unable to resist De Flores's mastery and reciprocates his desire for her without realizing it: 'it is perfectly clear that [Beatrice-Joanna] does love [De Flores], that unconsciously her feelings toward him have undergone a profound change'[91].

Barker is not the only one to support the idea of mutual attraction between Beatrice and De Flores. Christopher Ricks suggests that Beatrice might have been in love with De Flores since the beginning, hiding her sexual desire towards him behind an open display of hate.[92] Regarding the partnership between Beatrice and De Flores, Luttfring also adds:

> Paula Johnson similarly characterized the relationship between De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna as one of dominance on his side and pleasurable submission and dependency on hers. She argues that their confrontation in 3.3, which leads to the consummation of their relationship, 'is a rape-fantasy objectified, enacting the covert wish of men and women alike for pleasure without blame because without consent'[93].

The idea of Beatrice as a cunning woman who hires a man she hates to kill an innocent and becomes the victim of her own plan totally disappears, offering instead the possibility to look at her under the light of traditional gender roles: "their dependency inverts: the woman relinquishes her unnatural tyranny; the man escapes his unnatural servitude"[94]. Men, being comparable to perfection, could not undergo such a transformation that was a threat to their supremacy.

Although Johnson implies that in Beatrice's submission there might be something pleasurable, she remarks the absence of consent in their physical union, a statement that Nicholas Brooke shares as he "conceives of the relationship between Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores as one of the 'mutual' pleasure and dependence, but he nevertheless, like Johnson, understands Beatrice-Joanna's feelings toward De Flores to be on some level non-consensual: 'she has been forced to love him, and she does'"[95]. An interesting aspect of their partnership is also their language, which is made up of violence and especially punning through which "De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna [...] confuse and misuse each other's words, […] characters who routinely steal each other's language for nefarious

[91] R. H. Barker, *Thomas Middleton*, ivi, p. 23.
[92] C. Ricks, "The Moral and Poetic Structure of *The Changeling*", ivi, p. 24.
[93] P. Johnson, "Dissimulation Anatomized: *The Changeling*", ivi, pp. 27-28.
[94] P. Johnson, *ibidem.*
[95] N. Brooke, *Horrid Laughter in Jacobean Tragedy*, quoted in Luttfring, "The Critical Backstory", p. 28.

purposes"[96]. The nature of the relationship in which the characters are involved once again creates a gap between the couple and the Macbeths' partnership, which is based on authentic feelings. Beatrice and De Flores are instead connected by a complex affair that J. L. Simmons describes as a "demonic pact" in which De Flores plays the role of an "incubus"[97], the evil spirit that takes advantage of sleeping women to have sex with them, focusing on the diabolic connotation of the play:

> Garber, like others before her, argues that Beatrice-Joanna's erotic/romantic feelings toward De Flores are repressed and involuntary. Both her alleged desire/love for De Flores and her sexual intercourse with him are to an extent non-consensual and coerced. Joost Daalder and Anthony Telford Moore similarly argue that 'Beatrice's visible, conscious loathing is in some way a manifestation of unconscious love': […] [Beatrice-Joanna] '"represses" it, but it cannot go away, and overwhelms her with the more force'[98].

Kenneth Tynan claims that Beatrice feels less attracted to her innocent husband who represents a hero than to the villain with which she shares guilt[99]. This recalls the picture of the two culprits tied together by the power of guilt that instead of dividing them and destroying their partnership, just as it happened to the Macbeths, draws them closer, connected by an inexplicable and devilish attraction that emphasizes Beatrice's clear lack of morality. Another interpretation of the relationship between Beatrice and De Flores can be found in Robert Jordan's analysis, mentioned by Sara D. Luttfring:

> According to Jordan, the relationship between De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna 'hover[s] on the verge of one of the more potent of mythic confrontations, that of beauty and the beast, the princess and the frog.'[100] In such tales, as well as in the motif of the wild man and the maiden that these tales stem from, the beautiful woman can 'tame' the wild man/beast man. As Jordan notes, however, the play adds a twist: 'Instead of the beast being revealed as a prince, the process of this story is to reveal that the princess is in fact a beast'[101].

The association of De Flores and Beatrice to a significantly altered version of the characters belonging to the fairy tale *The Beauty and the Beast* is also analysed by Viviani, who shares the view of the transformation of Beatrice into the beast of the story; De Flores too undergoes an important change, mutating from the beast he was to something that

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[96] P. A. Cahill, "State of the Art", in Hutchings (ed.), op. cit., 67-92, p. 68.
[97] J. L. Simmons, "Diabolic Realism in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*", quoted in Luttfring, "The Critical Backstory", p. 28.
[98] J. Daalder and A. T. Moore, "There's scarce a thing but is both loved and loathed: *The Changeling* I.i.91-129", ivi, p. 32.
[99] K. Tynan, "The Problem of Pain", in J. Panek, "A Performance History", in Hutchings (ed.), op. cit., 35-66, p. 44.
[100] R. Jordan, "Myth and Psychology in The *Changeling*", in Luttfring, "The Critical Backstory", p. 25.
[101] R. Jordan, *ibidem.*

appears much more pleasant only to the eyes of the transformed Beatrice. She now sees De Flores under a different positive light, an opposed perception that according to Viviani is a reflection of Beatrice's brutality. Those critics who support the perspective of a profound change in Beatrice usually recognize her initial virtuosity, whereas those who do not share this view argue that the repulsion shown by Beatrice at the beginning of the play was just a mere attempt at hiding her attraction. Other critics claim that the reason why she kept hiding her feelings was her refusal of acknowledging her savage, carnal nature that she could see reflected in De Flores, a nature that was eventually destined to emerge[102]. Although analysing the character of Beatrice inevitably draws the attention to its complexity, Viviani argues that what is particularly meaningful is that she ends up forming a coalition with the immoral De Flores until she starts being seduced by him. She thus becomes part of an evil that she does not accept, behaving instead as a helpless victim[103]. The topic of the hidden beast perfectly reflects the theme of disguise that is central to the whole play.

Yet another essential theme that is revealed through the character of Beatrice and that creates an interesting parallelism with Lady Macbeth is the women's approach to patriarchy and the consequent reactions to the social conventions that restricted the life of women. Beatrice is described by Levin as a naive child, a "pampered coquette"[104]. Cherry explores the impact that such social conventions have on the character's behaviour:

> Cherry argues that Beatrice-Joanna's flaws are not innate, but are the 'result of limited education and restricting social conventions. She is seen by her father, though he is loving and even somewhat indulgent, as both a possession and a toy; he never questions his right to marry her off as he pleases'.[105] Beatrice-Joanna's crimes are, therefore, not merely the result of juvenile immorality or sexual promiscuity; her rejection of Alonzo in favour or Alsemero is her way of 'rebelling against parental authority and assuming control over her own fate'[106].

Beatrice becomes a danger to the patriarchal society of the play, as Luttfring claims quoting Roger Stilling. Yet Wiggins underlines the obedience to patriarchal norms that can be easily noticed during the play. Arthur L. Little also underlines the importance of the virginity test that Beatrice finds in Alsemero's closet, as she is forced to fake later the

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[102] Viviani, «Tutto il mondo è teatro», pp. 20-21.
[103] *Ibidem.*
[104] Levin, quoted in Luttfring, "The Critical Backstory", p. 26.
[105] C. L. Cherry, *The Most Unvaluedst Purchase: Women in the Plays of Thomas Middleton*, ivi, p. 27.
[106] *Ibidem.*

effects it would provoke on a real virgin:

> 'Elopement and adultery are unthinkable…because they would involve her defying patriarchal authority', whereas 'murder is a remote, nebulous sin that seems less real…than disobeying Daddy'.[107][…] Arthur L. Little, Jr argues that the effects of the test place women in a double bind, forcing them to enact madness on order to confirm their sexual purity. In an ironic show of social sanity, Beatrice-Joanna fakes the hysteria demanded by the virginity test 'not because she is evil…but because she wishes to protect the patriarchal validation of her virginal self'[108].

The claim that Beatrice, even though opposing herself to her father's will, decides to reproduce the effects of the potion she drinks in order to be considered still honourable according to the patriarchal society, creates a parallelism with Lady Macbeth's statement after Duncan's death, her impossibility at killing the king that resembles her father and that Drakakis had described as "a residual patriarchal imperative"[109]. However, Lady Macbeth, does not reflect the ideal image of a woman that accepts the role imposed by men in a patriarchal society. The contrast between these two aspects involving hostility towards gendered roles that both Beatrice and Lady Macbeth play, and the inevitable power that such expected behaviours continue to exert on the characters, produce a meaningful correlation between the two female characters. They both acknowledge male power, as it can be evinced by Lady Macbeth's attempt at unsexing herself in order to gain masculine connotations that might help her not to lose her ruthless and violent determination, and by Beatrice's acceptance of the limits she has because of being a woman, together with the desperate awareness that she has to cheat during the virginity test.

Bawcutt takes into consideration the theme of patriarchy as well, an aspect that influenced women's life as their arranged marriages were not supposed to satisfy their desires but were mostly based on interests and advantages. Beatrice is destined to endure the cruel consequences of her actions, she "undergoes a process of 'demonisation' in the play because she has the temerity to assert her own choice of partner"[110]. Yet Tomazo is the only one who recognizes the potential threat of marrying Beatrice, whose cold behaviour towards Piracquo is suspicious: "Think what torment 'tis to marry one / Whose heart is leapt into another's bosom" (II.i.131-2). Despite the persistence of the limits

[107] M. Wiggins, *Journeymen in Murder: The Assassin in English Renaissance Drama*, quoted in Luttfring, "The Critical Backstory", p. 32.
[108] A. L. Little, Jr., "Transshaped" Women: Virginity and Hysteria in *The Changeling*", *ibidem.*
[109] Drakakis, "Introduction", p. 10.
[110] Bawcutt, "Introduction", p. 24.

imposed by a patriarchal society, the two women manage to trust their own will power and abilities at plotting a murder maintaining a cold mind and through an astounding skill at manipulating men, only to fall victims to their plans, Lady Macbeth consumed by remorse because tormented by Duncan's blood which constantly reminds her of the deed that corrupted her soul, and Beatrice forced to join De Flores's evil and to be physically violated by a man she deeply despises.

2.3 Physicality in *The Changeling*

The development of tragedy through the pressing presence of physicality emerges in several crucial events and makes *The Changeling* overwhelming in its brutality. Since the first scenes of the play, De Flores's physical appearance is so unbearable that Beatrice cannot even accept to have him around, a repulsion that becomes evident in her refusal to wear the glove that she has let fall. Physicality, according to Sarah Dustagheer, is a means used by Middleton and Rowley to convey themes such as sex and violence; through physicality, the authors also describe the main infatuations of the characters: "De Flores's moral depravity is expressed in his disfigured face; Beatrice-Joanna's feelings for the servant are represented (arguably) in her dropping her gloves"[111]. Beatrice's attraction towards De Flores's unpleasing appearance represents a stunning "sexualisation of ugliness"[112]. Beatrice is considered a spoilt and naïve child that unconsciously suppresses her impulsive and strong desire for De Flores behind hate.

The controversial relationship between Beatrice and the abominable De Flores is also analysed by Paul Taylor, who focuses on the bizarre attraction towards the man and claims that "the repulsive has its perverse, magnetic attractions. We can lust for what we loathe"[113], emphasizing the relevance of ugliness as a magnet that physically attracts Beatrice. The hypothesis that loath and attraction can co-exist at the same time is also supported by Arya Rina, interested in the paradoxical idea that the "abject" is able to repel

[111] S. Dustagheer, "New Directions: Performing *The Changeling*: 2006-2015", in Hutchings (ed.), op. cit., 143-164, p. 158.
[112] "Olivia Williams, Tom Hiddleston and Will Keen talk about their roles in *The Changeling*", ivi, p. 159.
[113] P. Taylor, quoted in Dustagheer, "New Directions: Performing", p. 159.

and attract simultaneously[114], an aspect reflected in Beatrice's attitude towards De Flores. The result is the creation of a dual image of her, the woman who is forced to give herself to a man she does not desire and keeps rejecting and a woman who is attracted to him since the beginning. Such duality is ironically emphasized by her double name that at the same time represents both a figure of chastity and lust, as explained by Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, who explores the association of repulsion and attraction, focusing on "the anatomy of abjection", an ambiguous theme which is the result of De Flores's ugliness:

> For Beatrice-Joanna, De Flores is a poison, while, she says, he could be 'wholesome' to another woman's taste. What is striking is that Beatrice-Joanna presents her sense of the abject as exceptional, compared to 'thousand other tastes'. […] The metaphor of poison indicates that De Flores is the thing that makes her sick, the thing she has to 'throw out' (*ab-jacere*). […] The dialogue expresses the ambivalence that is emblematic of abjection: although he is poison to her, the 'gentleman', De Flores, is the only creature in Beatrice-Joanna's memory. […] Abjection is here defined as a fault, a frailty that one 'cannot help' having. […] The dialogue in which Alsemero and Beatrice-Joanna describe their feeling of abjection as 'an infirmity' or a 'frailty' expresses a mixture of fascination and repulsion, obsession and rejection[115].

De Flores's imposition on Beatrice occurs thanks to his own physical appearance that evokes abjection and pushes Beatrice to reject him, like a venomous, dangerous and repulsive basilisk. Yet, in her rejection there lies also a palpable seduction, a physical attraction that behaves as a magnetism she cannot ignore.

Physicality in *The Changeling* takes on different shapes that contribute to enrich the play's force and powerful intensity. Some of them are expressed through gaze: "Beatrice-Joanna paradoxically cannot detach her gaze from De Flores either, even if he is a source of repulsion"[116]. Much importance is here given to eyes, as the place through which judgement develops while examining people, their physical appearances, their being. The body becomes an essential instrument through which the play proceeds with its astonishing and brutal scenes, emphasized by significant events that involve the body, for instance through the immaculate one with which a virgin can give proof of her being honourable. This is one of Beatrice's main sources of anguish after she realizes she will not be able to prove to Alsemero that she is a virgin. Through the body, the characters can also show themselves and give responses without using words, a feature that is taken into account by Peter Womack, focusing in particular on the scene between Beatrice and De

[114] A. Rina, *Abjection and Representation. An Exploration of Abjection in the Visual Arts, Film and Literature,* in Vienne-Guerrin, "New Directions: Loving", p. 167.
[115] Ivi, pp. 168-169.
[116] Ivi, p. 170.

Flores when the servant claims his reward for the murder of Piracquo:

> The woman is deprived of words and shown in the grip of her automatic response. For the moment, she *is* her body. In all three instances, too, her reaction is framed by the comments of the predator. This makes the dramatization of the body brutally reductive. Suddenly the girl is exposed, *as* flesh, to a knowing male regard[117].

Shifting to the role played by the body in the scene of the virginity test and the bed-trick, Womack adds:

> The same logic governs the scene of the virginity test. If a woman who swallows Alsemero's potion is a virgin, it will cause her to yawn, sneeze and laugh, in that order. […] The yawning, sneezing and laughing, like the trembling and painting, are reactions in which flesh expresses itself independent of conscious intention, but which we observe in full consciousness of their meaning. Diaphanta's body is telling us the truth about itself without her knowledge. […] The 'bed-trick' assumes that the husband will not notice that he is making love to the wrong person – it therefore works as a cartoon-like representation of the idea that one sexually available woman is much the same of another[118].

Other parts of the body that are repeatedly mentioned and that equally operate as means of representations are hands and especially fingers with their sexual connotations. De Flores describes Beatrice's fingers as "wanton" in picturing them while they caress his beard, underlying the importance of touch and physical approach in the speech where he uses food as metaphor: "Oh my blood / Methinks I feel her in mine arms already / Her wanton fingers combing out this beard / […] praising this bad face / […] Some women are odd feeders" (II.ii.146-8, 149, 153). Womack explores the remarkable role played by the physical reactions in this passage too and insists on the body as the place in which the involuntary and the unconscious are situated:

> Blood, arms, fingers, beard, face – the connection is made out of detailed physical sensations. And the conceit that follows is aggressively materializing, not merely making eating a metaphor for sex, but imagining it as 'feeding' – coarse, needy, animal-like. Moreover, the reflection on 'odd' preferences takes the thought back to the idea of the involuntary. Sometimes (as proverbially in pregnancy) women just want to eat weird things; rational choice is overridden by an obscure impulse from within; again, literally, the body appears as the seat of the unconscious[119].

Womack also highlights the importance of the scene in which De Flores offers the explicit image of his own fingers thrusting into the sockets of Beatrice's dropped glove. In yet another macabre passage, De Flores cuts Piracquo's finger off and tries to give it to Beatrice as a token, representing a brutal castration and emphasizing the "perverse

[117] P. Womack, "New Directions: Embodied Theatre in The *Changeling*", in Hutchings (ed.), op. cit., 93-120, p. 109.
[118] Ivi, pp. 109-110.
[119] Ivi, p. 111.

eroticism", as Womack calls it, that flows between Beatrice and the servant. De Flores's attention on Beatrice's hands when she realizes that the only way to convince him to murder Alonzo is to fake tenderness towards him is significant as well: it is a physical contact that according to Womack creates an intensity much more powerful than the one between Beatrice and Alsemero. Womack also draws attention to De Flores's lines when Tomazo approaches him, referring to the belief in corpses bleeding when their murderers are around. Patricia Cahill analyses this issue by a more scientific point of view and pinpointing three specific scenes involving Beatrice in which physical contact occurs: the two passages when she lets her glove drop on the floor and when she touches De Flores's face, and a third episode, the test that Beatrice conducts on Diaphanta in order to prove her chastity. Cahill suggests a scientific approach into "the nature of touch and the literal matter of skin as a sensory organ"[120]. Gail Kern Paster similarly describes Beatrice's transformation as the result of being a character mostly represented as a body that, influenced by the environment, undergoes a constant change, a "flux"[121]. Sara Eaton offers a similar point of view as well, taking into consideration the repressive society that surrounds the character and that results in Beatrice being considered only as a body, a mere object that can belong to someone else. She also focuses on the aspect of her sexuality, which can only define her either as a virgin or a whore[122].

The most striking moment in which body, besides being an instrument, also becomes a representation of loss and violence, is Beatrice's forced sexual encounter with De Flores, a scene that is not supposed to happen on stage but becomes evident due to Beatrice's lines: ("This fellow has undone me endlessly", IV.i.1) following the sexual act. This controversial passage can be interpreted as an authentic rape, since De Flores forces Beatrice to agree at giving him the sexual reward he asked for by threatening her. The issue attracted the attention of several critics. Deborah G. Burks analyses the topic of ravishment as a property crime in early modern England with a special focus on female consent, disapproving the misogynist "tendency of scholarship to focus on the extravagance of Beatrice-Joanna's desire rather than to the way she is strong-armed into sex" [123]:

[120] Cahill, "State of the Art", p. 89.
[121] G. K. Paster, ivi, p. 90.
[122] S. Eaton, "Beatrice-Joanna and the Rhetoric of Love in *The Changeling*", in Luttfring, "The Critical Backstory", p. 30.
[123] Cahill, "State of the Art", p. 78.

> In her analysis of early modern rape law, she notes that 'English law treated ravishment as a crime targeted at propertied men, through a piece of their property, women.'[124] The law was concerned not simply that men might sexually abuse women, but that 'women might lack the sense to conduct themselves appropriately' and might actually be complicit with their rapists.[125] The play depicts Beatrice-Joanna as 'an active participant in her rape', 'an archetype of the woman-driven by desire' and this is how many critics have read her'[126].

Frances Dolan underlines the ambiguity of De Flores and Beatrice's sexual encounter and examines the tendency not to consider it a rape in which Beatrice is pictured solely as the passive victim of De Flores's obtruding physical presence. Dolan points out the importance not simply of the issue of male coercion but also of what Cahill, referring to female sexual agency, describes as a "sophisticated investigation […] of a woman's intention to survive her deeply circumscribed fate"[127].

The Changeling inspired many reflections in the so-called "narratives of embodiment", mostly referred to female characters and in this case to Beatrice-Joanna. For instance, Lisa Hopkins argues that it is in embodiment itself that Beatrice's greatest threat to patriarchal structures lies[128]. Silvan Tomkins and Jennifer Panek similarly explore the way in which shame, sexuality and involuntary responses are associated in the play[129]: Panek focuses on the blushing and sexual shame referred to Beatrice before her sexual meeting with De Flores and towards the end of the play: "a blush was imagined both as attesting to sexual innocence and as inciting sexual arousal"[130], in yet another essential and significant use of bodily responses as instruments.

The Changeling makes a powerful and meaningful use of physical acts and bodies. Physicality reaches its peak in the final act with the imminent murder-suicide, after De Flores and Beatrice's being "twins of mischief" (V.iii.142) is revealed. As Bawcutt underlines, Beatrice is once again making a misjudgement. Alsemero forces her to enter in his closet, right after joined by De Flores with the ironic and crude suggestion of Alsemero to "get in to her" and "orders the couple to copulate as a rehearsal for the performance they will be giving in hell before an audience of devils"[131]. Beatrice's horrid

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[124] D. G. Burks, "'I'll Want My Will Else': *The Changeling* and Women's Complicity with Their Rapists", quoted in Luttfring, "The Critical Backstory", p. 33.
[125] D. G. Burks, *ibidem.*
[126] D. G. Burks, *ibidem.*
[127] Cahill, "State of the Art", p. 79.
[128] L. Hopkins, *The Female Hero in English Renaissance Tragedy*, ivi, p. 81.
[129] J. Panek, "Shame and Pleasure in *The Changeling*", ivi, p. 83.
[130] Ivi, pp. 83-84.
[131] Bawcutt, "Introduction", p. 19.

moans can be exchanged for sounds of pleasure but are revealed as cries of pain. The servant stabs her in a scene that Deborah Burks considers significant: "Her body, when De Flores drags her out onto the stage, bears visible signs of his violation, signs which are a literalization of the violence their sexual union committed on her body and her honor and, by extension, on her family"[132]. Beatrice seems overwhelmed by the atrocious reality of what her blind greed and passion caused, displaying the consciousness of her guilt and the presence of remorse in her words:

> *Vermandero*. An host of enemies entered my citadel
> Could not amaze like this. Joanna! Beatrice! Joanna!
> *Beatrice*. Oh, come not near me, sir; I shall defile you.
> I am that of your blood was taken from you
> For your better health; look no more upon't,
> But cast it to the ground regardlessly.
> Let the common sewer take it from distinction.
> Beneath the stars, upon yon meteor
> Ever hung my fate, 'mongst things corruptible;
> I ne'er could pluck it from him. My loathing
> Was prophet to the rest, but ne'er believed;
> Mine honour fell with him, and now my life. (V.iii.147-158)

Beatrice becomes aware of her "corrupt and defiling, diseased, blood"[133], as Bawcutt describes it, referring to the medical blood-letting which consisted in removing the bad blood from diseased patients in order to cure them. Beatrice is so repulsed by her own contaminated blood that she asks her father to throw it on the ground, as it can be good only for the sewer, a scene whose lines are defined by Bawcutt as "the most powerful and chilling"[134] ones. Blood represents an essential aspect in the play both here and in *Macbeth*. It is the means through which remorse starts taking control over Lady Macbeth. The prominence of blood in *The Changeling* is explored by Womack, who analyses the scene in which De Flores cannot approach Tomazo because he believes that going near the man he murdered could open his wounds again and make him bleed: "what is happening in this scene is an extension of the same principle. Tomazo is 'of the same blood' as Alonzo, and it is this shared blood that is reacting to the presence of the man who shed it"[135]. Tomazo's reaction in meeting De Flores, during his anguished attempt at finding the murderer of his brother, is defensive: "He walks a-purpose by, sure to choke

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[132] D. G. Burks, "I'll Want My Will Else", quoted in B. Cano-Echevarría, "New Directions: Doubles and Falsehoods: The *Changeling's* Spanish Undertexts", in Hutchings (ed.), op. cit., 121-142, p. 134.
[133] Bawcutt, "Introduction", p. 19.
[134] *Ibidem.*
[135] Womack, "New Directions: Embodied Theatre", p. 113.

me up, / To infect my blood" (V.ii.24-5). Tomazo is not yet aware that De Flores is the murderer; according to Womack, it is a response caused by a sort of unconscious awareness: "blood is the medium of occult influences, communicated wordlessly from one physical interior to another"[136].

Equally interesting in Beatrice's previous lines is the contrast between stars and meteors: as stars were considered "pure, fixed, and eternal; meteors belonged to the sublunary world of change and decay, and were transitory, of evil omen, and the result, or indication, or corruption"[137]. Vermandero refers to his citadel, considered a safe and impenetrable place against the enemies, at least externally; it was not equally protected by its wicked inhabitants, but actually hiding inside terrible deeds and secrets. As Viviani points out, castles and houses symbolised the human body, making thus particularly impressive the similitude with Beatrice's situation, a nice-looking and apparently genuine woman whose inwardness, being violated, manipulated and corrupted by De Flores, did not reflect her exterior beauty[138]:

> *De Flores*. I loved this woman in spite of her heart;
> Her love I earned out of Piracquo's murder.
> […] And her honour's prize
> Was my reward. I thank life for nothing
> But that pleasure; it was so sweet to me
> That I have drunk up all, left non behind
> For any man to pledge me. […]
> Make haste, Joanna, by that token to thee:
> Canst not forget, so lately put in mind,
> I would not go to leave thee far behind.
> *Beatrice*. Forgive, Alsemero, all forgive;
> 'Tis time to die, when 'tis a shame to live (V.iii.165-6, 167-171, 175-9).

If Beatrice-Joanna seems able to recognize her fault and her ingenuity in ignoring her judgement that tried, through repulsion, to alert her about De Flores's depravity, the ruthless servant does not show any signs of remorse. On the contrary, he considers himself glad for having killed Alonzo so that he could claim his reward, the only pleasure that managed to satisfy him in his whole life. He deadly wounds Beatrice in order to keep her with him even in death and prevent others to have her, "killing her to ensure that no other man can share the privilege. He has achieved what he regards as his life's ambition, and

[136] *Ibidem*.
[137] Bawcutt, "Notes", p. 131.
[138] Viviani, «Tutto il mondo è teatro», p. 24.

is quite content to die"[139]. Beatrice is forced to follow him, but she is also certain that dying guilty is less humiliating that living with shame. Some final morality in Beatrice emerges. This defines a difference between the two main characters: although they were both blinded by their passions and wishes, throughout the play De Flores gives proof of being pushed by a more malevolent nature. Even in his last moments there is no trace of repentance in him; he is still guided by a twisted dedication to an obscene lasciviousness, as Christine Varnado argues: "Unlike De Flores, who takes sexual pleasure in murder, Beatrice-Joanna, she implies, is fundamentally unlike the sexually-depraved figure to be found in past criticism of the play, for she is shown to be motivated simply by self-interest rather than the irrationalities of lust"[140].

Even though Beatrice acknowledges the destruction she caused to her honour and life as well, her first and last attempt at compensating with her confession of both her adultery and her involvement in a murder does not move Alsemero, who in his own turn had misjudged Beatrice during their first encounters, considering her a virtuous and innocent woman that now has turned into a whore. According to Guerrin, the impact of the word "whore" is much more deleterious to Beatrice than the actual deeds she has committed; Beatrice's view about what she did is sided by the certainty that love for Alsemero was the main reason: "your love has made me / A cruel murd'ress" (V.iii.65-6).

2.4 The sub-plot and the different shapes of madness

The main plot of *The Changeling* is sided by a sub-plot that develops in a madhouse run by Alibius. Probably written by Rowley, it has been considered "barely worth acknowledging[141]; [...] distasteful and tedious"[142]. According to Bawcutt, madness did not evoke feelings of sympathy and was usually associated with fright:

> Discipline is maintained with a whip, and there are hints that the patients may not be well fed (I.ii.197-211). It is unlikely, however, that contemporary audiences would have been shocked by Alibius's behaviour. Madness was regarded at the time with a robust lack of sympathy which we

[139] Bawcutt, "Introduction", p. 19.
[140] C. Varnado, in Cahill, "State of the Art", p. 81.
[141] Luttfring, "The Critical Backstory", p. 21.
[142] W. Archer, *The Old Drama and the New: An Essay in Re-valuation*, *ibidem.*

> should now consider to be outright brutality. [...] It does seem, however, that Rowley is using folly and madness for comic purposes, not to create horror[143].

Yet, Rowley has been also credited with some excellent scenes of the main plot, such as the passage of Beatrice's dropped glove and her lines in the fifth act after being wounded by De Flores. Rowley's sub-plot began later to be praised by critics for its interesting parallels. Its events offer the audience a different feeling than the tragic one which is taking place in Vermandero's house, also due to the presence of jokes, satire, mockery, fools and madness.

The two plots are inevitably linked, creating a succession of similarities among the characters and situations. Alibius is the head of the bedlam just as Vermandero is the head of the castle. An interesting parallel can also be found between Alibius and Alsemero, both "anxious about the honesty of their wives, neither appreciating the danger posed by the trusted Lollio and De Flores respectively"[144]. Lollio, who tries to take advantage of Antonio's revelation of love to Isabella to blackmail her, recalls how De Flores threatens Beatrice to reveal the whole truth unless she gives herself to him. Yet, Isabella promptly threats him as well, claiming that if he dares to speak she will make sure to satisfy Antonio in exchange for Lollio's throat to be cut. Moreover, Isabella and Beatrice share a similar situation in which they are surrounded by men who desire them, including servants such as De Flores and Lollio, even though the two women's nature are clearly different and the circumstances' conclusions are definitely opposite, as Bawcutt observes:

> The sub-plot is a comedy of love intrigue, but the intrigues are doomed to collapse into bathetic failure. Usually in Jacobean comedy a foolish old husband with a pretty young wife will be cuckolded sooner or later. Here the pattern is inverted, and a loyal wife outwits the men who wish to seduce her. Isabella is like Beatrice in having three lovers ardently pursuing her; unlike Beatrice she has an innate honesty and strength of mind that enable her to escape disaster. By the end of the play the husband recognises his error and promises to treat her with more respect in future[145].

According to Viviani, Isabella's honesty represents the main difference between the plots. It is thanks to her loyalty that Antonio, Franciscus and Lollio have no chance to seduce and push her to give herself up to anyone that is not her husband, showing an essential will power in resisting those same passions and desires that instead put Beatrice in danger.

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[143] Bawcutt, "Introduction", p. 15.
[144] Hutchings, "Introduction", in Hutchings (ed.), op. cit., p. 7.
[145] Bawcutt, "Introduction", p. 15.

Patricia Cahill accentuates the importance of such evident differences in how the two female characters of the play deal with their admirers, a view in which the patriarchal consideration of the Jacobean English woman once again emerges:

> In the castle plot, she suggests, the Spanishness of the lovesick Beatrice-Joanna and her three suitors (Piracquo, Alsemero and De Flores) is depicted in terms of their excesses of heat and lasciviousness, which (in the cases of two of them) ultimately lead to their deaths. By contrast, she argues, in the hospital space, Isabella emerges as a version of the witty English wife familiar from Jacobean city comedy: represented as well able to master not only her suitors but also her jealous husband, the chaste wife thus reveals the superior value of English womanhood[146].

Madness is the crucial theme that links the two plots together. In the asylum it takes on the shape of a real mental health problem from which the fools and the madmen suffer; in the castle, it is a metaphorical insanity that overwhelms the inhabitants through passions and love, as Viviani underlines in drawing the attention to Isabella's question: "Alack, alack, 'tis too full of pity / To be laughed at. How fell he mad? Canst thou tell?" and Lollio's answer: "For love, mistress" (III.iii.45-7). Madness creates a crucial correlation between the two main plots. Sara Dustagheer notes that "the castle inhabitants and madhouse inmates were one and the same, equally maddened and corrupted by love and lust"[147]. Particularly significant is the show of the madmen who behave like birds, hinting that without reason there is no difference between humans and animals; in the castle, Beatrice and De Flores turn into actual beasts. The overlapping of the two settings becomes extremely meaningful and highlights the importance of their connection. The issue of madness is also analysed by Joost Daalder in her essay. In particular, she takes into consideration the connection between sanity and madness, two opposite conditions that in the tragedy are instead linked by an ambiguous bond. Through the characters, the dramatists upset the distinction between these two conditions, so that it is not easy to understand who are the actual madmen and who are the normal ones. Daalder especially explores such ambiguous distinction:

> The relationship between the sub-plot and the main plot is one of carefully wrought irony. Compared with the people around her, Beatrice is mad. She stands out most against Isabella, however, not only because Isabella is the chief woman in the sub-plot as Beatrice is in the main plot, but also because if we compare Beatrice with other people in the main plot the contrast is not so glaring. Ostensibly, all those people are normal, and it would have been easy for the dramatists to give us a sub-plot with a sane woman surrounded by real idiots and lunatics which reverses a main plot containing an insane woman in a sane world. That comparatively simple model, however, is not that of The Changeling. It is certainly one which the dramatists have in mind, in

[146] C. T. Neely, in Cahill, "State of the Art", p. 76.
[147] Dustagheer, "New Directions: Performing", p. 146.

> that Isabella is sane and Beatrice insane, while each woman appears to inhabit a world contrasted with her. However, appearances are deceptive: although the people in Alibius's institution are indeed fools and madmen, they may in the end strike us as on a profound level less insane than the seemingly 'normal' people of Beatrice's Alicante[148].

The role played by madness in *The Changeling* inevitably recalls Lady Macbeth's end, driven firstly to a metaphorical insanity by her greedy ambition and lust for the crown that encouraged her to plan the murder of Duncan, and then literally maddened by the power of remorse that begins to overwhelm her with her loss of sanity and hallucinations. The feeling of being trapped, cornered and unable to leave a tangled situation that threatens to become unbearable, inevitably creates another bond between the characters, especially Beatrice, and Lady Macbeth, as emphasized by the former: "I'm in a labyrinth" (III.iv.71). The feeling of being oppressed is a central aspect of the play that is explored by Dustagheer, who takes into account both the physical and psychological enclosure that involve some of the characters and that takes place in the madhouse and in the castle of Vermandero as well:

> Inmates are physically contained in the madhouse, as Isabella, all under the watchful eye of key holder Lollio. In the main plot, De Flores is Lollio's counterpart, a key holder who traps its inhabitants: Alonzo is permanently bound in the castle walls by death and Beatrice-Joanna is psychologically enclosed by her actions. […] Ultimately both Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores are physically contained in Alsemero's closet, making literal their pre-existing moral and psychological enclosure[149].

Despite the different plots, "*The Changeling*'s settings – the castle and the Alibius's madhouse of the subplot – become increasingly palpable sites of claustrophobia and depravity"[150], representing the physical and mental imprisonment to which the characters are subjected. In the sub-plot, just as in the main one, there is a high presence of explicit sexual puns, coming mostly from Lollio and directed to Isabella. The relation between the two plots does not involve only such parallels. As Michael Oakley and Dustagheer argue, the sub-plot has also the fundamental goal to give the main plot time to evolve and develop with coherence. The two plots do interact, as Alsemero commissions a show made by the fools and madmen belonging to Alibius for the guests of the wedding and in the last act some of the characters of the secondary plot are also in the castle when Franciscus and Antonio confess their disguise:

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[148] Daalder, 1988. "Folly and Madness", op. cit., p. 7.
[149] Dustagheer, "New Directions: Performing", p. 151.
[150] Ivi, p. 144.

> *Antonio*. I was changed too, from a little ass as I was
> to a great fool as I am, and had like to ha'been changed
> to the gallows, but that you know my innocence always
> excuses me.
> *Franciscus*. I was changed from a little wit to be stark mad,
> Almost for the same purpose (V.iii.204-9).

Antonio is considered the main "changeling" of the play, a folkloristic term that was used to refer to an ugly or diseased child that had been left by the fairies in place of a human child stolen from his crib. The connotation of the term is slightly different in the play: it also alludes to someone who undergoes a change. Given the peculiar choice of naming a play focusing on a secondary character, Viviani suggests that the reference also expands to the other characters, not only Franciscus who, following Antonio's change replaces a madman, but others as well, as Bawcutt also explains in analysing the transformations experienced by the inhabitants of the castle too:

> The use of the words 'change' or 'changed', which occur nineteen times in the play as a whole, helps to reinforce the idea that we are witnessing a vital turning point in the characters' lives. Alsemero is transformed from a hardened soldier and traveller, indifferent to women and restlessly anxious to move on to his next destination, into an ardent lover, a change which Jasperino observes with amazement. […] Beatrice too shows a 'giddy turning' (I.i.158)[151].

Bawcutt's reference to Beatrice's "turning" implies her change in feelings after seeing Alsemero, a line significantly preceded by the statement "I shall change my saint" (I.i.157). As Viviani emphasizes, Beatrice has no other choice but to disguise herself, hiding her wickedness behind the fake image of an innocent virgin and skilfully deceiving Alsemero. Changing and transforming, thus, involve most of the characters, mutations on which Viviani describes as "lunatic" [152], highlighting thus the meaningful lines of the fifth act through which Alsemero begins to close the play before the final epilogue:

> What an opacous body had that moon
> That last changed on us! Here's beauty changed
> To ugly whoredom; here, servant obedience
> To a master sin, imperious murder.
> I, a supposed husband, changed embraces
> With wantonness, but that was paid before (V.iii.196-201).

In blaming the moon for all the sins and the changes that occurred, Alsemero nourishes its association with madness and with the alterations that were believed to happen because of lunar effects, sometimes resulting in atrocious consequences that are due to such

[151] Bawcutt, "Introduction", p. 5.
[152] Viviani, «Tutto il mondo è teatro», cit., p. 31.

changes. Greed, passions and sexual desires condemned the evil and corrupt characters to pay the price for their wickedness; the only path that now they can take inevitably leads them directly to hell and to damnation.

CHAPTER 3

3.1 Christianity and religious symbols in *Macbeth*

Religion is extremely important in a tragedy that deals with stunning aspects such as brutal murders, the blood of innocent victims, the presence of death and evil, together with the conscience of the main characters that react to the deeds committed. In *Macbeth*, religion often emerges through multiple events, symbols and references. A primary subject is the battle between evil and good. Roy Walker emphasizes the importance of good, naturally associated with God, that at last inevitably wins over evil[153]. Ervin Staub analyses the definition and manifestation of evil; strictly related to human actions and deeds that are committed voluntarily and whose devastating consequences harm other people. Staub also underlines that evil can be prevented[154], a point of view that becomes particularly meaningful in surveying Lord and Lady Macbeth's harmful actions. Evil does not only emerge as the invisible entity that corrupts the nature of the characters and encourages them to commit horrifying deeds, but is also manifested through images that remind the reader of its presence, such as the plentiful spilling of blood and the weather with its rain, storms and thunders that are mentioned in the report of the captain ("Shipwracking storms and direful thunders" I.ii.26). Thunders and lighting also open the play announcing the appearances of the three Witches ("When shall we three meet again? In thunder, lightning, or in rain?" I.i.1). The supernatural forces in which evil reaches its peak are linked with foul weather, as it is intelligible in the sisters' ability at changing and controlling the weather to commit indeed evil actions:

> SECOND WITCH
> I'll give thee a wind.

[153] R. Walker, *The Time is Free: A Study of Macbeth*, in Clark, *The Critical Backstory*, p. 44.
[154] E. Staub, *The Psychology of Good and Evil*, *Why Children, Adults, and Groups Help and Harm Others,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

FIRST WITCH
Th'art kind.
THIRD WITCH
And I another.
FIRST WITCH
I myself have all the other.
And the very ports they blow
All the quarters that they know
I'the shipman's card.
[…] Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tossed (I.iii.11-7, 24-5).

Witches are presented as demonic figures, described by Verena Theile as "agents of the devil"[155] that are able to demonise Macbeth himself. Just as they manage to change the weather so that it torments the shipman, they can similarly change Macbeth's honourable nature and make him accomplish bloody acts simply by tempting his ambition through their prophecy. Evil, devilish attitudes as opposed to good, moral behaviours forecast the tragic destiny of a man and his wife who choose evil over good and condemn their own souls to perdition. Moreover, this went against the assumption that monarchs derived their right to rule by Divine concession: committing a regicide was a crime against God.

Hannibal Hamlin suggests an interesting relationship between the presence of the witches and the sense of apocalypse that can be perceived in the play, supporting the opinion of Adrian Streete who "notes that early modern treatises on witchcraft emphasized not only witches' Satanic origins but their connection to end times as described in Revelation"[156]. Hamlin accentuates the role played by the Weird Sisters as forces that fully oppose God and that guide the characters towards their imminent destruction. He also mentions Stuart Clark's reference to witches (and magicians) as "precursors of the Antichrist"[157]. In Act 1, scene 3, it is Banquo himself who, witnessing the prophecy of the witches, states that "oftentimes, to win us to our harm / The instruments of darkness tell us truths" (I.iii.122-3), highlighting the link between the Sisters and their dark evil nature.

The intricate relationship between good and evil has been explored by several authors for the relevance that it undoubtedly has in the play. John D. Cox recalls W. C. Curry's consideration of the presence of the significant word "germens", a term that Curry

[155] V. Theile, "Demonising Macbeth", in L. Hopkins, H. Ostovich (eds.), *Magical Transformations on the Early Modern English Stage*, Farnham, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 75-90, 2014, p. 77.
[156] A. Streete, in H. Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 292.
[157] Stuart Clark, *Thinking with demons*, *ibidem.*

analyses taking into account the idea that God, in transforming chaos, created the "seeds of reason[158] […] adopting this idea to explain how evil disrupts God's plan, Augustine speculated that God permits demons to know the "seeds of reason" and on occasion to speed up natural (i.e., divinely ordained) processes in a destructive manner"[159]. As Curry adds, there are several references to "seeds", precisely in the scene during the encounter with the three sisters in which Banquo states "If you can look into the seeds of time / And say which grain will grow and which will not" (I.iii.57-58). Macbeth also mentions the word "germens" ("Though the treasure / Of nature's germens tumble all together / Even till destruction sicken", IV.i.57-9)[160], significantly referring to the Witches that represent the evil forces that interfere with God's work.

The opening scenes of the play and the ones in which the Weird Sisters are introduced abound with other references to Christian themes. Peter Milward, a supporter of the belief that Shakespeare was a Catholic, underlines several references that would emphasize Shakespeare's "echoes" of the gospels, especially regarding Christ's passion. Among the numerous parallels proposed by Milward, the first one is the description made by the captain of Macbeth's valorous actions during the battle, in which he gave proof of being able to "memorize another Golgotha" (I.ii.41). The reference becomes gradually more significant since Macbeth will also accomplish the murder of his lord. Another crucial aspect is the greeting of the witches in Act I, "All hail!" (I.iii.47-9), which recalls the way Judas greeted Christ before betraying him. Milward again suggests that Macbeth behaves exactly like Judas since he betrays king Duncan. Milward also takes into account the parallel between Macbeth's lines "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well / It were done quickly" (I.vii.1-2) and Jesus' words to Judas "That thou doest, do quickly!" (John 13:27), evincing a similarity between Macbeth's soliloquy and Judas' potential thoughts in committing the act of disloyalty towards Christ. Both the figures are bonded by an immoral deed, betrayal against their innocent lords. In the scene after Duncan's death, Macbeth mentions the king's "golden blood" (II.iii.109); Milward points out the similarity with St. Peter, who "describes 'the precious blood' of Christ being of more value than 'gold or silver' (1 Pet 1:18-19)"[161]. Another reference to Christian themes is

[158] W. C. Curry, in J. D. Cox, "Religion and Suffering in 'Macbeth.'" *Christianity and Literature*, vol. 62, no. 2, 2013, pp. 225–240. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/44324131. Accessed 10 Jan. 2020, p. 226.
[159] *Ibidem.*
[160] *Ibidem.*
[161] P. Milward, SJ, "Meta-drama in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*", in B. Batson (ed.), *Shakespeare's Christianity*

the portrayal of the condition of Catholics, which Milward thinks Shakespeare had in mind:

> Still, there is one crucial scene in act 4 of Macbeth, in which Malcolm and Macduff are engaged in a long conversation. It not only vividly recalls the problems of Elizabethan Catholics, but it is strangely prolonged by the dramatist out of all proportion to the prevailing brevity of the play. It shows the extreme caution Malcolm has to observe in dealing with Macduff, who for all he knows may be a spy for Macbeth, as he has experienced not infrequently in the past. Such, too, was the caution that had to be observed regularly by Catholic recusants in Elizabethan England, and no doubt by Shakespeare himself[162].

Milward finds another parallel in the scene in which Lennox is engaged in a conversation with a lord and his attitude towards the unknown man is clearly suspicious. His caution is shown by the restrained way in which he speaks as if trying to avoid the risk of saying something that may be reported to Macbeth: "My former speeches have but hit your thoughts, / Which can interpret further. Only I say / Things have been strangely borne", III.vi.1-3). Milward describes the behaviour adopted by Lennox as yet another faithful representation of the strenuous situation in Elizabethan England, where Catholics lived in an atmosphere of dread[163]. Several readers would indeed agree with Cox when he considers *Macbeth* "the most explicitly religious of all Shakespeare's tragedies"[164].

3.2 The importance of prayer and the need for blessing

The eternal struggle between good and evil pushes the main characters towards chaos and damnation, segregating them in a state of sufferance in which they face the horror of their deeds and the devastating consequences. The ambition of Macbeth does not reflect his Lady's desire for the crown and her blind determination in accomplishing the atrocious murder of Duncan. The opposed approaches of the main characters are evident from the beginning and are intensified during the scene of the murder. The passage after the king's assassination and Macbeth's failure in replying to the guards talking in their sleep

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The Protestant and Catholic Poetics of Julius Caesar, Hamlet, and Macbeth, Waco, Baylor University Press, 2006, 1-18, p. 12.

[162] Ivi, p. 16.

[163] Ivi, pp. 16-17.

[164] Cox, "Religion and Suffering", p. 225.

emphasizes Macbeth's sudden remorse for what he has just done and underlines the forceful impact that religious themes have on the sequence of events. Once the murder is committed, Macbeth refers to his Lady the detail of the "Amen" episode (II.ii.26), showing all his anguish and paranoia for the possible meaning behind such event:

> One cried 'God bless us' and 'Amen' the other,
> […] Listening their fear I could not say 'Amen'
> When they did say 'God bless us'.
> […] But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen'?
> I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen'
> Stuck in my throat (II.ii.26, 28-9, 31-33).

The powerlessness of Macbeth in replying to the guard and physically articulating "Amen" suggests that Macbeth is so appalled and petrified by his own actions that he cannot find the strength to reconcile his guilty conscience with his mouth. Having corrupted his soul with an atrocious homicide, Macbeth becomes suddenly aware of being no longer worthy of receiving God's blessing.

The issue of Macbeth's lack of response is explored by Robert S. Miola foregrounding how this passage shows, through the desperate need for a blessing, Macbeth's recognition of his own human weakness. In surveying the crucial role played by prayer, Miola takes into account both the Catholic and the Protestant approach, pointing out the relevance that is given to an invocation that needs to involve not merely the mouth but also true will. According to John Fisher, prayer is "a turning of the mind and heart toward God"[165], a notion that stresses out the importance of speaking to God with extreme honesty and genuineness first, not simply with words. Consequently, the scene of the sleeping guards suggests that Macbeth is not actually speaking adequately with his heart in his request of receiving God's blessing:

> Macbeth's inability to say "Amen" testifies to his hypocrisy and sinfulness; but, more important, his desire to say "Amen" testifies to his goodness, to his deep and deeply denied need for grace and blessings. Macbeth's abortive prayer thus illustrates the moral world of the play, the ethical universe in which he must live and die. And we must surely share, at first, in his momentary astonishment: why, after all, cannot the man who has just butchered his guest, kinsman, and king manage to mouth an "Amen," even if insincere? What stops him, what sticks the word in his throat—the involuntary reflex of a defeated conscience or some divine refusal to tolerate yet another transgression? The play affords no window through which to look this deeply into Macbeth's soul, but one thing is clear: Macbeth's inability to say "Amen" signals the futility of

[165] R. S. Miola, "I Could Not Say 'Amen': Prayer and Providence in Macbeth", in B. Batson (ed.), op. cit., 57-72, p. 60.

his crime[166].

Macbeth's attempt at addressing God will turn into a completely different invocation once he becomes a hateful tyrant, so damned that he is destined to walk more and more away from God with no chance to redeem himself. His failed endeavour has revealed Macbeth's imminent assimilation of his evil nature. The scenes where he inveighs against the Witches ("Deny me this / And an eternal curse fall on you", IV.i.104-5) and against his servant ("The devil damn thee black", V.iii.13), manifests an outstanding difference between his previous tendency towards blessing and his new turning to curses: "King Macbeth invokes the Prince of Darkness to curse […]. He that had most need of blessing now turns the other way for curses"[167].

The importance of prayer often emerges as the characters beseech the intervention of God. The play's allusions to God that listens to their prayers and judges are emphasized by the guards talking in their sleep ("One cried 'God bless us' and 'Amen' the other, II.ii.26) and the doctor praying for Lady Macbeth. Miola highlights the fundamental presence of religion also during the sleepwalking scene, as the doctor, powerless in front of the woman's delirium, exclaims: "More needs she the divine than the physician. / God, God forgive us all! Look after her, / Remove from her the means of all annoyance / And still keep eyes upon her" (V.i.70-3). Lady Macbeth's torment is not only physical, nor can it be cured with antidotes: it is mainly spiritual. Her only invocation is the one addressed to the spirits in the "Unsex me here" speech (I.v.39). In her current condition, completely consumed by her remorse and madness, she cannot ask for God's mercy. Too absorbed in her paranoiac state and living as the mere shadow of herself, she is lost in the dark depths of her own conscience afflicted by guilt. Miola connects Macbeth with Dante's Inferno highlighting his inability to pray:

> The resulting portraits of sin, punishment and damnation stand worthily next to those of Dante's Inferno: to Ezzelino the tyrant in Phlegethon, the boiling river of blood (canto 12); to Vanni Fucci, defiant and making an obscene gesture to God (canto 25); to Ugolino, who eats the bodies of his dead children (canto 33); to Fra Alberigo and Branca Doria, whose souls are already in hell though their bodies live on earth (canto 33); to the traitors Judas, Brutus and Cassius […]. Dante and Shakespeare portray the sinners themselves, living human beings, groaning, sweating, suffering, cursing, excusing, regretting, all their faults and imperfections on their heads, their sins in full and flagrant blossom. And, like Macbeth, the damned souls throughout the nine circles of Dante's Inferno are capable of every kind of speech-noise, eloquence and remorse, save one: they cannot

[166] Ivi, p. 61.
[167] Ivi, p. 63.

pray[168].

Miola also points to Macbeth's awareness of being punished for the vile actions accomplished. Deeds and choices concern the issue of free will. Although aware of the effects that his actions will have, Macbeth voluntarily chooses evil and "repeatedly adverts to the terror implicit in free will, in the awesome power to choose good or evil […]. He never contemplates the predispositions of fate or of the deity but thinks instead on the consequences of his choices and actions"[169].

Since the first appearance of the Witches, the evil forces arouse ambition in Macbeth, a state that is deepened by Lady Macbeth's power over him. Macbeth willingly decides to surrender to his wife's words. The main difference between Macbeth and his wife is enhanced by his desire to obtain the crown right after the prediction of the Weird Sisters. Several passages do reveal Macbeth's hesitation in putting the plan into practice. In his "If it were done when 'tis done" (I.vii.1) speech he shows his awareness concerning the consequences that would follow the deed, stressing out the importance of choice and justice ("This even-handed justice / Commends the ingredience of our poisoned chalice / To our own lips", I.vii.10-2). From the very beginning through the apparitions and states of pure anguish, Macbeth's guilt reminds him that his damned soul is suffering the consequences of his own choice freely taken. He accepts his condition and witnesses with resigned awareness the death of his Lady, equally guilty in the deed as the tempting serpent of the Eden.

3.3 *The Changeling* and the Fall

The definition of Lady Macbeth as the serpent that tempts Adam and Eve[170], reported by Sandra Clark, recalls De Flores, who not only behaves with the same ruthless persuading attitude, bus is also explicitly compared to a poisonous and dangerous snake, as well as to a deadly basilisk. The references to the Fall from a state of beatitude to damnation are

[168] Ivi, pp. 66-67.
[169] Ivi, p. 69.
[170] H. R. Coursen, in Clark, "The Critical Backstory", p. 44.

evident during the scene in which Alsemero and Beatrice see each other again and their meeting takes significantly place in a church: "I love her beauties to the holy purpose, / And that, methinks, admits comparison / With man's first creation, the place blest, / And is his right home back, if he achieve it", I.i.6-9. The allusions are here to marriage and its faculty to partially redeem the fallen state of the first man and woman who lived in the garden of Eden[171].

Several critics, included Viviani and Bawcutt, identify in the play other passages in which the double guilt of both De Flores and Beatrice still refers to the Fall. If De Flores is the snake that manages to seduce and tempt the woman, Beatrice is "the broken rib of mankind" (V.iii.146), as the servant describes her, in yet another allusion to the first woman. More similarities with the original sin emerge: "You must forget your parentage to me: / You're the deed's creature; by that name / You lost your first condition, and I challenge you" (III.iv.136-8). De Flores explains that the deed they committed now unites them and makes them equal, creating a bond in which they share the guilt. Viviani underlines the importance of mentioning the loss of the "first condition" that echoes the loss of beatitude of Adam and Eve[172], which leaves them to deal with the repercussions of the original sin: "Did my fate wait for this unhappy stroke / At my first sight of a woman?" (V.iii.12-3). The reference to the "first woman" suggests that Alsemero, in referring to Beatrice as the woman with whom he has fallen in love for the first time, is also "hinting at Adam's experience"[173].

Another religious theme is the contrast between the unfallen state of the first humans in Eden and the damnation they are destined to because of their actions, echoed by De Flores and Beatrice. Viviani equally underlines the allusion made by Antonio: "How can he freeze, / Lives near so sweet a warmth? Shall I alone / Walk through the orchard of the Hesperides, / And cowardly not dare to pull an apple?" (III.iii.174-7). Although he specifically mentions the garden of the Hesperides, according to Viviani, his remark is yet another reference to the Fall.[174] Antonio is trying to seduce Isabella, a married woman, and therefore his actions are comparable to the ones of Adam and Eve that surrendered to temptation.

[171] Bawcutt, "Notes", p. 33.
[172] Viviani, «Tutto il mondo è teatro», pp. 27-28.
[173] Bawcutt, "Notes", p. 124.
[174] Viviani, «Tutto il mondo è teatro», pp. 27-28.

Allusions to religion can be found also in the peculiar uses of some words:

> There is also a frequent use of words with a theological flavour– 'heaven', 'creation', 'saint', 'devil', 'devotion', 'reverence', 'holy', and 'blest'. (Beatrice, who has most need of blessing, says 'bless me' four times.) But language of this kind can be used metaphorically to convey emotions which are obviously secular, as at I.i.31-5 and II.II.8-12. At times the vocabulary can be employed in ways which are perverse, if not blasphemous, as when De Flores describes himself as being 'up to the chain in heaven' (II.ii.79)[175].

As Bawcutt claims, the frequency of words related to the religious field, although sometimes the way they are used by the characters does not truly reflect an authentic response to a religious atmosphere, becomes particular also thanks to prophetic signs and warnings. I already mentioned in the second chapter the crucial meaning given to "omen" by Alsemero ("What omen yet / Follows of that?" I.i.2-3), emphasizing the negative connotation of the presage that the meeting with Beatrice will lead towards troubles and disasters. Peter Womack focuses on the view according to which, taking into account Beatrice's line "My loathing / Was prophet to the rest, but ne'er believed" (V.iii.156-7), her words might not only be seen as a suppressed and especially unconscious attraction towards De Flores that Beatrice kept well-hidden behind repugnance, but might also be interpreted through a religious point of view which "invites us to take Beatrice-Joanna's words 'prophet' and 'believ'd' in their obvious religious senses, and to understand her loathing as a divinely prompted recognition that De Flores is destined to be the instrument of her damnation. God was warning her, but sin stopped her ears"[176].

Although the issue regarding the intervention of religion through unconsciousness was analysed by many critics, it was particularly explored, as Womack underlines, by John Stachniewski[177].

Beatrice-Joanna fails to pay attention to the signs alerting her about De Flores's dangerousness. At least until the last moments before her death, she fails to accomplish a self-examination that was a particularly important practice in the Calvinist perspective of soteriology, which encouraged to "please God his only Way, is to take him to a Daily Direction, and some set rules, thereby looking constantly to his heart all the Day"[178]. Womack, who believes that the interpretation of Beatrice's loathing towards De Flores as

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[175] Bawcutt, "Introduction", p. 21.
[176] Womack, "New Directions: Embodied Theatre", p. 101.
[177] J. Stachniewski, *Calvinist Psychology in Middleton's Tragedies*, in Womack, "Notes", in "New Directions: Embodied Theatre", p. 239.
[178] J. Rogers of Dedham, *Sixty Memorials for a Godly Life*, ivi, p. 101.

both an unconscious attraction and as God's warning are not necessarily contrasting, argues that the heart is not separated from the psyche and that in analysing themselves as the Calvinist approach suggests, the characters leave out a small portion that is not subjected to such examination; this portion is the unconscious, which the characters themselves can perceive but not control or even understand, resulting in a self that is divided[179].

The issue of the self as a split entity evokes another essential difference that Womack takes into account focusing on the Letter to the Romans in which the mind is described as opposed to the body, the "members" that are mostly subjected to sin. The many manifestations of the body throughout the play such as shame, attraction, sexual approaches and representations of inner wickedness, return in the case of De Flores's ugliness as an effect of his evil nature. What emerges by Womack's analysis of Paul's Epistle is that the mind has instead the desire to please God's will:

> The mind, the 'inward me', wills the good and delights in the law of God, but the flesh, the outward 'members', are subject to the law of sin, and constantly thwart the mind's intentions. […] In verse 18, Paul can say 'in me (that is, in my flesh)', as if 'me' and 'my flesh' are synonymous. But by verse 20, he is saying that the flesh makes him do things he wants not to do, and, to that extent, 'it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me'. Now it seems that 'I' means 'my mind', and that the flesh is an alien force that opposes and enslaves 'me'. […] 'Flesh' becomes the name of a part of the soul. It is therefore not merely a physiological entity, but also a psychological one[180].

Overwhelmed by the passions and blemished by the sins committed and to which the flesh cannot resist, De Flores and Beatrice are destined to experience damnation.

3.4 Hell and the "barley-break" game

Since the moment in which murder is plotted by Beatrice and fulfilled by De Flores, the characters enter a vicious cycle made of wicked and immoral actions that makes them become one single unit connected by guilt. A central role is played by the constant presence of damnation and the burden of the corrupt souls that the characters have to carry. Beatrice becomes aware of her terrible fate when she realizes that, once she has

[179] Womack, "New Directions: Embodied Theatre", pp. 102-104.
[180] Ivi, pp. 105-106.

hired De Flores to kill Alonzo, she cannot deny him the reward he claimed without risking to be betrayed. The fear for her reputation is testified by the bed-trick scene. She knows that she has no other choice than to give up, but she is also aware that coupling with the wicked servant will only damn her soul even further, recalling once again the image of De Flores as the snake: "Was my creation in the womb so cursed / It must engender with a viper first?" (III.iv.165-6).

The presence of damnation, and above all of hell as an entity that accompanies the characters, also surfaces through the game of "barley-break" that during the tragedy is mentioned only twice:

> a country game played by three mixed couples. One couple, who occupied a central area known as 'hell', held hands and were not allowed to separate; they tried to catch the others as they ran through the central space in order to change partners. Those who were caught had to replace the original couple in hell[181].

The image of a game in which a couple is placed in "hell" offers a metaphorical description of a final condition to which the characters are destined. The first allusion to the game is made in Act III, scene 3: the madmen are playing in the madhouse and one of them suddenly exclaims "Catch there, catch the last couple in hell!" (III.iii.167), while Isabella is arguing with Antonio disguised as a fool, a statement referred to the game and directly mentioning hell. Viviani analyses the sharp insinuation to Isabella's Fall since hell might exactly be her destination if she agrees to give up to Antonio's courtship[182].

In the main plot, Beatrice's Fall begins after the murder of Piracquo and continues once she is engaged in a sexual affair with De Flores. The reference to the game and therefore to hell reappears in the final scenes with De Flores: "And the while I coupled with your mate / At barley-break; now we are left in hell" (V.iii.162-3). The meaning of "couple" (clearly an allusion to the rules of the game according to which the members play in couples) is yet another direct reference to the sexual encounters between Beatrice and the servant[183]. Vermandero's reply to De Flores's mentioning of the hell he is heading towards together with Beatrice is also extremely significant: "We are all there; it circumscribes here" (V.iii.164). Hell permeates the whole play, not only for the damned characters. Viviani suggests that the "barley-break" turns from a game to a reality in

[181] Bawcutt, "Notes", p. 77.
[182] Viviani, «Tutto il mondo è teatro», 28.
[183] Viviani, "Note", p. 273.

which hell and damnation are perpetual presences that represent the inevitable results of the Fall and the consequent condition of humans on earth, an authentic "infernal reality"[184]. Such reality does not end with the play, as it faithfully reflects the consequences of committing sins. The spectators witness De Flores and Beatrice's punishment, as Tomazo, who finally acknowledges that the killing of his brother has been avenged with the murder-suicide of the two culprits, states:

> Sir, I am satisfied; my injuries
> Lie dead before me. I can exact no more,
> Unless my soul were loose, and could o'ertake
> Those black fugitives that are fled from thence,
> To take a second vengeance; but there are wraths
> Deeper than mine, 'tis to be feared, about 'em. (V.iii.190-5)

There is no wrath that should be feared more than the one that is awaiting De Flores and Beatrice, betrayed by their own depravity, unlike Isabella who managed to resist the temptations of Antonio and Franciscus and also the threats of Alibius. Neely claims that the contrast between the two women was intended to highlight the fundamental difference between the Spanishness represented by Beatrice and the ideal image of the English Jacobean woman that was instead portrayed through the character of Isabella[185]. The religious aspect emerges in the relationship between Isabella and Beatrice as well: a significant contrast regards their natures and their attitudes that is apparently justified by Middleton and Rowley's beliefs, an issue that was analysed with major attention by Nora J. Williams and David Nicol by focusing on Middleton's Calvinism and Rowley's Pelagianism. The views of the two writers probably influenced the perception of the choices made by the characters and the way they behave. The characters are represented by Middleton as unmistakeably good or evil, a condition that contributes to their tendency to commit a sin or refrain from doing it, with the consequence that evil characters are inevitably destined to keep committing sins. Rowley instead represents his characters as free to commit and choose to sin intentionally[186]:

> It is important to note the paralleling of Isabella in the madhouse and Beatrice-Joanna in the castle; nowhere is this juxtaposition more evident than in their disparate handling of their various male aggressors. If Beatrice-Joanna can be seen as reprobate – in line with Middleton's apparent belief in predestination – Isabella can be read as both an alternative example of feminine resistance and a strident example of Rowley's Pelagian worldview. She has the option to sin and comments upon

[184] Ivi, pp. 28-29.
[185] C. T. Neely, in Cahill, "State of the Art", p. 76.
[186] D. Nicol, in N. J. Williams, "Resources", 187-210, in Hutchings (ed.), op. cit., p. 196.

the possibility of having an affair with Antonio: 'Here the restrained current might make breach, / Spite of watchful bankers'[187].

De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna cannot prevent the repercussion that due to her natures and damned souls they will have to deal with: they cannot do anything but accept it, especially Beatrice since her tendency towards evil is worsened by her surrendering sexually to De Flores.

Humans are constantly persuaded by desires and impulses that push them to sin and continuously enticed by serpents that surround us and that in the tragedy are significantly represented first of all by De Flores and subsequently by the suitors in the sub-plot that disguise themselves and make threats in order to manipulate a married woman. The play thus offers a representation of a reality in which sins are an incessant temptation with damnation as a consequence, a portrayal that inevitably has, and is supposed to have, an impact on the audience, echoing Isabella's remarkable lines: "Would a woman stray, / She need not gad abroad to seek her skin; / It would be brought home one ways or other" (III.iii.215-7).

[187] Williams, "Resources", p. 205.

Conclusion

The central issue that links *Macbeth* and *The Changeling* is the murder of an innocent man plotted by a woman who wants to satisfy her greed or passion and entrusted to a man, creating a relationship of complicity mostly based on guilt. Although the similarities between the tragedies and above all the shared representation of guilt and remorse as deleterious forces are clear, some important contrasts surface. The differences involve especially the two female characters who mercilessly plot the homicides, as the way in which they handle the situation creates significant divergences.

The viciousness and ruthlessness that motivate them are undoubtedly the same, as both Lady Macbeth and Beatrice manage to plan the murder with striking ease, without wondering whether they should think properly before they take such a horrible decision. There is no hesitation and definitely no humanity in the insouciant attitude shown in their choices. Nevertheless, while Lady Macbeth plots the assassination of Duncan right after receiving the letter of her husband as if she had been waiting only for the right moment to change her social status and become the wife of a king, Beatrice's reaction is not as immediate as Lady Macbeth's one. Beatrice reaches the conclusion that killing Alonzo is the solution to her problem only when Alsemero tells her that he is ready to send a challenge to Alonzo. It is the worry of the potential risks run by Alsemero in challenging Piracquo that gives her the idea of the murder. Alsemero might win and defeat his opponent, but even if he won and got rid of the other man, he would be persecuted by the law and the effort would not be worth the reward.

The contrast between the two women is evident in their motives as well. The eagerness and coldness in deciding that a man has to die in order to satisfy their wishes does not reflect the reasons behind the gestures. Lady Macbeth is prompted by her strong ambition, a ferocious greed for the crown that will change her life and will turn her husband into a king. As mentioned before, some critics support the idea that Lady Macbeth's ambition is not based exclusively on the desire of becoming herself a queen,

but on the hope that Macbeth will achieve the power he deserves. Therefore, in Lady Macbeth's determination there is not simply a selfish intent, but the desire to become indeed powerful together with her husband. She thus expects that their relationship, introduced as a bond that does not lack mutual complicity nor support, will become even stronger and will lend them the alluring opportunity to reign together.

Beatrice is instead encouraged by passions and attraction towards another man, the one she would like to marry instead of the one her father betrothed to her. No power, no crown, only her desire to avoid her father's will and satisfy her own. There is a selfish ambition in her: she stops Alsemero from challenging Piracquo only because she would not be able to marry him even if he won. The concern that she feels for him and for his fate is apparent and temporary, as she later changes her attitude, not only betraying Alsemero with De Flores, although she is forced to surrender to him, but also showing less attraction to her good husband than the one she manifests for the wicked De Flores. Beatrice's egoistical attitude, directed towards the satisfaction of her own will, does not correspond to Lady Macbeth's, aimed at improving her and her husband's status.

The passages in which the two women show their manipulative tendency are also different. Lady Macbeth is able to show her dominating nature and choose the right words to persuade Macbeth. She talks to him with brutal honesty, almost coercing him but at the same time making him feel the advantages of regicide in order to convince him once and for all. She guides and supports him, dealing with the planning of the murder and the preparation of the drink with which the guards are drugged. Lady Macbeth is undoubtedly a leader, a true female villain; the same cannot be said for Beatrice. Her manipulative attempt is not as effective as Lady Macbeth's. She manages to convince De Flores to murder Alonzo only because the wicked servant already has a foretaste of victory, as he perfectly knows what is the reward that he will ask for, once the task is accomplished. Beatrice has to fake a sudden change in her attitude towards the man she used to insult and push away, instead of using her devious nature to speak with honesty like Lady Macbeth does. Gaining pleasure from the new tender way in which Beatrice talks to him, complimenting him and especially touching his face, De Flores takes advantage of the situation, encouraged by that same change. Therefore, Beatrice turns from the manipulative and dominant woman into a manipulated victim. Once De Flores obtains his reward, every trace of the wicked female villain she seemed to be at the beginning

disappears: there only remains Beatrice as a subjugated character, depending exclusively on De Flores's help.

The relationship between the two culprits involved in the crime also undergoes a total change that in the tragedies are clearly divergent. The marriage that Lady Macbeth wanted to make powerful with the achieving of the crown for the husband does not manage to overcome the anguish caused by the murder. It does not resist to the consequences and eventually the apparently unbreakable bond between the Macbeths collapses once they start dealing with the weight of their unbearable guilt. Differently, guilt strengthens the relationship between Beatrice and De Flores, a partnership that at the beginning seemed absolutely unimaginable. If in *Macbeth* guilt separates them, in *The Changeling* it unites them, probably due to the female characters and their contrasting attitude. Lady Macbeth is a woman that tries to manage the whole situation and at the same time makes sure that her husband does not let remorse give them away, but in the end her attempt at dealing with the repercussions for both of them has an effect on her psyche. Her decline due to the pressure is testified by the desperate and delirious reassurance she believes she is giving to Macbeth, when actually she is trying to comfort herself. Beatrice finds in the partnership with De Flores the support she needs in order not to succumb to the effects of the murder she entrusted to the servant. She is not as self-confident and sly like the Lady, as testified by her incapability at managing the situation without the help of De Flores. By getting rid of Diaphanta and consequently of Beatrice's worries, De Flores reveals his being indispensable for her. Thus, Beatrice relies on him to the point of not feeling attracted to Alsemero anymore, or at least not as she was before, much more loyal to De Flores now. She simply needs to make Alsemero (and her father as well) believe that she is still a virgin, not because she is worried that Alsemero will refuse her, but because she feels the urge not to disappoint the moral expectations imposed on women by a patriarchal society.

The issue of patriarchy represents another essential difference between the two female characters. Lady Macbeth does not feel restricted at all by the society she lives in: in fact, she takes advantage of the features usually considered typical of men in order to strengthen herself and behave exactly like Macbeth would have done if tenderness and his being honourable had not stopped him. The only reference to a possible effect of patriarchy can be found in the scene after the assassination of Duncan ("Had he not

resembled / My father as he slept, I had done't", II.ii.12-3), previously described by Drakakis as an echo of patriarchy. Nonetheless, there is no limit to the Lady's power that she is willing to accept, as highlighted by her resolution in asking the spirits to take away from her every feminine feature associated with affection, weakness and care. She is so overwhelmed by those aspects associated to men that Macbeth significantly tells her: "Bring forth men-children only! / For thy mettle should compose / Nothing but males" (I.vii.72-4).

Conversely, patriarchy is definitely more oppressing for Beatrice, who can only accept her feminine nature that pushes her to hire a ruthless and abominable man for the horrible assignment. Above all, she feels obliged to make the men she deals with believe that she is already a virgin, even if this means cheating in the test and especially sending her waiting-woman to Alsemero's room, sacrificing their first night of marriage. Beatrice becomes completely dependent on De Flores, who as a man leads the couple and takes care of the consequences of Piracquo's death. Patriarchy also emerges in the final moments of the two culprits: Beatrice is stabbed to death by the servant who does not accept the idea of not being followed by Beatrice even in death, so that he can continue to claim her. The difference between the two plays on the matter is also emphasized by Isabella in the sub-plot. She is equally restricted by the limits of a patriarchal society, but her restraints become physical as these are represented by the madhouse in which Alibius keeps her. She is forced to remain in the building due to her husband's jealousy, also controlled by Lollio, the assistant of Alibius.

Finally, another essential theme that links the two tragedies but with different perspectives is madness. The effects of Duncan's death and the awareness that both Lady Macbeth and her husband's hands are covered with the blood of an innocent king are devastating. She loses her patience when Macbeth appears scared and hallucinates, but as the play develops, guilt slowly begins to devour her. The sleepwalking scene and her distressed movements are the result of madness that remorse eventually caused. She literally becomes insane after all the self-control and will power with which she was introduced. Beatrice's madness is not a consequence or an effect, but it rather is the cause. Passions and desires have made her mad enough to plot a murder and hire a dangerous man without seriously taking into account the consequences of such request. It is a metaphorical madness, while Lady Macbeth's one is obviously real, the intolerable

madness of a human being crushed by the torment of a murder that will never let her live peacefully anymore. Beatrice, on the other hand, experiences a different kind of madness, the one that reflects the blind impulses she wants to satisfy, a madness that pushes her to commit mistakes and ignore the signs that would have saved her life.

In the end, although mainly different and equally determined to reach their goals, both women realise that death is the only end that greedy and vicious culprits deserve. Beatrice accepts her own murder at the hands of De Flores, while Lady Macbeth in all likelihood commits an extreme gesture, her own suicide.

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Summary

La profezia delle streghe arriva per Macbeth nel momento ideale, di ritorno da una battaglia che gli assicura le lodi del re Duncan. La sua ambizione viene risvegliata dalla prospettiva che presto, secondo le previsioni delle streghe, Macbeth diventerà non soltanto Barone di Cawdor, ma persino re, prendendo così il posto di Duncan. L'immediato ed effettivo arrivo della notizia circa il titolo di Barone di Cawdor appena concesso a Macbeth spinge quest'ultimo ad avvertire, tramite una lettera, la moglie della lieta notizia e della profezia delle streghe. La reazione di Lady Macbeth dinanzi all'avvenimento mette subito in mostra la determinazione della donna nell'organizzare un piano diabolico destinato a culminare nell'omicidio di Duncan, così da assicurarsi che la corona finisca direttamente nelle mani del marito, senza attendere che sia la sorte a portare a compimento la profezia delle streghe.

L'evidente cupidigia di Lady Macbeth non riflette l'ambizione del marito, un uomo che si dimostra in un primo momento devoto a Duncan e incapace di prendere in considerazione la strategia che Lady Macbeth ha invece immediatamente formulato. Il contrasto tra i due personaggi diventa ancora più evidente nel confronto tra i due coniugi durante il quale emerge l'indecisione dell'uomo e l'inarrestabile sete di potere di Lady Macbeth. La sua abilità nel manipolare il marito è espressa con particolare enfasi dall'atteggiamento persuasivo e dalla durezza delle sue parole, capaci di far barcollare le certezze di Macbeth, spinto a realizzare con le sue stesse mani l'ambizione di prendere il posto di Duncan.

L'esitazione di Macbeth e i riferimenti alle conseguenze di un assassinio dimostrano la sostanziale differenza tra l'approccio spietato della Lady e quello restio, finanche preoccupato, di Macbeth: "Impartiamo istruzioni / Sanguinose che, una volta impartite, / Tornano a tormentare il maestro. Questa / Giustizia dalle mani eque offre / La miscela del nostro calice avvelenato / Alle nostre stesse labbra", (*Macbeth,* I.vii.8-12). La cupidigia cieca di Lady Macbeth e l'ambizione di Macbeth, frenata dalla consapevolezza

di non poter tradire e uccidere il leale e buon Duncan, costituiscono il tema centrale attorno al quale orbita l'omicidio del re, portato a termine da Macbeth con estremo cruccio e spinto ormai dal solo desiderio di soddisfare la richiesta della moglie.

Compiuto l'omicidio, i due coniugi sono macchiati da un duplice reato, quello di aver ucciso un uomo innocente per pura avidità e quello di aver commesso un regicidio, crimine abominevole contro Dio, basato sul presupposto tipico dell'epoca che il diritto di un re di regnare fosse il risultato di una concessione divina. L'orrore di un simile atto riflette un evento avvenuto proprio nello stesso periodo, il cosiddetto Gunpowder Plot del 1605, un tentativo fallito di uccidere James I e terminato con la tortura e con la morte dei cospiratori.

È Macbeth il primo a cedere al peso della colpa che lo attanaglia, già turbato ancor prima dell'assassinio dall'agghiacciante allucinazione di un coltello sospeso a mezz'aria che si tinge di sangue, dando forma al tormento interiore che tuttavia non lo ferma dal compiere l'atto. Lo stato di preoccupazione e angoscia nel quale cade, quello di un uomo inizialmente giusto e onesto macchiatosi di un grave reato, viene intensificato dalle parole delle streghe che lo mettono in guardia da Banquo e Malcolm, potenziali minacce al suo regno. Ciò lo porta a compiere un ulteriore omicidio nel timore che la morte di Duncan sia stata vana, ma ancora una volta il rimorso prende forma, questa volta attraverso l'apparizione, visibile soltanto a Macbeth, del fantasma di Banquo coperto di sangue. A causa dello stesso timore, gli omicidi ordinati da Macbeth non si arrestano e fanno di lui un re tirannico, spietato e sanguinario, superando persino la moglie.

Allo stesso tempo l'indole determinata e priva di scrupoli di Lady Macbeth vacilla, anch'ella vittima del peso della colpa che comincia ad opprimerla. Il suo sonno è turbato dalla consapevolezza dell'omicidio di Duncan e il travolgente rimorso emerge attraverso la visione del sangue che le sporca perennemente le mani. A nulla serve lo sforzo continuo e affannato di lavare e strofinare via le macchie, il sangue versato di Duncan che le macchia le mani non smette di ricordarle l'atroce omicidio da lei pianificato. Lo sforzo fisico di Lady Macbeth evidenzia l'angustia provata, tutta la colpa che la attanaglia viene proiettata nella disperazione con la quale continua a strofinarsi le mani. Della donna autoritaria e in grado di tenere a bada il timore del marito resta una donna consumata e stremata, trascinata verso la follia e infine verso la morte, presumibilmente il risultato di un suicidio.

Le caratteristiche di Lady Macbeth prima del suo declino, quali la determinazione ma ancor di più la capacità di prendere l'iniziativa nel pianificare un omicidio e soprattutto la fredda brutalità con la quale espone al marito il proprio piano la rendono una vera e propria deviazione dal modello di donna tipico dell'età elisabettiana e giacomiana. La figura femminile, contraddistinta dalla tenerezza e dalla debolezza, nonché costretta a fare i conti con i limiti imposti da una società palesemente patriarcale che la riduce ad avere un ruolo marginale e circoscritto all'ambito familiare, non rispecchia quella dominante di Lady Macbeth. Non c'è tenerezza nelle sue parole e la crudeltà del gesto che va compiuto per ottenere la corona si intensifica nel soliloquio rivolto alle forze delle tenebre, alle quali chiede di privarla del proprio sesso e della propria femminilità. Il suo scopo è quello di per potersi liberare della tenerezza e della dolcezza associata alle donne così da poter proseguire con il piano brutale ("Venite, Spiriti / Che presiedete a pensieri di morte, toglietemi / Il sesso e riempitemi tutta, dalla testa / Ai piedi, della più feroce crudeltà! […] E mutate il mio latte in fiele", *Macbeth*, I.v.38-46). Il tema della femminilità diventa dunque fondamentale.

Gli aspetti centrali che caratterizzano *Macbeth* riemergono nell'opera di Middleton: *The Changeling.* Un confronto permette di individuare differenze e similitudini tra le due tragedie, accomunate da un omicidio pianificato ai danni di un innocente pur di soddisfare la propria bramosia, dalle conseguenze che portano ad avvertire il fardello della colpa, da una figura femminile come ideatrice del piano e direttamente coinvolta nell'affidare l'incarico ad un uomo. Se il rapporto che lega i Macbeth inizia con la complicità di due coniugi che si macchiano di un crimine e, logorati dal rimorso, sono costretti ad osservare non soltanto mentre subiscono gli effetti devastanti dell'omicidio, ma anche la distruzione del loro stesso legame, la complicità tra il servitore De Flores e Beatrice comincia e si evolve in tutt'altra maniera. L'uomo ripugnante, perennemente insultato ed evitato, diventa l'assassino perfetto per l'omicidio di Alonzo, il promesso sposo di Beatrice, la quale però desidera ardentemente Alsemero. Il cambiamento repentino nell'atteggiamento della donna pur di convincere il servitore ad accettare l'incarico mette in mostra la natura da manipolatrice stratega di Beatrice, che tuttavia ad omicidio commesso e libera di sposare l'uomo che desidera, si rende amaramente conto di essere diventata la vittima del suo stesso piano.

I riferimenti ad un potenziale evento disastroso sono molteplici e presenti

nell'opera sin dal principio, come quel significativo "omen", il presagio avvertito e tuttavia ignorato da Alsemero, ma non mancano altri episodi simili, ad esempio il guanto di Beatrice lasciato cadere presumibilmente perché Alsemero lo prenda e raccolto invece proprio da De Flores, quasi ad anticipare il rapporto che presto legherà Beatrice allo spietato servitore. Lo stesso nome di De Flores è significativo: un chiaro riferimento all'imminente "defloration" di Beatrice. Convinta di potersi liberare sia del promesso sposo che di De Flores, al quale offre del denaro ed il consiglio di fuggire il più lontano possibile, assiste con orrore al reale compenso preteso dal viscido e crudele servitore: la sua verginità. Non potendo negare, nonostante le suppliche, quel compenso all'uomo, Beatrice gli si concede e nella colpa che li accomuna i due diventano in tutto e per tutto una cosa sola. La donna capace di manipolare e malvagia abbastanza da organizzare un omicidio diventa la creatura figlia di quel delitto commesso.

Il rapporto tra De Flores e Beatrice viene analizzato da una duplice visione. Se da un lato Beatrice passa da "villain" della tragedia a preda del ben più spietato De Flores, dall'altro il rapporto che la lega all'uomo e la consapevolezza di potersi affidare a lui per architettare l'inganno ai danni di Alsemero, ignaro di aver passato la sua prima notte di nozze con la servitrice Diaphanta e non con Beatrice ormai non più vergine, suggeriscono la possibilità che l'iniziale avversione della donna per De Flores nascondesse in realtà un inconscio e involontario desiderio nei suoi confronti. Un uomo inizialmente insultato e respinto che diventa degno di lode per la sua capacità di guidare Beatrice, che ormai dipende da lui. Fondamentale il tema del patriarcato, un aspetto che la mette in netto contrasto con Lady Macbeth, molto più opprimente per Beatrice che avverte la preoccupazione di non rappresentare più il modello di donna rispettabile imposto dalla società. Questa sua preoccupazione è difatti evidenziata dal test della verginità al quale si sottopone, fingendone scrupolosamente i sintomi per proteggere la propria immagine.

Un aspetto introdotto nel *Macbeth* che gioca un ruolo essenziale anche nell'opera di Middleton è quello dell'atto fisico e della fisicità in generale, a partire dall' aspetto di De Flores che passa dall'essere ripugnante ad attirare Beatrice, alle reazioni del corpo stesso che spesso e volentieri diventa ciò a cui una donna è ridotta: oggetto, mera carne sottoposta al desiderio di uomini come De Flores tanto quanto alle reazioni del test in grado di svelarne la verginità. L'impatto della corporalità è altrettanto presente negli atti di violenza, nella coercizione all'atto sessuale e nell'omicidio-suicidio con il quale la

storia dei due amanti si conclude, una volta scoperta la loro colpa. Beatrice, al contrario di De Flores che muore soddisfatto delle proprie azioni, avverte il peso di questa colpa che la porta ad arrendersi dinanzi alla straziante consapevolezza di rappresentare nulla più che il sangue corrotto sottratto al padre, proprio come si usava fare nei pazienti malati nel tentativo di curarli privandoli del sangue cattivo.

Anche la trama secondaria è fondamentale, concentrata su due tematiche in particolare che legano le vicende di entrambe le storie: la follia con le sue diverse forme, quella reale di cui soffrono gli internati del manicomio, contrapposta a quella causata dalle passioni che travolgono i protagonisti e il concetto attorno al quale ruota la figura di Antonio, definito il "changeling". Questo termina indicava, secondo il folklore, un bambino brutto e deforme che veniva lasciato in culla al posto di quello sano e umano, rapito dalle fate. Nella trama secondaria indica il cambiamento di Antonio, che si finge idiota per essere internato così da poter tentare di sedurre Isabella, moglie del geloso Alibius a capo del manicomio, una sostituzione (da persona sana a finto folle) che nella trama principale coinvolge i personaggi. Questi, con i loro mutamenti, si trasformano e vengono in qualche modo sostituiti da una nuova immagine di se stessi, prima fra tutte Beatrice, che muta i suoi sentimenti e sostituisce il proprio volto da donna corrotta con uno da vergine ingenua e innocente.

Il tema della religione occupa un posto fondamentale in entrambe le tragedie. I simboli religiosi presenti in *Macbeth* sono numerosi, prima fra tutti la lotta tra il bene e il male, associato alle streghe che aprono l'opera e anticipano catastrofici eventi con i tuoni e i lampi che le annunciano. Significativi i riferimenti alla religione cristiana ed in particolare alla Passione di Gesù che paragonano Macbeth a Giuda, entrambi colpevoli di aver tradito il loro Signore. La scena delle guardie che parlano e pregano nel sonno porta alla luce l'importanza della preghiera per Macbeth, che non riesce a rispondere "Amen" come invece vorrebbe, segno che la propria anima è talmente provata dall'immoralità dell'omicidio compiuto da non poter più ricevere la benedizione ed il perdono di Dio; un evento che turba profondamente Macbeth e che anticipa la sua imminente trasformazione in un tiranno non più degno di pronunciare preghiere. È questa la punizione che gli spetta per aver deliberatamente scelto il male. Il concetto di libero arbitrio è dunque un altro aspetto saliente dell'opera. Macbeth può solo assistere alla dannazione che lo aspetta e alla tragica fine della sua Lady.

La dannazione come ultima conseguenza delle terribili azioni commesse accomuna i protagonisti di *Macbeth* con quelli di *The Changeling*, una presenza costante proprio come i ripetuti riferimenti alla Caduta di Adamo ed Eva a causa del peccato originale. Il serpente che li tentò a mangiare il frutto proibito appare nel personaggio di De Flores, più volte descritto come un rettile velenoso e persino mortale come il famigerato basilisco, rivelandosi effettivamente letale per Beatrice. Insieme sono destinati a raggiungere l'inferno dove, come Tomazo afferma, un'ira profonda li attende.

I richiami all'inferno emergono in particolar modo attraverso un gioco al quale si fa più volte riferimento nell'opera: il "barley-break", secondo le cui regole una coppia di giocatori si trova in uno spazio centrale, definito appunto inferno, mentre il resto delle coppie corre intorno per scappare da quella centrale che deve acchiapparli. Se anche uno dei partecipanti viene catturato, insieme al compagno deve sostituire la coppia al centro, ovvero all'inferno. Il "barley-break" viene inizialmente citato nella trama secondaria mentre alcuni internati stanno giocando, ripreso poi alla fine della tragedia da De Flores, il quale si è accoppiato (con un duplice significato) con Beatrice e adesso insieme costituiscono la coppia che rimane all'inferno. La presenza dell'inferno come conseguenza delle azioni ripugnanti, dopotutto, proprio come le passioni e i desideri che tentano al pari del famoso serpente dell'Eden, non smettono di circondare non soltanto i personaggi dell'opera, ma tutti gli esseri umani, nessuno escluso.