

The Changeling

(In) Visibility, Knowledge and Subaltern Power

1.1 DIS-PLACEMENT in SPACE and TIME: BROKEN DECORUM

How is DIS-PLACEMENT represented in the opening moments of the play?

- GEOGRAPHICALLY LIMINAL: on the docks
- PSYCHOLOGICALLY DISTRICTED: Jaspolino's "Come, the wind's fair" (1.1.13) countered by Alsemero's "'tis contrary / In my best judgment" (15-16);
- INTERRUPTION: De Flores is "out of his place then, now" (139);
- OUT OF SYNC: Alsemero's arrived at the moment of Beatrice's wedding; would have been a soldier, "had not the late league / Prevented me" (190-91);
- INTERCEPTION: "I should thrust my fingers / Into her sockets here" (240-41)

"SERVICE" AND THE SUBALTERN

- "Service": the interaction of systems of power, gender, rank:
- "the *laissez passer* into the rich, secure world of the court of which [the lady] was mistress.... Moreover, the 'service' of the free vassal, as distinct from that of the servile orders, was conceived to be prompted by his loyalty and honour, not by fear and necessity."

(Chakravorty, *Society*)

- Whereupon it is sayd, that the gentleman loveth, and the slave feareth."

(Guazzo, *Civile Conversation*, qtd. in Chakravorty, *Society*)

SCOPIC ECONOMY

- "THE GAZE": the attribution of power and agency through the ability to LOOK and therefore to DEFINE;
- Defines the gazer as the SUBJECT or AGENT and the observed as the OBJECT or PASSIVE recipient of that defining power.

GENDER AND THE SCOPIC ECONOMY

Women must "discover vnto men all things that are fit for them to vnderstand" and ALSO "to hide... in the closest prisons of [their] strictest gouernment" what might excite "wonton and lasciuious delight and pleasure."

(Hic Mulier)

CONTROLLING THE GAZE

"Every window closed with a strong Casement, and every Loope-hole furnish with such strong Ordnance, that no vnchast eye may come neere to assayle them; no lasciuious tongue wooue a forbidden passage, nor no prophane hand touch reliques so pure and religious. Guard them about with counter-scarfes of Innocence, Trenches of humane Reason, and impregnable walles of sacred Diuinitie."

Hic Mulier

SCOPIC ECONOMY

- Alsemero: "Twas in the temple where I first beheld her" (1.1.1)
- De Flores: "I'll please myself with sight / Of her, at all opportunities" (1.1.106-7)
- Defined by a trope of SURVEILLANCE:
 - 2.1, 2.2: 24 references to SIGHT
- Beatrice is surrounded by OBSERVING MEN:
 - Authorized: Vermandero, Alonzo;
 - Unauthorized: Alsemero, De Flores, Tomazo
- All "see" a different "Beatrice"

Act 2: COMPETITION FOR (SELF) DEFINITION

- STRUGGLE between men to define Beatrice = a struggle for masculine SELF-DEFINITION:
 - Vermandero
 - Alonzo
 - Tomazo
 - Alsemero
 - De Flores
- REVEALS the vulnerability of masculine selfhood to reliance on the feminine MIDDLE TERM

Act 2: the RIGHT TO LOOK

- Competition for Beatrice
 - Transaction for STATUS between men
 - De Flores: "And were I not resolved in my belief / That thy virginity were perfect in thee" (3.4.117-18)
- Masculine power defined as the RIGHT TO LOOK = THE RIGHT TO DEFINE, TO APPROPRIATE, TO TRANSFER
- Feminine positioned as the OBJECT of SCOPIC and SOCIAL TRANSACTION


SUBALTERN POWER: FEMININE DISSIMULATION

- IF masculine power is defined by the RIGHT TO LOOK; feminine power is defined by the RIGHT TO DISSIMULATE or DEFLECT the gaze:
 - Beatrice shows DIFFERENT SURFACES to different men;
 - Reflects men's desires back to them;
 - Protects the secret interior (figured as virginity)

SUBALTERN POWER: DISSIMULATION: LANGUAGE/BODIES

- How does this power of DEFLECTION manifest itself in the text:
 - DOUBLE ENTENDRES and ASIDES: divide the space into exterior/interior; excluded/included;
 - BODY DOUBLE: if women are \$\$, they can be "exchanged" or "substituted" for one another:
 - Virginity test
 - Bed trick
 - APPROPRIATION OF MASCULINE KNOWLEDGE
 - The "opening" of Alsemero's secret chest
 - "Forbidden" knowledge

Act 3: SUBALTERN POWER: INTERCEPTION

- DE FLORES: doubled access:
 - Masculine RIGHT TO LOOK;
 - Servant  MAN => ABILITY TO BE INVISIBLE = ACCESS
- INTERCEPTION of HOMOSOCIAL EXCHANGE:
 - "STOLEN" KNOWLEDGE reveals Beatrice to HERSELF and effaces difference:
 - "Look but into your conscience, read me there, / 'Tis a true book, you'll find me there your equal" (3.4.133-34);
 - Interception of Beatrice's love-token, the glove, meant for Alsemero;
 - APPROPRIATES the power of other men to SEE Beatrice and therefore to USE her

ACT 5: THE "DIVINE" COMEDY: KNOWLEDGE


- ▶ "The prospect from the garden has showed / Enough for deep suspicion" (5.3.2-3).
 - ▶ SURVEILLANCE from INSIDE the Garden → the Fall of Man
 - ▶ De Flores = the serpent whose "gift" is FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE
 - ▶ KNOWLEDGE = double entendre: intellectual and sexual intimacy
 - ▶ Diaphanta's death: "it was the wages of her knowledge" (5.3.58);
 - ▶ Beatrice: "I have kissed poison for't, stroked a serpent" (5.3.66);
 - ▶ Vermandero: "We are all there [in hell], it circumscribes [us] here" (5.3.164)

Act 5: "DIVINE COMEDY": *felix culpa*

- ▶ EXCISION OF DISEASE:
 - ▶ "I am that of your blood that was taken from you / For your better health" (5.3.149-50);
- ▶ ANAGNORISIS?
 - ▶ "upon yon meteor / Ever hung my fate, 'mongst things corruptible" (154-55);
 - ▶ "Your change come too, from an ignorant wrath / To knowing friendship" (5.3.202-3)

Act 5: *hortus conclusus*?

- ▶ "Sir, you have a son's duty living" (5.3.216).
- ▶ The PERFECT HOMOSOCIAL EXCHANGE
 - ▶ Alliance between Alsemero and Vermandero ELIDES the MIDDLE TERM
 - ▶ Feminine body:
 - ▶ unpredictable,
 - ▶ resistant to scopic penetration,
 - ▶ DUPLICITOUS because INTERCHANGEABLE.
- ▶ FORECLOSES the vulnerability of DEPENDENCE upon the SUBALTERN for ratification of the masculine identity.



Is it a tidy little ending? THE OPACITY OF THE CLOSET

- "Enter DE FLORES bringing in BEATRICE [wounded]"
(5.3.s.d.43)
- We do not see what happens in the closet:
 - Does De Flores stab Beatrice?
 - Does she stab herself?
 - What difference does it make?
- What is the SIGNIFICANCE of this concluding moment of OPACITY?
