THE USE OF CUCKOLDRY IN THE PLAYS OF THOMAS MIDDLETON

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1973

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For their support of, and contribution to, the effort involved in writing this dissertation, I offer my sincere thanks to the following: The Ford Foundation for financial assistance for study, research, and writing; my adviser Professor John B. Gabel for his accessibility, his constructive criticism, and his unfailing optimism from the inception of this project to its completion; Professors Edwin W. Robbins and Mildred B. Munday for reading the manuscript and offering helpful suggestions; Professor Francis L. Utley for his kindness and his willingness to let me use his personal library; numerous friends for their personal warmth and encouragement, and especially Danny H. Pogue, who typed the final draft and who bore with me during the typing as only a friend would; and finally, my family for being "always there for whatever."
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, the hero Amintor, prompted by his friend Melantius to reveal the reason for his distraction, finally confides that his wife Evadne, Melantius's sister, has been consorting with the king. Once convinced of the truth of Amintor's confession, Melantius vows to uphold the honor of his family by slaying the adulterous pair. But Amintor stays his friend, explaining that the defense of family honor will inevitably reveal the secret he has kept to prevent his own disgrace:

it will be call'd
Honor in thee to spill thy sister's blood,
If she her birth abuse, and on the king
A brave revenge; but on me that have walk'd
With patience in it, it will fix the name
Of fearful cuckold. Oh, that word!

(III, ii, 224-29)

Renaissance drama is replete with husbands who, like Amintor, dread having the epithet "cuckold" applied to them. In Chapman's *All Fools*, for another instance, the easily gullied Cornelio, having been driven almost mad by insinuations of his wife's unfaithfulness, wounds one of her alleged lovers and promptly sets things in motion to sever all relations with her. "I'll not be made cuckold in my own house," he rants before demanding that the notary read the
terms of divorce. Kitley, the jealous husband in Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*, enters a house and drags off his wife, her woman friend, whom he dubs her bawd, and her alleged lover, whom he calls "old cuckold-maker," as he storms, "I'll ha' you every one before a justice: Nay you shall answer it, I charge you go." In Ford's *The Broken Heart*, old Bassanes declares, "If I be a cuckold, and can know it, I will be fell, and fell." And fell he is. By continually accusing his wife of cuckolding him with any man within proximity, even her own brother, he makes her life so miserable that she refuses both meat and drink and passes away, having been literally worried to death. And of course in *Othello*, Shakespeare's noble Moor, indignant over Desdemona's alleged faithlessness ("I will chop her into messes. Cuckold me!") and encouraged in his wrath by the villainous Iago ("O, 'tis foul in her"), strikes his gentle wife and later smothers her in her bed.

"Cuckold," the name of ridicule applied to the husband of an adulterous wife, is said to be derived from the cuckoo, the chief characteristic of which is to lay its eggs in other birds' nests. Samuel Johnson in his *Dictionary* accounts for the direct application of the term to disgraced husbands thus: "It was usual to alarm a husband at the approach of an adulterer by calling out 'Cuckoo,' which by mistake was applied to the person warned."
The cuckolded husband is also often referred to as "wearing the horns." E. Cobham Brewer in his *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* supposes a connection between the expression and the fate of Actaeon, the huntsman in Greek mythology who was changed by Diana into a stag after he surprised her bathing and was then torn to pieces by his own hounds. The stag, a horned animal, later became a representative of men whose wives are unfaithful. Brewer also cites a possible connection between this expression and the chase. In rutting season, one stag selects several females, who constitute his harem until another stag contests the prize with him. If beaten, he is without associates until he finds a stag feebleler than himself, who is made to submit to similar terms. As the horned stags have their mates taken from them by their fellows, the application is palpable. Another explanation, given in *The New English Dictionary*, is that the metaphor comes from "the practice formerly prevalent of planting or engrafting the spurs of a castrated cock on the root of the excised comb, where they became horns, sometimes several inches long."

By virtue of these metaphoric derivations, then, the cuckold was naturally cast in a negative light. But the common fund of bawdy tales in which the conventions of cuckoldry were established perhaps did more than such derivations
to make the cuckold an object of ridicule. In these tales, the husband—inevitably cast as old, stupid, jealous, or merely hard-working so that he was frequently away from home—would either suspect his wife of dissembling or almost discover her and her lover in a tryst. But usually the wife would manage to divert the husband's suspicions, make her lover's presence on the scene appear innocent, relying on her quick wit, her ready tongue, and her lover's ability to feign according to the shift she had speedily contrived. Sometimes, though far less frequently, it was the lover who took command of the situation rather than the wife. And sometimes an outside party, usually a bawd, had a focal role in connection with the affair. But almost always, these tales were concluded with wife and lover able to continue their affair unpunished, unsuspected, or undetected by the husband.

Of ancient and varied origin, these tales circulated orally during the Renaissance, as they had throughout the ages. But they were also a part of the reading matter of the period. The *Decameron*, which of course was laden with cuckoldry tales, was not translated into English until 1620. But dramatists and other writers throughout the Renaissance had read it and used it, as well as the works of other Italian writers who had patterned their *novelle* after
Boccaccio, as source material for their works. The *Canterbury Tales*, however, in which Chaucer had told typical cuckoldry tales in the Miller's, Reeve's, and Merchant's tales and had seemingly begun one in the Cook's tale, was extremely popular among all levels of readers. The work went through at least twelve editions by the end of Elizabeth's reign.

Other English frame stories modeled on *The Canterbury Tales* and containing cuckoldry tales were also published during the period. Thomas Churchyard's *The First Part of Churchyarde Chippes* (1575), for instance, contains "A Tael of a Freer and a shoemaker's wyef," a story written in obvious imitation of Chaucer. And Robert Greene, in *Greene's Vision* (1592), has Chaucer tell a lively cuckoldry tale even if he also has Gower object that the tale is too scurrilous and ultimately win the argument that ensues. *The Cobler of Canterbury* (1590) and *Westward for Smelts* (c. 1603) are especially noteworthy for their heavy concentration of cuckoldry tales. All six of the stories in *The Cobler of Canterbury*, alleged to follow "old Father Chaucer," are on the theme of dissembling wife and cuckolded husband. The narrator of one of the tales even gives an exposition of eight degrees, or kinds, of cuckold. And four of the five tales told by the wine-besotted fishwives in *Westward for Smelts* are on the theme. Cuckoldry tales less elaborately told
than in the frame stories are found in numerous jestbooks of the period, such as *A Hundred Merry Tales* (printed 1526), *Tales and Quick Answers* (printed 1535), *The Sackful of News* (printed at least by 1557), and *Pasquil's Jests, mixed with Mother Bunch's Merriments* (printed 1604).

Again, then, whether in abbreviated form, like the stories in the jestbooks, or in a more elaborate form, like those in the frame stories, the cuckoldry tales were part of the general reading material of the Renaissance. And though the full spirit and intrigue of such tales can best be captured by reading the tales themselves, the following abstracts will perhaps give some indication of these properties as well as illustrate the conventions of cuckoldry discussed earlier:

(1) A wife is with her lover when another suitor comes to call. She is afraid not to accommodate him because he is rich and powerful and will dishonor her if she does not. The husband returns unexpectedly. The wife sends the rich suitor forth, telling him to wear a scowl on his face while saying, "Cock's body, I shall find him again otherwhere." When the husband wonders at the gentleman's remark, the wife says that he came to the house chasing a young man who had run to the house for rescue only a few minutes before. The lover, who has been hiding in the bed chamber, comes out, corroborates the story, and says he does not know why the gentleman was chasing him. The husband praises the wife for preventing a killing in the house, gives the lover supper, and takes him home.

*(Decameron, VII, 6)*

(2) A fair young wife has finally consented to an affair with a young servant. But her old husband never lets her out of his sight. She finally arranges for the
servant to come at night to the chamber where she and her husband lie. A little before the time he is to arrive, she awakens her husband and tells him that the servant thinks she will meet him in the garden for a tryst. She has her husband dress in her clothes and go to the garden to beat him when he comes. While the husband is in the garden, the wife lies with the servant in the chamber, then sends him to the garden to lambaste and beat the husband, dressed in her clothes, for wantonness. The husband, with many sore stripes, leaves the garden thinking he has both a trusty servant and a faithful wife.

(from The Sackful of News)

(3) A cobbler who is jealous of his wife has his mother watch her whenever he is away from home. The wife's lover is a neighbor, her husband's friend. The wife asks her husband's permission to visit her own mother. The mother-in-law is sent with her. An old woman, the lover's bawd, throws bloody water on the wife as she passes, and the mother-in-law is sent for clean clothes. The wife and her lover conduct their affair in the old woman's house. At the lover's suggestion, the wife later tells her husband that the neighbor has proposed a tryst with her and that she has finally agreed to have him come when the husband and his mother are away. The husband hides behind the door. The lover comes and tells the wife he was merely testing her for his good friend. The husband comes from behind the door, glad for a faithful wife and a true friend. The wife and the neighbor continue to cuckold the unsuspecting husband.

(The Smith's Tale in The Cobbler of Canterbury)

(4) An old widower takes a fair young wife, whom he makes resent him because he is so fearful of being made a cuckold. He spreads lies to the neighbors and they have ill will toward her. In church, the miserable young woman tells her pew-fellow, another young woman, of her unhappiness. The pew-fellow advises her to make merry at night since her husband watches her all day. The wife begins to take the key from under the sleeping husband's pillow, steal out of the house, visit the pew-fellow and lovers, and return home before the husband wakes up. One night when she returns later than usual, the husband wakes up and finds her gone. When she leaves again the next night, he bars her out. The wife knocks to get in, but the husband will not open the door. When the wife
pretends to drown herself in a nearby creek, the husband comes out and she slips in and bars him out. When he knocks on the door, she empties the contents of the chamber-pot on his head. Through a window, she engages a passer-by to tell her pew-fellow to bring her relatives and friends. She tells them that the husband is barred out because he goes whoring at night. They berate him. He has to be a contented cuckold.

(The Fishwife of Richmond's Tale in Westward for Smelts)

Thomas Middleton, who commenced his career as a dramatist at the beginning of the seventeenth century, was especially fascinated by the subject of cuckoldry. For he used cuckoldry situations—either actual, potential, or alleged—significantly in twelve of the twenty-one plays which constitute his canon.\(^1\) As has been indicated, others among his contemporaries were variously concerned with cuckoldry; but Middleton has the distinction of being the Renaissance dramatist who dealt most extensively with the subject in his work.

We may only posit reasons as to why Middleton was attracted to cuckoldry. Perhaps he was drawn to it for personal reasons. We know little about his personal life except for those aspects recorded in legal documents. Or perhaps

\(^1\)The enumeration of plays in the Middleton canon is based on the plays included in A. H. Bullen's edition, The Works of Thomas Middleton, 8 vols. (London, 1885-86)—the last uniform edition of the complete works to have been issued. The twelve plays referred to do not include The Roaring Girl and Anything for a Quiet Life, in both of which the problems of collaboration complicate the handling of cuckoldry situations, which at any rate were not basically Middleton's work.
Middleton's sustained interest in the topic was initially fostered by a concern with the societal. Almost exclusively a writer of city comedy at the beginning of his career, Middleton necessarily focused upon situations and areas of concern prevalent in contemporary London society. At the time Middleton was writing these comedies, the popular controversy over woman's place in society had again come to the fore. Bourgeois wives were enjoying unprecedented freedom from household duties as a result of their husbands' increasing prosperity. This, it was supposed, gave them time to gad about in the streets. And one of the things of which these middle-class wives were accused by their attackers, who resented the boldness and forwardness they seemingly gained with such freedom, was unfaithfulness to their husbands. Or perhaps Middleton's preoccupation with cuckoldry was specifically related to the dramatic. One of the most effective manipulators of plot complication among Renaissance dramatists, Middleton consciously sought to capitalize upon the possibilities that cuckoldry situations inherently offered for intrigue. This would have been

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2 The controversy over woman's place in society took place in sporadic outbursts throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries according to the stimulation of current situations. For a discussion of the controversy, see Louis B. Wright's chapter "The Popular Controversy over Woman" in Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1935), pp. 465-507.
encouraged by his knowledge that such situations, with their implied machinations, were indelibly fixed in the minds of his audience through the agency of the ever-popular cuckoldry tale. Or, looked at from another angle, cuckoldry could have been a natural result of many of the plot situations with which Middleton dealt. These are plots built around the relations of married couples; and cuckoldry is a natural complication for such plots, just as the opposition of parents is a natural complication for plots built around the relations of young men and women in love, leading to marriage.

Middleton may have been attracted to cuckoldry situations, then, for one of these reasons or for a combination of them. Whatever the case, he was to use such situations in varying proportion, to various effect, and with varying degrees of success in twelve plays which span his career. And in these plays, through his failures and successes in handling them, are to be found indications of his developing strength as a dramatist.
CHAPTER 2: COMEDY, PHASE ONE

Middleton's early comedies *The Family of Love* (1602) and *The Phoenix* (1603-4)\(^1\) are notably different from each other in tone and focus, the former being basically a light comedy which approaches farce and the latter being a more serious comedy with a definite didactic or moral intent. Nonetheless, the plays reflect similar strengths and weaknesses so far as Middleton's handling of cuckoldry in them is concerned. In both plays Middleton evidences a remarkable adeptness at sustaining traditional cuckoldry conventions in a dramatically workable and creditable way, relying chiefly on the devices of ambiguity, allegation, and word play. Moreover, he demonstrates a facility in relating cuckoldry to other thematic considerations within each play. In spite of these accomplishments, however, he is finally to be called to task for his failure to reconcile his moral stance in resolving the cuckoldry episodes of both plays

\(^1\)Problems of chronology and authorship in the Middleton canon are not minor. The authority for the present study is Richard H. Barker, who surveys the entire field concerning the canon and records variant opinion in the appendix of his *Thomas Middleton* (New York, 1956). In most cases, Barker himself accepts the majority view and so will provide a trustworthy standard.
with certain characterizations and points of view developed within them.

Perhaps because the title of Middleton's play The Family of Love is the name of the religious sect which is ostensibly satirized in the sub-plot,\(^2\) critics have been inclined to regard this part of the play as basically an attack upon a Puritan sect.\(^3\) Actually, however, only one of the major characters in the plot, Rebecca Purge, is a member of the religious group; and although she is satirized as a hypocritical Familist, she receives a stronger characterization as a cuckolding wife who is directly or indirectly implicated in the venery of the other major characters in the sub-plot.

At the beginning of the play, we learn of Mistress Purge's affair with Glistier, a doctor of physic, in

\(^2\)Bertril Johansson in Religion and Superstition in the Plays of Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton (Upsala, 1950), pp. 102, 157, makes the point that the satire is not on the sect called the Family of Love but on the usual Puritan stereotype.

progressive steps. First, a connection between the two is established when Mistress Purge anxiously asks her husband's apprentice Club, who has been sent to invite Glister and his wife to the farewell supper of Geraldine, the Purges' young kinsman, if Glister said he would come. We are then led to believe that she desires to see the doctor for his professional services, as just before the guests arrive she tells her husband:

In troth, sa, I am not well; I had thought to have spent the morning at the Family, but now I am resolved to take pills, and therefore, I pray thee, desire doctor Glister that a would minister to me in the morning.

(I, iii, 58-61)  

Suspicions are aroused later, however, when Geraldine takes Mistress Glister aside before he allegedly leaves the country and tells her that Glister "cuckolds Purge oftener than he visits his patients," that Purge himself is the pander in the affair, and that Glister may also have lascivious designs on his own niece Maria. Yet we cannot be certain at this point how much credence to place in the confided information. For in spite of the fact that Geraldine is implicating the Purges, who are his relatives and with whom he is on good terms, his basic intent is to discredit Glister, who will not permit Maria to marry him because he owns no land.

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The next reference to the relationship between Mistress Purge and Glister comes from Purge, an apothecary by trade, who delivers a long soliloquy at the beginning of the second act:

The grey-eyed morning braves me to my face, and calls me sluggard: 'tis time for tradesmen to be in their shops, for he that tends well his shop and hath an alluring wife with a graceful what d'ye lack? shall be sure to have good doings, and good doings is that that crowns so many citizens with the horns of abundance. My wife, by ordinary course, should this morning have been at the Family, but now her soft pillow hath given her counsel to keep her bed: master doctor should indeed minister to her; to whose pills she is so much accustomed, that now her body looks for them as duly as the moon shakes off old and borrows new horns. I smile to myself to hear our knights and gallants say how they gull us citizens, when, indeed we gull them, or rather they gull themselves. Here they come in term-time, hire chambers, and perhaps kiss our wives; well, what lose I by that? God's blessing on's heart, I say still, that makes much of my wife! for they were very hard-favoured that none could find in's heart to love but ourselves: drugs would be dog-cheap, but for my private well-practiced doctor and such customers. Tut, jealousy is hell; and they that will thrive must utter their wares as they can, and wink at small faults.

(II, i, 1-23)

The soliloquy lends credence to Geraldine's earlier whisperings to Mistress Glister. Riddled as it is with horn metaphor in addition to the pointed suggestion that Mistress Purge's body looks for Glister's ministrations, it seems to imply cuckoldry and Purge's full awareness of it. However, Purge's explanation of the chain of gullery and his insistence that he is in control of it give reason for pause. For Purge indicates that he knowingly uses his wife's charms to attract Doctor Glister and other customers, as, being
thus captivated, they buy drugs from him without objecting to his high prices.\textsuperscript{5} Then again, although according to Purge such customers sometimes get to kiss his wife at most, we wonder if he is not merely rationalizing his avarice, as his description of the situation coincides with Geraldine's earlier allegation about Mistress Purge and Glisten in all but degree of involvement. At any rate, the extent of the relationship between the apothecary's wife and the doctor is still nebulous. But it is finally defined after this series of oblique suggestions when Glisten himself, in an aside, refers to Mistress Purge as his "vessel of ease" before craftily causing the gallants Lipsalve and Gudgeon extreme discomfort for attempting to have an affair with her.

The comfortable triangular relationship formed basically by the Purges and Glisten does not remain undisturbed, however; and the fact that it does not precipitates most of the action in the sub-plot. Purge is forced to turn his attention away from the confidently sanctioned relationship between his wife and the doctor when he becomes suspicious that his wife is conducting extra-marital activities with the Family brethren. For his part, Glisten is routed from his comfortable position as Purge's cuckolder,\footnote{Purge's assertion of the reversal aspect of gullery is reminiscent of some of Valerio's speeches in Chapman's \textit{All Fools} (1599).}
though not by the brethren. As has been indicated, he must plot against Lipsalve and Gudgeon to protect his interest as a lover. But he must also defend his position as a husband when his wife becomes increasingly suspicious of his activities and the two gallants set about to cuckold him.

Throughout the play, Mistress Purge is characterized by her preciseness in dress and her Familist cant. We become increasingly aware that these are mere façades as we learn of her adulterous relationship with Glistner. But she also uses the "narrow-ruffed, strait-laced" clothes and the pious talk as camouflages for her untoward activities with the brethren, and the initial indication of this comes when she is actually on the way to one of the frequently referred to Family meetings. This is also the first time we are informed that some of the meetings are held at night. Club is carrying a smoking lantern, and, already rather begrimed from performing household duties all day, he gets too near the immaculate Mistress Purge, who scolds him: "Fie, fie, Club, go a' t'other side the way. Thou callowest me and my ruff: thou wilt make me an unclean member i' the congregation" (III, iii, l-3). The connection between the concern with fastidiousness of outer appearance and nocturnal activity gives a clue that Mistress Purge is to be suspected of sexual promiscuity at the Familist meetings, as it links her with one of Glistner's patients, a whore, whom Club has
earlier described as "she that paints a day-times, and looks fair and fresh on the outside, but in the night-time is filthier than the inside of Bocardo" (I, iii, 5-8).

On the heels of her reproval of Club, the apothecary's wife has a conversation with Dryfat, which further implicates her in venery with the brethren. Dryfat expresses surprise that a family exercise is being held at night. Mistress Purge confirms the fact and tells him that the meeting will also be conducted with the candles extinguished, as the Familists "fructify best i' th' dark: the glance of the eye is a great matter; it leads us to other objects besides the right" (III, iii, 21-24). Thinking he understands her point, Dryfat agrees that people can perform best when they are unhampered by the fetters of the body. When Mistress Purge seems not to understand the word "fetters," Dryfat substitutes "organs" as a synonym. Mistress Purge's ensuing remarks, laden with illogicality and cant, can only be demonstrated:

Mis. P. Organs? fie, fie, they have a most abominable squeaking sound in mine ears; they edify not a whit; I detest 'em. I hope my body has no organs.

Dry. To speak more familiarly, mistress Purge, they are the senses, the sight, hearing, smelling, taste, and feeling.

Mis. P. Ay, marry--marry, said I? Lord, what a word's that in my mouth!--you speak now master Dryfat; but yet let me tell you where you err too; this
feeling I will prove to be neither organ nor fetter; it is a thing—a sense did you call it?

Dry. Ay, a sense.

Mis. P. Why, then, a sense let it be,—I say it is that we cannot be without; for as I take it, it is a part belonging to understanding: understanding, you know, lifteth up the mind from the earth: if the mind be lift up, you know, the body goes with it: also it descends into the conscience, and there tickles us with our works and doings: so that we make singular use of feeling.

Dry. And not of the rest?

Mis. P. Not at that time; therefore we hold it not amiss to put out the candles, for the soul sees best i' th' dark.

Dry. You come to me now, mistress Purge.

(III, iii, 29-52)

Purge overhears the last part of this conversation. In language which is clearly suggestive, his wife tells Dryfat that the senses "are of much efficacy in carnal mixtures; that is when we crowd and thrust a man and a woman together" (III, iii, 54-56). Such "carnal mixtures" are definitely outside his realm of control, and he promptly vows to stop overlooking "small faults":

What, so close at it? I thought this was one end of your exercise: byrlady, I think there is small profit in this. I'll wink no more; for I am now tickled with a conceit that it is a scurvy thing to be a cuckold.

(III, iii, 57-60)

He immediately attempts to follow his wife and Dryfat into the meeting-house. However, he is not permitted to enter
because in giving the password he makes "an ellipsis of in" and says he is "a Familiar Brother" instead of "a Brother in the Family."

But Purge learns his lesson, and on the next occasion he succeeds in gaining admittance by giving the correct response to the door-keeper. Inside, in the darkness provided for "meditation," he slips between Lipsalve and Gudgeon, who are trying to get near his wife, and has his way with her. Thinking him a lover, she even allows him to take her wedding ring as a token of affection. He emerges a defeated man, lamenting, "Surely if affliction can being a man to heaven, I cannot see how any married man can be damned: I have made myself a plain cuckold" (IV, iv, 43-45). Although Purge has the wedding ring as proof of his wife's infidelity, he needs witnesses. And with the help of Lipsalve and Gudgeon, who overhear his complaint and offer to testify in his behalf, their own opportunity for a tryst having been foiled, he has enough evidence to carry his dissembling wife to court.

Just as Purge's avarice causes him to be a fit subject for cuckoldom, Glist er's inordinate concern with wealth is responsible for his potential involvement in a similar situation. As has been stated, because Glist er will not allow his niece to marry the landless Geraldine, the young
lover has set a plot afoot to gain Maria's hand by trying to discredit the doctor with allegations to his wife about his lasciviousness toward Mistress Purge and his niece. When Maria later becomes pregnant, Mistress Glister readily assumes that Glister is the father, as she does not know that Geraldine, having pretended to leave the country, has hidden in the trunk which was supposed to contain the possessions he left to Maria. Furthermore, when she reads the fictitious letter Geraldine has sent from "Thomasine Tweedles," an alleged country wench, begging Glister to provide for a bastard child, she has no doubts about her husband's lechery. She is determined to carry the doctor to court for his uncontrolled sexuality, but she also decides to furnish him with horns in revenge.

In much the same way that Glister's greed is responsible for his wife's decision to cuckold him, his trickery is responsible for supplying her with partners for her intentions. Unaware that Mistress Purge is Glister's mistress, Lipsalve and Gudgeon have separately solicited the doctor to use his "magic art" in enabling them to have an affair with her. Having led each of them to believe she will appear in the likeness of the other in Lipsalve's chamber, Glister has caused them to give each other a sound beating with whips before they realize he has tricked them.
Consequently, the two gallants swear to "cuckold him, that he shall not be able to put his head in at 's doors" (III, vi, 57-58). Their plan, to which Mistress Glister agrees for the reasons previously indicated, is to obtain Glister's consent to stay at his house for a few days while he treats them for wind-colic and thus, having ready access to his wife, to supply him with horns. But the doctor overhears their scheme; and instead of treating them for their alleged ailment, he plies them with pills that have extreme purgative powers and so drains them of energy that they cannot carry through their adulterous plot.

A mock court set up by Geraldine is the scene for the unraveling of plots. Geraldine is disguised as judge, Dryfat as proctor, and Club as crier. Purge accuses his wife of cuckolding him and asks that his witnesses Lipsalve and Gudgeon be called. But Glister's physic still has the gallants in tow, and they have neither energy nor desire to give meaningful testimony against Mistress Purge. Purge, however, still has the wedding ring. When his wife is confronted with this evidence, she first maintains that she does not know how he got it as she gave it "to the relief of the distressed Geneva." Confident that he has trapped her, Purge then relates that he secured the ring from her in the Familist meeting when he "thrust in amongst the rest." But even an accusation based on first-hand information will not
stand before Mistress Purge, who is adept at making sense of nonsense, nonsense of sense. She is in fine form as she hastily and righteously retorts,

Husband, I see you are hoodwinked in the right use of feeling and knowledge,--as if I knew you not then as well as a child knows his own father! Look in the posy of my ring: does it not tell you that we two are one flesh? and hath not fellow-feeling taught us to know one another as well by night as by day? Husband, husband, will you do the blind jade, break your neck down a hill because you see it not? ha' you no light of nature in that flesh of yours?--

Now, as true as I live, master doctor, I had a secret operation, and I knew him then to be my husband e'en by very instinct.

(V, iii, 288-98)\(^6\)

The "judge" finds Mistress Purge innocent of the charges brought against her. Furthermore, he berates Purge for being a jealous husband and then mockingly suggests how he and all husbands like him can avoid being cuckolded:

You have your ring that has made this combustion and uproar: keep that still; swear it; and here by my edict, be it proclaimed to all that are jealous, to wear their wives' ring[s] still on

\(^6\)It has been generally noted that Mistress Purge's defense recalls Falstaff's "instinctive recognition" of Prince Hal ("I know ye as well as he that made ye"--1 Henry IV, II, iv). However, in the fifth story of the seventh day in the Decameron, a cuckoldling wife, having confessed her infidelity to her jealous husband who has disguised himself as a priest, uses a defense which is also strikingly similar to Mistress Purge's ("Deemest thou, husband mine, I am as blind of the eyes of the body as thou of those of the mind? Certes, no; I perceive at first sight who was the priest that confessed me and know that thou wast he"). Though this wife actually does recognize her husband, she uses the confession as a means of curing him of his jealousy so that she may continue cuckoldling him unsuspected.
their fingers, as best for their security, and the only charm against cuckoldry. (V, iii, 416-21)

For her part, Mistress Purge is still unscathed after Purge, tempered by his reproof, asks her "to come no more at the Family." She both promises to be ruled by his wishes and assures him she will continue to cuckold him, as she answers, "Truly, husband, my love must be free still to God's creatures; yea, nevertheless, preserving you still as the head of my body, I will do as the spirit shall enable me" (V, iii, 425-28).

Of course, Glister does not fare well at all in the trial, for the "judge" uses the falsely based charges relating to the doctor's sexual adventures with Maria and "Thomasine" to win his consent to marry his niece. Saying that he will check his austerity because of the reverence of Glister's calling as a doctor, the "judge" offers to persuade Geraldine to wed the pregnant Maria and father the child if Glister will "launch with a thousand pound, besides her father's portion." Glister consents; Geraldine, Dryfat, and Club discover themselves; and the play ends abruptly with Geraldine's promise to "satisfy at full" whatever doubt remains.

Within the logic of the play, however, Geraldine can be expected to allay confusion only with reference to Maria's pregnancy and the letter from "Thomasine," for he was not
involved in the charges Purge brought against his wife. Clearly, Middleton himself meant to "wink at Mistress Purge's small faults," as he characterizes the cant-spouting apothecary's wife as the traditional clever wife who knows how to cover her cuckolding activities and who, if caught, can still manage to appear innocent. However, in maintaining her thus, he sacrifices the credibility of Mistress Glister and further confuses the already confused point of view of the main plot.

To recapitulate, we know that an affair does exist between Mistress Purge and Glister, and we know that Geraldine tells Mistress Glister about it. But we know also that Mistress Glister places some credence in the information because she is obviously curious about Mistress Purge and her husband when she asks Club some pointed questions:

and how does thy mistress? was she at the Family today?

...  

And, I prithee, Club, what kind of creatures are these Familists?

...  

but tell me, doth she not endeavor to bring my doctor of her side and fraternity?  

(II, iv, 61-80)  

And she has every reason to believe that Geraldine's allegation about Glister and Mistress Purge is true once she is convinced that her husband has impregnated Maria. After all,
Geraldine told her of her husband's adultery at the same time he told her of his incestuous intentions towards his niece. Then, too, the letter from "Thomazine" furnishes her with further "proof" that Glistor is lecherous. Yet after the inquiries to Club, she never mentions the relation between her husband and Mistress Purge. Even if it may be argued that she has "tangible proof" of the two affairs about which she becomes disturbed while she has only the allegation of one with reference to Mistress Purge, it may not be defended that she does not even bring up the matter in court when the apothecary's wife is being accused of cuckoldry. Purge, we know, has his own reasons for keeping quiet about Glistor and his wife. But the Mistress Glistor who creates a clamor in court and whom Dryfat describes as "an angry honeyless wasp" has no logical reason for not openly accusing her husband of being unfaithful to her with Mistress Purge.

So far as the point of view of the main plot is concerned, on the one hand, it seems to come under the category of the typical romantic comedy in which the young lovers must overcome the opposition of their parents (or relatives) to consummate their love in marriage. On the other hand, the plot seems not so clearly romantic because the lovers usually elicit sympathy as they counter their foes, and this attitude is difficult to maintain with Middleton's young
pair because his own attitude toward them seems ambivalent. For instance, some of the verbal echoes of Romeo and Juliet, of which there are numerous instances, seem to be a parody of the romantic view as opposed to a serious presentation. In addition, there is a sense of disharmony between Maria's high declaration of love as a spiritual ideal (III, i) and


8For instance, in the balcony scene (I, ii, 73-140), unaware that Geraldine, Lipsalve, and Gudgeon are below, Maria soliloquizes that if her flesh could "like swift-moving thoughts, transfer itself/ From place to place," she would move within Geraldine's orb and he in hers. Lipsalve immediately attaches a bawdy meaning to Maria's musings. This is to be expected from the libertine gallant. But it is not to be expected that Maria, discovering that Geraldine is below after her high-flown expressions of eternal love, should lower her tone and direct him to her chamber "by negatives":

I prithee, love, attempt not to ascend
My chamber-window by a ladder'd rope:
Th' entrance is too narrow, except this post,
Which may with ease,—Yet that is dangerous:
I prithee, do it not.

Maria's innuendo suggests that Lipsalve's interpretation was correct, that her longing for Geraldine is more physical than spiritual. It should be noted that there is finally not much difference in tone between this balcony scene and the obviously parodied one in which Lipsalve pretends to be Geraldine and tries to gain access to Maria's chamber (III, ii, 30-99).
the rather mundane condition of her pregnancy which we discover without any indication of a change in her attitude. 9

There is a similar disharmony between principle and practice when Geraldine sanctions Mistress Purge's cuckoldry at the end of the play. Earlier in the play, his principles are firm as he defends his desire to marry Maria against Lipsalve and Gudgeon:

Gud. A man may take more wife with one hand than he's able to put away with ten, Geraldine. A wife is such a cross, that all married men would most gladly be rid of.

Ger. And yet such a cross, that all bachelors would gladly be creeping to. Profane not thus the sacred name of love, You libertines, who never knew the joys Nor precious thoughts of two consenting hearts.

(I, ii, 10-17)

Later when Maria tells of the gallants' plight at the hand of her uncle after they have tried to cuckold him, Geraldine's remarks show his principles still unimpaired:

No matter, he serves them in their kind: they were infamous in court, and now they are grown

9Richard Levin, "The Family of Love and the Family of Lust," SEL, 6 (1966), 309-22, maintains that the Maria-Geraldine plot is romantic, that the love it emphasizes is pure, not puritanical—that is, it is physical as well as spiritual. This is certainly not to be denied, but it would seem that the aforementioned factors would necessitate more difficulty in interpreting the plot as purely romantic than Mr. Levin seems willing to admit. John V. Curry, Deception in Elizabethan Comedy (Chicago, 1955), p. 40, argues for the opposite point of view. The love affair, he says, is hardly romantic, as Geraldine, caught up in intrigue, is willing to go to any lengths to accomplish his end, even to besmirching the reputation of the girl he wants to marry.
as notorious in the city: they may happily
prove particles in our sport, and fit objects
for laughter.

(V, ii, 47-50)

And they are still intact when he as judge sends the gallants
back to court to tell how they have been punished for their
attempts at fornication and adultery in the city. His point
of view, then, is definitely inconsistent when, immediately
after reproving the gallants, he merrily and nonchalantly
bows before Mistress Purge and all other wives who would
cuckold their husbands.

ii.

There is no confusion as to what point of view
Middleton intends to be dominant in The Phoenix. In this
play, in which the tradition of the morality play is the
chief informing principle, the old Duke of Ferrara, who
has ruled the kingdom for forty-five years and who thinks
his demise near, prepares to relinquish the dukedom to his
wise and virtuous son Phoenix. At the suggestion of one
of his noblemen, however, the duke decides to send his son
abroad to gain experience through travel before assuming
the ducal position. Phoenix leaves, taking with him only
one servant so that he may see the faults of the people

10Alan C. Dessen, "Middleton's The Phoenix and the
Allegorical Tradition," SEL, 6 (1966), 291-308, discusses
Middleton's conscious employment of the dramatic conven-
tions of the morality play in The Phoenix.
unhampered by their knowing he is a prince. Unknown to anyone except his trusted servant Fidelio, however, he decides not to go abroad but instead to travel about Ferrara in disguise. This will enable him to uncover the treachery he suspects among his father's flattering nobles and also to "look into the heart and bowels of this dukedom, and . . . mark all abuses ready for reformation or punishment" (I, i, 100-2). The bulk of the play, then, consists of the display of various evil conditions within the kingdom and Phoenix's discovery of them.11

Middleton employs cuckoldry in two of these displays. The first one concerns Castiza, the mother of Phoenix's companion Fidelio, and the Captain, whom she married after the death of Fidelio's father. Having listened to his soldiering fellows' talk of the plunder their next voyage promises and the blissful state they enjoy as unmarried men, the Captain wants to disengage himself from the bonds of matrimony and go to sea once more. And to justify his attitude, he takes up the mantle traditionally given to merchants and

11Clifford Davidson, "The Phoenix: Middleton's Didactic Comedy," PLL, 4 (1968), 121-31, discusses the play in terms of the Renaissance concept of the necessity of a prince to be educated in the ways of the world and of his realm. N. W. Bawcutt, "Middleton's The Phoenix as a Royal Play," N & Q, n.s. 3 (1956), 287-88, and William Power, "The Phoenix, Raleigh, and King James," N & Q, n.s. 5 (1958), 57-58, suggest that the play is more specifically political. Both cite parallels between The Phoenix and the situation surrounding James' accession to the throne.
seamen, who are obliged to be away from their wives for long periods of time:

What a lustful passion came aboard of me, that I should marry? was I drunk? ... and to say truth, too, when I'm abroad, what can I do at home? no man living can reach so far: and what a horrible thing 'twould be to have horns brought me at sea, to look as if the devil were in 'th' ship! and all the great tempests would be thought of my raising! to be the general curse of all merchants! and yet they likely are as deep in as myself; and that's a comfort. O, that a captain should live to be married!

(I, ii, 43-56)

Castiza, however, is as chaste as her name implies; and so the cuckoldry in this episode is displayed not in her deeds but in the Captain's rationalizations and maneuverings. The Captain sees an opportunity to make his specious reasoning factual when a servant informs him that Proditor, the treacherous nobleman who has suggested that Phoenix should travel abroad, is approaching:

I must
Make much of him; he'll one day write me a cuckold;
It is good to make much of such a man:
E'en to my face he plies it hard,—I thank him.
(I, ii, 99-102)

After Proditor and the Captain engage in a preliminary conversation about Phoenix's leaving the country, carrying with him only the Captain's son-in-law Fidelio, "an inseparable knave," Proditor ambiguously asks for access to Castiza. The Captain, pretending obeisance to the nobleman, permits him to enter the room where his wife is and then gives forth
a mixture of cool rationalization and manufactured indignation for the action he has intended to perpetrate:

So; his way is in; he knows it.
We must not be uncourteous to a lord;
Warn him our house 'twere vild.
His presence is an honour; if he lie with our
wives, 'tis for our credit; we shall be the better trusted; 'tis a sign we shall live i' th' world.
O, tempests and whirlwinds! who but that man whom
the forefinger cannot daunt, that makes his shame
his living—who, but that man, I say, could endure
to be thoroughly married? Nothing but a divorce
can relieve me.

(I, ii, 138-47)

As the virtuous Castiza resists Proditor's advances, her husband's plans for using her infidelity as grounds for divorce are foiled. But his lawyer, Tangle, who "has more tricks and starting holes than the dizzy pates of fifteen attorneys" (I, ii, 154-56), advises him that he may still be rid of his wife by selling her to Proditor, who has bid five hundred crowns for her.

Learning of the Captain's plans from Tangle, Fidelio and Phoenix disguise themselves as the scrivener who is to read the terms of sale and a rich farmer's son who wants to invest in the Captain's forthcoming voyage, respectively, so that they can be privy to the transaction. Once the sale has been sealed, Fidelio and Phoenix discover themselves and beat the Captain, and then Phoenix, censuring him, banishes him from the land:

Monster, to seal spit thy abhorred foam
Where it may do least harm; there's air and room;
Thou 'rt dangerous in a chamber, virulent venom  
Unto a lady's name and her chaste breath.  
If past this evening's verge the dukedom hold thee,  
Thou art reserved for abject punishment.  
(II, ii, 319-24)

Ever the loyal wife, Castiza freely forgives her husband  
and would give him all the money from the sale which has  
been granted her as recompense for her wrong but for Phoenix  
who prevents her and closes the incident, advising her "Use  
slaves like slaves; wealth keeps their faults unknown" (II,  
ii, 340).12

The second display in which cuckoldry is used is  
diametrically opposed to the Castiza-Captain episode. In  
it, in contrast to the wife who is the epitome of chastity,  
the Jeweller's Wife is an unabashed cuckold of an elderly  
husband, who, according to her, "if he were married to a  
young virgin, he were able to break her heart, though he  
were able to break nothing else" (IV, ii, 31-32). In fact,  
in contrast to the Captain who dominates the first episode,  
so ineffectual is the husband that he never appears on the  
scene. We know that he is a breathing body only because his  
wife and her maid refer to him and resort to the usual  
tricks and maneuverings for keeping husbands unaware of

12The Captain is given the most severe punishment of  
any of the villains in the play. John B. Brooks in "Middle-  
ton's Stepfather and the Captain in The Phoenix," N & Q, n.s.  
8 (1961), 382-84, states that Middleton seems to have a per-  
sional grudge against the Captain and, citing parallels be-  
tween incidents in the play and actual situations relative to  
Middleton's own family, suggests that Middleton modeled the  
Captain after his stepfather, Thomas Harvey.
their cuckoldom. In addition, the sale motif in this episode operates in reverse. Instead of being sold by her husband to a would-be lover, the Jeweller's Wife sells her husband to buy a lover, in the sense that she steals money from him to maintain the Knight, whom she calls her "Pleasure" and who calls her his "Revenue."

This episode, however, is not as self-contained as that involving Castiza and the Captain— that is, as it is not resolved until the end of the play, it is interspersed with more of the other episodes and thus handily includes motifs common to them as well as to its obvious opposite. One aspect of the Jeweller's Wife's manipulation to lie with her lover, for instance, parallels that used in a scene involving her father, Falso. When the bold Jeweller's Wife tells the Knight that she has "got single" and that he shall accompany her to her father's house where she will spend the night, he asks, "'S foot, where shall I lie then?" Her answer:

What an idle question 's that! why, do you think I cannot make room for you in my father's house as well as in my husband's? they're both good for nothing else.

(I, v, 33-36)

And make room for him she does. By unblinkingly shifting ground, surrounding a base truth in language which will encourage her father to think she intends another meaning,
she causes him to welcome her "Pleasure" as her kinsman:

Fal. Daughter, what gentleman might this be? 

Jew. Wife. He's my husband's own brother, I can 
tell you, sir.

Fal. Thy husband's brother? speak certainly, 
prithee.

Jew. Wife. I can assure you, father, my husband 
and he has lain both in one belly.

Fal. I'll swear then he is his brother in-
deed and by the surer side.—I crave hearty pardon, 
sweet kinsman, that thou hast stood so long unsalu-
ted in the way of kindred: 
Welcome to my board: I have a bed for thee: 
My daughter's husband's brother shall command 
keys of my chests and chambers.

(I, vi, 148; 152-63)

We later learn the full extent of Falso's hospitality to 
his "daughter's husband's brother"; for after the two have 
spent the night at his house a second time and are pre-
paring to leave, Falso, pardoning the Knight for a light 
jibe at his status as a justice of the peace, says, "I 
make bold with you, kinsman, thrust my daughter and you 
into one chamber" (II, iii, 11-13), and then good-naturedly 
agrees with him that kinsmen may lie anywhere. We cannot 
be sure whether Falso knows that the Knight is not actually 
his daughter's brother-in-law, whether he knows the "true 
relation" of these chamber-mates; for his language is 
couched in ambiguity which will not permit us to penetrate
his level of awareness on this point. At any rate, the theme of incest suggested by the adulterers' sleeping together as alleged sister and brother-in-law is underscored by the actual incest which Falso proposes with his niece, who has become his ward after the death of his brother. After the Niece has refused to save Falso from "the charge of marriage," saying that Fidelio is her "vow'd husband," he counters her, arguing that husbands are strangers at first and that she is therefore considering lying with a stranger before lying with her own uncle. And when the Niece then argues directly against the sin of incest, he continues to shift the point in a way which, in its use of ambiguous terms, is directly reminiscent of the Jeweller's Wife's argument that the Knight is her kinsman:

Niece. Do you so far forget the office
Of blushing modesty? Uncles are half fathers;
Why, they come so near our bloods, they're
E'en part of it.

Falso. Why, now you come to me, niece: if your uncle be part of your own flesh and blood, is it not then fit your own flesh and blood should come nearest to you? answer me to that, niece.

(II, iii, 77-83)

The practice of twisting logic, of using words to confound the issue, which is subsidiary to these two episodes, is of course carried to full realization with Tangle, who has "words enow for [any] purpose" (I, iv, 171-72) and accordingly gives his clients faulty advice disguised by a
plethora of legal terminology to get money to pursue fabricated cases against his enemies. Moreover, Tangle engages in these activities for sheer pleasure and is thus connected with the Jeweller's Wife, whose basis for her relationship with the Knight is described by her term of endearment for him, "my Pleasure."

As has been previously stated, there can be no confusion as to Middleton's serious didactic impulses in The Phoenix. After each of the scenes in which an evil condition is displayed, Phoenix is ever present to remind us that an ideal does exist while he deplores a particular enormity. This is especially evidenced by the speech on Law (I, iv, 197-203), which he makes after hearing Tangle describe the tricks he practices as an attorney, and by the one on Matrimony (II, ii, 164-75), which resembles Milton's famous "Hail, wedded love, mysterious law" passage in Paradise Lost (IV, 750 ff.) and which he delivers while watching the Captain greedily count the five hundred crowns received for selling Castiza.

In addition, Fidelio, Castiza, the Niece, and Quieto, who loves peace and quiet and has repented his unnatural crimes before Phoenix meets him, deliver similar speeches against abuses and are suitably rewarded or held in high regard for their virtue. On the other hand, practically
all the characters guilty of enormities are either punished or brought into resolve. As has been established, early in the play, the Captain is banished to sea for his abuse of matrimony. The other base characters are dealt with before the court as the Duke reads the letter in which Phoenix exposes their evil deeds: Proditor is exiled for both his treachery and his attempted seduction of Castiza; Falso is stripped of his title as justice of the peace for his thievery as well as his attempts at incest; the two nobles Lussurioso and Infesto are reproved for their gaming, gulling, and bawdry and then brought under pardon; Tangle, who has gone mad upon having two of his cases defeated in the law courts, is cured by the judicious ministrations of Quieto in a scene which is similar to the purging of Crispinus in Jonson's *The Poetaster*. In fact, the only characters who are not treated with the degree of seriousness which their base deeds would seem to warrant are the Jeweller's Wife and the Knight. In handling them, Middleton seems to

13Lussurioso and Infesto seem to be an afterthought on Middleton's part. Unlike the other characters, they are not depicted in the act of committing their abuses, though they are included in the letter of exposure. This undoubtedly accounts for their pardon without any specific punishment other than reproval.

14Falso's servants, Latronello, Fucato, and Furtivo, who rob honest men under the protection afforded by his being a justice of the peace, are not specifically dealt with, as they are neither mentioned in the letter nor brought into court. However, it may be assumed that Falso's loss of office means that they will no longer enjoy their former immunity from justice.
sacrifice the resolution logically called for by the overall seriousness of the play to the levity traditionally associated with cuckoldry.

Phoenix discovered the Jeweller's Wife's infidelity when he accidentally jarred the ring of her door and thereby unknowingly gave the signal by which the maid was to admit the Knight, who was to be given a hundred and fifty pounds which she had filched from her husband. Although the Jeweller's Wife is brought into court with the other base characters, the Knight is not. For when he goes to get the money which his "Revenue" has promised him, the maid, having already admitted Phoenix earlier, thinks him an imposter and gives him a box on the ear for his trouble before shutting the door in his face. The Knight therefore does not have money to pay his tailor, and an officer takes him into custody. However, upon hearing of the Knight's arrest, a gentleman, who has apparently been one of his drinking companions, goes into action with a trick, the successful execution of which marks the Knight's escape from punishment for the debt to his tailor and for his being the Jeweller's Wife's "Pleasure" as well:

Gent. Art sure thou sawest him arrested, drawer?

Dra. If mine eyes be sober.

Gent. And that's a question. Mass, here he goes! he shall not go to prison; I have a trick shall bail him: away!

[Exit Drawer.]
[Blinds the first Officer, while the Knight escapes.]

**First Off.** Oi!

**Gent.** Guess, guess! who am I? who am I?

**First Off.** Who the devil are you? let go: a pox on you! who are you? I have lost my prisoner.

**Gent.** Prisoner? I've mistook; I cry you heartily mercy; I have done you infinite injury; a' my troth, I took you to be an honest man.

**First Off.** Where were your eyes? could you not see I was an officer?—Stop, stop, stop, stop!

**Gent.** Ha, ha, ha, ha!

*[Exeunt severally.]*

*(IV, iii, 65-78)*

Not as completely exonerated as the Knight, the Jeweller's Wife is lambasted in court by Phoenix:

Stand forth, thou one of those
For whose close lusts the plague ne'er leaves the city.
Thou worse than common! private, subtle harlot!
Thou dost deceive three with one feigned lip,
Thy husband, the world's eye, and the law's whip.
Thy zeal is hot, for 'tis to lust and fraud,
And dost not dread to make thy book thy bawd.
Thou'rt curse enough to husband's ill-got gains,
For whom the court rejects his gold maintains.
How dear and rare was freedom won to be!
Now few but are by their wives' copies free,

---

15The trick which the Gentleman employs here is very much like the one the clever wife uses in the well-known cuckoldry tale about the petticoat. Almost caught with her lover upon her husband's unexpected return, the wife pretends to be frightened and then asks her husband what he would do if he caught another man with her. "I'd kill him," he says, whereupon the wife replies, "No, you wouldn't, because I'd throw a petticoat over your head, like this, and hold you so tightly you couldn't see." The lover, who has been hiding under the covers, takes the hint while the wife is obstructing the husband's vision and escapes.
And brought to such a head, that now we see
City and suburbs wear one livery!

(V, i, 227-39)

But the Jeweller's Wife, twisting Phoenix's last point that
lustful wives now so trick their husbands, who have obtained
their wealth by devious means, that it is difficult to
determine whether the husbands or the wives should be more
severely chastised, tries to shift the focus from herself
to fortune-hunting knights or gallants who she claims "will
never leave marrying our widows till they make 'em all as
free as their first husbands" (V, i, 241-43). The wise
Phoenix is well aware of her attempted ploy, as he promptly
replies, "I perceive you can shift a point well" (V, i, 244).
Nonetheless, as sherepents with haste, offering to atone by
impeaching all other wanton women and then promising "I will
hereafter live so modestly, I will not lie with mine own
husband, nor come near a man in the way of honesty" (V, i,
251-53), she is still comically begging the question. She
is reminiscent of Rebecca Purge in her double-edged promise
of improvement. Certainly she has to exert no extra effort
not to lie with her husband, with whom she has not been en-
joying the pleasures of marital bliss anyway, as he is old
and impotent; and apparently it has not been her habit to
"come near a man in the way of honesty" for some time.

Phoenix does pardon the Jeweller's Wife, as he does
all the characters save the Captain and Proditor; but it
should be noted that his specific pardon of her is based on the fact that the virtuous Niece pleads for her ("Her birth was kin to mine; she may prove modest:/ For my sake I be-
seech you pardon her"—V, i, 261-62), not on the fact that he thinks her promise sincere. Thus, in resolving the sec-
ond cuckoldry episode, at least, Middleton seems to be ruled, as he had been in The Family of Love, more by convention than by dramatic necessity in the play.
CHAPTER 3: COMEDY, PHASE TWO

In each of four comedies which follow The Phoenix, Middleton again resolves his cuckoldry situations in the traditional manner—that is, by leaving the erring wife and her partner free to continue their affair. Manipulating the cuckoldry variously from Your Five Gallants (1604-6), in which he uses it basically adjunctively, to Michaelmas Term (1604-6), in which he incorporates it in his main plot, to A Mad World, My Masters (1604-6), in which he devotes most of his sub-plot to it, to the highly complex A Chaste Maid in Cheapside (1611<), in which he makes it the controlling focus of two plots, he of course continues to evidence the basic strengths that are apparent in The Family of Love and The Phoenix. But, in addition, he shows singular ability in handling factors that had discredited, or been discredited by, his open-ended resolution of the situations in the two earlier plays. In these four plays, characterizations are not violated to accommodate the resolution; romantic plots or elements are handled so that they creditably complement or emphasize it; and moral stance is focused in such a way as not to prove contradictory to it.
i.

So far as structure is concerned, perhaps no two plays in the Middleton canon are more similar than *The Phoenix* and *Your Five Gallants*. In both plays Middleton assembles a number of rogues engaged in folly and crime and places among them a figure who serves as their foil as he seeks to attain a worthy end. For just as in the former play Prince Phoenix goes into various disguises and discovers the truth about evil conditions in Ferrara (the Captain, Proditor, Falso, Tangle, the Jeweller's Wife) and thus educates himself for his future role as duke, Fitsgrave in the latter play assumes the disguise of Master Bousier, a university scholar and would-be gallant, and uncovers the truth about the evil conditions surrounding him (the five gallants), thereby assuring himself of gaining the hand of Katherine, the virtuous and wealthy orphan whom the gallants also sue.

In spite of these similarities, however, there are revealing differences between the two plays. As Alan Dessen points out, there is a difference in the stature of the respective heroes and in the nature and scope of the specific evils uncovered. Specifying the differences, he states that Fitsgrave is a suitor and a gallant whose successful espionage is placed in the context of a conventional romantic plot
with its emphasis upon winning the lady. Phoenix, on the other hand, is a prince and future ruler whose undercover action is seen in the context of the present and future health of the state. Moreover, Fitsgrave exposes the five gallants who represent five different types of London cheats, while Phoenix uncovers a panorama of vice, which represents the condition of an entire kingdom.\(^1\) There is yet another factor besides the reduction in grandiosity, as it were, which marks the difference between the two plays. In *Your Five Gallants*, as R. B. Parker suggests, the roles of the "good characters" are secondary to those of the criminals who engage in mutual cozenings in contrast to the relative emphasis of these roles in *The Phoenix*,\(^2\) a difference which is certainly implied by the focuses suggested by the two titles.

Admittedly, the displays of cuckoldry in *Your Five Gallants* are not of major proportions. For of the five rogues who dominate the action of the play—Frippery the broker-gallant, Primero the bawd-gallant, Pursenet the pocket-gallant, Goldstone the cheating-gallant, Tailby the whore-gallant—only Tailby regularly plays the lover to dissembling wives. Then, too, this is only part of his


"profession," for he is irresistible to single women as well. And Mistress Newcut, who is the only one of Tailby's married conquests actually dramatized in the play, is used chiefly as one of the devices for setting off Tailby, Primero, and Goldstone as successful practitioners of their art. Nevertheless, with both Tailby and Mistress Newcut, Middleton works the traditional motifs associated with lover and dissembling wife.

Tailby is typical of the young lover who can put a husband in relief, especially an old one, because of his sexual prowess. His servant Jack, who works without wages because the vails, or tips, he makes in running errands to Tailby's mistresses are more than sufficient, seems well aware of this, as he comments,

But those vails stand with the state of your body,
Sir, as long as you hold up your head; if that
droop once, farewell you, farewell I, farewell all;
and droop it will, though all the candles in Europe
should put their helping hands to't.

(IV, ii, 24-28)

Tailby, too, indicates that he knows the maintenance of his attractiveness to women depends largely upon the carnal. When he is being robbed by the masked Pursenet on the way to accommodate one of his mistresses from whom he has received a typical summoning letter ("My husband is rode from home:
make no delay; I know if your will be as free as your horse,
you will see me ere dinner"—III, i, 1-3), he begs, "Pray
use me like a gentleman; take it all, but injury not my body" (III, ii, 45-46). Undoubtedly, he is concerned that his "sexual parts" not be maimed as well as that his face not be disfigured.

The dissembling wives reward Tailby for the physical pleasure he brings them. Conveniently, the morning after he has lost his clothes gambling with Goldstone's man Fulk, he is restored to finery by three of his grateful mistresses. First, Mistress Cleveland sends her servant to "commend her secrets unto him" and present him with a new satin suit. Next, an emissary arrives from Mistress New-block with a letter and a new beaver hat "with a band best in fashion." And finally, Mistress Tiffany sends him ten pounds. Mistress Tiffany, however, has taken special precaution that her extra-marital affair will not be revealed, leading the servant who delivers the ten pounds to think that she is sending back not a love-token but merely some money which Tailby has paid her to furnish him with some cloth. Typical of the lover who relies on his mistresses's ingenuity for maintaining deception, Tailby can well appreciate her stratagem:

--Ha, ha!

This wench will live: why, this was sent like a Workwoman now; the rest are butchers to her.
Faith, I commend her cunning; she's a fool
That makes a servant fellow to her heart;
It robs her of respect, damns up all duty,
Keeps her in awe e'en of the slave she keeps:  
This takes a wise course—I commend her more—  
Sends back the gold that I never saw before.  
(IV, ii, 82-91)

Nor is Mistress Newcut, in the play the first dis-
seeming wife to show an interest in Tailby, less careful  
of her reputation than Mistress Tiffany. As she enters  
Primero's brothel house, intent on choosing a gallant "for  
sheer pleasure and affection," she is concerned that she  
not be seen: "Is all clear? may I venture? am I not  
seen of the wicked?" (II, i, 3-4). Though it would at  
first seem that in using Primero as bawd Mistress Newcut  
is exercising no more caution than Tailby's mistresses who  
took their servants into their confidence, Primero's  
replies to her fervid questionings make it clear that,  
though she is concerned that she will be discovered, she  
is actually being very careful. For Primero's maintenance  
of the brothel house depends as much upon his discretion  
as her assignations do; and so he will not admit, even to  
her, that his house is other than completely respectable:

Strange absurdity, that you should come into my  
house, and ask if you be not seen of the wicked! push!  
I take 't unkindly, i' faith: what think you of my  
house?  
'tis no such common receptacle.  
(II, i, 5-8)

Somewhat reassured, Mistress Newcut apolozizes for her appre-
hension, while still maintaining that caution is the word:

Forgive me, sweet master Primero: I can be content  
to have my pleasure as much as another, but I must  
have a care of my credit; I would not be seen;
anything else. My husband's at sea, and a woman shall have an ill report in this world, let her carry herself never so secretly; you know it, master Primero.

(II, i, 9-14)³

And when, from the numerous gallants who parade through Primero's house, she chooses Tailby as the one with whom she would have a tryst, she does so without his having seen her, as, appropriate to her wariness, she has been positioned to observe from her "old spy-hole." For his part, Primero continues his role as unacknowledging bawd once Mistress Newcut has made her choice known. He uses skillful innuendo rather than direct language to convey Tailby to her, thereby furnishing himself as well as the dissembling wife with the needed veneer of respectability.

Later in the play when Mistress Newcut would again avail herself of Tailby's attentions, she continues to show that she values discretion. Like Mistress Tiffany, knowing the advantage of keeping servants unaware of their true mission, she sends her servant Marmaduke to invite her cousin Bungler to dinner. As she knows Bungler is acquainted with Tailby, she has Marmaduke specify that her cousin may also bring whatever other gentleman he pleases as his guest. This, she says to herself, is "as far as I durst go"; but

³Mistress Newcut is the typical dissembling wife of an absent seaman. It might be argued that here Middleton is dramatizing the wife the Captain pretends to have in The Phoenix.
she simultaneously reasons, "Why may he not then make choice
of master Tailby? had he my wit or feeling he would do 't"
(IV, vii, 17-19).

Bungler shows that he certainly has neither her wit
nor her feeling; he invites as his guest Goldstone, who
manages to compound theatrocity of not being Tailby by
effecting a trick to steal her bell-salt. But though Miss-
tress Newcut is cautious, she is not lacking when it comes
to taking advantage of a situation. For we learn that,
when her intentions toward Tailby miscarry, she seizes the
opportunity to lavish her favors promptly on the more ac-
cessible Goldstone, who later muses,

A fine provoking meal, which drew on apace
The pleasure of a day-bed, and I had it;
This her one ring can witness; when I parted
Who but sweet master Goldstone? I left her in a trance.
(IV, viii, 51-54)

As has been stated, cuckoldry forms only a minor part
of the incessant and abundant deception manifest in the play.
But cuckoldry is taken up again, significantly, in the dé-
nouement. Having discovered the "profession" of each of the
five gallants, Fitsgrave has caused them to prove their own
undoing by ironically acting out their true roles in a
masque presented before Katherine, who is to choose a hus-
band from among all her suitors (the five gallants and Fits-
grave). Katherine of course chooses Fitsgrave, who, since he
has revealed the roguishness of the gallants, is given the task
of providing their "doom." The punishment he decides upon is that each gallant (with the exception of Primero the bawd-gallant, who is to be whipped) shall choose a wife from those who have been their mistresses—three courtesans and Mistress Newcut, who has recently become widowed. The gallants first object that they will not marry strumpets; but Goldstone persuades his fellows that "'tis our best course to marry 'em" (V, ii, 79). The courtesans, in their turn, object to marrying such rascals as the gallants, until Mistress Newcut alerts them that as wives they will enjoy a legal protection for their amatory affairs which they will not have as single women:

By my troth, wenches, be ruled by me; let's marry 'em, and it be but to plague 'em; for when we have husbands we are under covert-baron,4 and may lie with whom we list! I have tried that in my t'other husband's days.

(V, ii, 82-86)

What is significant about the cuckoldry motif that is renewed with Mistress Newcut's suggestion is that it seems to fit the tone of the play. As has been previously stated, the dominant tone is set by the roguish gallants as opposed to the worthy Katherine and Fitsgrave, and thus Mistress Newcut's licentious suggestion seems appropriate.

4Bullen gives an explanatory note for this term drawn from Cowell's Interpreter: "Coverture is particularly applied in our common law to the estate and condition of a married woman, who by the laws of our realm is in potestate viri, and therefore disabled to contract to any to the prejudice of herself or her husband without his consent and privy, or at the least without his allowance and confirmation." The Works of Thomas Middleton, I, 168.
Moreover, when the courtesans all agree to marry the gallants and Goldstone expresses hesitation ("These forc'd marriages do never come to good"--V, ii, 89), Fitsgrave's hasty retort, which definitely sanctions the cuckoldry that Mistress Newcut and the courtesans propose ("How can they when they come to such as you?"--V, ii, 90), has at least a measure of credibility. For, as has been implied, in contrast to Phoenix, though we know Fitsgrave to be a "good character," his worthiness is never dramatized to the extent that we are inevitably led to regard his remark as inconsistent with his character.

ii.

The main action of Michaelmas Term centers upon the maneuverings of Ephestian Quomodo, a crafty woolen-draper, to gain possession of a rich country estate and his loss of that prize as a result of overreaching himself. By master-minding his "spirits" Shortyard and Falselight through a series of ruses, Quomodo becomes proprietor of the rich Essex lands of Richard Easy, who, as a young country gentleman eager to adopt the sophisticated ways of the city, falls ready victim of the woolen-draper's cony-catching operations. Then, anxious to see how his son and heir Sim would manage these lands after his death, Quomodo feigns his own demise and returns disguised as a beadle, only to find that Shortyard
has cozened Sim out of the lands and then timorously relinquished them to Easy upon being lambasted for his knavery.

W. D. Dunkel, Richard Barker, and Richard Levin are all critical of Middleton's characterization of Quomodo and Easy in this play, which has as its theme "the duper duped" or "the tables turned." In order to effect Easy's triumph over Quomodo, Dunkel and Barker assert, Middleton makes Quomodo suddenly become stupid and Easy suddenly become clever. Levin, arguing along similar lines, states that Quomodo's decision to stage his own death is unmotivated and that furthermore he is so vividly and complicatedly presented that it is difficult to sympathize at the end with Easy, who has been gullible and passive. Their objections may be questioned, however, on two points—the emphasis which they place on Easy and the element of suddenness which they attach to character motivation.

First of all, Quomodo is "the duper duped" not only because he loses the lands he has so craftily gained but because his wife Thomasine makes him a cuckold, as, thinking him dead, she promptly marries the dispossessed Easy. And it should be noted that it is Thomasine's assuming an active

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6Michaelmas Term, Regents Renaissance Drama Series (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1966), pp. xviii-xix.
role on Easy's behalf more than his cleverness or strengthening as a character which is responsible for his regaining the lands. At one point, Easy does lash out against Quomodo for seizing his property (IV, i, 60-61), but after that, it seems that he would quietly accept his ill usage and remain in the background, but for Thomasine. It is she who secretly sends him a hundred pounds "to comfort his heart." It is she who, after Quomodo's "death," plans to see his misfortunes requited (IV, iii, 40-41). It is she who engineers the marriage immediately after Quomodo's "funeral" (IV, iv, 72-81). It is she who prompts Easy to launch forth in the vituperation that results in Shortyard's returning the titles to his lands (V, i, 17-36). And when Quomodo returns disguised as a beadle seeking recompense for his services on behalf of "the deceased," it is she who is responsible for his signing the memorandum and thus unwittingly providing the means by which Easy later legally regains his lands (V, i, 82-101).

It would thus seem appropriate to discuss the issue of character motivation from the standpoint of Quomodo and Thomasine, not Quomodo and Easy. And as Quomodo's feigned death marks the pivot upon which his weakening, or fall, and Thomasine's strengthening, or rise, both take an active turn, the extent to which we are prepared for their actions
which are responsible for the dénouement can be determined by concentrating on their characterizations up to this point.

Quomodo himself specifies the reasons for his necrotic performance. Through it, he will

in disguise note the condition of all: how pitiful my wife takes my death, which will appear by November in her eye, and the fall of the leaf in her body, but especially by the cost she bestows upon my funeral, there shall I try her love and regard; my daughter's marrying to my will and liking; and my son's affection after my disposing; for, to conclude, I am as jealous of this land as of my wife, to know what would become of it after my decease.

(IV, i, 109-18)

Though Susan Quomodo's romantic life is actually given rather scant attention in the play, that Quomodo should wonder whether his daughter will marry to his "will and liking" is not uncharacteristic of him. For at an earlier point in the play, he and Thomasine have debated over which of her two suitors Susan should marry. Thomasine has favored Rearage, a real gentleman with lands of his own, even if he is in debt, as a son-in-law. But Quomodo has favored Lethe, a social upstart who has recently come up to London from the country and has managed to get a position at court. And he has been specific in citing the advantages that Susan's marriage to Lethe will afford. It will, he has said, "make us rich in custom, strong in friends, happy in suits; bring us into all the rooms a' Sundays, from the leads to the cellar . . . ." (II, iii, 41-44).
And that Quomodo should wonder how his son would manage the rich lands and how deeply his wife would grieve if he were dead does not seem uncharacteristic of him in view of the "jealousy" he has expressed of both land and wife at earlier points in the play. His initial speech, in which he converses with Shortyard is indicative:

**Quo.** My journey was toward Essex--

**Sho.** Most true.

**Quo.** Where I have seen what I desire.

**Sho.** A woman?

**Quo.** Puh, a woman! Yet beneath her,
That which she often treads on, yet commands her:
Land, fair neat land.

**Sho.** What is the mark you shoot at?

**Quo.** Why, the fairest to cleave the heir in twain,
I mean his title; to murder his estate,
Stifle his right in some detested prison:
There are means and way enow to hook the gentry.
Besides our deadly enmity, which thus stands,
They're busy 'bout our wives, we 'bout their lands.

**Sho.** Your revenge is more glorious.
To be a cuckold is for one life;
When land remains to you, your heir, your wife.

**Quo.** Ah, sirrah, do we sting 'em?

(I, i, 102-16)

On the basis of this passage alone, it would seem that Quomodo holds the land in higher regard than he does his wife, both because of his own statements and because he does not deny Shortyard's contention that a gentleman who is
gulled out of his lands loses more than a husband who is cuckolded. But the relative position he allots them is really a manifestation of the importance he attaches to the real estate rather than an indication of nonchalance toward Thomasine. For it will be noted that he equates them, if indeed he does not imply that he is more concerned about Thomasine, when, in giving reasons for acting out his demise, he says he is as jealous of the land as of his wife. Besides, in disclosing his plans to Shortyard for cozening Easy, his expression of confidence that his confederate will be discreet shows his guardedness toward her ("But now to thee, my true and secret Shortyard,/ Whom I dare trust e'en with my wife"—I, i, 90-91).

There are further manifestations of Quomodo's excessive watchfulness and concern over wife and lands. For instance, when the woolen-draper enters his shop as Thomasine sends Mother Guel with a harsh message to Lethe, whom she loathes, he says,

How now? what prating have we here? whispers? dumbshos? Why, Thomasine, go to; my shop is not altogether so dark as some of my neighbors', where a man may be made a cuckold at one end, while he's measuring his yard at t' other. (II, iii, 34-38)

And Thomasine seems mindful that Quomodo's protestations about infidelity are not mere sounds, as she rationalizes
not informing Easy that her husband is gulling him:

I die
As often as thou drink'st up injury;
Yet have no means to warn thee from 't, for he
That sows in craft does reap in jealousy.
(III, iv, 267-70)

As far as the land is concerned, Quomodo's lyrical descriptions of it and his speculations on the pleasure and respectability it will afford him, his family, and his friends are indications of the value it holds for him:

O that sweet, neat, comely, proper, delicate parcel of land! like a fine gentlewoman i' th' waist, not so great as pretty, pretty; the trees in summer whistling, the silver waters by the banks harmoniously gliding. I should have been a scholar; an excellent place for a student; fit for my son that lately commenced at Cambridge, whom now I have placed at inns of court.
(II, iii, 91-97)

A fine journey in the Whitsun holidays, i' faith, to ride down with a number of citizens and their wives, some upon pillions, some upon side-saddles, I and little Thomasine i' th' middle, our son and heir, Sim Quomodo, in peach-colour taffeta jacket, some horse-length, or a long yard before us;--there will be a fine show on's, I can tell you;--where we citizens will laugh and lie down, get our wives with child against a bank, and get up again.
(IV, i, 74-82)

Again, then, Quomodo's decision to feign his death as a means of determining how his lands will be handled and how his wife will be affected does not seem unnatural or unmotivated in view of the attitude he has manifested toward them throughout the play.  

7Many critics have compared Middleton's play with Jonson's Volpone (1605), in which the downfall of the crafty Volpone is also precipitated by his decision to feign death.
Nor is Thomasine's interest in Easy and activity on his behalf an incredible development. For earlier in the play her licentiousness and her sympathy for Easy, both of which are factors that account for her attraction to him, are well established. Her response to the letter which Lethe sends her shows her wanton nature. Lethe egotistically proposes an affair with Thomasine, saying that if she will consent to Susan's marriage to him, it will mean that the two of them can better find opportunity to be together without arousing suspicion. Thomasine, infuriated, sends a verbal message back by Mother Cruel:

Were these fit words, think you, to be sent to any citizen's wife: to enjoy the daughter, and love the mother too for a need? I would foullly scorn that man that should love me only for a need, I tell you. And here the knave writes again, that by the marriage of my daughter, 'a has the better means and opportunity of myself. He lies in his throat like a villain, he has no opportunity of me, for all that; 'tis for his betters to have opportunity of me, and that he shall well know. A base, proud knave! 'A has forgot how he came up, and brought two of his countrymen to give their words to my husband for a suit of green kersey, 'a has forgot all this. And how does he appear to me when

Generally, in the comparisons Michaelmas Term comes off as being the lesser work of art, the critics for the most part maintaining that the "death" of Volpone is the crux of the designing of Jonson's play whereas Quomodo's death seems a superimposition in Middleton's. (See Ruby J. Chatterji, "Unity and Disparity in Michaelmas Term," SEL, 8 [1968], 358-59; see also Barker, p. 50, and Levin, Michaelmas Term, Regents Renaissance Drama Series, p. xviii.) In spite of borrowed features, Middleton's play is his own. Though Quomodo's "death" is not validated in the same way that Volpone's is, it is not unsubstantially motivated, as the preceding discussion establishes.
his white satin suit's on but like a maggot crept out of a nutshell, a fair body and a foul neck; those parts that are covered of him looks indifferent well, because we cannot see 'em; else, for all his cleans ing, pruning, and pairing, he's not worthy a broker's daughter, and so tell him.

(II, iii, 1-18)

But when Quomodo enters and asks what is astir as Mother Gruel leaves, Thomamine calmly replies, "Only commendations sent from master Lethe, your worshipful son-in-law that should be" (II, iii, 39-40). And as the conversation continues and Quomodo and Susan argue for Lethe's merits while Thomamine argues for Rearage's, she still does not divulge that Lethe has sought to establish an adulterous relationship with her. The fact that she keeps the matter secret is indeed revealing. For she knows that Quomodo is jealous and that such information would cause him to vent his wrath against Lethe, whom she loathes, and probably endorse Susan's marriage to Rearage, of whom she approves. But, as her remarks to Mother Gruel suggest, she objects to being approached by the obnoxious upstart, but not to being approached per se. Thus, by not disclosing the true nature of Lethe's letter, she lessens the possibility that Quomodo, having been aroused by the actuality of this instance, will become more suspicious and watchful of her than he is already and thereby increases her own chances of being able to take advantage of more desirable offers, should they be tendered.
Thomasine's amorous attachment to Easy does not come about as a result of his suggesting an affair with her, however; rather it is initiated when he politely salutes her with a kiss upon being introduced to her as Quomodo, desirous of appearing to be one who observes the amenities, fawningly gives him leave to do so. Thomasine's reaction to the kiss ("Beshrew my blood, a proper springall and a sweet gentleman"—II, iii, 444-45) is undoubtedly a further manifestation of the sympathy she has earlier expressed for Easy while watching from the gallery as Quomodo and his rogues conduct parts of their elaborate scheme for cozening him out of his lands (II, iii, 226-31, 376-78). But it is also a further manifestation of her licentiousness. For when she next makes a comment about Easy, she is explicit about her amorous feelings toward him as she expresses her frustration at not being able to tell him of Quomodo's trickery:

My love is such to thee, that I die
As often as thou drink'est up injury;
Yet have no means to warn thee from 't, for he
That sows in craft does reap in jealousy.

(III, iv, 267-70)

And as has been previously indicated, she later secretly sends him money after he has lost his land and then promptly marries him once Quomodo removes himself from the scene.

When Quomodo returns in disguise, he receives the first indication that things are not going exactly as he
would expect when Sim, to whom his cherished lands have fallen, openly denounces his "dead" father for his knavery. But Quomodo is not especially disturbed because his thinks he has the remedy to this situation well in hand:

He shall be speedily disinherited, he gets not a foot, not the crown of a mole-hill: I'll sooner make a courtier my heir, for teaching my wife tricks, than thee, my most neglectful son.

(IV, iv, 49-52)

Ironically, his exaggerated expression of determination to keep Sim from ever possessing the land turns out to have significant basis in fact as events continue to unfold. For when he proceeds to his shop and signs the memorandum as a means of discovering himself to "little Thomasine," he in effect makes an heir of Easy (no courtier but a country gentleman) who, though he has not needed to instruct Quomodo's wife in trickery, has nonetheless cuckolded him. Quomodo is not aware of what he has done with reference to the land at this point, however. But he does realize that he has been horned when he hears Thomasine refer to Easy as "sweet husband," and he is thoroughly enraged:


Tho. O, he's as like my t' other husband as can be!

Quo. I'll have judgment; I'll bring you before a judge: you shall feel, wife, whether my flesh be dead or no; I'll tickle you, i' faith, i' faith.

(Exit.

(V, i, 128-35)
In court, in presenting his case to gain back his wife, Quomodo is forced to acknowledge his trickery in seizing the rich Essex lands. Thus, the judge can also rule on the proper disposition of that property. He proclaims Easy again legal owner of it, as Shortyard had not only cheated Sim out of the land but in cowardice given it back to Easy before Quomodo signed the memorandum, which read: "Memorandum, that I have received of Richard Easy all my due I can claim here i' th' house, or any hereafter for me: in witness whereof I have set mine own hand, 
EPHESTIAN QUOMODO" (V, i, 113-16).

On the other hand, the judge rules that "after some penance and the dues of law" (V, iii, 58), Thomasine is still Quomodo's wife. Actually Middleton could have allowed the judge to declare Thomasine Easy's wife by considering the memorandum to be Quomodo's statement of her official release from the marriage contract as he had done with reference to Easy and the land. And though his failure to do so may be a justifiable point of criticism as far as the dénouement is concerned, it is also a measure of his art as a dramatist. By having the judge decide thus, he effectively underscores the theme of "the duper duped." For when Thomasine anticipates that the judge will invalidate her marriage to Easy, she expresses consternation, exclaiming "O heaven!" (V, iii, 57). And after the judge has made
his ruling, when Lethe, who has been summoned before the
same court for his lechery and deception and whom Susan
denounces as her choice for a husband, \(^8\) addresses her as
"Mistress Quomodo," she snaps, "Inquire my right name again
next time," implying that she still considers herself
"Mistress Easy." Thus, Middleton shows the tables doubly
turned on Quomodo in this respect; for he must not only live
with the knowledge that he has been surely cuckolded but
with the fear that he may continue to be, for "little
Thomasine" considers herself contracted to another.

iii.

A substantial portion of the sub-plot of \textit{A Mad
World, My Masters} is devoted to cuckoldry, which sprouts,
as it were, from Harebrain's determination not to wear the
horns. Thinking that a lover may try to approach his wife
under the cover of night, Harebrain first employs two
watchmen, who having been told that they are to guard the
house from robbers, actually serve as protection against
would-be cuckold-makers. He then hires as his wife's com-
panion Frank Gullman, whom he takes to be a "sweet virgin,"

\(^8\)The romantic plot concerning Susan and her two
suitors is, as has been previously indicated, scantily de-
veloped. But it will be seen that Susan's denunciation of
Lethe, Quomodo's choice for her mate, as well as Sim's
losing the lands to Shortyward and therefore to Easy, also
contributes to the tables' being turned on Quomodo.
and instructs her to "read to her [Mistress Harebrain] the horrible punishments for itching wantonness, the pains allotted for adultery; tell her her thoughts, her very dreams are answerable, say so; rip up the life of a courtesan, and show how loathsome 'tis" (I, ii, 54-58).

In reality, however, Frank is herself a courtesan and also the bawd of Penitent Brothel, who cannot check his wild passions for Mistress Harebrain. Thus, confident that he employs Frank to his advantage, Harebrain ironically seals his own undoing; for the accomplished bawd instructs his wife in dissembling:

When husbands in their rank'st suspicions dwell
Then 'tis our best art to dissemble well;
Put but these notes to use that I'll direct you,
He'll curse himself that e'er he did suspect you.
Perhaps he will solicit you, as in trial,
To visit such and such; still give denial;
Let no persuasions sway you; they're but fetches
Set to betray you, jealousies, slights and reaches.
Seem in his sight t' endure the sight of no man;
Put by all kisses till you kiss in common:
Neglect all entertain; if he bring in
Strangers, keep you your chamber, be not seen.
If he chance steal upon you, let him find
Some book lie open 'gainst an unchaste mind,
And coted Scriptures; though for your own pleasure
You read some stirring pamphlet, and convey it
Under your skirt, the finest place to lay it.
This is the course, my wench, t' enjoy thy wishes;
Here you perform best when you most neglect;
The way to daunt is to outvie suspect.
Manage these principles but with art and life,
Welcome all nations, thou'rt an honest wife.

(I, ii, 79-100)
This advice does not go unheeded. For once Frank sets a scheme in motion by feigning a fatal illness, Mistress Harebrain, who has agreed to an assignation with Penitent, demonstrates adeptness according to the pattern the bawd has prescribed. When Harebrain sends his servant Ralph to his wife's room to bid her come and greet their guests, the two brothers Inesse and Possibility, he returns saying that his mistress begs to be excused, as she has a fit of ague. But when the brothers leave, Ralph tells Harebrain that his wife's true message was that since the illness of the modest virgin Frank Gullman, the only company she desires is Harebrain himself. And reflecting upon her recent actions, which unknown to him are executions of Frank's instructions, Harebrain pronounces his jealousy unfounded. Thus when Mistress Harebrain continues her deception by telling her husband she will not allow anyone but him to accompany her to her sick friend's house as otherwise rumors are likely to be spread that she is seeking a lover, he is quite willing to make the journey with her.

Harebrain has been perfectly set up for his horns. In part of what Standish Henning describes as one of the finest scenes in the play, his wife and Penitent, who has been posing as Frank's physician, steal to a convenient

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spot and cuckold him, while the allegedly ill courtesan and bawd, who has seen him positioned to listen at the door, masterfully conducts a "conversation" with his wife:

Har. I'll listen: now the flesh draws nigh her end, At such a time women exchange their secrets And ransack the close corners of their hearts: What many years hath whelm'd, this hour imparts. [Aside.

Cour. Pray, sit down, there's a low stool. Good, mistress Harebrain, this was kindly done,--huh,-- give me your hand,--huh,--alas. how cold you are! even so is your husband, that worthy, wise gentleman; as comfortable a man to woman in my case as ever trod--huh--shoe-leather. Love him, honour him, stick by him; he lets you want nothing that's fit for a woman; and, be sure on 't, he will see himself that you want it not.

Har. And so I do, i' faith; 'tis my right humour. [Aside.

Cour. You live a lady's life with him; go where you will, ride when you will, and what you will.

Har. No so, not so, neither; she's better looked to. [Aside.

Cour. I know you do, you need not tell me that: 'Twere e'en pity of your life, i' faith, if ever you should wrong such an innocent gentleman. Fie, Mrs. Harebrain, what do you mean? come you to dis- comfort me? nothing but weeping with you?

Har. She's weeping! t' as made her weep: my wife shows her good nature already. [Aside.

... 

Cour. Will you be going then?

Har. Fall back, she's coming. [Aside.

Cour. Thanks, good mistress Harebrain; welcome, sweet mistress Harebrain; pray commend me to the good gentleman your husband.

(III, ii, 187-235)
Buoyed by the success of their first assignation, the two lovers plan to meet again in three days when Harebrain is to be away from home. However, before that time a succubus in the shape of Mistress Harebrain appears to Penitent and tempts him. But Penitent resists the demon; and in a fit of remorse he rushes to his mistress, lectures her on the immorality of adultery, and solicits her repentance. Harebrain, again eavesdropping, overhears only the last part of their conversation and ironically assumes that there has never been anything untoward in his wife's and Penitent's relationship:

Enter Harebrain behind.

[Pen. B.] Live honest, and live happy, keep thy vows; She's part a virgin whom but one man knows; Embrace thy husband, and beside him none; Having but one heart, give it but to one.

Mis. Har. I vow it on my knees, with tears true bred, No man shall ever wrong my husband's bed!

Pen. B. Rise; I'm thy friend for ever.

Har. [Coming forward.] And I thine For ever and ever!—Let me embrace thee, sir. Whom I love even next unto my soul, And that's my wife. Two dear rare gems this hour presents me with, A wife that's modest and a friend that's right: Idle suspect and fear, now take your flight! (IV, iv, 72-85)

William W. E. Slights and Levin both assert that the Penitent-Harebrain plot is brought to a rather abrupt end by the appearance of the succubus to Penitent and the hasty
repentance of the two lovers.\textsuperscript{10} This would also seem to be the opinion of others who culminate their analyses of this plot with discussions of Penitent's sense of sin and the appropriateness of the use of a supernatural agent as a tool for his conversion.\textsuperscript{11} Actually, however, the scene with the succubus and the subsequent conversions marks only the end of the adulterous relationship in the Penitent-Harebrain plot, not the end of the plot itself. The suggestion that it is extended beyond this point comes at the end of the conversion scene, when Harebrain, upon receiving an invitation to Sir Bounteous Progress's feast, immediately invites his newly declared "true friend" to attend as his guest. Furthermore, when the Harebrains and Penitent attend the feast, which spans the entire last act, their role is not merely perfunctory. Rather, it offers a meaningful contribution to the theme of the play, which is made manifest chiefly through the outcomes of Follywit and Frank, the prime tricksters in the play.

In the main plot, the young rake Follywit conducts a triple foist with elaborate disguises, whereby he tricks Sir Bounteous, his grandfather, out of money and valuables


\textsuperscript{11}See Barker, p. 61, and Henning, p. xiii.
to support his living as a spark. In his first scheme, he gains access to his grandfather's house disguised as the wealthy Lord Owemuch, with his cohorts pretending to be his servants. During the night, he and his companions disguise themselves again and rob Sir Bounteous. Next he disguises himself as Frank, who is Sir Bounteous's courtesan, and thereby is afforded the opportunity to steal some jewels from his grandfather's casket. And finally, under the guise of a strolling entertainer, he gulls his grandfather out of a chain, a jewel, and a watch by pretending to need them as props for the play with which he is supposedly about to entertain Sir Bounteous and the guests at the feast. After his third foist, however, he is uncovered as a trickster when he returns to his grandfather's house as himself and the watch alarm goes off in his pocket.\(^\text{12}\) When Follywit tries to explain his action by saying it was a jest to prolong his grandfather's life, the old gentleman shows no signs of being amused. Follywit continues his attempt to placate Sir Bounteous, vowing that he will live soberly. As proof of his intention, he points to his recently acquired wife, "both a gentlewoman and a virgin," who is attending the feast. The wife turns out to be none other

\(^{12}\)John V. Curry, Deception in Elizabethan Comedy (Chicago, 1955), pp. 108-9, makes the point that the recoil of Follywit's final trick upon him is due to "an excess of confidence and impudence," a characteristic which is also evident in his previous tricks.
than Frank Gullman, Sir Bounteous's own courtesan. And, seeing the irony of his witty grandson's being outwitted, the thrice-robbed Sir Bounteous merrily forgets his losses, awards Follywit a thousand pounds as a wedding gift, and ends the play with the aphorism,

Who lives by cunning, mark it, his fate's cast;  
When he has gull'd all, then is himself the last. 
(V, ii, 298-99)

There is almost an irresistible temptation to make this sentiment apply further than it properly can. For apart from the fact that Sir Bounteous utters it after he learns that his grandson has at last been duped, Follywit himself seems to subscribe to the view it expresses. Though at first he egotistically applies it only to his grandfather and others, seeming to regard his tricks as forces for wielding justice in the world, he finally includes himself in the scheme after he learns that his wife is a former courtesan as he responds, "Tricks are repaid, I see" (V, ii, 288). Such evidence has no doubt contributed to the opinion of some critics that Sir Bounteous's closing maxim is intended to express the theme of the play. Barker, for instance, states conclusively about Follywit: "The reversal is complete. The wit is outwitted." And Arthur Kirsch expounds, "Much of the

\[13\] See, for instance, III, iii, 7-13; IV, iii, 31-38; 47-54.

\[14\] Barker, p. 60.
pleasure of the play consists both in observing Follywit put this principle [self-betrayal of folly] into practice by capitalizing upon his uncle's [sic] bounteousness and seeing him fall victim to it himself as he marries his uncle's whore."15

At most, however, Sir Bounteous's aphorism applies only partially to his grandson. True, Follywit has unknowingly married a courtesan. But she has promised him, if only in a hasty couplet, to be a good wife ("What I have been is past; be that forgiven,/ And have a soul both true to thee and heaven!"—V, ii, 86-87); and, as has been stated, Sir Bounteous has promised to give him a thousand pounds. Follywit's final "fate," then, is strikingly at variance with the expressed view that gullers will receive their due, that tricks will be repaid.

Nor is this view substantiated by the "plight" of Frank Gullman, who has also been associated with trickery throughout the play. Like Follywit, she has used disguise, or role-playing, to achieve her ends. Appropriately manipulating her roles as virgin and patient, she has engineered the cuckold of Harebrain, extracted money from Sir Bounteous and the two brothers Inesse and Possibility, and snared a rich husband as well. And like Follywit, she is not "gull'd at the last." For as her former whoredom

15Jacobeant Dramatic Perspectives (Charlottesville, Va., 1972), pp. 77-78.
is of no consequence to Follywit, who has seen his sudden attraction to her as a manifestation of madness ("'Twere a mad part in me now to turn over . . . . Man's never at high height of madness full/ Until he love and prove a woman's gull"--IV, v, 10, 14-16) and who ultimately seems more interested in the dowry of three hundred pounds she brings him than in her virginity ("Tut, give me gold, it makes amends for vice/ Maids without coin are caudles without spice"--V, ii, 294-95), that former status certainly is of no consequence to her.

Thus, it would seem that Sir Bounteous's statement and Follywit's as well serve, not to express the theme of "tricks repaid," but to emphasize the theme of incongruity, of irony, of paradox suggested by the title of the play--indeed, it is "a mad world, my masters." This theme is underscored by the final stage of the Penitent-Harebrain plot, which, as has been previously suggested is enacted at Sir Bounteous's feast, to which the Harebrains take Penitent as their guest. Sir Bounteous does not know Penitent, and so Harebrain makes the introduction (underlining mine):

Har. Sir, here's an especial dear friend of ours: we were bold to make his way to your table.

Sir. B. Thanks for that boldness ever, good master Harebrain: is that your friend, sir?

Har. Both my wife's and mine, sir.
Sir. B. Why, then, compendiously, sir, you're welcome.

(V, i, 11-16)

The strong friendship Harebrain feels for Penitent Brothel, who has actually crowned him with the prize he feared most--his horns--of course continues the irony underscored earlier in the play when on several different occasions Harebrain misinterpreted deceptive situations. But it also has implications for the theme of "madness" to which the play subscribes by its ending. For although Harebrain is made aware that Frank Gullman is no "sweet virgin," he is never specifically alerted to the fact that she has played the bawd for Penitent and his wife. And in the sense that the two former lovers enjoy immunity from Harebrain's suspicion and wrath, they escape the fate of having "tricks repaid," of being "gull'd at the last," as do Frank and Follywit.

iv.

In _A Chaste Maid in Cheapside_, Middleton emphasizes an aspect of cuckoldry he had treated ambiguously with Purge in _The Family of Love_, had allowed to go unrealized with the Captain in _The Phoenix_, and had obscured by general tone with the band of finagling blades in _Your Five Gallants_--the willingly cuckolded husband. For at the beginning
of one of the plots of the play, he has Allwit, whose name is appropriately a transposition of "wittol," the designation for a complaisant cuckold, brashly deliver a long soliloquy on the advantages of his cuckoldom. Having learned that Sir Walter Whorehound, to whom he cheerfully allows his wife to be mistress, has just returned from a trip to Wales, Allwit rejoices and thus rehearses the blessings of his status:

The founder's come to town: I am like a man
Finding a table furnish'd to his hand,
As mine is still to me, prays for the good founder,—
Bless the right worshipful the good founder's life!
I thank him, has maintain'd my house this ten years;
Not only keeps my wife, but 'a keeps me
And all my family; I'm at his table:
He gets me all my children, and pays the nurse
Monthly or weekly; puts me to nothing, rent,
Nor church duties, not so much as the scavenger:
The happiest state that ever man was born to! ...

When she lies in,

As now she's upon the point of grunting,
A lady lies not like her; there's her embossings
Embroiderings, spanglings, and I know not what,
As if she lay with all the gaudy-shops
In Gresham's Burse about her; then her restoratives
Able to set up a young 'pothecary,
And richly stock the foreman of a drug-shop;
Her sugar by whole loaves, her wines by rundlets.

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16 Critics have varied in their enumerations of the plots in this highly complex and fascinating comedy. Thomas Parrot and Robert Ball, *A Short View of Elizabethan Drama* (New York, 1943), p. 163, and R. B. Parker, "Middleton's Experiments with Comedy and Judgement," pp. 188-89, for instance, analyze the play in terms of three plots. On the other hand, W. D. Dunkel, p. 15, holds that there are "five independent and completely developed stories." Richard Levin, however, in "The Four Plots of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*," *RES*, 16 (1965), 14-24, offers the most carefully worked out analysis of the matter.
I see these things, but, like a happy man,
I pay for none at all; yet fools think's mine;
I have the name, and in his gold I shine:
And where some merchants would in soul kiss hell
To buy a paradise for their wives, and dye
Their conscience in the bloods of prodigal heirs
To deck their night-piece, yet all this being done,
Eaten with jealousy to the inmost bone,—
As what affliction nature more constrains,
Than feed the wife plump for another’s veins?—
The torments stand I freed of; I’m as clear
From jealousy of a wife as from the charge:
O, two miraculous blessings! ’tis the knight
Hath took that labour out of my hands:
I may sit still and play; he’s jealous for me,
Watches her steps, sets spies; I live at ease,
He has cost and torment, when the string
Of his heart frets, I feed, laugh, or sing,
La dildo, dildo la dildo, la dildo dildo de dildo! [Sings.

(I, ii, 11-56)\(^7\)

With none but the members of the Allwit household
present when Sir Walter enters, the wittol demonstrates the
subservience upon which his continued enjoyment of the bene-
fits depends by baring his head, along with the servants, to
show respect for the knight. As one of the servants, who has
earlier denied Allwit’s claim to be his master by telling him
that he is merely his mistress’s husband, remarks, “He’s but

\(^7\)Several analogues have been suggested for Allwit’s
soliloquy. Alan H. Gilbert, “The Prosperous Wittol in Gio-
nanni Battista Modio and Thomas Middleton,” SP, 41 (1944),
235-37, suggests that Middleton caught the theme of the wit-
tol’s abundant life from a passage in Modio’s prose work, Il
Convito (1554), and developed it freely to suit the London
atmosphere and fit the plot of the play. This, he maintains,
is partly evidenced by the fact that the long soliloquy,
which is abruptly introduced, “while of an informing type not
uncommon in plays, suggests borrowing from an exposition
rather than from an already developed narrative,” Elisabeth
L. Buckingham in “Campion’s Art of English Poesie and Middle-
ton’s Chaste Maid in Cheapside,” PMLA, 43 (1928), 784-92,
one peep above a serving man, / And so much his horns make him" (I, ii, 63-64). Moreover, Allwit fawningly concedes the role of husband to Sir Walter, who fills the relinquished position to overflowing; for, as Allwit has informed us in his soliloquy, the knight is jealous of his "wife." He questions the servants as to whether any strangers have been lurking about to seek Mistress Allwit's attentions during his absence, refusing to believe their negative answers. When one of the servants seeks to satisfy his master once and for all with regard to the matter by soliciting verification of his answer from Allwit, the result is monstrously funny as Sir Walter, the "husband," rejects assurance from the wittol, yet seeks it in spite of himself:

First Ser. Sir, he can tell himself--

Sir Wal. Heart, he can tell?
Do you think I'll trust him? as a usurer

suggests that the soliloquy may have been influenced by "The Eight Epigramme" of Chapter VI in Campion's Observations in the Art of English Poesie (1602), in which Barnzy (Barnaby Barnes?) is said to boast of having a cuckold-benefactor, Harvy (Gabriel Harvey?), who is jealous of his relationship with his wife, as Sir Walter is of Allwit's. The "dildo" line which Allwit sings may be a take-off on a contemporary ballad "The Batchelor's Feast," in which a bachelor lauds the single life over the married. He boasts that he can take his rest and live at liberty, as he does not have to be bothered with rocking cradles, listening to children cry, paying landlords and nurses, buying special soaps, knacks, swaddling bands. Each stanza ends with the refrain:

With hie dilido dill,
hie ho dildurie;
It a delightfull thing
to live at liberty.
With forfeited lordships:--him? O monstrous injury! Believe him? can the devil speak ill of darkness?--What can you say, sir?

Allwit. Of my soul and conscience, sir, She's a wife as honest of her body to me, As any lord's proud lady [e'er] can be! 18

Sir Wal. Yet, by your leave, I heard you were once offering To go to bed to her.

Allwit. No, I protest, sir!

Sir Wal. Heart, if you do, you shall take all! I'll marry.

Allwit. O, I beseech you, sir! (I, ii, 87-97)

Naturally, Sir Walter is also constantly assured that there is no contest for his role as father. When he asks how Mistress Allwit, who is pregnant by him for the seventh time, fares, Allwit readily replies, "E'en after your own making, sir,/She's a tumbler, 'afaithe, the nose and belly meets" (I, ii, 68-69). And when the knight's two oldest bastards, Wat and Nick, enter and greet Allwit as "father," the wittol expeditiously shushes them and shoves them toward Sir Walter, who can thus demonstrate fatherly concern by asking his sons how their school work goes. 19

18 Allwit's oath here is humorously equivocal, as were Rebecca Purge's (see p. 22) and the Jeweller's Wife's (see p. 40).

19 We may assume from this brief passage (I, ii, 105-19), which is the only one in the play in which Sir Walter comes in contact with any of his illegitimate children, with the exception of the latest addition which is born within the course of the play, that the arrangement between the wittol and the knight is that the children will be allowed to think that Allwit is their father.
Under the sanctioning eye of the wittol, Mistress Allwit, too, gives Sir Walter confidence on the matter of his fatherhood. When he inquires after her health, her response reminds us of Allwit's after he has been asked the same question: "Made lightsome e'en by him that made me heavy" (I, ii, 123).

Upon the birth of the seventh Allwit-Whorehound child, however, Allwit slips into the role of father and husband while Sir Walter poses as a close friend of the family. Pretending to be the typical doting parent of a new-born child, Allwit welcomes the Puritans and gossips as they arrive for the child's christening and later supervises the nurse in passing about the comfits and wine. Sir Walter's performance is no less spectacular than the wittol's. Wanting to make certain that his real connection with the Allwits is kept within the closed circle of their household, he has told Allwit that he will serve as one of the gossips for his own child. And he plays the part perfectly at the christening, deferentially presenting Mistress Allwit with "a fair standing cup/ And two great 'postle spoons" (III, ii, 41-42) for his bastard ("A poor remembrance, lady,/ To the love of the babe; I pray, accept of it"—III, ii, 38-39) before the female guests, who, because he has used "fine words" in addressing them, regard him as "a fine gentleman
and courteous." Indeed, so much has he impressed the Second Gossip that she has praised him thus: "Methinks her [Mistress Allwit's] husband shows like a clown to him" (III, ii, 30).

The gossip's remark is an ironic comment on the relationship between Sir Walter and Allwit. For in actuality the knight "shows like a clown" to the wittol, not vice versa. When, for instance, Allwit stands bare-headed with the servants, Sir Walter, desirous of having his wittol think he enjoys a special privilege, indulgently tells him to put his hat on. But Allwit, noting to himself that "the game begins already," continues to stand uncovered. After Sir Walter again instructs him to put the hat on, Allwit lets the audience know in an aside that he has been manipulating his maintainer:

Now must I do't, or he'll be as angry now,
As if I had put it on at first bidding;
'Tis but observing,
'Tis but observing a man's humour once,
And he may ha' him by the nose all his life.
(I, ii, 75-79)

Similarly, when the knight begins to inquire if there were any visitors to see Mistress Allwit while he was away, Allwit is in command of the situation, as he says to himself: "His jealousy begins: am not I happy now,/ That can laugh inward whilst his marrow melts?" (I, ii, 83-84). Even when Sir Walter threatens to marry if he ever hears of
Allwit's sleeping with Mistress Allwit and then indicates in an aside that he knows how to keep the cuckold submissive ("That wakes the slave,/ And keeps his flesh in awe"—I, ii, 97-98), Allwit's aside is the final one, and he is still in control:

I'll stop that gap
Where'er I find it open: I have poison'd
His hopes in marriage already [with]
Some rich old widows, and some landed virgins;
And I'll fall to work still before I'll lose him;
He's too sweet to part from.

(I, ii, 99-104)

Allwit is on top of the situation, too, when the bastard sons greet him as "father." For as he quickly checks their salutation, he has the satisfaction of cursing them under his breath; and as he tells them to pay their respects to the knight by kneeling before him, he humorously notes the special appropriateness of their posture: "They should kneel indeed,/ If they could say their prayers" (I, ii, 110-11).

The wittol is not to be found at a disadvantage either when he and Sir Walter banter with reference to their speculation that Mistress Allwit, who "shows gallantly, like a moon at full" (I, ii, 123), will give birth to a boy. Sir Walter, indicating that Allwit has gotten the better of him on a point of logic, says, "It shall be yours, sir" (I, ii, 126). But Allwit, quick to suspect that according to the line of argument the knight could be referring to the unborn
"boy" as well as to the point of logic, emphatically rejects the concession and then reminds us in an aside that he secures the advantage by doing so:

No, by my troth, I'll swear
It's none of mine; let him that got it keep it!—
Thus do I rid myself of fear,
Lie soft, sleep hard, drink wine, and eat good cheer.

(I, ii, 128-31)

And later, after the baby is born, as Allwit, strutting about at the christening in one of Sir Walter's suits, watches the gossips greedily delve into the comfits with their "long fingers that are wash'd/ Some thrice a-day in urine" (III, ii, 53-54) and gulp down the wine, he is more explicit about the advantages of the position he enjoys:

Had this been all my cost now, I'd been beggar'd;
These women have no conscience at sweetmeats,
Where'er they come; see and they've not cull'd out
All the long plums too, they've left nothing here
But short wriggle-tail comfits, not worth mouthing;
No mar'l I heard a citizen complain once
That his wife's belly only broke his back;
Mine had been all in fitters seven years since,
But for this worthy knight,
That with a prop upholds my wife and me,
And all my estate buried in Bucklersbury.

(III, ii, 61-71)

It is thus to be expected that when Allwit learns from Sir Walter's other parasite, his poor kinsman Davy Dahanna, that the knight plans to marry Moll Yellowhammer, he swings into action to prevent the match. As Allwit himself has informed us, he has schemed to keep Sir Walter from marrying many times before. This time he sets about to
outmaneuver his benefactor by posing as a distant relative to Moll's father Yellowhammer, a goldsmith, and telling him of Sir Walter's long-standing arrangement with the Allwits, certain that this will cause Yellowhammer to refuse to allow his daughter to marry such a moral pauper as the knight. Surely at this point Allwit is "one up" on Sir Walter, who is not even aware that the wittol knows of his intentions. Nevertheless, here Allwit's efforts are nullified, ironically without his knowing it. For Yellowhammer leads his "distant relative" to believe he is indignant over the knight's degenerate behavior and swears to "have done with him." But in actuality, the goldsmith, himself no paragon of virtue, is willing to sacrifice morals for money and minimize this "flaw" in his future son-in-law:

Well, grant all this, say now his deeds are black, Pray, what serves marriage but to call him back? I've kept a whore myself, and had a bastard By mistress Anne, in anno I care not who knows it; he's now a jolly fellow, Has been twice warden; so may his fruit be, They were but base begot, and so was he. The knight is rich, he shall be my son-in-law; No matter, so the whore he keeps be wholesome, My daughter takes no hurt then; so let them wed: I'll have him sweat well ere they go to bed. (IV, i, 251-61)

At the end of the play, though, Allwit is again in control of his situation with reference to the knight. That he is so, however, is due initially not to his own efforts but to those of Touchwood Junior, who also wants to marry Moll and
who engages his older brother Touchwood Senior to help him foil Sir Walter's parent-sanctioned marriage to her.

The plot concerning Touchwood Junior's attempts to marry Moll over the opposition of her parents is typically romantic. Touchwood Junior first tries to bring the marriage about by having Moll meet him secretly in his lodgings, where he has a parson standing ready to perform the ceremony. But Yellowhammer and Sir Walter discover the plan and fall upon the surprised pair just as the Parson is about to join their hands, and Yellowhammer takes Moll home and locks her up for safe-keeping. The second attempt at elopement is foiled when the lovers are about to escape in separate boats on the Thames and Maudlin Yellowhammer catches up with Moll's boat and drags her daughter through the water and back home by the hair.

After Moll's second capture, Touchwood Junior and Sir Walter engage in a duel in which they wound each other. This is what actually turns the tide for both of them, favorably in the case of the young lover and unfavorably in the case of the knight. Touchwood Junior feigns death from his wound and, through the help of his brother and Susan, one of Moll's faithful maids, manages to have Moll also counterfeit death and thereby turns their funerals, which meet in procession, into their wedding. On the other hand,
Sir Walter, thinking himself mortally wounded, repents of his entanglement with the Allwits. But in doing so, instead of receiving some measure of relief, he is merely made more miserable by his parasite.

Sitting suffering from his wound at the Allwits' house, Sir Walter first expresses his abhorrence of his former deeds by lashing out at Allwit: "Touch me not, villain! My wound aches at thee, / Thou poison to my heart!" (V, i, 13-14). But Allwit, ever confident of his importance to Sir Walter as his wittol, assumes that the knight is delirious from his wound and tries to make himself remembered to him as his friend and ally:

He raves already;
His senses are quite gone, he knows me not.--
Look up, an't like your worship; heave those eyes,
call me to mind; is your remembrance left?
Look in my face; who am I, an't like your worship? (V, i, 14-18)

The scene mounts in irony as the knight becomes more explicit about his detestation of the Allwits and Allwit becomes more determined to bring his benefactor through his delirium. When Sir Walter attacks Allwit for encouraging him in his sin "like hell's flattering angel," the wittol steps back only to thrust forward Mistress Allwit, even more repulsive to the knight because she has been his partner in adultery, "to do good on him." And when the anguished Sir
Walter calls her a "loathsome strumpet" whom he trembles to behold and who "keeps back/ All comfort while she stays" (V, i, 37-38). Allwit, still bent on comforting his benefactor, sends Davy to fetch the children, positive that "sight of them/ Will make him cheerful straight" (V, i, 53-54). Upon seeing the children, the loathed products of his adultery, Sir Walter again articulates his desire to sever his relationship with the Allwits:

O, my vengeance!
Let me forever hide my cursed face
From sight of those that darken all my hopes,
And stand between me and the sight of heaven!

(V, i, 76-80)

But Allwit continues his ironically inappropriate efforts to cheer the knight, telling Nick to speak to him and Wat to help "keep him alive" by reciting to him a Latin epistle. And undoubtedly the wittol would not have relented in this line of action, even after the knight bequeathed to him "three times his weight in curses" and to Mistress Allwit "All barrenness of joy, a drouth of virtue,/ And dearth of all repentance" (V, i, 103-4), but for the fact that two servants enter severally and announce respectively that Touchwood Junior has died from his wound and that Sir Oliver Kix's wife is finally with child.

The news of these events signals Allwit that it is time for a final change of roles between him and Sir Walter. Upon hearing of Touchwood Junior's "death," he
quickly judges that the knight, who he thinks is now a murderer, will undoubtedly lose his lands, even if the law rules that he has killed in self-defense, and will therefore no longer be able to benefit him. Promptly, he snaps into the role of husband, rejecting Sir Walter, who asks that someone lift him, by replying,

Let the law lift you now, that must have all;  
I have done lifting on you, and my wife too.  
(V, i, 111-12)

Mistress Allwit, not as positive as her husband that the "murder" will cause Sir Walter to be dispossessed, cautions him not to be so quick with his decision. But the erstwhile wittol protests, "Away, wife! hear a fool! his lands will hang him" (V, i, 120). And when he learns of Lady Kix's pregnancy, which means that Sir Walter will not receive his expected inheritance, he has more assurance than he needs that he is following the right course. Emphatically, he again spurns the knight, specifically rejecting him both as family friend and cuckold:

I wonder what he makes here with his consorts?  
Cannot our house be private to ourselves,  
But we must have such guests? I pray, depart, sirs,  
And take your murderer along with you;  
Good he were apprehended ere he go,  
Has kill'd some honest gentleman; send for officers.  
(V, i, 135-41)

I must tell you, sir,  
You have been somewhat bolder in my house  
Than I could well like of; I suffer'd you  
Till it struck here at my heart; I tell you truly  
I thought y'had been familiar with my wife once.  
(V, i, 142-46)
Lady Kix's pregnancy is significant not only as a factor marking the end of the role-exchanging between Allwit and Sir Walter, but as the basis for the setting up of a replica, with modifications, of the original Allwit-Whorehound relationship in the plot dealing with the Touchwoods and the Kixes. At various points in the play, the Kixes are shown blaming each other for their seven years of childless marriage. Touchwood Junior, aware that the Kixes' "dry barrenness puffs up Sir Walter" (II, i, 153), engages his brother, whose situation is the exact opposite of the rich but barren Kixes as he has had to "bake up house" because he and his wife can "only get children but no riches" (II, i, 12), to impregnate Lady Kix and thus disinheret Sir Walter, making him unattractive to Yellowhammer as a son-in-law. When the bickering Kixes' maid tells them that she knows a gentleman, Touchwood Senior, "that has got/ Nine children by one water that he useth" (II, i, 173-74) and that he can use that same "water" to make the Kixes "so swarm with children" they shall be poor, they immediately hire him to administer his fertility potion. Touchwood Senior gives Sir Oliver a vial of almond milk and sends him to ride on horseback for five hours to build up his sexual potency. He then tells Lady Kix, who is anxious to know how she should take her medicine, "Yours must be taken lying" (III, iii, 142), and politely leads her off—wherever she will for her own ease—to lie
with her. When the "water" has indeed worked its magic, Sir Oliver thinks that he has impregnated Lady Kix with the help of Touchwood Senior's medical skills. Enraptured and determined that the "doctor" will always be available to administer to him and his wife, he proposes that the Touchwood family come and live with them in a mutually beneficial relationship.\footnote{The Touchwood-Kix plot shows the influence of Machiavelli's comedy, Mandragola (printed 1524). For a discussion of the similarities and differences between the two plots, see Robert I. Williams' "Machiavelli's Mandragola, Touchwood Senior, and the Comedy of Middleton's A Chaste Maid in Cheapside," SEL, 10 (1970), 385-96.} Though he is comically unaware of the fact, with the sealing of this bargain Sir Oliver sanctions Touchwood Senior's cuckolding him, just as Allwit had endorsed Sir Walter's. Touchwood Senior, though not merely satisfying his lust like Sir Walter in being a cuckold but helping his own brother and later his wife and children, will thus become, as the knight already is, the father of a host of bastards through a relationship encouraged by his mistress's husband. And though Lady Kix engages in the relationship with Touchwood Senior primarily because she wants to be a mother (in contrast to Mistress Allwit, who has maintained her relationship with Sir Walter solely for lucrative benefits), she will nonetheless, like her counterpart, realize some financial advantages from the arrangement and, like her, too, be "circled with children" fathered by a single cuckold.
But if the Allwit-Whorehound and Touchwood-Kix plots are linked because the triangular relationship with its attendant offspring in the latter plot repeats and thus continues that terminated in the former, they are also connected because the status of respect which Sir Oliver ironically accords to Lady Kix as he begins his alliance with Touchwood Senior parallels that which Allwit deliberately bestows on Mistress Allwit as he ends his arrangement with Sir Walter. Besides being a point which further binds the two plots to each other, however, this similarity also links them to a theme in the Tim Yellowhammer-Welshwoman plot.

Tim Yellowhammer is comically characterized as a fool, who, as a result of being provided with a Cambridge education by his solicitous parents, is full of pretensions at pedantry. On one occasion, just after he has revealed his stupidity by going through a lesson with his tutor and proving a fool to be a rational creature (IV, i, 18-21), he boasts to his mother, Maudlin, who enters upon the dispute, that he can prove anything by logic:

[Tim.] By logic I'll prove anything.
Maud. What, thou wilt not?
Tim. I'll prove a whore to be an honest woman.
Maud. Nay, by my faith, she must prove that herself, or logic will ne'er do't.
Tim. 'Twill do't, I'll tell you.
Maud. Some in this street would give a thousand pounds
That you could prove their wives so.

Tim. Faith, I can,
And all their daughters too, though they had three bastards.

(IV, i, 41-47)

The would-be scholar is presented with the opportunity to prove just this self-negating point after he has wooed and married a "Welsh heiress," the reputed owner of "some nineteen mountains" and "some two thousand runts" as well, at the encouragement of the mercenary Yellowhammers. For he finds that his bride is no heiress at all, but the penniless ex-mistress of Sir Walter Whorehound. However, when Maudlin, who is determined to set this gross error as straight as she possibly can, urges Tim to make good his former boast, he at first rather half-heartedly, though typically, reasons: "Uxor non est meretrix, ergo falleris" [A wife is not a whore, therefore you lie] (V, iv, 103). But later, after comments from both his wife and his mother, neither of whom has understood his Latin, to the effect that marriage is a "trick" that makes his wife honest, Tim, pedant that he is, knowingly takes up the argument they suggest and indeed makes a whore an honest woman by an implied play upon "meretrix" and "merry tricks":

I perceive than a woman may be honest
According to the English print, when she is
A whore in Latin; so much for marriage and logic . . . .

(V, iv, 107-9)
The connection between the Tim Yellowhammer-Welshwoman plot and the Allwit-Whorehound and Touchwood-Kix plots thus comes to the fore: what Tim proves by verbal manipulation is what Allwit and Sir Oliver prove by illustration. For, as has been indicated, after Allwit has determined that his wittoldom will no longer be profitable, he takes back his wife, who has, by his commission and encouragement, birthed seven bastards in wedlock, and strikes the pose of a husband who will not tolerate another man's making advances toward his wife. Sir Oliver is no less awe-inspiring than Allwit in accomplishing the feat of making a whore an honest woman. For, in the euphoric state fostered by his falsely-assumed virility, as he makes his ironic request of Touchwood Senior ("Get children and I'll keep them" [V, iv, 76]), he masterfully, if ignorantly, encourages his wife's promiscuousness at the same time that he insures her of respectability.

This wantonness-to-virtuousness motif which informs the Allwit-Whorehound, Touchwood-Kix, and Tim Yellowhammer-Welshwoman plots operates in reverse in the main plot, however. For in their determination to marry Moll to Sir Walter as opposed to Touchwood Junior, the Yellowhammers may be said to try to "prove an honest woman a whore." That Moll is an "honest woman" is established at the beginning of the play when Touchwood Junior, secretly giving her a
letter which apparently outlines his first plan for their elopement, implies that their courtship has been characterized by restraint:

Turn not to me till thou mayst lawfully; it but whets my stomach, which is too sharp-set already. Read that note carefully [giving letter to Moll]; keep me from suspicion still, nor know my zeal but in thy heart: Read, and send but thy liking in three words; I'll be at hand to take it.

(I, i, 143-48)

The Yellowhammers do not bother to ascertain the facts, however. To them, Moll's attraction to a lover who is without means can only signify that she has sacrificed her principles; and they are specific in maligning her character with regard to the matter. When Yellowhammer and Sir Walter foil her first attempt at elopement, for instance, Yellowhammer lashes out at Moll: "Thou disobedient strumpet!" (III, i, 21). And after Maudlin has captured her on the Thames during her second attempt to escape and is tugging her home by the hair, all three of the Yellowhammers label her with derogatory metaphor. Tim, who of course has been influenced in his opinion by his parents, comments that his mother "hath brought her from the water like a mermaid [a whore]" (IV, iii, 53); Maudlin lambastes her as "Dissembling, cunning baggage!" (IV, iii, 56); and Yellowhammer again uses his favorite epithet: "Impudent strumpet!" (IV, iii, 56).

Once Moll contracts a cold from being exposed to the chilly water of the Thames and seems about to expire
because of it, as well as because she thinks Touchwood Junior has been fatally wounded, the Yellowhammers become ashamed of their actions and change the way they refer to her (Yellowhammer refers to her as "my poor girl"; Tim as "my sister"; Maudlin as "sweet Moll"). But it remains for Touchwood Senior to give Moll her full due as an honest woman, as he eulogizes her when her "funeral procession" meets with Touchwood Junior's:

But for this maid, whom envy cannot hurt
With all her poisons, having left to ages
The true, chaste monument of her living name,
Which no time can deface, I say of her
The full truth freely, without fear of censure:
What nature could there shine, that might redeem
Perfection home to woman, but in her
Was fully glorious? Beauty set in goodness
Speaks what she was . . .

(V, iv, 10-17)

And after Touchwood Senior ends his oration by berating the senselessness which kept the two lovers apart, Moll is finally rewarded for her virtue, as she and Touchwood Junior rise from their coffins and turn their "funerals" into a wedding among a host of well-wishers.

The romantic main plot in which Moll and Touchwood Junior triumph over those who would "prove an honest woman a whore" emphasizes by contrast the basic statement the play makes. Set against the three plots in which whores are resolutely proven respectable by subterfuge and ignorance, its straight contention that "an honest woman is an honest woman"
is indeed remarkable. In fact, it is nothing less than a miracle that there can be found "a chaste maid in Cheapside."
CHAPTER 4: COMEDY, PHASE THREE

Perhaps five and ten years, respectively, after Middleton wrote *A Mad World, My Masters*, he wrote *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's* (1610<) and *The Widow* (c. 1616), two comedies which are reminiscent of it in several respects. Like *A Mad World*, both comedies are composed of two clearly defined plots, which, though connected throughout by character interaction, are more strongly integrated or controlled by thematic framework. And, as in *A Mad World*, one plot in each play is devoted almost exclusively to cuckoldry.

That Middleton could repeat the accomplishment in plotting and thematic integration he had evidenced in the earlier play is certainly apparent in these two comedies. But his resolution of the cuckoldry situation in each play, unlike his resolution of it in *A Mad World*, leaves something to be desired, just as it had in *The Family of Love* and in the second cuckoldry episode in *The Phoenix*. In contrast to the way in which he finally handled the cuckoldry in each of those plays, Middleton in *No Wit* and *The Widow* resolves the situation not according to convention or traditional expectation but according to traditional morality.
Nonetheless, as he did in the earlier comedies, he faces the problem of making his resolution credible in view of prevailing tendencies he establishes in each of these two later comedies.

i.

At the beginning of the main plot of No Wit, we learn that Mistress Kate Low-water and her husband have fallen into a state of financial ruin because of the machinations of Avarice Goldenfleece, a usurer and extortionist now dead. Having courted Goldenfleece's wealthy widow and expecting her soon to consent to marry him, Sir Gilbert Lambstone thinks that by offering Mistress Low-water a chance to gain back some of the wealth from the extortionist's widow, he can finally induce her to engage in an adulterous relationship with him. He sends his footman to her with a letter in which he makes his proposition:

Mistress Low-water,—If you desire to understand your own comfort, hear me out ere you refuse me. I'm in the way now to double the yearly means that I first offered you; and to stir you more to me, I'll empty your enemy's bags to maintain you; for the rich widow, the Lady Goldenfleece, to whom I have been a longer suitor than you an adversary, hath given me much encouragement lately, insomuch that I am perfectly assured the next meeting strikes the bargain. The happiness that follows this 'twere idle to inform you of; only consent to my desires, and the widow's notch shall lie open to you. This much to your heart; I know you're wise. Farewell. Thy friend to his power and another's, Gilbert Lambstone.
Sir Gilbert's letter elicits precisely the opposite effect from that he anticipated. For having read the letter, the "more to hate the writer," after first throwing it down and refusing to receive it, Mistress Low-water is turned not to a favorable disposition toward Sir Gilbert, but to charity toward her enemy, whom he proposes to exploit at the same time that he violates her honor:

In this poor brief what volumes has he thrust
Of treacherous perjury and adulterous lust!
So foul a monster does this wrong appear,
That I give pity to mine enemy here.

(I, ii, 97-100)

The "pity" which Mistress Low-water feels for her enemy Lady Goldenfleece immediately spurs her to launch a plan of action which will expose Sir Gilbert, of a piece with all those who "dare oppose all judgment to get means,/
And wed rich widow's only to keep queans!" (I, ii, 102-3), and which will at the same time cause the widow to give up the wealth illegally gained from her husband. When Sir Gilbert comes to receive his answer, she artfully leads him to believe she has been swayed by his argument and is almost ready to acquiesce. Pretending to be concerned that he will regard her favors as only a trifle, she expresses her doubts about entering the relationship. All the while, he insists

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1The circumstances surrounding Sir Gilbert's letter to Mistress Low-water are similar to those surrounding Lethe's letter to Thomasine in Michaelmas Term (see pp. 58-59). Both Sir Gilbert and Lethe want to use marriage to further adulterous designs. And Mistress Low-water and Thomasine are perhaps equally repelled by the proposals they receive, though for different reasons.
that she will find him a constant lover and argues that his purpose in marrying the widow is but to serve their mutual advantages. She then tells him that she needs one more day to think over his persuasive answers and make her decision. And as he leaves, thinking "This bird's my own!" (I, ii, 143), she expresses happiness that her plan seems to be succeeding and enthusiastically enlists her husband's aid:

O, are you come, sir? husband
Wake, wake, and let not patience keep thee poor,
Rouse up thy spirit from this falling slumber!
Make thy distress seem but a weeping dream,
And this the opening morning of thy comforts;
Wipe the salt dew off thy careful eyes,
And drink a draught of gladness near thy heart,
T'expel the infection of all poisonous sorrows!

(I, ii, 161-68)

By disguising herself as a young knight and going to a banquet which Lady Goldenfleece is attending with Sir Gilbert and two other suitors, Pepperton and Overdone, at the house of Weatherwise, who also seeks her hand, Mistress Low-water manages to expose Sir Gilbert in front of the widow. And she is as shrewd in effecting this part of her plan as she was in making Sir Gilbert think she was seriously considering yielding to his advances. Having gained access to the banquet by sending word that "he" has "earnest business" with Lady Goldenfleece, the "knight" enters with Low-water disguised as a serving man, casually takes part in the astrological punning which accompanies the feast laid out according to the twelve signs of the zodiac, and finally falls to
the purpose for which "he" came by showing Lady Goldenfleece the treacherous letter and concocting a tale as to how it came into "his" hands that further implicates Sir Gilbert. Convinced that the "knight's" account is factual and having as evidence the letter itself, which Sir Gilbert unintentionally admitted having written, Lady Goldenfleece promptly sends her lecherous suitor forth with a verbal lashing. Thus, by the successful execution of this part of her plan, Mistress Low-water prevents Lady Goldenfleece from falling victim to Sir Gilbert's deception and at the same time insulates herself from his adulterous advances, as he can no longer seek to forward them with the lure of the widow's wealth.

However, in order to recover her husband's fortune, instead of using her skills to avert an act of cuckoldry, the witty Mistress Low-water monitors a series of events so that it will appear that such an act has been committed. Continuing to operate in disguise, she moves with the same aplomb that had enabled her deftly to unmask Sir Gilbert. She first dupes Weatherwise, Pepperton, and Overdone, each of whom thinks he is likely to speed well with the widow now that Sir Gilbert is no longer a competitor. When they come to call on her, the "knight" is already waiting to see her. Craftily "he" pretends a special familiarity with the widow by referring to the three suitors as "his" friends and to her as "Bess," ordering Low-water, still disguised as
a serving man, to summon her, professing anger when Lowwater returns and pretends that "his mistress" begs to be excused momentarily, and finally inviting the suitors to take a cup of the widow's wine. The "knight's" demonstration of boldness in the widow's household of course has the desired effect: the suitors promptly leave, thinking any efforts on their part to gain the widow's hand are wasted.

With the suitors thus diverted, the next step in the "knight's" plan involves "his" actual wooing and winning of the widow. Of the opinion that "nothing kills a widow's heart so much/As a faint, bashful wooer" (II, iii, 90-91), the "knight" falls to "his" business roundly. When Lady Goldenfleece apologizes for having been so long detained as she finally enters, "he" replies forthwith, "Why you shall make one amends for that then, with a quickness in your bed" (II, iii, 111-12). The widow tries mildly to put her bold suitor off, but "he" insists that "he" is "very hungry" to lie with her. And to her responsive query, "What, are you, sir?" (II, iii, 132), "he" spins off a reply which sways her both by the nature of its content and the forcefulness of its excess. After a few coy remarks, Lady Goldenfleece indicates that she has been conquered by her bold and lusty suitor by asking Weatherwise,
Pepperton, and Overdone, who have just returned because a servant has suggested they have been deceived, to witness that she chooses the "knight" as her husband.

Once the widow and the "knight" are married, the restoration of the Low-water fortune is practically assured. The "knight" makes a complete reversal, telling the widow, who is anxious that "he" make good "his" former boasts, that "he" is trying to break "himself" of such rude, bold tricks, as marriage is a "serious and divine thing," and sends her to her chamber alone. The "knight" and "serving man" then arrange for Beveril, Mistress Low-water's scholar-ly brother who has recently returned from his travels and who has fallen in love with the widow upon being asked to produce a masque for the wedding, to receive a letter they have written summoning him to Lady Goldenfleece's chamber:

Kind sir,—I found your care and love so much in the performance of a little, wherein your wit and art had late employment, that I dare now trust your bosom with business of more weight and eminence. Little thought the world that, since the wedding-dinner, all my mirth was but dissembled, and seeming joys but counterfeit. The truth to you, sir, is, I find so little signs of content in the bargain I made i' the morning, that I repent before evening prayer; and to show some fruits of his wilful neglect and wild disposition, more than the day could bring forth to me, has now forsook my bed; I know no cause for' t. . . . Being thus distressed, sir, I desire your comfortable presence and counsel, whom I know to be of worth and judgment, that a lady may safely impart her griefs to you, and commit 'em to the virtues of commiseration and secrecy.—Your unfortunate friend, THE WIDOW-WIFE.
I have took order for your private admittance with a trusty servant of mine own, whom I have placed at my chamber-door to attend your coming.

(V, i, 97-117)²

Low-water is of course the "trusty servant"; and after he has led the sympathetic Beveril to his destination, the "knight," having roused the wedding guests to witness that the widow and the scholar are together in her chamber, makes all the noises of the indignant cuckolded husband:

What, have I taken you?
Unmerciful adultress, the first night! . . .
Give me the villain's heart
That I may throw't into her bosom quick!
There let the lecher pant.

(V, i, 157-61)

Treacherous sir,
Did I for this cast a friend's arm about thee,
Gave thee the welcome of a worthy spirit,
And lodg'd thee in my house, nay, entertain'd thee
More like a natural brother than a stranger?
And have I this reward?

(V, i, 167-72)

for ever I refuse her;
I'll never set a foot into her bed,
Never perform duty of man to her,
So long as I have breath.

(V, i, 180-83)

The "knight" then demands that the widow and her lover leave the house and possesses "himself" of the two caskets which contain all her wealth in gold and jewels.

²This is the second time in the play that Middleton uses the letter as a device for advancing the action of his plot (see p. 96). Unlike the previous letter, however, this is a summoning missive, like the short one he uses in Your Five Gallants (see p. 45) and the longer one he uses in The Widow (see p. 112).
The plot ends on a happier note, however. For after being prevailed upon by Sir Oliver Twilight, one of the wedding guests, not to be so harsh in dealing with the widow, the "knight" gives her back one of the caskets, the contents of the one "he" keeps being enough to satisfy the amount Low-water has lost, and sets her free by admitting that he is "married to another." Then the "knight" and "serving man" discover themselves to the general rejoicing of all those assembled. And later Beveril and Lady Goldenfleece, who have decided to marry, express their gratitude and respect for Mistress Low-water's wit, judgment, and good will by asking her to manage and freely enjoy their wealth.

Middleton's characterization of Mistress Low-water as a manipulator of cuckoldry schemes would be flawless but for one consideration. In his determination to show that the clever wife is virtuous in spite of the fact that her schemes require her to assume roles which suggest moral laxity, Middleton has her articulate her position as an honest woman on several occasions before she goes into operation. Even before she conceives of her scheme, she expresses her determination to remain faithful to her husband after a series of rhetorical questions in which she hints that she has been approached to engage in an affair:

Is there no saving means, no help religious,  
For a distressèd gentlewoman to live by?  
Has virtue no revenue? . . .
No dowry in the chamber beside wantonness? . . .
Must I to whoredom or to beggary lean,
   My mind being sound? . . .
Horror nor splendor, shadows fair nor foul,
Shall force me shame my husband, wound my soul.
   (I, ii, 1-26)

Upon receiving the letter from Sir Gilbert, she not only repeats the resolution to faithfulness but expresses her resentment of her seducer for his persistence:

'Life, had he not his answer? what strange impudence
Governs a man when lust of lord of him!
Thinks he me mad? 'cause I've no monies on earth,
That I'll forfeit my estate in heaven,
And live eternal beggar? he shall pardon me,
That's my soul's jointure--I'll starve ere I sell that.
   (I, ii, 76-81)

And after reading the scandalous proposition, just before she conceives that she will be able to use it to propitious effect, again she reaffirms her position of virtue, as she professes an inability to understand Sir Gilbert's twisted conception of morality:

What a strange path he takes to my affection,
And thinks 't the nearest way! 'twill never be;
Goes through mine enemy's ground to come to me.
   (I, ii, 104-6)

In these passages, however, Middleton over-commits himself. For by investing Mistress Low-water's resolutions with a serious tone, he makes it seem improbable that she would resort to witty cuckoldry schemes as a means of alleviating plights. Middleton seems to have realized this and to have tried to reconcile the inconsistency in two specific
passages. But instead of solving the problem, he simply poses another.

The first passage comes just after Mistress Low-water has tricked Sir Gilbert into believing she is actually considering his proposition:

There is no happiness but has her season,  
Wherein the brightness of her virtue shines:  
The husk falls off in time, that long shut up  
The fruit in a dark prison; so sweeps by  
The cloud of miseries from wretches eyes,  
That yet, though faln, at length they see to rise;  
The secret powers work wondrously and duly.  
(I, ii, 144-50)

The passage is of course supposed to imply that Mistress Low-water's witty scheme can be successful because in the general operation of natural process the time has come for her and her husband to be relieved from financial stress, for the widow to be freed of a deceptive suitor. But the message that comes through more forcefully is that all virtue is eventually, inevitably rewarded, that the virtuous need only be patient when they are beset with difficulties. Thus, the passage seems antithetical to Mistress Low-water's manipulations in general and to the exhortation to action, quoted earlier, which she immediately gives her husband in particular ("Wake, wake, and let not patience keep thee poor . . .").

The second attempt to reconcile Mistress Low-water's witty manipulations with the serious tone that is at first
characteristic of her comes just after the "wooing" and "winning" of the widow, as she commissions a servant to engage a scholar to plan a device for the wedding:

Since wit has pleasur'd me, I'll pleasure wit;  
Scholars shall fare the better. O my blessing!  
I feel a hand of mercy lift me up  
Out of a world of waters and now sets me  
Upon a mountain, where the sun plays most,  
To cheer my heart even as it dries my limbs.  
What deeps I see beneath me, in whose falls  
Many a nimble mortal toils,  
And scarce can feed himself! the streams of fortune,  
'Gainst which he tugs in vain, still beat him down,  
And will not suffer him--past hand to mouth--  
To lift his arm to his posterity's blessing:  
I see a careful sweat run in a ring  
About his temples, but will not do;  
For, till some happy means relieve his state  
There must he stick, and bide the wrath of fate.  
I see the wrath upon an uphill land;  
O blest are they can see their falls and stand!  
(II, iii, 250-67)

This passage is as confusing as the first one. Ostensibly Mistress Low-water is thankful because the "hand of mercy" has allowed her to use wit to bring relief in a situation of stress. But, as in the previous passage, the emphasis on gradual and inevitable unfolding of events, on inalterable process renders the role of wit negligible. Then, too, as Mistress Low-water speaks of having been lifted from a "world of waters," she suggests that she, like those whom she now observes from an "uphill land," has been toiling, tugging against the "streams of fortune." But coming as it does at the end of the first witty scheme, which seems to
have been effected almost effortlessly, and at the beginning of the second, which is carried through with equal facility, the passage seems woefully inappropriate in both tone and point of view.

The help Mistress Low-water gives to Lady Golden-fleece in uncovering Sir Gilbert, to Law-water in regaining his fortune, and, in the process, to Beveril in gaining the hand of Lady Goldenfleece by manipulating schemes based on suggestions and allegations of cuckoldry is paralleled in the other plot of the play mainly by the help Lady Twilight gives her son Philip in keeping the good faith of his father by agreeing to a deception. Ten years before the action of the play begins, Lady Twilight and an infant girl, supposedly her daughter Grace, have been captured at sea by the Dunkirk and later sold and separated. After nine years of captivity, Lady Twilight has been instructed to send her husband, Sir Oliver, a letter requesting ransom; and he has promptly dispatched Philip and his servant, Savourwit, with the money to insure her return. But Philip and Savourwit did not reach their destination with the ransom. As Savourwit recounts it, they landed by the way and "eas'd [their] pockets/ In wenches' aprons" (I, i, 77-78), and Philip paid the rest of the money to marry a young gentlewoman with whom he fell in love. Upon returning home, Philip has told his father that his mother is dead and has introduced his wife
as "his sister that was sold"—"a fair tale of [Savourwit's] own bringing up." But despite Philip's irresponsible action with regard to his mother, she is returned home anyway, as Beveril comes upon her during his travels and pays the ransom. Not recognizing her son when she meets him in the street, Lady Twilight asks Philip for directions to the Twilight house (Sir Oliver "has remov'd his house" during her captivity) and inquires about the well-being of Sir Oliver's son. When Philip answers that he is that son and Lady Twilight makes herself known to him as his mother, he is happy for her "blest presence." But he is also fearful that his father will be angry upon discovering the "tale" that he and Savourwit have fabricated. At Savourwit's suggestion, he confesses to Lady Twilight, who, eager to be agreeable to the son she has not seen for ten years, readily forgives him and promises to help him by telling Sir Oliver that she recognizes the girl he has brought home to be his sister.

Although Lady Twilight carries through her promise, instead of helping her son in his difficulty, she succeeds only in adding to his anxiety. For after she questions Philip's wife, whose name is Grace as was the Twilight's daughter's, she is convinced that the girl is indeed Philip's sister, her daughter. Lady Twilight thus thinks that all is well; for as she tells Philip, who expresses concern that he
has committed incest, "Amongst all sins, heaven pities ignorance" (IV, i, 253), and he will easily be forgiven upon his repentance. Unknown to his mother, however, Philip finds no respite in this advice; for he has not been so much concerned about the sin of incest as about the fact that his "wife-sister" is pregnant with his child.

At the end of the play, Philip is finally relieved of his disquietude by Lady Goldenfleece. The Twilights and their friends are among the guests who attend the widow's wedding festivities. And after the matter concerning the Low-waters and the widow has been happily resolved, Sir Oliver, caught up in the mood of jubilation which prevails, decides "'tis as fine a contracting time as ever came amongst gentlefolks" (V, i, 401-2). As he has been led to believe, through Philip's efforts to cover up his deception, that Philip wants to marry Jane, the daughter of his old friend Sunset, and that Philip's friend Sandfield wants to marry his daughter Grace, Sir Oliver calls the two couples to "come to the book." But Lady Goldenfleece intervenes, saying she must "break an oath to save two souls" (V, i, 417). She reveals that she learned from Sunset's wife on her dying bed that, because her husband's fortunes were low, she, being nurse to both her own daughter and the Twilights', exchanged the infants so as to speed her daughter's fortunes. Therefore, "Jane" is really Grace; "Grace," Jane. Thus, with each
girl having been restored to her "right name and place" due to Lady Goldenfleece's revelation, Philip can happily comment to his pregnant wife who is not his sister after all: "How art thou blest from shame, and I from ruin!" (V, i, 467). 

Like Mistress Low-water, both Lady Twilight and Lady Goldenfleece attach a serious tone and point of view to their helpful actions. For just before Lady Twilight verifies the identity of "Grace " to Sir Oliver, who has lost faith in Philip for lying about his mother's death and who has come to doubt that the girl Philip has brought home is his daughter, she instructs her son:

You see how hard 'tis now
To redeem good opinion, being once gone;
Be careful then, and keep it when 'tis won.

(IV, i, 74-76)

Then, when Philip thanks her for having gone through with the deception, though she indicates that her actions warrant no special regard, she at the same time reminds him that he has a filial responsibility to live up to: "Love is a mother's duty to a son,/ As a son's duty is both love and

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3 Middleton took the basic framework of this plot from della Porta's late sixteenth century comedy, La Sorella. However, he departed from the original in making Philip an un-heroic character so as to stress the significance of Lady Twilight and Lady Goldenfleece in relieving him of his troubles. (D. J. Gordon makes a comparison between Middleton's plotting and della Porta's in "Middleton's No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's and della Porta's La Sorella," RES, 17 [1941], 400-14.)
fear" (IV, i, 167-68). And, as has been indicated, Lady Goldenfleece says she is revealing the true identities of Grace and Jane "to save two souls,/ Lest she should wake another judgment greater!" (V, i, 418-19). However, their seriousness does not result in problems of incongruity as Mistress Low-water's does. First of all, the point of view which is adopted by both ladies, especially Lady Twilight, is comprehensive but not profound and so does not militate against the comic scope of the play. And secondly, as neither Lady Twilight nor Lady Goldenfleece has been involved in setting Philip's "fair tale" in motion, neither encounters the problem of having to reconcile a humorous posture with a serious one. Then, too, Lady Goldenfleece's remark with reference to the help she gives is part of a series of utterances which become progressively sober as she goes through stages of enlightenment resulting from Mistress Low-water's schemes.4

ii.

Middleton begins The Widow by setting up the potential for the classic cuckoldry triangle of a young wife-old husband-young lover. As the play opens, Francisco arrives at the house of old justice Brandino, supposedly for the

4See, for instance, II, i, 373-98; V, i, 77-83, 206-22, 292-98, 380-86.
express purpose of obtaining a warrant from the justice's clerk Martino. But actually he has gone there to get another glimpse at Philippa, Brandino's young wife, for whom he has a desperate passion. Unknown to Francisco, Philippa is already pleasantly disposed toward him. However, as she tells her maid Violetta as they both watch him through a slit in a closed window from above, though he is handsome, she wants nothing to do with him unless he also has wit.

To determine whether Francisco meets her specification, Philippa first writes a letter to herself proposing a secret meeting and signs his name:

To the deservingst of all her sex, and most worthy of his best respect and love, mistress Philippa Brandino.

(I, i, 142-44)

Fair, dear, and incomparable mistress . . . My love being so violent, and the opportunity so precious in your husband's absence tonight, who, as I understand, takes a journey this morning . . . I will make bold, dear mistress, though your chastity has given me many a repulse, to wait the sweet blessings of this long-desired opportunity at the back gate, between nine and ten this night . . . Where, if your affection be pleased to receive me, you receive the faithfulest that ever vowed service to woman.--FRANCISCO.

(I, i, 203-19)\(^5\)

Then, as Francisco leaves, she drops the letter after him and pretends to Martino that the young man has deliberately

\(^5\)Though Philippa hints at the nature of this letter, its entire contents are revealed through Martino's reading them aloud. He reads the first three lines of the letter when he is trying to determine to whom it has been sent; the remainder of it he reads later, amid interruptions by Brandino and Philippa.
planted it. Next, she insists piously that her honor has been offended and spurs Brandino to confront Francisco with the letter. Thus, Philippa's test for Francisco has been set in motion: if he is clever enough to see that he is being summoned to an assignation through the letter, he may be accepted as having wit enough to be a safe lover.

Francisco not only understands Philippa's message, but he calms her irate husband as well. He tells Brandino, who had been like a brother to his now dead father, that he has indeed sent the letter to Philippa and has often "courted her, tempted and urg'd her," but only to test her constancy so that he can justifiably defend both Philippa's honor and his against those who will undoubtedly make insinuations about the fact that "[Brandino] in years/ Married a young maid" (I, ii, 225-26). Thoroughly ashamed of having accused Francisco of dishonorable intentions, Brandino not only begs his forgiveness, but ironically invites him freely to visit his house:

Francisco, is thy father's soul in thee?
Lives he here still? what, will he show himself
In his male seed to me? give me thy hand;
Methinks it feels now like thy father's to me:
Prithee, forgive me! . . .
Come to my house; thy father never miss'd it.
(I, ii, 236-41)
now I know thy intent
Welcome to all that I have!

(I, ii, 244-45)

On his way to keep the tryst with Philippa "at the back gate, between nine and ten[that]night," Francisco is twice delayed. He is first arrested as a result of his involvement in the efforts of his friend Ricardo to capture a rich widow. But Brandino, beginning the very journey to which Philippa alluded in her letter, sees the officers holding him and again ironically facilitates his access to Philippa by deciding to stand his bail. Francisco is delayed again, however, about two miles from Brandino's house when a "roguy flight of thieves" sets upon him and wounds him.

When Francisco finally arrives at Brandino's house, tired though he is from the difficulties that have beset him, his thoughts are still "brisk and set upon [his] business." But just before he reaches the gate, he sees a shadow in the darkness and decides against carrying out the tryst:

'Life, what should that be? a prodigious thing
Stands just as I should enter, in that shape too
Which always appears terrible.
Whate'er it be, it is made strong against me

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6The situation in which a husband is duped not only into thinking that his wife's lover has no intention of cuckoldling him, but into believing that the lover is his friend is a common cuckoldry motif. Middleton used a variation of this motif earlier with Harebrain and Penitent Brothel in A Mad World (see pp. 67-68, 72-73).
By my ill purpose; for 'tis man's own sin
That puts an armour upon all his evils,
And gives them strength to strike him. Were it less
Than what it is, my guilt would make it serve:
A wicked man's own shadow has distracted him.
Were this a business now to save an honor,
As 'tis to spoil me, I would pass this then,
Suck all hell's horrors i' thee: now I dare not.
Why may't not be the spirit of my father,
That lov'd this man so well, whom I make haste
Now to abuse? and I've been cross'd about it
Most fearfully hitherto, if I well think on't;
Scap'd death but lately too, nay, most miraculously.
And what does fond man venture all these ills for,
That may so sweetly rest in honest peace?
For that which, being obtain'd, is as he was
To his own sense, but remov'd nearer still
To death eternal. What delight has man
Now at this present for his pleasant sin
Of yesterday's committing? 'Ias, 'tis vanish'd,
And nothing but the sting remains with him!
The kind man bai'd me too; I will not do't now,
And 'twere but only that. How blest were man
Might he have his end appear still to him,
That he might read his actions i' th' event!
'Twould make him write true, though he never meant.
Whose check soe'er thou art, father's, or friend's
Or enemy's, I thank thee; peace requite thee!
Light, and the lighter mistress, both farewell!
He keeps his promise best that breaks with hell. [Exit.]

(III, iii, 85-118)

It will be noted that once Francisco gets over the initial shock of seeing the shadowy figure, his reflections on the implications of his experience in this long soliloquy are serious in tone and point of view. And although nothing

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The means by which Francisco is brought to repent of his adulterous designs links him with both Sir Walter in A Chaste Maid and Penitent Brothel in A Mad World. Like Sir Walter, he receives a wound which he considers to be a warning device, though he does not consider it thus until he, like Penitent, has been shocked into repentance by the appearance of the "ghost."
said earlier in the play has led us to expect this gravity in him, apparently we are meant to regard it seriously, as he is sustained in this posture in both word and deed for the balance of the play. When he goes to Brandino's house the next day, he goes not as Philippa's lover, but as the old justice's friend. He piously reflects that he can enter Brandino's house "with joy/ Sweet peace, and quietness of consciousness" (V, i, 125-26) as he is not guilty of trysting with his wife. Later when he falls in love with a "sweet gentlewoman," he sees it as an "honest love" to replace the immoral one he has forsworn. And he subsequently professes his "honest love" to her and is rewarded by gaining her hand in marriage. Yet, we cannot adopt the serious attitude that Francisco's words and deeds demand without violating the playful spirit the play has established and continues to establish both in this plot and in the sub-plot.  

In the main plot, the light mood is maintained chiefly by Philippa, who continues her manipulations to cuckold Brandino. Just before Francisco's arrival at the

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8Although Penitent in A Mad World and Sir Walter in A Chaste Maid are themselves no less serious than Francisco about reforming their ways, their repentances are brought within the comic framework of their respective plays. Harebrain overhears part of Penitent's confession and thinks he is merely lecturing Mistress Harebrain on the merits of good conduct, never suspecting the reason that had led to the outburst (see pp. 67, 72-73). And Sir Walter's serious repentances are made to look ridiculous before Allwit, who keeps insisting that the knight is raving because he is in a state of delirium (see pp. 84-85).
gate, Philippa, in a discussion with Violetta, has decided that Francisco has no wit, as it is getting late and they have seen no signs of his coming. And although Philippa professes that she is better off not to have become involved with Francisco ("If he cannot conceive what's good for himself,/ He will worse understand what's good for me"—III, ii, 10-11) and wishes she had the letter she sent him back in her possession, she indicates that she is not through with her game of seeking a lover as she engages in a song with Violetta and concludes that being an old man's wife is the worst extremity that a woman can come to—it is even worse than being a "fool's mistress." Thus, when "a sweet young gentleman" knocks at the door asking for help a few moments later, he is not unwelcome to Philippa, who has been disappointed in her expectation of Francisco's arrival. Violetta describes the newcomer in glowing terms ("he's a most sweet one;/ Francisco is a child of Egypt to him"—III, iii, 30-31), and Philippa promptly asks her to show him in.

The "sweet young gentleman" is actually Martia, a young girl who has disguised herself as a man to escape a forced marriage with a rich old man. She is also the shadowy figure that Francisco has seen in the dark. As she has been set upon and stripped of everything but her shirt by the same band of thieves that robbed Francisco, when she catches sight of him approaching Brandino's house, she thinks he is
one of the thieves returning to do her more harm. Thus, she has resolved to ask for help at Brandino's house.

When Philippa sees the "young gentleman," she is impressed with "his" physical appearance, as she had been with Francisco's. The "young gentleman" shows to special advantage because "he" is handsome in spite of the fact that "he" is dressed in one of Brandino's old suits which Violetta has let "him" borrow to replace the one the thieves have taken from "him." And after engaging in a conversation with "him," she is convinced that "he" has "wit and faith" enough to be her lover. However, as the "young gentleman" has an appointment about ten miles away, which, if "he" fails to meet, will prove "as much as ['his'] undoing," Philippa is hampered in furthering her designs on this occasion. But she gives "him" a purse to bear charges on "his" way, and "he" promises to repay her when "he" returns shortly to bring back Brandino's suit. As the "gentleman" hastily takes "his" leave, Philippa suddenly realizes that people will probably be suspicious if they see "him" riding through town at this early hour in Brandino's clothes. She and Violetta try to call "him" back, but "he" is too far in the distance to hear them.

Exactly what the appointment is that the "gentleman" must keep we never do find out. But "he" does appear

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9"He" tells Philippa that "he" is "to meet a friend/ Upon ['his'] state's establishing" (III, iii, 106-7); but this meeting is never again referred to in the plot.
in town and Brandino's clothes do get "him" into difficulty. The thieves who have robbed Francisco and the "gentleman" have set themselves up in town as empirics. And when the "gentleman" enters their place of business to inquire if they have seen the knot of thieves who robbed "him," Brandino, entering soon afterward, recognizes his suit on "him" and has "him" arrested without allowing "him" to explain how "he" came by it. The thieves craftily relieve Brandino and Martino of their purses; and when they discover they have been robbed, they assume, with a little encouragement by the thieves, that the "gentleman" picked their pockets before "he" was taken to jail. Brandino then sends Martino back to his house to ask Philippa if they have been robbed of anything besides his suit, as he wishes to make the "gentleman" answer for all his enormities when be brings formal charges against "him."

When Martino returns to inquire about stolen property, Philippa and Violetta learn what has delayed the "gentleman." And when Philippa further learns that "he" has not revealed how "he" came to be wearing Brandino's suit, she assumes that "he" allowed her husband to think it was stolen so as to keep him from suspecting that she plotted intrigue, a restraint which proves to her and Violetta alike not only that "he" has "wit and faith" enough to be her lover, but that "he" has a special regard for her.
Philippa resolves to help the "young gentleman" by going into town and telling the truth. But before she can do so, "he" comes to the house, still wearing Brandino's clothes, having been relieved of the purse Philippa gave "him" by the thieves, who decide not to let "him" be punished for their crimes. Afraid that Martino will come back again and discover the "gentleman," Philippa tells Violetta to "dress him up in one of [her] gowns and headtires" (V, i, 75). But she also sees the disguise as facilitating her cuckolding Brandino with the "gentleman." As Violetta exits with him, she muses,

I've thought upon a way of certain safety,
And I may keep him while I have him too,
Without suspicion now; I've heard o' th' like:
A gentleman, that for a lady's love
Was thought six months her woman, tended on her
In her own garments, and she being a widow,
Lay night by night with her in way of comfort;
Marry, in conclusion, match they did together:
Would I'd a copy of the same conclusion!

(V, i, 85-93)

When Brandino returns home, he brings with him the reformed Francisco, informing Philippa that her would-be lover has said he wrote the letter only to try her constancy. Philippa of course is insulted that Francisco, who has been wise enough to see her ploy, has not capitalized on it. Therefore, when she discovers that he has instantly fallen in love with the "disguised gentleman," she sees a chance to get even with him for ignoring the
proposed assignation. Scarcely able to muffle her laughter so that Francisco will not detect her amusement, she asks the "gentleman," who has earlier expressed "his" gratitude for her kindness, to go along with her in playing a prank by encouraging Francisco as a lover.

Philippa is foiled in her attempt to wreak vengeance on Francisco, however. After the "disguised gentleman" has apparently quickly agreed to Francisco's earnest pleadings for a match, Violetta joins Brandino and the guests who have just arrived--Philippa's widowed sister Valeria and the three gentlemen who are suing for her hand--and then laughingly informs them that Francisco has married a man. But Violetta is quickly halted in her mirth, as is Philippa, who enters in a jovial mood with the matched pair. One of Valeria's suitors recognizes the "disguised gentleman" as his daughter Martia, who promptly apologizes to her father for being disobedient and is readily forgiven by him, as "Francisco's of a noble family," Though he be somewhat spent" (V, i, 415-16) and therefore is as good a mate as the old man to whom he had sought to contract her. The plot ends as Francisco and Martia, realizing that Philippa and Violetta have sought to have fun at their expense as well as to set up a contrivance by which Brandino could be cuckolded,
exert them to goodness in sober language:

Martia. Be good.

Fran. Be honest.

Martia. Heaven will not let you sin, and you'd be careful.

Fran. What means it sends to help you, think and mend, You're as much bound as we to praise that friend.

Phil. I am so, and I will so.

Martia. Marry you speedily; Children tame you, you'll die like a wild beast else.

Vio. Ay, by my troth, should I. (V, i, 423-29)

We may assume from the play that Philippa's and Violetta's acquiescence to the advice they receive does indicate their actual reform, although they have been virtually notorious for their ingenious schemes and although Brandino himself never seems to become aware of the fact that they have been contriving to cuckold him. But at the same time, we may note how much more in keeping with the tone of the play their reform is than was Francisco's. For it is actually brought about not by the serious exhortations they receive, but by their realization that they may prove the objects of ridicule:

Phil. O, Violetta, who shall laugh at us now?

Vio. The child unborn, mistress. (V, i, 421-22)
As has been indicated, the sub-plot, from which the play takes its title, is also conducted on a light level. Valeria, a rich young widow, is about the business of choosing a second husband. Like her sister Philippa, she insists that her prospective mate should have a certain quality; as she tells one of her suitors, "I'd have one that loves me for myself,/ Not for my wealth" (II, 1, 68-69). But unlike Philippa, she stands out as being an admirable character, for the alliance she seeks does not contravene moral law. Yet she is never staid. Typical of the colorful tone she maintains throughout the play is the comment she makes after instructing her servant not to admit one of her suitors who paints his face:

ne'er may I marry again,
If his right worshipful idolatrous face
Be not most fearfully painted; so hope comfort me,
I might perceive it peel in many places:
And under's eye lay a betraying foulness,
As maids sweep dust o' th' house all to one corner;
It showed me enough there, prodigious pride,
That cannot fall but scornfully. I'm a woman;
Yet, I praise heaven, I never had th' ambition
To go about to mend a better workman... (II, 1, 4-13)

And when she gets ready to choose a mate from her three suitors, she engages in trickery, causing them to believe she has permanently signed over all her wealth to her brother-in-law Brandino. This situation is rendered especially humorous as two of the suitors quickly lose
interest in making the match and as Brandino pleads misunderstanding when she takes back the titles to her wealth from him.

Francisco's friend Ricardo, a bankrupt gallant, is the suitor who meets the widow's requirement. Though he admits early in the play that he is not attracted to the widow entirely by love, but by "love chiefly," he comes to have a "greater mind to her . . . than e'er [he] had" (II ii, 46-47) and proves it by not deserting her when she seems to be penniless. Thus, he becomes a parallel character to Francisco, who professes that he loves Martia for herself alone. But there is as much difference in tone between their declarations of love as between Francisco's resolve not to cuckold Brandino and Philippa's. Francisco's professions are serious, even religious in tone. For instance, when Philippa points out that he knows nothing of Martia's background as he begins his suit, he replies, "'Tis only but her love that I desire;/ She comes most rich in that" (V, i, 256-67). And later when he makes his feelings known to her father, he pleads,

I lov'd her not, sir,
As she was yours, for I protest I knew it not,
But for herself, sir, and her own deserving,
Which, had you been as foul as you've been spiteful,
I should have lov'd in her.

(V, i, 416-20)
But Ricardo's declarations never approach this tone. Rather, throughout the play, he banTERS with the widow as he insists that he will have her for his wife. And in the epilogue, as he restrains Francisco from deserting the company before they get audience approval for their performance, though his love for the widow has been proven as worthy as Francisco's for Martia, he makes no attempt to ennoble his attraction to her:

    Stay, stay, sir; I'm as hungry of my widow,
    As you can be upon your maid, believe it;
    But we must come to our desires in order;
    There's duties to be paid ere we go further.--
      (V, i, 447-50)
CHAPTER 5: TRAGICOMEDY AND HISTORY

By virtue of genre, of course, Middleton can invest the cuckoldry plots in both his tragi-comedy *The Witch* (1610-16?) and his history play *Hengist, King of Kent, or The Mayor of Queenborough*\(^1\) (1616?) with the serious tone and implication that complement traditional moral resolution far less offensively than he could in *No Wit* and *The Widow*. Nonetheless, in *The Witch*, in which he treats cuckoldry in two basically well-developed though almost totally disconnected main plots and a sub-plot which is ingeniously and complicatedly connected to one of them, serious tone and implication, and therefore moralistic resolution, are ultimately undermined as he subscribes to the demands of genre. In *Hengist*, the cuckoldry plot or intrigue, masterfully worked into the play, is also resolved according to traditional moral standards. And though there is no question of the undermining of this resolution in *Hengist* as there is in *The Witch*, in the history play, as in the tragi-comedy, genre

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1*Hengist, King of Kent* was designated a comedy on the title page of its original quarto. It has since been variously termed a tragi-comedy, a tragedy, a history play by its critics. The reason for its designation here as a history play is included in the discussion of the play later in this chapter.
becomes a factor in the negative evaluation of the cuckoldry plot.

i.

The Witch opens with a banquet which the Lord
Governor gives to celebrate the marriage of his niece Isa-
abella to Antonio. Ostensibly, the occasion is one of jubil-
ation, but several of those present find it impossible to
subscribe to a mood of gaiety. Sebastian, who lurks about
unseen by all except his friend Fernando, is wretchedly un-
happy because he feels that Isabella is rightfully his;
Florida, who, like Sebastian, remains unnoticed by all but
a confederate, is overcome by the sharp pangs of rejection,
as she has been Antonio's mistress for five years; Francis-
ca is worried that her brother, Antonio, will discover that
she is about to give birth to an illegitimate child; Alm-
achildes is miserable, as his love for the Duchess's woman
Amoretta goes unrequited; the Duchess becomes angry because
the Duke engages in an action which shows disrespect for her
dead father. From this occasion of ostensible merriment
which actually brings to the fore considerable discontent,
the play moves forward in its two main plots and one sub-
plot.

One of the main plots, which Middleton adapts from
Machiavelli's Florentine History concerns the Duchess's
attempt to get revenge on the Duke. At the banquet, proposing a toast to the health of the bride, the Duke produces a cup made from the skull of the Duchess's father, whom he has conquered in battle. And he is as confident as he is insensitive in thinking that his wife will join in the pledge without reservation because of the affection she holds for him:

Our duchess, I know, will pledge us, though the cup
Was once her father's head, which, as a trophy,
We'll keep till death in memory of that conquest.
He was the greatest foe our steel e'er strook at,
And he was bravely slain: then took we thee
Into our bosom's love: thou mad'st the peace
For all thy country, thou, that beauty, did.
We're dearer than a father, are we not?

(I, i, 116-23)

The Duchess at first seems not a disappointment to the Duke's expectations. For when the Lord Governor notes that she seems to have paled at the sight of the skull-cup, she denies the validity of his observation and proceeds to drink as the Duke would have her. But later we learn that her response to the Duke is merely a cover for her true feelings. After she has drunk the pledge, she lets us know through an aside that this is the second time the Duke has bid her toast in the "strange cup" and that she has certainly not been pleased to do so on either occasion:

Did ever such cruel barbarous act match this?
Twice hath his surfeits brought my father's memory
Thus spitefully and scornfully to mine eyes;
And I'll endure 't no more; 'tis in my heart since:
I'll be reveng'd as far as death can lead me.

(I, ii, 137-41)
The plan which the Duchess conceives to wreak vengeance on the Duke involves her maid Amoretta and Almachildes. Knowing that the proud young Almachildes, who has a reputation for wantonness among the ladies, is attracted to Amoretta, who finds him "the uncivil'st gentleman,/ And every way desertless" (II, ii, 83-84), the Duchess asks the maid to pretend that she at last favours him and is willing to have a tryst with him, if he will yield "to such conditions/ As [her] poor bashfulness shall require from [him]" (II, ii, 137-38). One of the conditions, the main one, is that Almachildes be blindfolded during the assignation. By this contrivance, the Duchess plans to make Almachildes her pawn by having him discover after the affair that he has not slept with Amoretta, but with her. Apart from the fact that Almachildes is obsessed with the idea of possessing Amoretta, one reason why he is taken in by the ploy is that he has just returned from a visit with Hecate and her companion witches to get a charm which will cause Amoretta to be favorably disposed toward him.\(^2\) The effects of the charm, a "silk ribbon

\[\text{In the course of the play, two other characters--Sebastian and the Duchess--are led to ask the witches for a magic charm. However, in spite of the fact that the title of the play would seem to indicate that the witch scenes are pivotal, or even focal, they finally are not. The first two witch scenes, the one involving the resolute Sebastian and the other involving the lecherous Almachildes, indicate that Middleton may have intended to use such scenes as structural and thematic devices; but the tight organization which they initially seem to offer soon becomes diffused into entertaining renditions of witch-lore (based mostly on the lore to be found in Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* [1584]) in}\]
of three colors," however, are nullified, as shortly after Almachildes has thrust the ribbon into Amoretta's breast during a forced embrace it has fallen to the floor. Thus, the scheme which the Duchess has plotted is not complicated by Almachildes' efforts with regard to Amoretta.

But during the tryst, Almachildes realizes that he has been deceived; the blindfold still over his eyes, he protests that his partner is certainly not inexperienced in love-making as she has led him to believe. However, he does not realize the extent of the deception until the blindfold is removed and the Duchess stands before him, presenting him with dreadful alternatives: "Say, thou must either die, or kill the duke" (III, i, 16). The Duchess has the matter well in hand, as she explains to the stunned Almachildes how she will insure his death by capitalizing on his reputation for debauchery in causing the Duke to believe he has cuckolded him if he does not oblige her in taking her husband's life:

But if through weakness
Of a poor spirit thou deniest me this,
Think but how thou shalt die! as I'll work means for't
No murderer ever like thee; for I purpose
To call this subtle, sinful snare of mine
An act of force from thee. Thou'rt proud and youthful;
I shall be believ'd: besides, thy wantonness
Is at this hour in question 'mongst our women,
Which will make ill for thee.

(III, i, 26-34)

subsequent scenes, which, with the exception of the scene near the end of the play in which the Duchess goes to the witches, are not related to the plots at all.
In the other main plot, Sebastian resorts to manipulating a cuckoldry scheme as a result of becoming increasingly embroiled in a mental anguish which verges on madness. Sebastian's disordered state of mind begins when he returns to Ravenna after spending three years in war, only to find that Isabella, who was contracted to him, has just married Antonio. From Sebastian's point of view, Isabella was already his wife, as their contract was sanctioned in the eyes of God. Yet he realizes that for others Isabella's marriage to Antonio has both law and religion on its side. His friend Fernando counsels him not to agonize over the situation, as, though he does not think Isabella "overloves" Antonio, he is nevertheless of the opinion that "now she intends/ Performance of an honest, duteous wife" (I, i, 15-16). But Sebastian is too deeply affected to abide this advice. And he resolves to use "strange employments" to prevent the consummation of the marriage which violates his sacred right, as he has no socially viable means of asserting himself (he does not know that Antonio has falsely reported his death in order to gain Isabella's hand).

Like Almachildes, Sebastian relies on the magic skills of the witches to help him gain his ends. He is reluctant to seek such aid, as it is "'gainst religion's knowledge." Yet he feels compelled to do so, because
religion has proven inadequate in his extremity. As he enters Hecate's abode, he rationalizes his action:

    Heaven knows with what unwillingness and hate
    I enter this damn'd place: but such extremes
    Of wrongs in love fight 'gainst religion's knowledge,
    That were I led by this disease to deaths
    As numberless as creatures that must die,
    I could not shun the way. I know what 'tis
    To pity madmen now . . . .

    (I, ii, 107-14)

Hecate gives him serpent skins, which, when conveyed into the house of a married couple, will render the husband impotent. Sebastian would have her "part 'em utterly," but she explains that witches "cannot disjoin wedlock;/ 'Tis of heaven's fastening" (I, ii, 171-72). Thus, he departs content that the marriage will not be consummated.

The charm does work as Hecate had promised. Having managed to get hired as Isabella's serving man by disguising himself as Celio, Sebastian observes Antonio's frustration the morning after the wedding night and Isabella's light-hearted attempts to convince herself that nothing is wrong. But finally for Sebastian the charm does not work well enough, for it cannot keep him from being deprived. He laments, "Still she's not mine, that can be no man's else/
    Till I be nothing . . . ." (II, i, 223-24).

At the depths of his despair, Sebastian is assisted by what he regards as "the likeliest means/ That fortune e'er yet show'd [him]" (III, ii, 46-47). From Antonio's servant
Gasparo, he learns that Antonio, in desperation because of his impotence with Isabella, has again taken to sleeping with his former mistress Florida. Thus, he considers himself justified in cuckolding the unfaithful Antonio. Still disguised as the servant Celio, he goes to Isabella and informs her that her husband, whom he knows to be on a journey from home, has gone to meet his mistress and promises to take her to the place of assignation so that she may discover them. The house to which he takes her is Fernando's. To provoke suspicion and anger in Isabella, he has arranged to have her see Florida leave as she approaches. And he plans to ravish her when she enters the room in which Antonio is supposedly sleeping.

In justifying this tactic to make Isabella his own, again Sebastian insists that the contract between them, having religious sanction, supersedes the tie between Isabella and Antonio. Rationalizing his intended action to Fernando, he maintains that his actions are not wrong, as he and Isabella are "register'd/ Husband and wife in heaven" (IV, ii, 8-9), that "Honest actions/ Are laws unto themselves..." (IV, ii, 63-64). But at the very moment when his success is possessing Isabella seems assured, he suddenly realizes the full implications of his actions; and he quietly reflects,

I cannot so deceive her, 'twere too sinful,
There's more religion in my love than so.
It is not treacherous lust that gives content
T' an honest mind; and this could prove no better.
Were it in me a part of manly justice,
That have sought strange hard means to keep her chaste
To her first vow, and I t' abuse her first?
Better I never knew what comfort were
In woman's love than wickedly to know it.
What could the falsehood of one night avail him
That must enjoy for ever, or he's lost?
'Tis the way rather to draw hate upon me;
For, known, 'tis as impossible she should love me,
As youth in health to doat upon grief,
Or one that's robb'd and bound t' affect the thief:
No, he that would soul's sacred comfort win
Must burn in pure love, like a seraphin.

(IV, ii, 95-111) 3

Thus, when Isabella finds no signs of Antonio in the designated chamber and wants to know what is amiss, Sebastian suggests that perhaps Antonio has thought better of his actions. And he wants to escort her back home immediately. But as he has obtained Florida's consent to make her brief but timely appearance at Fernando's house by promising her that she would be able to enjoy lying with Antonio while he himself ravished Isabella (Sebastian considered himself to be playing a trick on Florida, since, as far as he knew, Antonio was on a journey), he suggests that Isabella rest for the night at Fernando's in order to prevent her from discovering Florida in her bed.

3Sebastian is like Francisco in The Widow in refraining from engaging in an adulterous affair just when he would be successful in realizing his ambition. However, we are not offended by Sebastian's gravity in giving the reason for his restraint as we are by Francisco's, because throughout the play Sebastian has been characterized by serious, if frenzied, introspection with regard to the situation that leads him to consider the affair.
Sebastian, however, is not the only one who has set a scheme afoot with regard to Isabella. For in the sub-plot, Antonio's sister Francisca has found it necessary to undo Isabella in the eyes of her brother. Toward the beginning of the play we learn that Francisca, not yet seventeen, is pregnant by Aberzanes, "a gentleman, neither honest, wise, nor valiant." She is fearful that her brother "sure would kill [her] if he knew't" (II, i, 60), but Aberzanes promises to devise a means whereby she may deliver the child unsuspected. He writes a letter to Antonio, supposedly from his and Francisca's mother, who lives in "the northern parts," asking that he send his sister home and stating that her presence there "will prove much for her good in the way of her preferment" (II, i, 77-78). Francisca thus provided with an excuse to be away from her brother's house for an extended period of time, Aberzanes takes her to an old woman's lodgings about eleven miles away where she gives birth to her bastard. In her absence, however, Isabella discovers a letter formerly sent to her which betrays her affair with Aberzanes. When she returns maintaining that the gentleman to whom her mother sought to marry her took ill and died, Isabella confronts her with the letter she has found and berates her for having wronged "so good a brother, and the thoughts/ That [they] both held of [her]" (III, ii 100-1). However, Isabella promises not to tell Antonio of
her disgrace if she will "desist here, and shake hands with folly" and "leave [her brother's] company."

Convinced that her sister-in-law will not be able to keep her secret, Francisca thinks of a plan which will enable her to "bring Isabella's honesty into question cunningly" and cause her brother to "be quit with her." Knowing that Antonio "will believe small likelihoods,/ Coming from [her] too" (III, ii, 134-35), she suggests to him that Isabella is unfaithful. Antonio promptly sets about to catch his wife at dissembling by pretending that he will be away from home for a fortnight on business for the state. Francisca is of course apprised of his real plans to return unexpectedly. And on the night when this is to take place, she sets the remainder of her deceptive scheme in motion. She "spices" all the maid-servants with a "drowsy posset"; then when she hears Antonio coming she wakes his servant Gasparo and spurs him to go into Isabella's room without putting on his clothes, saying that Isabella has called out for help. As Antonio comes in, she tells him to look first in Gasparo's room, then in Isabella's. Finding Gasparo not in his own room but in Isabella's, Antonio, certain that he is being cuckolded, stabs the "perjurous woman" and Gasparo, as he exclaims, "There perish both, down to the house of falsehood/ Where perjurous wedlock weeps!" (IV, iii, 45-46). 4

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4The scheme Francisca uses for implicating Isabella is basically the same that Mistress Low-water in No Wit uses to discredit Lady Goldenfleece (see pp. 101-2).
That Francisca should think of this scheme to protect herself against Isabella's possible betrayal and carry it out with facility is not at all surprising. For at earlier points in the play she has demonstrated her cleverness in soliloquies and in asides during conversations with Isabella and Antonio. But in spite of the fact that she is clever, she fails to calculate the complete reaction of her brother to the suggestion that he is being cuckolded. For though she predicts correctly that his rage will lead him to fiercely attack dissembling wife and lover, she never thinks about the possibility that his fury could encompass her as well.

When Antonio emerges from the bed chamber, having stabbed the discovered pair, he tells Francisca: "Talk to thy soul, if thou wilt talk at all;/ To me thou'rt lost for ever" (IV, iii, 62-63). He reasons that he must now kill his sister both because she has made him a murderer and because she knows that he is a cuckold:

'Tis that too diligent, thankless care of thine
Makes me a murderer, and that ruinous truth
That lights me to the knowledge of my shame.
Hadst thou been secret, then had I been happy,
And had a hope, like man, of joys to come:
Now here I stand a stain to my creation;
And which is heavier than all torments to me,
The understanding of this base adultery;
And that thou toldst me first, which thou deserv'st
Death worthily for.

(IV, iii, 67-76)

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5For example, see II, i, 34-142; II, i, 188-99; III, ii, 114-41.
To save her life, Francisca quickly assures her brother that he is not a cuckold and confesses that she has concocted the whole scheme to keep him from finding out that she had a child by Aberzanes. Although Antonio has practically directed the course Francisca takes to get out of her predicament by admitting that he is less bothered by the fact that he is a murderer than he is by the knowledge that he is a cuckold, it might be argued that Middleton's characterization of her at this point is a disappointment. For it would seem that the Francisca who has so cleverly handled eventualities to keep her disgrace from becoming known up to this point in the plot would have thought of some shift besides confession to divert her brother from his projected course of action.

Nonetheless, after Francisca's confession, the sub-plot moves forward by a series of steps and missteps that increasingly intertwine it with the Sebastian-Isabella plot and lead to that plot's resolution. Upon learning that his sister has been made a whore, Antonio sends for Aberzanes and challenges him to a fight. But the cowardly lover refuses to draw his sword. Antonio then forces him and Francisca to kneel and contract themselves before making them drink along with him the wine he has instructed his servant Hermio to poison. Almost immediately afterward, he learns that he has not killed the pair of lovers he found in
the bed chamber but only wounded them and that the woman he 
has stabbed is not Isabella but Florida, who has fallen 
asleep while waiting for him to come on the basis of infor-
mation she has received from Sebastian. However, instead of 
rejoicing that he has not thus unjustly killed or wounded 
his wife, Antonio is suspicious of her absence and wishes 
that the poison he has taken in the wine "would but spare 
[his] life/ Till [he] had found her out!" (V, i, 84-85). 
Hermio comes to his aid in this respect. "Upon the faith-
fulness of a pitying servant," he tells his master, "I gave 
you [no poison] at all" (V, i, 86-87). As Isabella's 
uncle, the Lord Governor, enters, Antonio denounces his wife 
as false, impudent, adulterous. And when the Lord Governor 
 attempts to defend his niece's "virtuous meekness," Florida 
enters the fray, saying that Isabella "lies this night with 
Celio, her own servant,/ The place, Fernando's house" (V, i, 
99-100). Enraged for the second time over an allegation of 
Isabella's unfaithfulness, Antonio rushes off to "make [his] 
revenge dreadfuller than a tempest" (V, i, 105).

When Isabella returns early the next morning, she is 
cleared of her guilt when she tells the Lord Governor what 
happened and "Celio" confirms her story. But as the Lord 
Governor has been informed by Florida of the adulterous 
design practiced between her and "Celio" to entrap Isabella's 
honor while she herself enjoyed Antonio, he is at a loss to
understand "Celio's" actions and demands an explanation. At this juncture, Hermio enters, informing the group that Isabella has been newly made a widow as Antonio has met his death by a "fearful, unexpected accident": he entered Fernando's house "like a rais'd tempest" and, blinded by his wrath and jealousy, fell from a trap-door "into a depth/Exceeds a temple's height" (V, i, 30-31). Upon the receipt of this news, Sebastian is "now of age to clear [himself]," and he throws off his disguise. Gasparo then admits that he and Antonio lied about Sebastian's death, and Sebastian and Isabella are reunited.

Thus, Middleton brings the Sebastian-Isabella plot and its sub-plot to their conclusions. But it becomes apparent that in doing so, he is guilty of manifesting the "irresponsibility," the "fundamental indecision" that critics have described as being typical of the genre of tragicomedy. In other words, in resolving these plots, in bringing them necessarily to "happy endings" he fails to deal with the serious issues or questions he has raised within them.

For example, Francisca in setting her cuckoldry scheme afoot would cause two innocent people to be murdered. But this issue seems to be dismissed so that the plotting can

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6These descriptive terms are used by Una Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama: An Interpretation (London, 1936), p. 206, and Muriel C. Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions in Elizabethan Tragedy (Cambridge, 1960), p. 244, respectively, in describing the tragicomedies of Beaumont and Fletcher, after whom many of the writers of tragicomedy of the period patterned their work.
proceed. Indeed, after her scheme miscarries, she herself drops out of the play completely, having been called into account for the intended murders only as she receives a coward for a husband and then drinks some "unpoisoned-poisoned wine." Twice an enraged Antonio attempts to catch and kill his innocent wife and her "lovers." After the first attempt, having been told that Isabella is innocent as is Gasparo with whom he found her and thinking himself soon to die from drinking the supposedly poisoned wine, he seems remorseful, as he soliloquizes,

Spread, subtle poison! Now my shame in her
Will die when I die; there's some comfort yet.
I do but think how each man's punishment
Proves still a kind of justice to himself.
I was the man that told this innocent gentlewoman,
Whom I did falsely wed and falsely kill,
That he that was her husband first by contract
Was slain i' th' field; and he's known yet to live:
So did I cruelly beguile his heart,
For which I am well rewarded; so is Gaspar,
Who, to befriend me, swore faithful oaths
He saw the last breath fly from him. I see now
"Tis a thing dreadful t' abuse holy vows,
And falls most weight[il]y.

(V, i, 56-60)

But for all the same remorsefulness he evidences, after his life is spared because of Hermio's actions, he becomes instantly enraged when he hears another rumor about Isabella and rushes off, again bent on murdering her and her "lover." Though Antonio meets his death as a result of his rashness, there is still an indecision, an irresponsibility that looms
over this development. For because he negates his realization of the consequences of his action with reference to Isabella and Sebastian by again striking the pose of the abused husband and because he never admits that he himself has been unfaithful to his marriage vow in keeping Florida as his mistress—both of which in the course of the plotting have promised to be issues with which he must deal—his death seems more expedient than justified. On the other hand, Sebastian is rewarded by being reunited with Isabella at the end of the main plot. But even this reunion is indicative of a certain authorial irresponsibility. For it comes about not because the question of Sebastian's right to Isabella over Antonio's is resolved (this is still a valid issue to Sebastian in spite of the fact that he decides not to act on it) or even because the lie about Sebastian's death is uncovered, but because Antonio takes a timely plunge through the trap door.

This "opting out" on a serious issue is also to be found in Middleton's resolution of the Duke-Duchess plot. Seeing no way out of the dilemma in which the Duchess has trapped him, Almachildes has consented to kill the Duke. However, he suspects that the Duchess, who has promised to raise him to the dukedom once he has rid her of her husband, is not to be trusted and that she will plot his own undoing once he has obliged her in the matter. And he is correct in
his assessment. For the Duchess wastes no time in making amorous advances toward the Lord Governor, whom the people, in a tumult over the Duke's "strange and sudden loss," esteem and will accept in the ducal position, and in going to the witches to procure a charm for Almachildes' death. But at the end of the plot, the duplicity of the Duchess is uncovered. When she goes to the house of the Lord Governor, he draws a curtain and exposes the Duke lying on a couch and then laments her for adultery and murder. The sight of the Duke thus positioned grieves the Duchess sorely, and she realizes that she is guilty of "a cruelty above [her] cause," that her revenge of murder was in excess of the Duke's offense of pledging in the cup made from her father's skull. But though she is willing to die for having her husband murdered, she insists that she was never unfaithful: "Blood I'm guilty of,/ But not adultery, not the breach of honour" (V, iii, 104-5). Almachildes immediately comes forth and attests to the fact that he has "known" her. But the Duchess calls Amoretta to witness what actually happened during Almachildes' "blinded assignation," and the maid does so under oath:

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As has been indicated (p. 129, n. 1) the Duchess is the third character in the play to seek aid from the witches. Unlike the case with the other two, however, the Duchess's trip proves inconsequential—that is, she supposedly gets the kind of charm she wants from Hecate, but we find no indication in the plot that Almachildes is ever affected by it.
by all the hopes of a maid's comfort
Either in faithful service or blest marriage,
The woman that his blinded folly knew
Was only a hir'd strumpet, a professor
Of lust and impudence, which here is ready
To approve what I have spoken.

(V, iii, 116-21)

Upon hearing this, the Duke rises (Almachildes has not killed him after all), embraces the Duchess, and thus forgives her for plotting his murder:

    since in honour thou canst justly rise,
    Vanish all wrongs, thy former practice dies!

    ...

[I thank] heaven for such a wife,
Who though her intent sinn'd, yet she makes amends
With grief and honour, virtue's noblest ends.

(V, II, 128-33)

With the Duke's words of forgiveness, Middleton's authorial irresponsibility again comes glaring through. The Duchess learns an important lesson with regard to the unwarranted extreme to which her wrath has led her. But this is made to seem inconsequential. For the Duke forgives her basically not because she regrets having let her anger lead

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8In the Florentine History, Queen Rosamund, the Duchess's counterpart, actually did sleep with a lover to insure the death of her husband. In this plot, however, Middleton is working a variation on the "Substitute Maid" motif which frequently occurs in cuckoldry tales. With this motif, a wife who has been caught with her lover is usually inflicted with a visible sign of her husband's wrath, such as a bruise, a broken nose, or shorn hair. However, as she is usually caught at her cuckoldry in the dark, she manages to have her maid take the punishment so that when her husband sees her in daylight, she can dupe him into thinking either that someone else was in their bed with a lover or that he dreamed the whole affair, as she will display no signs of his having attacked her.
her to contrive a plot for his murder, but because she has not committed adultery—a restraint which, though commendable, has no bearing on the enormity she has intended.

ii.

At the beginning of Hengist, King of Kent, or The Mayor of Queenborough, Raynulph, Monk of Chester, tells the spectators that they are about to witness a play based on events described in the chronicles of early British history. The play treats the story of Vortigern, or Vortiger, the legendary king of Britain who usurped the crown from Constantius, eldest son of Constantine, and of Hengist, who, leading the Saxon army which Vortiger summoned to his aid in order to fight off the invading Scots and Picts, came to like Britain and determined to gain a kingdom for himself. Beginning with Bede's Ecclesiastical History, the story had been told and retold in chronicles and poems down through the Renaissance. In working out the details for Hengist, Middleton fused his findings from a number of these sources, especially the chronicles of Holinshed and Fabyan. But he also supplemented them with elements of his own invention.

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9 The sub-title has its derivation in a publisher's allusion to the play in the preface of its 1661 quarto.

10 R. C. Bald gives an account of Middleton's sources in his edition of the play, Hengist, King of Kent, or The Mayor of Queenborough (New York, 1938), pp. xxxvii-xlili.
Chief among Middleton's embellishments in Hengist is the triangular intrigue between Vortiger, Hengist's daughter, Roxena, and the Saxon warrior, Horsus. In the legendary accounts, Vortiger does fall in love with Roxena when she comes to Britain; but Horsus is not amorously connected with her, as he is referred to as either the brother or the cousin of Hengist\(^{11}\) and would therefore be her kinsman. Middleton, however, does not acknowledge a family tie between Horsus and Hengist. Rather, he casts them as mere fellow warriors, having Hengist refer to Horsus as "captain Horsus" (II, iii, 29) when he introduces himself and his companion to Vortiger. Thus, he makes valid the amorous relationship he develops between Horsus and Roxena as a complication of the legendary relationship between Vortiger and Roxena.

In the play, Vortiger falls in love with Roxena when she, having followed the Saxons to Britain supposedly for the love she bears her father, drinks a health to him among the Saxon soldiers upon hearing of her father's success in gaining the king's favor. Hengist is pleased when one of his soldiers informs him that Vortiger has suddenly become enamored of Roxena. But Horsus is deeply disturbed, for he regards Roxena as his own. Just before the soldier enters to bring these tidings, he has insisted that Hengist be sure

\(^{11}\)See Bald, p. xxxvii, for the variations on the relationship between Hengist and Horsus in Middleton's sources.
to include Roxena when he sends for more Saxons to come to Britain, as she is the "star of Germany," "a fair fortunate maid." But in an aside, he has revealed that though she is fair and possibly fortunate, he can certainly attest to the fact that she is no maid. And when he first hears that she has come without being sent for, he is cynically confident that it is because of her lust for him and not her love for her father that she has "Expos'd herself to all the merciless dangers/ Set in mankind or fortune" (II, iii, 163-64) to get there:

'tis her cunning,
The love of her own lust, which makes a woman
Gallop down hill as fearless as a drunkard.
There's no true loadstone in the world but that;
It draws them through all storms by sea or shame:
Life's loss is thought too small to play that game.

(II, iii, 166-71)

The news that Vortiger is attracted to Roxena affects Horsus physically, making him "feel a pain like a convulsion,/ A cramp at heart" (II, iii, 191-92). But when he sees the pair strolling arm in arm, hears Vortiger ask Hengist for Roxena as his mistress, and then watches as Hengist, having refused to allow his daughter to be thus used, is subsequently made Earl of Kent by Vortiger, he falls down in a tantrum, knowing that his whore will eventually be lost to him. Roxena, however, confidently takes the situation in hand, suggesting to her father, the king, and others
assembled that Horsus' "epilepsy" has stricken him again and audaciously offering to cure him:

A virgin's hand strok'd upon his heart
Gives him ease straight; but it must be a pure virgin,
Or else it brings no comfort.  

(II, iii, 219-21)

As Roxena strokes his heart, Horsus at first stubbornly resists her "cure" and threatens to expose her "crack'd virginity." But she whispers to him, urging her good faith; and he decides to "bite in [his] pain" and rise, thus insuring both the proud Hengist and the love-smitten Vortiger of his strumpet's chastity.

In the following scene, Roxena again talks Horsus out of his jealousy and wins his cooperation. Craftily assuming the role of the injured party, she complains that he has no affection for her ("I've no conceit now that you ever lov'd me,/ But as lust led you for a time"--III, i, 1-2) and accuses him of being selfish ("Do you pine at my advancement, sir?--III, i, 3). She then proceeds to point out the advantages of her relationship with Vortiger; for, she argues, not only will it bring them both advancement, it will provide a cover for their affair and thus prevent her father's wrath. Horsus counters that Roxena will cause him to "come crouching; or perhaps/ To bow in th' hams" (III, i, 35-36) once she has risen. But she prevails, again assuming the pose of the injured:

I pity all the fortunes of poor women
In my own unhappiness. When we have given
All that we have to men, what's our requital?
An ill-fac'd jealousy, that resembles much
The mistrustfulness of an insatiate thief,
That scarce believes he has all, though he has stripp'd
The true man naked, and left nothing on him
But the hard cord that binds him: so are we
First robb'd, and then left bound by jealousy.

(III, i, 44-52)

And Horsus tells her not only to "Aspire with [his] consent"
(III, i, 64), but that he will help her realize her ambition
by removing "the let/ That stands between [her] and glory"
(III, i, 68-69).

The promise which Horsus makes Roxena marks his
emergence as the dominant figure in the triangular relation-
ship which ensues. After the conversation between the two
lovers, Vortiger enters, expressing exasperation that though
he is king and thus has "power/ Of life and death" (III, i,
77-78), he cannot possess himself of Roxena. Horsus im-
mediately seizes the opportunity to make the distressed king
his puppet. Professing concern for Vortiger's grief, he
shrewdly advises him of a way to rid himself of his "sin-
killing modest" wife, thereby making possible his marriage
to Roxena: they will fall upon the virtuous Castiza during
one of her contemplative solitary walks and blindfold her;
Vortiger will take her by force, being careful not to speak
and thus preventing her from knowing that she "lies with her
own lord"; later Vortiger can force her to admit that she has
lain with a man other than himself and thus have a reason for
casting her aside.
After Vortiger has "raped" Castiza and then forced her to admit the "act of lust" at a banquet held at Hengist's castle by setting up a situation in which she is called upon to swear her honesty, Horsus remains in control of the situation. For when Roxena quakes at the thought of Vortiger's asking her to swear to the same oath because she is all too mindful of the fact that she is "as far to seek in honesty/As the worst here can be" (IV, ii, 169-70), he reminds her of her impunity as a pagan:

Why, fool, they swear by that we worship not;  
So you may swear your heart out, and ne'er hurt yourself.  
(IV, ii, 171-72)

And after she does indeed "swear her heart out" ("Here I take oath I am as free from man/As truth from falsehood, or sanctity from stain"—IV, ii, 209-10), Horsus again demonstrates his complete mastery of the situation as he stands off and laughs that Vortiger, in marrying his whore, will unwittingly provide well for him:

Ha, ha!  
He's well provided now: here struck my fortunes.  
With what an impudent confidence she swore honest,  
Having th' advantage of the oath! precious whore!  
Methinks I should not hear from fortune next  
Under an earldom now: she cannot spend  
A night so idly, but to make a lord  
With ease, methinks, and play.  
(IV, ii, 220-27)

Apparently, after the marriage Horsus does reap the benefits of Roxena's influence over Vortiger by enjoying
political advancement. But more important to him is his continued enjoyment of Roxena. For after Hengist, who has risen in power, has forced Vortiger to make him King of Kent and the humiliated Vortiger is preparing to take Roxena and flee to Cambria, Horsus does not choose the path of apparent triumph and ally himself with Hengist. Instead he fastens himself to Vortiger as a friend who has "vow'd lasting service to [his] life's/Extremest minute" (IV, iii, 118-19). For he will have his whore. And after he has succeeded in getting Vortiger, grateful for "so pure a friend" as he, to invite him to make the journey to Cambria, he exults in an aside:

I'll follow you through the world to cuckold you;
That's my way now. Every one has his toy
While he lives here: some men delight in building,
A trick of Babel, which will ne'er be left;
Some in consuming what was rais'd with toiling;
Hengist in getting honor, I in spoiling.
(IV, iii, 124-29)

At the castle in Cambria, Horsus continues to cuckold Vortiger. And this degenerate relationship would remain undetected by the politically disgraced king but for the fact that when he sees himself about to be destroyed in the castle by the surrounding forces of Aurelius and Uther, brothers of Constantius from whom he has usurped the throne, he turns on Horsus, denouncing him as the perpetrator of his despicable action in casting aside Castiza for the pagan
Roxena and offering to appease the wrath of his enemies by surrendering him to them. But Horsus maintains the advantage. For after Vortiger stabs him during the argument which develops between them, he realizes that he can inflict a wound on the king that will be incurable. And when Vortiger laughs at his threat to do so, he thus lengthily and permanently wounds him:

Hor. Dost laugh? take leave of't: all eternity Shall never see thee do so much again. Know, thou'rt a cuckold.

Vort. What!

Hor. You change too soon, sir. Roxena, whom thou'st rais'd to thy own ruin, She was my whore in Germany.

Vort. Burst me open, The violence of whirlwinds!

Hor. Hear me out first. For her embrace, which my flesh yet sits warm in, I was thy friend and follower.

Vort. Defend me, Thou most imperious noise that starts the world!

Hor. And to serve both our lusts, I practs'd with thee Against thy virtuous queen.

Vort. Bane to all comforts!

Hor. Whose faithful sweetness, too precious for thy blood, I made thee change for love's hypocrisy.

Vort. Insufferable!

Hor. Only to make My way to pleasure fearless, free, and fluent. (V, ii, 83-98)
As the castle is being consumed by a fire started by the surrounding forces, Vortiger and Horsus continually stab each other with their daggers. Roxena appears, appealing first to her lord and then to her lover to save her from the flames, which she imagines to be in the shape of Vortiger's and Castiza's son Vortimer, whom she has earlier poisoned. But cuckold and cuckolder are too bent on destroying each other to pay her any regard at this point. The triangular intrigue ends as Vortiger, being wounded more by the knowledge of his cuckoldom than by the wounds from which he, like Horsus, finally falls, pronounces the verdict on his pagan strumpet:

O mystical harlot,
Thou hast thy full due! Whom lust crown'd queen before,
Flames crown her now a most triumphant whore;
And that end crowns them all!

(V, ii, 123-26)

Middleton has indeed powerfully presented the amor-ous intrigue involving Vortiger, Roxena, and Horsus. In fact, so powerfully has he presented it that some critics of the play have seen it as the basis for categorizing Hengist as a tragedy rather than as a history play. Samuel Schoenbaum, for instance, asserts, "In Hengist Middleton follows the structure of the chronicle history, but he loses sight of the purpose which, at least to some extent, justified that structure. As the play unfolds it becomes gradually apparent
that Hengist belongs to the great majority of repertory plays. It does indeed turn out to be a tragedy of lust and murder."¹² And Irving Ribner is of the same opinion: "After the first act, Hengist, King of Kent becomes a tragedy of lust with no political implications whatever."¹³ Such assessments, I believe, must finally be regarded as overstatements. For although the intrigue is compelling, it is not sufficiently so to justify disregarding the historical emphasis of the play as a whole. Viewed in its entirety, Hengist is a play about kingship and the way to rule. And Middleton's primary emphasis in the play as a whole is, as the title suggests, on Hengist, who throughout the play is characterized by his cunning and his overreaching ambition as he rises to kingship.

Almost from the moment Hengist appears on the scene, these characteristics are in evidence. After Hengist has led the Saxons in successfully quelling the insurrection of the Britons, who have sought to depose Vortiger for usurping the throne, he manages to get a grant of land from Vortiger, who, while not unwilling to pay him and his soldiers in gold and silver, is reluctant to give them land because they are pagans. But Hengist, perceiving Simon the Tanner, who


happens by carrying a hide, begs for just so much land as "yon poor hide will compass" (II, iii, 36). When Vortiger grants the request, thinking the parcel of land will be so small as to be inconsequential, Hengist bursts forth in jubilation: "Rivers from bubbling springs/ Have rise at first, and great from abject things" (II, iii, 40-44). And later we understand why. Summoning Simon and giving him money, Hengist commissions him to cut the hide into the slenderest thongs possible so that he can join them together and thus encompass a large area of land. Thus, his remarks referred not to the small plot of land but to the small hide which he would make large by this crafty extension.

Roxena and Horsus in their turn also offer testimony to Hengist's ambition and cunning. As has been indicated, though Horsus is physically affected by seeing Vortiger with his whore, his fit of "epilepsy" comes after Vortiger ingratiatingly makes Hengist Earl of Kent. In his succinct remark--"O, that will do't" (II, iii, 216)--just before he falls to the ground in his tantrum, he expresses his knowledge of the high premium Hengist places on his own advancement. Roxena, too, is aware of the regard her father has for his own ambition. In persuading Horsus to yield to her wishes to encourage Vortiger's attentions as a cover for their affair, she specifies that her father would be
especially enraged if he knew about it because he has now become an earl:

the greater
My father is in blood, as he's well risen,
The greater will the storm of his rage be
'Gainst his blood's wronging: .

(III, i, 21-24)

And later, after Vortiger has announced that he will take Roxena as his queen, Horsus again attests to Hengist's ambition as he observes that Hengist is not satisfied with being Earl of Kent and will work cunningly to get what he wants:

The earl of Kent
Is calm and smooth, like a deep dangerous water;
He has some secret way; I know his blood;
The grave's not greedier, nor hell's lord more proud.
Something will hap; for this astonishing choice
 Strikes pale the kingdom, at which I rejoice.

(IV, ii, 226-31)

Horsus' prediction proves true. Hengist wants a kingdom in Britain for himself. And even though he is expelled from Britain after Vortiger, having been deposed from the throne in favor of his son Vortimer, is returned to kingship following Roxena's poisoning of Vortimer, he manages to get it. Cunningly requesting a peaceful parley with Vortiger, Hengist, having hidden a knife in his hose and having instructed the Saxons who attend the meeting with him to do likewise, gets Vortiger in a compromising position and demands to be made not Earl of Kent, as he formerly was, but King of Kent and of its "pair of teeming sisters/ Norfolk and Suffolk" (IV, iii, 91-92).
But even the kingdom of Kent and its surrounding areas are not enough for Hengist. And he indicates as much when he replies to Vortiger's accusation that he has "a dangerous thirst of late" that it "behooves [him] then/ For [his] blood's health to seek all means to quench it" (IV, iii, 94-95) and then turns to address his Saxon soldiers (italics mine): "Here's an hour/ Begins us, Saxons, in wealth, fame, and power" (IV, iii, 101-2). Hengist's thirst must finally go unquenched, however. For as he endeavors to expand his rulership from the small kingdom with which he has begun to the whole of Britain at the same time that he seeks to prevent Roxena from being destroyed in the castle at Cambria along with Vortiger, he is captured by the forces of Aurelius and Uther. But as he addresses Aurelius in his final speech, he lets us know that he is as ambitious as he ever was. He does not see his "thirst" as being a cause for repentance; rather, he regards it as being a part of his nature which can be slaked only with his death:

Heng. Had but my fate directed this bold arm
To thy life, the whole kingdom had been mine;
That was my hope's great aim: I have a thirst
Could never have been quench'd under all;
The whole must do't, or nothing.

Aur. A strange drought!
And what a little ground shall death now teach you
To be content withal!
Heng. Why let it then,
For none else can; you've nam'd the only way
To limit my ambition; a full cure
For all my fading hopes and sickly fears,
Nor shall it be less welcome to me now,
Than a fresh acquisition would have been
Unto my new-built kingdom. Life to me,
'Less it be glorious, is a misery.

(V, ii, 163-76)

But if, through Hengist, Middleton shows a man
destroyed as a result of overreaching political ambition,
he at the same time offers a comment on the way to rule by
showing how Hengist regards Simon and the citizens of Queen-
borough. Hengist never forgets that Simon, by happening
along when he was asking Vortiger for land, gave him the
idea by which he was initially able to gain possession of a
large tract in Kent. Thereafter, whenever he sees the tanner or hears of his progress he is always happy. He even
visits Simon after he becomes King of Kent. And he is
tolerant of the citizens of Queanborough. Though their
bickering is foolish, their mentality juvenile when they
come to him for assistance in carrying out their civic
election, he receives them genially.14 But whatever the
genuineness of his affection for Simon, it should be noted

14 The scenes with Hengist and Simon and the citizens,
with Simon and the citizens in some instances seem to constitute an excess of comic relief. Nevertheless, as Bald notes,
"this part of the play so interested the audiences . . . that it was regarded as the principle attraction of Hengist," a
fact which undoubtedly accounts for the publisher's supplying it with its sub-title in the 1661 quarto (Bald, p. xlvi).
that his treatment of the citizens is not entirely unmoved. For in soliloquy he reveals,

'Tis no safe wisdom in a rising man
To slight off such as these; nay, rather these
Are the foundations of a lofty work;
We cannot build without them, and stand sure.
He that ascends first to a mountain top
Must begin at the foot.

(III, iii, 24-29)

In other words, Hengist admits that his treatment of the people is fraught with policy, with manipulation rather than with humanity. He actually regards them as stepping stones to his own selfish ambition. Thus, because he exists not to serve the people but to be served by them, he cannot, in the final analysis, be a good ruler.

It would appear that Middleton had in mind developing Vortiger as a parallel character to Hengist. In the early stages of the play, Vortiger, like Hengist, is characterized by excessive political ambition. This is first apparent in the opening soliloquy in which Vortiger alludes to the fact that he has almost succeeded in superseding Constantine's son, Constantius, on the throne:

How near was I to sceptre and crown!
Fair power was even upon me; my desires
Were casting glory, till this forkèd rabble,
With their infectious acclamations
Poison'd my fortunes for Constantine's sons.

(I, i, 4-8)

Like Hengist, too, he is willing to use devious means to achieve his ends. And so he engineers a series of strategems
by which he hopes to "vex authority" from Constantius.15
Although the strategems fail, they give him the basis for
taking direct action which he, like Hengist, does not hesi-
tate to effect. Perceiving that through the vexations he
has discredited Constantius in the eyes of his subjects and
that he himself has grown "strong . . . / In people's
wishes" (II, i, 32-33), he has Constantius killed and man-
eges to secure the crown.

As with Hengist, Vortiger's regard for the people
is also an aspect of his character which is focused upon.
For instance, in his opening soliloquy, part of which has
been previously quoted, Vortiger refers to the populace as
"that wide-throated beast," "this forkèd rabble"; shortly
afterward he alludes to them as "those trunks, that have no
other souls/ But noise and ignorance" (I, i, 14-15). And
later when Simon, who has become mayor, and his brethren
greet him before Hengist's castle and ceremoniously present
him and his queen with a scabbard and dagger, he lashes out
at them:

Forbear your tedious and ridiculous duties;
I hate them, as I do the riots of your
Inconstant rabble; I have felt your fits:
Sheath up your bounties with your iron wits. (IV, i, 15-18)

15 These strategems are Middleton's own elaborations.
See Bald, p. xl.
Vortiger, then, is obvious in his disregard for the people's humanity.

These aspects of Vortiger's character, however, are not maintained throughout the play. For shortly after Vortiger engineers the vexations and then has Constantius murdered so he can gain the throne, he becomes enamored of Roxena and then gets involved in the plot to rid himself of Castiza; immediately following his encounter with Simon and his brethren, he attends the banquet at which he casts his virtuous queen aside and becomes betrothed to Roxena—and from that point on he is seen in his capacity as cuckolded husband. It is on this basis that we may criticize the triangular intrigue as a part of the play. Because Middleton in the early stages of the play carefully develops Vortiger as a parallel character to Hengist, whom he maintains throughout the play in politically oriented perspective, he makes his later characterization of Vortiger as the helpless pawn of a cunning whore and her master-minded lover seem a thing apart from the rest of the play rather than a natural development within it. Thus the criticism we may level at Middleton for his handling of the triangular intrigue in the play is just the opposite of that which we level at him with reference to The Witch. Too willing to be ruled by genre in resolving the cuckoldry plots in the tragicomedy, he is in
Hengist unwilling to be governed by it at all, allowing the triangular intrigue to run its course at the expense of sacrificing the political frame in which he has initially cast Vortiger, if not Roxena and Horsus.
CHAPTER 6: TRAGEDY

In his tragedies, The Changeling (1622), written in collaboration with Rowley, and Women Beware Women (>1627), Middleton again resolves his cuckoldry plots according to traditional moral standards. But here he is confronted neither with the problem of adopting a tone or posture which is too grave for the general atmosphere of the play, as he was in No Wit and The Widow, nor with the problem of tempering the resolution to meet the requirements of genre, as he was in The Witch. Thus unencumbered, he finally succeeds in effecting his resolutions satisfactorily. Moreover, in each of the tragedies, he handles the cuckoldry plots masterfully in leading to the resolutions, as is certainly predictable from his powerful, if heedless, presentation of the triangular intrigue in Hengist. In The Changeling, he handles his cuckoldry plot subtly, brilliantly as part of a pattern for revealing the inner workings of a character's mind. And in the highly satirical Women Beware Women, manipulating two cuckoldry plots, he brings to the fore his ability to connect plots by both character interaction and theme—an ability he had earlier evidenced in the best of his comedies—and at the same time captures aspects of the psychological
penetration that is the distinguishing characteristic of The Changeling.

i.

The New English Dictionary gives four meanings for the word "changeling" which were current in the seventeenth century:

1. One given to change; a fickle or inconstant person; a waverer, a turncoat, a renegade.

2. A person or thing (surreptitiously) put in exchange for another.

3. spec. A child secretly substituted for another in infancy; esp. a child (usually stupid or ugly) supposed to have been left by fairies in exchange for one stolen.

4. A half-witted person, idiot, imbecile.

Early critics of Middleton's and Rowley's The Changeling have regarded the play as deriving its title solely from Antonio, the pretended fool in the play who is specifically referred to as "the changeling" in the original dramatis personae.¹ But more recent critics have maintained that the title encompasses the various seventeenth-century meanings of "changeling" and applies to several other

characters in the play and in more than one sense. And chief among these characters is Beatrice-Joanna, around whom all the action revolves in the main plot, which was written mostly by Middleton, rather than around Antonio, whose role is restricted to a minor one in the sub-plot furnished by Rowley.

Beatrice, the beautiful daughter of the governor of the castle of Alicant, Vermandero, is first seen as a changeling in the sense that she is fickle. Having been betrothed for five days to Alonzo de Piracquo, a "courtier and gallant, enrich'd/ With many fair and noble ornaments" (I, ii, 216-17), she suddenly falls in love with Alsemero when he professes that he is enamored of her after seeing her in the temple at mass and says he wants to marry her.


3The following division, given by Barker and agreed upon by most modern critics of the play, makes the main plot basically Middleton's and the sub-plot Rowley's:

Middleton:  II, i-ii; III, i-ii, iv; IV, i-ii; V, i-ii

Rowley:  I; III, iii; IV, iii (possibly some Middleton); V, i-iii
Beatrice herself attests to the fickleness of her sudden affection for Alsemero when she refers to it in an aside: "I shall change my saint, I fear me; I find/ A giddy turning in me" (I, i, 158-59). And it is as a result of her inconstancy to Pirac quo that she figuratively becomes another kind of changeling—an ugly child left by the fairies in exchange for one stolen. For finding it necessary to rid herself of her betrothed if she wants to marry Alsemero, she commissions De Flores, whom she detests but who cherishes a passion for her, to murder Pirac quo. De Flores is notable for his repulsive visage in the play.4 He is described as an "ominous ill-fac'd fellow" (II, i, 52), a "standing toad-pool" (II, i, 58); as having "foul chops" (II, i, 84), a "dog-face" (II, ii, 148). And when the fair Beatrice decides to use him for foul purposes, she becomes associated with the ugly visage as well as with the ugly deed.

In the case of Beatrice, however, Middleton emphasizes not so much the fact that she becomes a changeling as the way she regards herself once she becomes one. For

4De Flores' hideous countenance is Middleton's invention; for in the fourth history of John Reynolds' The Triumph of God's Revenge against the Crying and Execrable Sinne of Wilful and Premeditated Murther (printed 1621), which Middleton uses as the basic source for his plot, De Flores is described as "a Gallant young Gentleman, of the Garrison of the Castle." (N. W. Bawcutt has conveniently appended a selection from Reynolds' story in his edition of The Changeling [Cambridge, Mass., 1958], pp. 113-27).
though after she irresponsibly "changes her saint" from Piracquo to Alsemero she becomes associated both with murder and with De Flores, she dissociates herself from both the guilt and De Flores and continues to think of herself as "beautiful." In the first three acts of the play, Middleton focuses upon her ironic posture by having De Flores act as her foil as she gets him to murder Piracquo and as she is subsequently approached by him to yield to his sexual desires as his reward for having so obliged her. But even though in order to get Beatrice to bestow her favors on him De Flores has to impress upon her that she is fickle, foul, as guilty of the evil deed as he, she still does not really acknowledge that she is malign. And Middleton emphasizes this fact through the use of the cuckold motif in the last two acts. For De Flores continues to exact his reward from Beatrice after she marries Alsemoro, and she evidences the same pattern in regarding herself as being untainted, "beautiful" that she had before De Flores plainly pointed out to her that she could not enjoy this status.

Beatrice's cuckold of Alsemoro is mentioned on three different occasions in the play. In the first

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5 In Reynolds' story, Beatrice cuckolds Alsemoro with De Flores willingly and openly, having become alienated from her husband by his sudden and groundless jealousy.
instance, Alsemero is approached shortly after his and Beatrice's wedding by his friend Jasperino and told that he and Beatrice's maid Diaphanta have been given reason to suspect Beatrice of being unfaithful:

'Twas Diaphanta's chance--for to that wench
I pretend honest love, and she deserves it--
To leave me in the back part of the house,
A place we chose for private conference;
She was no sooner gone, but instantly
I heard your bride's voice in the room next to me;
And lending more attention, found De Flores
Louder than she. . . . Diaphanta
At her return confirm'd [what I suspected]. . . .
Then fell we both to listen, and words pass'd
Like those that challenge interest in a woman.

(IV, ii, 90-97, 100-3) 6

Alsemero's first impulse is flatly to deny his friend's charges, as he has had ample indication that the "very sight of [De Flores] is poison to [Beatrice]" (IV, ii, 99); but upon considering that Jasperino has spoken out of true faith and friendship, he decides that he will put his bride to a test, which was "By a Chaldean taught [him]" (IV, ii, 113). The test, as we have already learned from an earlier passage in the play in which Beatrice discovers Alsemero's "physician's closet," is entitled "How to know whether a

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6Bawcutt in his edition of the play suggests in a footnote (p. 78) that Jasperino is referring specifically to the first instance in which De Flores forces Beatrice to yield to him before she marries Alsemero. This, however, could not possibly be the case. For if it had been, Jasperino of necessity would have known about Piracquo's murder because both De Flores and Beatrice constantly refer to it in their argument. Then, too, if Jasperino had suspected Beatrice of this indiscretion at this point in the play, he would certainly have informed his friend of it before he married Beatrice.
woman be a maid or not" and involves giving a woman a spoonful of a special water and then watching her reaction to determine her virginity ("[the water will] make [a maid] gape, then fall into a sudden sneezing, last into a violent laughing"—IV, i, 50-52). And such a test will be appropriate for Alsemoro's use as, though he has already wed Beatrice, he has not yet consummated his marriage because it is still during the day.

When Alsemoro calls Beatrice and takes the glass containing the special water from Jasperino, she, recognizing the glass as the one which contains the liquid for the virginity test, remarks in an aside: "I am suspected" (IV, ii, 132). What she thinks is that she is now being called upon to prove that she has never been known by any man rather than to allay the specific charge of committing adultery with De Flores. Thus, because she is unaware of being associated with an "ugliness"—she does not particularly regard the test for virginity in general as being a reflection on her honesty so much as an indication of Alsemoro's high moral standards—she does not think her "beauty" is being attacked. And thinking she has the situation completely in hand, she comments in an aside on her own cleverness ("I'm now put to my cunning—IV, ii, 138),

7See Beatrice's comments with reference to Alsemoro in II, i, 6-19; IV, i, 10-17.
perfectly feigns the three effects of the liquid, and then
innocently asks her much relieved husband, "What's the mat-
ter, sir?" (IV, ii, 147).

Beatrice's tendency to be unaware that she is sus-
pected or seen for her association with "ugliness" and to
think that she is clever and circumspect has been demon-
strated earlier in the play. To get De Flores to consent
to murder Piracquo, Beatrice first decided that instead of
railing at De Flores as she usually did whenever she saw
him, she would be cleverly manipulative and pretend that
she did not find him repulsive:

    Why, put case I loath'd him
    As much as youth and beauty hates a sepulchre,
    Must I needs show it? Cannot I keep that secret,
    And serve my turn upon him?

(II, ii, 66-69)

And when De Flores approached, she called him by his name
instead of by one of her usual insulting epithets, touched
his pimply face and commented that he must "have met with
some good physician" as he "look[ed] so amorously," promised
to make a water with her own hands that would cleanse his
face in a fortnight when, for the sake of credibility she
had to admit that his face was still somewhat pimply, and
finally found convincing reason to praise his "hard looks":
"Hardness becomes the visage of a man well,/ It argues
service, resolution, manhood . . ." (II, ii, 92-93).
Having thus primed De Flores to be especially anxious to do her any favor, Beatrice easily extracted from him the promise to kill Piracquo. That he should commit the crime, she regarded as no more than appropriate. For "Blood guiltiness," she had remarked earlier in dissuading Alsemero from challenging Piracquo to a duel, "becomes a fouler visage" (II, ii, 40). But more important than the fact that she would not allow Alsemero's handsome visage to become associated with "blood guiltiness" is the fact that she did not allow her own "beauty" to be associated with it either. Indeed, she ordered Piracquo's murder without definitely uttering the word by expressing to De Flores her mere wish that her betrothed were removed forever from her sight (II, ii, 112-14); and after De Flores promised to see that her wish came true, she transferred the guilt to him completely (italics mine): "Then take him to thy fury" (II, ii, 134).

But throughout all her maneuvering and distancing, De Flores thought her neither clever nor circumspect. For though he was pleased by her warm attentions and flattery, he was aware that his visage was as foul as it ever was, as he remarked in an aside: "'Tis the same physnomy, to a hair and pimple/ Which she call'd scurvy scarce an hour ago:/ How is this?" (II, ii, 76-78). And whatever tactics she may have used in rationalizing to herself and thus maintaining her "beauty," De Flores knew that she was "ugly."
For having observed a secret meeting between her and Alsemero, he had already marked her as a transgressor:

I have watch'd this meeting, and do wonder much
What shall become of t'other; I'm sure both
Cannot be serv'd unless she transgresses; haply
Then I'll put in for one; for if a woman
Fly from one point, from him she makes a husband,
She spreads and mounts then like arithmetic,
One, ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand,
Proves in time subtler to an army royal.

(II, ii, 57-64)

The second instance of Beatrice's cuckoldling Alsemero occurs on their wedding night. Apparently De Flores has insisted that she yield to him while Diaphanta, who has proven to Beatrice that she is a maid by properly reacting to the "triple qualitied" virginity test, reaps the "first night's pleasure" with Alsemero so that he will not discover that his bride is not a virgin. But Diaphanta enjoys her night's work so much that she completely forgets herself and does not come from the chamber to relinquish her place to Beatrice at midnight as she was instructed.

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8We learn of this at least a day after it occurs when De Flores, having been brought to admit his and Beatrice's affair, tells Alsemero that on his wedding night he (De Flores) "coupled with [Beatrice] at barley-break" (V, iii, 165-66).

9Bertram Lloyd, "A Minor Source in The Changeling," MLR, 19 (1924), 101-2, suggests that Middleton's source for this ploy was Leonard Digges' novel Gerardo the Unfortunate Spaniard (London, 1622), which was translated from the Spanish by Gide Cepedes y Meneses. Whatever the specific source from which Middleton drew in this instance, it may be noted that he had earlier used the "substitute Maid" motif in his tragicomedy, The Witch (see pp. 143-44).
As the clock strikes two, De Flores, waiting with the distressed Beatrice in the hall for Diaphanta to finally "rule her blood, to keep her promise" (V, i, 7), comes up with a plan. He starts a small fire in Diaphanta's chamber, alarms the household, and in the process manages to rout Diaphanta from the bridal chamber and get Beatrice in her place without Alsemero's being the wiser. And when Diaphanta enters her chamber in confusion, he kills her "with a piece high charg'd" to make sure she will not reveal that she was Alsemero's "bride" (no one is suspicious about the noise from the piece because De Flores has said he will use it to scour the chimney and put down the fire) and then burns her.

But in spite of Beatrice's complicity in these proceedings after she has just "coupled with De Flores at barley-break" her reaction indicates that she completely dismisses any idea of her own "ugliness." Just after De Flores briefly outlines to her his plan for getting the exchange made and then permanently silencing Diaphanta, she says to him: "I'm forc'd to love thee now,/ 'Cause thou provid' st so carefully for my honour" (V, i, 47-48). He, characteristically aware of his true motives, informs her that he has no such high ideal as his guiding principle: "'Slid, it concerns the safety of us both,/ Our pleasure and continuance" (V, i, 49-50). Despite De Flores' sobering
remarks, however, Beatrice continues to think of herself in this elevated manner. When she sees how quickly De Flores has managed to start the fire, she says,

Already? 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 in not more beauteous than his service.

(V, i, 68-71)

And though Beatrice's remarks after De Flores has executed all of his plan are designed to keep the household from suspecting any collusion between her and De Flores, they at the same time reinforce her notion that she is kept away from any unpleasantness or foulness because of his service:

Beat. Which of you spied the fire first?
De F. 'Twas I, madam.
Beat. And took such pain in't too? A double goodness!
'Twere well he were rewarded.
Ver. He shall be; De Flores call upon me.
Als. And upon me, sir.

(V, i, 119-22)

Beatrice's tendency to consider herself as "the exalted mistress served" as a means of keeping herself untainted repeats an aspect of her refusal to associate herself with Piracquo's murder. For just as she regards De Flores as her servant on her adulterous wedding night, she had so regarded him in obliquely arranging the death of her betrothed; and similar to her refusal to give credence to
De Flores' statement that he has thought of his clever plan not so much because he is concerned about her honor but because he wants to continue his adulterous affair with her was her mental rejection of the obvious sexual implications in De Flores' remarks (II, ii, 123-330).\textsuperscript{10} And the extent to which she distanced herself from both Piracquo's murder and De Flores was reflected in her remarks as she, from her standpoint, closed the deal:

\textit{Beat.} When the deed's done,
I'II furnish thee with all things for thy flight;
Thou may'st live bravely in another country.

De F. Ay, ay;
We'Il talk of that hereafter.

\textit{Beat.} I shall rid myself
Of two inveterate loathings at one time,
Piracquo, and his dog-face. \textsuperscript{[Aside and exit.} (II, ii, 143-48)

The third instance of Beatrice's adultery is mentioned at the beginning of V, iii.\textsuperscript{11} Alsemero and Jasperino have observed Beatrice and De Flores at a trysting place in the garden. When Alsemero meets his wife as she comes from the garden, he confronts her with the question of

\textsuperscript{10}Christopher Ricks, "Moral and Poetic Structure of The Changeling," EIC, 10 (1960), 296-99, citing the word "service" as one of the most important verbal bases of the play, shows how Middleton plays upon the double meaning (sexual and menial) it had for a seventeenth-century audience.

\textsuperscript{11}Though this scene is properly given to Rowley, Middleton's development of the main conflict has obviously dictated the patterning and tone to which it subscribes.
her honesty and then labels her a whore when she lightly avoids answering his question. Feeling the sting of her husband's wrath, Beatrice begs him to give her the reason for his accusation that she may defend her virtue. And Alsemero thus provides her and lambastes her:

[Als.] How comes this tender reconcilement else 'Twixt you and your despite, your rancorous loathing, De Flores? He that your eye was sore at sight of, He's now become your arm's supporter, your Lip's saint!

Beat. Is there the cause?

Als. Worse, your lust's devil, Your adultery!

(V, iii, 50-54)

Beatrice, having commented that his accusation has a "horrid sound," that it "blasts a beauty to deformity" (V, iii, 32), typically resists being associated with "ugliness." She confesses that she has persuaded De Flores to murder Piracquo and has thus been forced to be friendly to him. But as, to her way of thinking, it is the adultery and not the murder which she has caused to be committed out of her love for Alsemero that will make her seem the more befouled, she insists to Alsemero that she has been a faithful wife: "To your bed's scandal, I stand up innocence" (V, iii, 63); "Remember I am true unto your bed" (V, iii, 83).

Her reaction after De Flores had initially come to claim his reward for murdering Piracquo had been similar.
Though she had finally acknowledged to De Flores her complicity in the murder, she had seen copulation with him as the greater threat to her "beauty" and it was this association which she had refused to accept:

[Beat.] 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 F. Push, you forget yourself;
A woman dipp'd in blood and talk of modesty!

Beat. O misery of sin! Would I'd been bound
Perpetually unto my loving hate
In that Piracco, than to hear these words!
Think but upon the distance that creation
Set 'twixt thy blood and mine, and keep thee there.

De F. Look but into your conscience, read me there;
'Tis a true book, 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 are the deed's creature; by that name
You lost your first condition, and I challenge you,
As peace and innocency has turn'd you out;
And made you one with me.

Beat. With thee, foul villain? (III, iv, 123-41)

And though in finally being forced to yield to De Flores, she had remarked, "Murder I see is followed by more sins" (III, iv, 164), she still had not accepted her "ugliness"; for as has been indicated by the previous discussion, she maintains her posture of "beauty" even after she becomes an adultress.
But Beatrice gradually comes to admit her "ugliness."

When De Flores enters just after Alsemoro has sent her into his closet while he decides the best course to take with reference to her involvement in Piracquo's murder, Alsemoro tricks him into admitting his affair with his wife. At this point, however, Beatrice still refuses to admit that she has lost her "beauty," as from the closet she cries out to counter De Flores' blanket statement to Alsemoro that she is a whore, "He lies! the villain does belie me!" (V, iii, 111). But Alsemoro sends De Flores in to her, making it plain that her "beauty" has been forever blasted in his sight:

Peace, crying crocodile, your sounds are heard;  
Take your prey to you;--get you in to her, sir,  
      [Exit De Flores into closet.

I'll be your pander now; rehearse again  
Your scene of lust, that you may be perfect  
When you shall come to act it to the black audience  
Where howls and gnashings shall be music to you.  
Clip your adulthood freely, 'tis the pilot  
Will guide you to the mare mortuum,  
Where you shall sink to fathoms bottomless.  
      (V, iii, 113-21)

And when Beatrice next appears, having been mortally wounded in the closet by De Flores, who has likewise wounded himself, she finally indicates that she sees her true "ugliness" as she stays her father, who approaches her:

O, come not near me, sir, I shall defile 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. [Pointing to De Flores.
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 believ'd;
Mine honour fell with him, and now my life.
(V, iii, 152-61)

At the end of the play, Alsemec sums up the changes
that have been wrought in the main plot, beginning with
Beatrice's change and proceeding to those resulting from
hers:

here is beauty chang'd
To ugly whoredom; here, servant obedience
To a master-sin, imperious murder;
I, a supposed husband, chang'd embraces
With wantonness,—but that was paid before.—
Your change [Piracquo's brother's] is come too, from
an ignorant wrath
To knowing friendship.
(V, iii, 200-6)

He then asks, "Are there any more on's?" (V, iii, 206); and
the characters from Rowley's sub-plot, having been earlier
brought on the scene, speak of their changes. Antonio, who
has pretended to be a fool so as to become an inmate in
Alibius' madhouse and thereby gain access to his wife Isa-
 bella and who has been exposed, says he "was chang'd too,
from a little ass as [he] was to a great fool as [he is]"
(V, iii, 207-8); Franciscus, who has counterfeited being a
madman to be admitted to Alibius' care for the same purpose
as Antonio and who has likewise been discovered, acknowl-
edges he "was chang'd from a little wit to be stark mad"
(V, iii, 211); and having been prodded by Isabella, Alibius,
who has been jealous of his wife without cause (she has remained faithful in spite of Antonio's and Franciscus' advances), finally promises that he "will change now/ Into a better husband, and ne'er keep/ Scholars that shall be wiser than [himself]" (V, iii, 217-19).

It becomes apparent, then, that Middleton's main plot and Rowley's sub-plot are connected not only by the "changeling" theme but by the cuckoldry theme as well. Isabella, the faithful wife, serves as a foil to Beatrice, the adultress. But for the purposes of this discussion, suffice it to say that there is nothing in Rowley's handling of the theme in his plot that can compare with the subtlety, the imagination, and the sheer genius with which Middleton handles it in the main plot.

ii.

As sources for the main plot and sub-plot, respectively, in Women Beware Women, Middleton uses a story in Celio Malespini's Ducento Novelli (published in Venice in 1609) and Meslier's Les amours tragiques d'Hypolite et Isabelle (published in Paris in 1610), both of which have as their theme a woman's being brought to ruin chiefly through the pandering of another. Picking up this theme, Middleton fuses the character of the bawd from both these sources into
that of Livia in his play, thus making her the prime agent through which his title is rendered appropriate.

In both plots, Livia's success as a bawd springs from the fact that she craftily plays upon the point of vulnerability of the young women who are to be seduced. In the main plot, Livia learns from Guardiano, her sometime accomplice, that the Duke has spied a fair young gentlewoman standing in the window of a poor old widow's house and is enraptured with her to the extent that "'Twould prove but too much worth in wealth and favour/ To those should work his peace" (II, ii, 23-24). The young gentlewoman is Bianca, an heiress who has gone against the wishes of her parents and married the widow's son, Leantio. There is no indication in the play that Livia knows the circumstances surrounding Bianca's being at the old widow's house, but she is confident that she will be able to "work the Duke's peace." As she tells Guardiano,

And if I do'nt not,  
Or at least come as near it--if your art  
Will take a little pains and second me--  
As any wench in Florence of my standing,  
I'll quite give o'er, and shut up shop in cunning.  
(II, ii, 25-29)

For what she seems to know instinctively is that it will be difficult if not impossible for a gentlewoman to prefer a penurious state to a luxurious one for any length of time.
And so her plan for tempting Bianca to yield to the Duke's desires involves the display of material wealth.

Since Livia has not been afforded an opportunity to meet Bianca (indeed no one in the city of Florence has met her, for Leantio considers Bianca his "jewel" and accordingly seeks to keep her "cased up from all men's eyes" when he is at home and insists that his mother do the same when he is away on his factorship), she must go about her business indirectly. She sends for the mother, who has apparently been her neighbor for a long time, and insists that she pass the afternoon with her in leisurely "tongue discourse" and then stay for supper. When the mother says that she cannot stay but will visit her at another time, Livia insists that she give her a reason. And not wanting Livia to think that she is merely being uncivil, the mother confides that her son has recently married a young gentlewoman, whom she does not wish to leave sitting all alone. With this admission from the mother, Livia has a clear way to Bianca. She insists that the old widow send for her daughter-in-law that she might be hospitable to her.

When Bianca arrives, Livia continues to work by indirection. She herself welcomes her guest warmly and innocently:

    I heard you were alone, and 't had appear'd
    An ill condition in me, though I knew you not,
Nor ever saw you—yet humanity
Thinks every case her own—'t have kept your company
Here from you, and left you all solitary:
I rather ventur'd upon boldness then,
As least fault, and wish'd your presence here . . . .

(II, ii, 252-58)

And then, pretending to have nothing else in mind, she humbly bids her sit and watch as she and the mother play a game of chess ("I pray, sit down, forsooth, if you've the patience/
To look upon two weak and tedious gamesters"—II, ii, 273-74). But this is actually the cue for Guardiano, who has been introduced to Bianca as another one of Livia's visitors, to take up the play. Accommodatingly, he suggests that Bianca might be more enjoyably entertained:

Guar. Faith, madam, set these by till evening,
You'll have enough on't then; the gentlewoman,
Being a stranger, would take more delight
To see your rooms and pictures.

Liv. Marry, good sir,
And well remember'd; I beseech you, show 'em her,
That will beguile time well; pray heartily, do, sir,
I'll do as much for you: here, take these keys;

[ Gives keys to Guardiano.]

Show her the monument too, and that's a thing
Every one sees not . . . .

(II, ii, 275-83)

The monument to which Livia refers is of course the Duke, who has been conveniently positioned in the house to present himself to Bianca when she is out of the mother's sight. But accomplished bawd that she is, Livia has arranged that Guardiano not rush Bianca to where the Duke is stationed
but actually take time to show her the pictures and rich furnishing so that the contrast between the poverty in which she lives with the widow's son and the luxury she can enjoy by succumbing to the Duke will be vividly fixed in her mind when he approaches her. The slow and deliberate process by which Bianca is thus seduced is brilliantly underscored by the device of the chess game. As Livia talks to the mother about her own moves in the game, she is at the same time wittily commenting on the movements of Guardiano, Bianca, and the Duke in the seduction that is taking place on the upper stage and behind the scenes, as the mother ironically focuses her attention on the chess game:

_Liv._ Alas, poor widow, I shall be too hard for thee!

_Moth._ You're cunning at the game, I'll be sworn, madam.

_Liv._ It will be found so, ere I give you over:—_[Aside._
She that can place her man well——

_Moth._ As you do, madam.

_Liv._ As I shall, wench, can never lose her game:
_Nay, nay, the black king's mine._

_Moth._ Cry you mercy, madam!

_Liv._ And this my queen.

_Moth._ I see't now.

_Liv._ Here's a duke
_Will strike a sure stroke for the game anon;
Your pawn cannot come back to relieve itself._
Moth. I know that, madam.  

(II, ii, 299-308)

Indeed, the "pawn cannot come back to relieve itself." The unsuspecting Bianca has been duly impressed by the rich ornaments Guardiano has shown her:

Bian. Trust me, sir,  
Mine eye ne'er met with fairer ornaments.

Guar. Nay, livlier, I'm persuaded neither Florence  
Nor Venice can produce.

Bian. Sir, my opinion  
Takes your part highly.

Guar. There's a better piece  
Yet than all these.

Bian. Not possible, sir.  

(II, ii, 315-19)

And though she protests that she has a husband whom she loves when the Duke appears and makes his plea for her favors, set up as she has been beforehand, she cannot resist him when he appeals to her on the basis of being able to offer her a life of luxury:

She that is fortunate in a duke's favor  
'Lights on a tree that bears all women's wishes:  
If your own mother saw you pluck fruit there,  
She would commend your wit, and praise the time  
Of your nativity; take hold of glory.  
Do not I know you've cast away your life  
Upon necessities, means merely doubtful  
To keep you in indifferent health and fashion--

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12 At this point the focus shifts to Guardiano and Bianca as they tour Livia's rooms. Toward the end of the scene, the focus shifts back to the two chess players, and Livia's remarks about her moves in the game again have double implications (III, ii, 393-99, 414-24).
A thing I heard too lately, and soon pitied—
And can you be so much your beauty's enemy,
To kiss away a month or two in wedlock,
And weep whole years in wants for ever after?
Come, play the wise wench, and provide for ever;
Let storms come when they list, they find thee sheltered.
Should any doubt arise, let nothing trouble thee;
Put trust in our love for the managing
Of all thy heart's peace: we'll walk together,
And show a thankful joy to both our fortunes.
[Exeunt Duke and Bianca above.]

When Bianca leaves the Duke, she is not without bitterness over having been tricked by Livia and her accomplice. She lambastes Guardiano ("I'm bound in soul/ Eternally to curse thy smooth-brow'd treachery,/ That wore the fair veil of a friendly welcome/ And I a stranger"—II, ii, 432-34) and calls Livia a "damned bawd." But Livia knows that Bianca's scruples will not last long:

'Tis but a qualm of honour, 'twill away;
A little bitter for a time, but lasts not:
Sin tastes at the first draught like wormwood-water,
But drunk again, 'tis nectar ever after.

(II, ii, 479-82)

And Bianca proves her correct in this assessment. For when she returns home with the mother, it is not her honour she thinks about, but the mean conditions in which she lives as Leantio's wife:

This is the strangest house
For all defects as ever gentlewoman
Made shift withal to pass away her love in:
Why is there not a cushion-cloth of drawn-work,
Or some fair cut-work pinn'd up in my bed chamber,
A silver and gilt casting-bottle hung by't?

(III, i, 16-21)
Must I live in want
Because my fortune match'd me with your son?
Wives do not give away themselves to husbands
To the end to be quite cast away: they look
To be the better us'd and tender'd rather,
Highlier respected, and maintain'd the richer,
They're well rewarded else for the free gift
Of their life to a husband! I ask less now
Than what I had at home when I was a maid,
And at my father's house ... .

(III, i, 45-54)

Thus, when the Duke later sends for her to come to a banquet at Livia's house, she responds to his invitation against her husband's wishes. And having responded favorably to the Duke's attentions throughout the banquet while Leantio languished at being thus served, she finally leaves with the Duke as he again promises her material comfort:

[Duke.] Come, fair Bianca,
We have took especial care of you, and provided
Your lodging near us now.

Bian. Your love is great, my lord... .

[Cornets flourishing, exeunt all but Leantio and Livia.

(III, ii, 236-38)

Livia is every bit as successful in her role as a bawd in the sub-plot as she is in the main plot. As in the case with Bianca, she can lay the groundwork for Isabella,

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Bianca's remarks are here seen as especially ironic in view of the fact that when Leantio introduced her to his mother as his wife, the mother told him that Bianca would not be content living according to their means. Leantio had countered that Bianca had expressed no concern about wealth and that he would keep her satisfied with his love; Bianca had seconded Leantio's statements, saying that she wanted nothing but to be with Leantio and enjoy his love (see I, i, 58-110, 125-42).
her own niece, to cuckold her husband because she knows the point on which to base her attack. Isabella's father and Livia's brother, Fabricio, has provided Isabella with a gentlewoman's education and is determined that she shall marry well. And he has chosen as her future husband Guardiano's nephew, the Ward. Isabella does not want to comply with his wishes because the Ward is a fool; but Fabricio cannot see this as a creditable objection, for, to him, as "[the Ward's] rich;/ The fool's hid under bushels" (I, ii, 84-85). When the distraught Isabella unburdens herself to Livia, she encourages her to refuse to accept the Ward as a husband ("I hope 'tis your choice/ To take or refuse, niece"—II, i, 82-83). But Isabella does not see this as a course of action to which she can subscribe:

   How can I, being born with that obedience  
   That must submit to a father's will?  
   If he command, I must of force consent.  

   (II, i, 86-88)\(^{14}\)

And Livia promptly perceives that she has the necessary information to go into her act of bawdry.

Before Isabella has approached her aunt, Hippolito, Livia's other brother, has confided to her that he has told Isabella, with whom he has enjoyed an especially close

\(^{14}\)Isabella expresses a reluctant compliance with her father's wishes here, but she has an earlier passage (I, ii, 169-85) which is noteworthy for its bringing into focus the unfairness of enforced marriages. Livia expresses similar ideas in an earlier conversation with Fabricio (I, ii, 29-45).
companionship, that he loves her not as an uncle but as a lover and that he is miserable as, after hearing his confession, Isabella has "forsworn [his] company,/ And sealed it with a blush" (II, i, 54-55). Though Livia has expressed her opinion that her brother's affection runs "somewhat too unkindly," she has promised to help him in his suit:

Sir, I could give as shrewd a lift to chastity
As any she that wears a tongue in Florence;
Sh'ad need be a good horsewoman, and sit fast,
Whom my strong argument could not fling at last.
Prithee, take courage, man; though I should counsel
Another to despair, yet I am pitiful
To thy afflictions, and will venture hard--
(II, i, 36-42)\textsuperscript{15}

And when Isabella expresses her inability to go against her father's wishes, Livia seizes the opportunity to ply her art. Getting her unsuspecting niece to promise not to repeat a "secret," she tells her that her dead mother confessed to her that unknown to Fabricio, Isabella was actually sired by a famed Spaniard, the Marquis of Coria. She then suggests to Isabella that since Fabricio is not her father,

\textsuperscript{15}Daniel Dodson, "Middleton's Livia," PQ, 27 (1948), 376-81, suggests that in arranging for the fruition of the Isabella-Hippolito relationship, Livia is actually releasing the incestuous passion that she herself cherishes for Hippolito. This argument, however, is unconvincing. What seems more likely is that Livia is so impressed with her own skill at bawdry that she relishes the challenge with which Hippolito provides her above all else. Compare the passage in which she makes the promise to Hippolito to that in which she guarantees that she will be successful in getting Bianca for the Duke (II, ii, 25-29) and also to her comments after she perceives she has succeeded in speeding Isabella to her affair (II, i, 78-79).
she is not bound to obey him and at the same time craftily suggests that she can seem to take the Ward as her "father" commands but at the same time reject him by making him a cuckold:

How weak his commands now whom you call father! How vain all his enforcements, your obedience! And what a largeness in your will and liberty, To take, or to reject, or to do both! For fools will serve to father wise men's children: All this you've time to think on.

(II, i, 158-63)

Livia then continues to pave the way for the affair between Hippolito and Isabella by subtly underscoring the fact that the secret she has told her means that the family ties she has long assumed are invalid after all and again insisting that she tell no one, even Hippolito her "uncle" and dearest friend, what she has learned:

I pray, forget not to call me aunt still; Take heed of that, it may be marked in time else: But keep your thoughts to yourself, from all the world, Kindred, or dearest friend; nay, I entreat you, From him that all this while you have called uncle; And though you love him dearly, as I know His deserts claim as much even from a stranger, Yet let not him know this, I prithee, do not . . . .

(Iii, i, 167-74)

The accomplished bawd is confident, just as she is after she has set up Bianca, that she has succeeded in working her craft. "Who shows more craft t' undo a maidenhead," she remarks in an aside as Isabella leaves, "I'll resign my part to her" (II, i, 178-79). And Isabella does not
disappoint her. The next time she sees Hippolito, who does not know that Livia has already contrived in his favor and who has not known either how she planned to contrive, she gives an excuse for having spurned him ("Prithee, forgive me,/ I did but chide in jest; the best loves use it/ Sometimes, it sets an edge upon affection"--II, i, 195-97) and then tells him that she will marry the Ward according to Fabricio's wishes, but will use the marriage as a cover for a love affair with him:

Troth, I begin
To be so well, methinks, within this hour,
For all this match able to kill one's heart
Nothing can pull me down now; should my father
Provide a worse fool yet--which I should think
Were a hard thing to compass--I'd have him either;
The worse the better, none can come amiss now,
If he want wit enough; so discretion love me,
Desert and judgement, I've content sufficient....
Pray, make your love no stranger, sir, that's all.--
(II, i, 208-26)

That Isabella will be able to easily cuckold the Ward is emphasized in the banquet scene, which has been previously referred to in connection with Bianca's forsaking Leontio for the Duke. Fabricio, anxious to show off the accomplishments of his gentlewomanly daughter, has her sing and dance to entertain the guests and also to impress the foolish Ward. The words to her song imply her dissatisfaction with the Ward as a mate, but he, characteristically
obtuse, is unmindful of this:

Isa. [Sings.]  
What harder chance can fall to woman,  
Who was born to cleave to some man,  
Than to bestow her time, youth, beauty,  
Life's observance, honour, duty,  
On a thing of no use good  
But to make physic work, or blood  
Force fresh in an old lady's cheek?  
She that would be  
Mother of fools, let her compound with me.

Ward. Here's a tune indeed! pish,  
I had rather hear one ballad sung i' the nose now  
Of all the lamentable drowning sheep and oxen,  
Than all these simpering tunes play'd upon cat's guts  
And sung by little kitlings. [Aside.  
[III, ii, 143-56]

And later when he is coaxed to dance with his future wife,  
he ironically insists that Hippolito dance with her first  
and be his example:

Look, here's her uncle, a fine-timbered reveller,  
Perhaps he knows the manner of her dancing too;  
I'll have him do't before me-- . . .  
Then may I learn the better.  
[III, ii, 183-87]

And before he finally does dance with her, ridiculously imitating his future cuckold, he unwittingly comments on his actions to Guardiano:

Ward. I'll venture a hornpipe with her, guardianer,  
Or some such married man's dance.

Guar. Well, venture something, sir.

Ward. I have a rhyme for what I do.

Guar. But little reason, I think.
Ward. Plain men dance the measures, the cinquepace
The gay;
Cuckolds dance the hornpipe, and farmers dance the hay;
Your soldiers dance the round, and maidens that grow big;
Your drunkards, the canaries; your whore and bawd, the
jug.
Here's your eight kinds of dancers; he that finds
The ninth let him pay the minstrels.

(III, ii, 211-20)

The banquet scene thus furnishes Livia with the
final signal that both her bawdy schemes have been well laid.
But if the banquet stamps Livia's sure success in one role,
it also marks the beginning of her sure failure in another.
For seeing Leantio, whom she has not known before though
she has known his mother, she suddenly falls in love with
him ("[I never] truly felt the power of love/ And pity to a
man, till now I knew him"—III, ii, 61-62) and determines
to replace Bianca in his affections. But because Leantio
loves his wife and continues to chafe under the weight of
his cuckoldom, she has embarked on an impossible task.16

Like her schemes of bawdry, Livia's appeal to Leantio,
which she makes as he stands lamenting after Bianca has

16Dodson, p. 380, implies that Livia is doomed to
fail with Leantio because she passes from "the imperturbabil-
ity of the realist" to "the vulnerability of one of Middle-
ton's unrealists." This, however, would not seem to be the
case. For, as will be pointed out in the subsequent discus-
sion, Livia does not forsake her realism, as is indicated by
the fact that she bases her appeal to Leantio on purely
materialistic terms rather than on romantic ones. What seems
to me more likely is that Leantio is the one who is doomed to
misery, to failure because he cannot make the transition from
the "vulnerable unrealistic" to the "imperturbable realistic"
and that Livia becomes caught in the chain reaction he starts
because he cannot.
left the banquet with the Duke ("O hast thou left me then, Bianca, utterly?/ Bianca, now I miss thee! O return,/ And save the faith of woman"—III, iii, 241–43) is characterized by subtlety. She first discredits Bianca ("Know most assuredly she is a strumpet"—III, ii, 275), tells Leantio he married her for the wrong trait ("You missed your fortunes when you met with her,./ Young gentlemen that only love for beauty,/ They love not wisely"—III, ii, 281–83), expresses pity for him in his predicament and asserts that he has been taken advantage of ("Alas, poor gentleman! what mean'st thou, sir,./ Quite to undo thyself with thine own kind heart?/ Thou art too good and too pitiful to woman"—III, ii, 287–89), and finally appeals to him in a speech strikingly similar to the one by which the Duke first won Bianca's favors:

Couldst thou love such a one, that, blow all fortunes, Would never see thee want? Nay, more, maintain thee to thine enemy's envy, And shall not speed a care for't, stir a thought, Nor break a sleep? unless love's music wak'd thee, No storm of fortune should: look upon me, And know that woman.

(III, ii, 301–7)

After long deliberation, Leantio decides that Bianca has shamed him monstrously, that his love to her should last no longer than her truth, and that he should avail himself of Livia's worldly treasure. Mistress and lover thus seal their pact:

[Liv.] but to me
Only, sir, wear your heart of constant stuff; do but love enough, I'll give enough.
Lean. Troth, then, I'll love enough, and take enough.

Liv. Then we are both pleased enough.

(III, ii, 373-77)

But regardless of Leantio's promise, he cannot "love his mistress enough" because he never loses his love for Bianca. On the pretext of merely wanting to see "how [his] despiser looks/ Now she's come . . . to court" (IV, i, 42-43), he visits her. At first each one comments on the evidences of the other's material well-being:

Lean. You're richly plac'd.

Bian. Methinks you're wondrous brave, sir.

Lean. A sumptuous lodging.

Bian. You've an excellent suit there.

Lean. A chair of velvet.

Bian. Is your cloak lin'd through, sir?

Lean. You're very stately here.

Bian. Faith, something proud, sir.

Lean. Stay, stay, let's see your silver slippers.

Bian. Who's your shoemaker? has made you a neat boot.

(IV, i, 52-57)

Leantio, however, cannot long maintain this conversation about trifles, and he soon gives way to invective, indicating the depth to which Bianca has wounded him ("You're a whore! . . . An impudent, spiteful strumpet" --IV, i, 63-64). And to spite her, he shows her one of his "perfumed papers"
from Livia before lambasting her as "A monster with all forehead and no eyes" (IV, i, 94) for her lack of conscience in her whoredom.

Angered not only by Leantio's verbal assault but by the fact that Livia, who played her bawd, now has the audacity to "dote, and send, and give, and all to [Leantio]" (IV, i, 76), Bianca tells the Duke of Leantio's visit. And it is as a result of this that Livia becomes irrefutably undone in her role as mistress. For to rid both Bianca and himself of Leantio, the Duke sends for Hippolito and tells him that Leantio is impudently and openly boasting that his sister is his mistress, thereby not only shaming her honor but keeping her from speeding in a match with "the great Vincentio"; and Hippolito of course promptly goes to Livia's house and kills the "impudent daylight lecher."

When Livia, having heard the commotion in the hall resulting from the fight between her brother and her lover, enters with her house guests and sees her "love's joy" lying dead, she is not only grieved but outraged; and she determines to avenge herself on Hippolito. Refusing to restrain her vituperation as Hippolito begs her to listen to his reason for killing her lover, she lashes out at him:

The reason! that's a jest hell falls a-laughing at: Is there a reason found for the destruction Of our more lawful loves, and was there none To kill the black lust 'twixt thy niece and thee, That has kept close so long?  

(IV, ii, 64-68)
And determined to make sure to wound Hippolito as much as she can, she specifically turns upon Isabella, confessing her own craft, when Guardiano, who has heard her remarks to Hippolito asks if he understood her correctly. She responds:

Too true, sir: there she stands, let her deny't:
The deed cries shortly in the midwife's arms,
Unless the parents' sins strike it still-born;
And if you be not deaf and ignorant,
You'll hear strange notes ere long.--Look upon me, wench;
'Twas I betrayed thy honour subtly to him,
Under a false tale; it light upon me now.--
His arm has paid me home upon my breast,
My sweet, beloved Leantio!

(IV, ii, 69-77)

Livia of course has not finished with her revenge. She is determined to serve Hippolito fully in kind by murdering his beloved Isabella. But her revelation means that Isabella, regarding herself "so cruelly beguiled," will seek to avenge herself on the cunning bawd and that Guardiano, seeing the Ward made a cuckold and therefore himself "so devilishly abused," will contrive to work Hippolito's undoing. And each of these abused parties sees his opportunity to wreak his vengeance in the masque which is given in honor of the Duke's marriage to Bianca, made possible by Leantio's death.

The wedding masque, during which the murder plots miscarry in confusing abundance, leaving the stage strewn with bodies, has been cited as the point at which the play "gets out of hand and rushes to a swift and sensational
conclusion." Admittedly, the events take place with a giddy speed and they are sensational in effect. But the sure hand with which Middleton has handled the rest of the play is still in unmistakable evidence. For as the characters wreak their vengeance on each other and pronounce their final dispositions on the predicaments in which they find themselves, whatever their acknowledgement of or repentance for their actions, they all turn, appropriately, to Livia as the perpetrator of their ruin.

Isabella, for instance, has felt the shame of incest (though, in perfect keeping with her protests about the marriage into which she has been forced, not the shame of cuckold- olding the foolish Ward) and has determined not to see Hippolito any more, but she has considered Livia as basically responsible for her sin:

My request is, I ne'er may see you more;  
And so I turn me from you everlastingly,  
So is my hope to miss you; but for her  
That durst so dally with a sin so dangerous,  
And lay a snare so spitefully for my youth,  
If the least means but favour my revenge,  
That I may practice the like cunning  
Upon her life as she has on mine honour,  
I'll act it without pity.  

(IV, ii, 143-51)

And during the masque, as she waves a poisoned censer before Livia, who plays the part of Juno, her concentration is still fixed on Livia's baseness rather than her own sin as she, in an aside, comments about the fumes from the censer:

(And if it keep true touch, my good aunt Juno,
'Twill try your immortality ere't be long:  
I fear you'll ne'er get so nigh Heaven again,  
When you're once down.)

(V, i, 141-44)

Hippolito, seeing that his beloved Isabella has fallen at the hand of Livia just before she dies from the fumes, acknowledges that "lust and forgetfulness" are being repaid and traces the bloody events back to Leantio's death; but he also regards Livia as being directly responsible for his punishment for his lust as he dies from being wounded by poisoned arrows which Guardiano has arranged for the "swift-winged Cupids" to shoot:

Lust and forgetfulness has been amongst us,  
And we are brought to nothing . . . . Leantio's death  
Has brought all this upon us--now I taste it--  
And made us lay plots to confound each other;  
Th' event so proves it . . . .  
She, in a madness for her lover's death,  
Revealed a fearful lust in our near bloods,  
For which I'm punished dreadfully and unlooked for . . . .  

(V, i, 186-97)

And in the final remarks of Bianca, who meets her death at the masque not directly because of Livia's actions but because of her own (Bianca has sought to poison the Duke's brother, the Cardinal, who has earlier chastised them for
their adulterous relationship; but the Duke accidentally gets the poisoned wine she has arranged for the masquers to give the Cardinal, and she, grief-stricken over the miscarriage, herself drinks some of the wine), Livia is nevertheless implicated as the wrecker of havoc:

Leantio, now I feel the breach of marriage
At my heart's breaking. O, the deadly snares
That women set for women, without pity
Either to soul or honour! learn by me
To know your foes: in this belief I die,--
Like our own sex we have no enemy.

(V, i, 252-57)

Of those who seek revenge in and at the masque, then, only Guardiano, who tries to vent his wrath on Hippolito but himself falls through the trap-door which he signals the Ward to open, does not regard Livia as the author of his undoing;\(^{18}\) for even Livia sees herself as the final perpetrator of her own ruin as she falls from Isabella's fumes:

This fume is deadly; O, 't has poison'd me!
My subtlety is sped, her art has quitted me;
My own ambition pulls me down to ruin. [Falls and dies.

(V, i, 172-74)

But we may imagine, with justification, that Guardiano's ward, who has certainly come to realize that he is "a cuckold, a plain reprobate cuckold" and who has berated his addle-pated servant for not cautioning him against marrying

\(^{18}\)Guardiano may fail to implicate Livia because he, having been her accomplice in the scheme to get Bianca and the Duke together, simply cannot see her as an enemy.
a woman who had "so many qualities," does say about all
women, including Livia, as he flees at the end of the play:
"Women! Beware women!"
CHAPTER 7: FURTHER IMPLICATIONS

Thomas Middleton dealt with cuckoldry—a topic familiar to his audiences and rich in connotation for them—in twelve plays which span his career. And, as the preceding study substantiates, his handling of cuckoldry plots and episodes in each of these plays is an index by which we may measure his skill as a dramatist. Beyond this consideration, however, Middleton's treatment of cuckoldry in the plays ultimately provides some elucidation on the question of his moral vision.

Basically, Middleton's critics divide into two schools on the question as it relates to all of his plays. Early critics generally tended to make a sharp distinction between one part of Middleton's work they regarded as failing to project a sense of moral order and another part they regarded as profoundly moral. Arthur Symons, for example, maintained that in the early comedies Middleton aimed chiefly at amusing theatricality and that he irresponsibly provided groundlings with what they wanted. Symons saw Middleton in later years, however, as rising above his pointless theatricality—largely, through the influence of Roweley—to "a new capacity for the rendering of great passions and a
loftiness in good and evil which had never yet been found in [his] brilliant and showy genius."¹ Felix Schelling found a similar division. In the early comedies, he propounded, Middleton literally copied the seamy side of London life, the result being a "merely realistic" literature. But regarding the later plays as having more significance, he stated, "There was another Middleton who showed the aspiration and the sense of the romantic and the passionate that was the birthright of the age . . . ."²

Other critics, such as T. S. Eliot, L. C. Knights, and F. S. Boas, adopted basically the same view.³ Having asserted that Middleton's greatest tragedies and his greatest comedies were as if written by two different men, Eliot stated that the comedies—with the exception of The Roaring Girl—were merely "photographic"; the tragedies, however, he

¹Studies in Elizabethan Drama (London, 1920), pp. 221-22, 226-30, 244-45.

²Elizabethan Playwrights (New York, 1925), pp. 172-73, 186-87. "The romantic," "the passionate" to which Schelling referred was the faculty by which the mind penetrated "mere reality" to discover a larger truth, and that truth, of course, was moral.

³Though addressing themselves basically to Middleton's comedies and tragedies and therefore not considering the plays of Middleton's "middle mood" (the tragicomedies), as did Symons and Schelling, these three critics seemed to give silent assent to the basic division in moral perspective of which Symons and Schelling spoke with reference to all of Middleton's work.
regarded as depicting discoveries of morality that were permanent to the human condition.\textsuperscript{4} Knights found Middleton's city comedies to be characterized by intrigue, yielding "little more than the pleasure of a well-contrived marionette show," presenting "neither thought, nor an emotional attitude to experience, nor vividly realized perceptions." Like critics before him, however, he did not find this vacuity in all of Middleton's work; for he stated that one could only regret that the profound understanding of an essential human morality found in \textit{The Changeling} was nowhere displayed in the comedies.\textsuperscript{5} And Boas criticized Middleton for presenting the immorality of the characters in the city comedies in such a way as to discourage serious moral judgment. But for him, as for Knights and the other critics, Middleton's general failing in the city comedies did not characterize all of his work; for he lauded \textit{The Changeling} as being at the very forefront of Stuart drama.\textsuperscript{6}

Unlike the early critics, Richard Barker, the only recent critic to discuss the question of Middleton's moral vision with reference to his entire canon, found basically


\textsuperscript{5}\textit{Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson} (London, 1937), pp. 260, 268.

\textsuperscript{6}\textit{Introduction to Stuart Drama} (Oxford, 1946), pp. 220-45.
the same point of view espoused in all of Middleton's work. Except for points at which he held that Middleton's moral outlook was obscured by problems of apprenticeship, Barker regarded Middleton as basically a determined moralist. According to Barker, the key to understanding Middleton's morality lay in understanding the rather unusual slant from which he persistently viewed it. Barker explained,

Sin is . . . [Middleton's] principal theme. . . . Other Jacobean dramatists . . . deal from time to time with the same theme. What is peculiar to Middleton is his persistent concern with the irony that invests the sinner's career. His thesis is that sin is blind. He wants to show that the sinner inevitably gropes in a dark world until he stumbles on the path that leads to inevitable disaster.  

R. B. Parker, though unlike Barker actually focusing only on a limited number of plays, also suggested that one thesis could be applied to the body of Middleton's work. Parker, however, did not find in the plays a strain of moralism that was basically unassailable. Explaining his position chiefly by referring to the city comedies, Parker maintained that there was in these plays a tension between two polarities: "amoral vitalism" and "determined moralism." In these comedies, he argued, Middleton presented the vices of his characters with ingenuity and amusement, with admiration for their vitality; yet at the ends of the plays, usually through deus ex machina devices, Middleton insisted

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upon judging the very traits he had encouraged us to enjoy with him. Parker insisted that these same tendencies were still evident in *Women Beware Women*, thus he implied that the same characteristics were evident in the plays between the city comedies and the tragedy.  

I believe that each of these points of view about Middleton's moral vision has some truth to offer. And a consideration of Middleton's treatment of cuckoldry in the twelve plays in question provides a measure for determining both what that truth is and what it is not.

On the basis of the preceding statements about the positions of Middleton's early critics concerning his moral vision in the city comedies, it may be concluded that regardless of the specific reasons they posited for considering these plays less significant than later works, these critics all agreed on the same basic point: Middleton failed to embody in these plays a philosophy that would reflect the clear-cut and uncompromising lines of the traditional Christian ethic, the point of view that showed virtue clearly rewarded, sin punished, folly ridiculed. Although Richard Barker insisted upon a thesis for the majority of Middleton's works, and therefore for his city comedies, which would support the view that these comedies

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subscribed to the traditional morality which the early critics found lacking, in the final analysis it appears that he was at least in partial agreement with his predecessors so far as the city comedies are concerned. For he indicated that this thesis did not apply to at least three of these comedies.\(^9\) R. B. Parker's thesis about determined moralism and amoral vitalism was of course grounded in the traditional ethic. And the fact that Parker saw the moralism as being militated against almost to the point of ineffectiveness or inconsequentiality suggests that he, too, found the plays basically lacking in this perspective.

I believe that, though these early comedies, or city comedies,\(^10\) are certainly to be found wanting so far as the uncompromising virtue rewarded-sin punished (or folly ridiculed) formula is concerned, a charge of total moral vacuity is not applicable to them. For in these plays there is moral code—one which the critics, perhaps because of

\(^9\) These comedies were *The Family of Love* and *Your Five Gallants*, in which Barker saw the concern with morality as being eclipsed by the fact that Middleton was a young playwright struggling to find a mode of expression in two traditions—the older romantic tradition and the newer realistic tradition—and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, which Barker dismissed as being an indication of Middleton's realism.

\(^10\) I am, of course, excluding *The Phoenix*, which I have characterized as being in the tradition of the morality play and which I have contended is governed basically by traditional moral ethic.
"conditioned reflex," failed to consider. The basis of this code might well be said to spring from the theme suggested in *A Mad World, My Masters*. The way of the world is "mad," incongruous, will not admit neat categorizations. Hence, the ethic by which one must operate, must judge has to admit exceptions. In *A Mad World*, Penitent Brothel and Mistress Harebrain in cuckolding Harebrain clearly have done wrong according to the traditional ethic. But are they to be condemned, punished, or even ridiculed? Middleton's answer would seem to be "no." For while they in their trysting are not virtuous, neither is Harebrain, who has been excessively jealous of his wife and who has been responsible, to some extent anyway, for his wife's affair with Penitent. This is actually the moral code which operates in many of the cuckoldry tales. Wife and lover may not be virtuous, but they nonetheless emerge as admirable by relative standards. As may be inferred from the discussion of *A Mad World*, this same code operates in its main plot. Follywit, rake and trickster that he is, is still less contemptible that his hypocritical, if generous, grandfather; and Frank Gullman, courtesan and bawd that she is, is less odious than most of her customers.

Certainly Middleton had this code in mind as early as *The Family of Love*, confused as it is from an artistic or formal point of view. Mistress Purge can with impunity
cuckold Purge with Glistre and the Family brethren because Purge, in his greed, has been too content to "wink at small faults." And Geraldine and Maria, though they fall short of the ideals to which they have paid lip-service, speed well because they are certainly more admirable than the avaricious Glistre and the totally libertine Lipsalve and Gudgeon. The code continues in Your Five Gallants, Michaelmas Term, and of course A Chaste Maid in Cheapside.

Mistress Newcut and the courtesans in Your Five Gallants are on one level seen as reprehensible for their adultery and fornication, but their actions are seen as minor beside the abundant trickery and deception of the gallants they snare in marriage at the end of the play. This idea is the crux of Fitsgrave's judgment of the situation. For, it will be remembered, Fitsgrave sees his forcing the gallants to marry their whores, who will undoubtedly cuckold them in the future, as no more than the gallants deserve. Similarly, in Michaelmas Term, Thomasine's implied future cuckolding of Quomodo is seen as an acceptable act because Quomodo has been greedy for land and unscrupulous in obtaining it from Easy, with whom Thomasine will cuckold him.

In A Chaste Maid, the Allwits, who exploit Sir Walter Whorehound by obliging him as a cuckold-maker, emerge unscathed. But the Allwits' situation at the end of the play does not disturb us because Sir Walter, their victim, has
actually victimized them throughout the play as much as they have so served him. Touchwood Senior and Lady Kix, we are led to believe, will continue to cuckold Sir Oliver Kix unhamppered. Sir Oliver is by no means the scoundrel that Allwit, his counterpart, is; but in a sense he elicits no sympathy because in his foolish pride over his long-lost potency he leaves himself open to cuckoldom. Besides, the whole triangular relationship between the Kixes and Touchwood Senior figures as part of the means by which the obnoxious Sir Walter is bested. Having been Sir Walter's whore, the Welshwoman who snares Tim Yellowhammer for a husband is certainly not a paragon of virtue. But the scholarly-pretentious Tim has little to recommend him either, and so the lack of traditional moral stricture where she is concerned is not unsettling. Thus, as has been maintained in the discussion of the play, Moll Yellowhammer, "the chaste maid" who is an honest character in the traditional moral sense, is certainly the exception rather than the rule.

After the city comedies, however, it appears that Middleton drops the code of moral relativity. As all of the early critics would agree, he deals with morality according to the traditional ethic. The early critics, however, do not specify Middleton's limitations as he begins to
operate within this realm. But in at least two plays—No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's and The Widow—it seems to me that R. B. Parker's thesis is operative.\(^{11}\) In No Wit, in one plot virtue is rewarded as the Low-waters recover the fortune out of which they have been cheated. Sin is punished as Sir Gilbert Lambstone is uncovered in his duplicity and prevented from prospering; and Lady Goldenfleece, having repented of her contentment with her ill-gained wealth, is brought to enjoy a state of bliss. In the other plot, Philip Twilight, like Lady Goldenfleece having been brought to see the error of his ways, finally enjoys his married state unhampered by complication. The Widow, like No Wit, shows characters being brought to a state of repentance before they can be rewarded. In one plot, Francisco, through the agency of the "ghost," repents of his designs at cuckoldry and is later rewarded with the honest love of Martia. And in the other, Ricardo wins the rich widow only after he comes to love her for herself alone. Yet in at least one plot in each play, it may be argued (to use Parker's terminology) that "amoral vitalism" weakens "determined moralism."

For, as has been maintained in the analyses of the two plays, both the nature and the abundance of Mistress Low-water's

\(^{11}\)Richard Barker did not see his thesis as applicable to these plays, which he regarded as mere exercises in the fashionable manner of Beaumont and Fletcher (Thomas Middleton, pp. 86-88).
cuckoldry scheming render the serious tone of the moral passages to which she resorts on occasion negligible; and Francisco's serious concern for morality is likewise militated against by the continued "amoral vitalism" of Philippa, with whom he would at first have a tryst.

In Hengist, King of Kent, The Changeling, and Women Beware Women, however, Richard Barker's thesis, rather than Parker's, would seem to apply. In these plays, sin is Middleton's principal thesis. And he clearly shows that the sinner inevitably gropes in a dark world until he stumbles on a path that leads to disaster. In Hengist, Vortiger, Roxena, and Horsus, each of whom is concerned with the gratification of his own lust to the total disregard of others, all entangle themselves in a web of their own undoing, as does Hengist in his overreaching ambition. In The Changeling, Beatrice-Joanna, psychologically blocking the realization of the full implications of her actions, inevitably becomes involved in sinful collusion with the ill-favored De Flores and falls with him at the end of the play. And finally, in Women Beware Women, the accomplished bawd Livia and the host of characters who either engage her services as bawd, allow her to function as bawd for them, participate with her in schemes of bawdry, or otherwise become connected with her, all meet their doom in the bloody masque which ends the play.
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