THE ROLE OF FEMALE STEREOTYPING IN
SEVEN ELIZABETHAN TRAGEDIES

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

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During the Elizabethan period, certain stereotypes existed concerning women. Seven tragedies were examined to discover the role played by those stereotypes in the dramas. These include *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Edward II*, *Bussy D’Ambois*, *The Changeling*, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, *Othello*, and *The Duchess of Malfi*.

Female stereotyping was found to be used in three important ways: in characterization, in motivation, and as a substitute for motivation. Some of the plays rely on stereotyping as a substitute for motivation while others use stereotyping only for characterization or subtly blend the existence of stereotyping into the overall plot. A heavy reliance on stereotype for motivation seems to reflect a lack of skill rather than an attempt to perpetuate those stereotypes.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE STEREOTYPE AFFIRMED: &quot;SECOND LOVE SHALL FURTHER MY REVENGE&quot;.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE SEVERAL FACES OF ADULTERY: &quot;HERE THE RESTRAINED CURRENT MIGHT MAKE BREACH&quot;.</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE RISKS OF INDEPENDENT ACTION: &quot;A GREAT PRICE FOR A SMALL VICE&quot;.</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSION.</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF WORKS CITED.</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the long period of development of English drama from the mystery cycles to the flowering of the Elizabethan playwrights, stereotyping played an important role. Indeed, one of the first developments in characterization was the extra-Biblical touches which the actors gave to their roles. For example, Noah's wife nagged, Cain was surly, and Herod raged. Later on, in the morality plays, the comic devil was introduced.¹ These characterizations and others first began as highly individual touches which added a human-interest element to the original didactic purpose of the plays, but they ultimately became stereotypes. Audiences of the time expected and probably demanded that Mrs. Noah nag and Herod rant as surely as the modern television audience expects the detective to get his man.

Yet many of these stereotypes, or stock characters, were developed and refined as playwrights learned their craft. The hints of verisimilitude first seen in the Cains, the Herods, and the devils ultimately reached peaks in such skillfully

¹Thomas Marc Parrott and Robert Hamilton Ball, A Short View of Elizabethan Drama (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), pp. 6-9, 14, 18-19.
drawn Elizabethan characterizations as Iago, Duke Ferdinand, and Falstaff. But what about the Mrs. Noahs? Did they remain basically nags? Did the women characters retain their stereotype qualities?

Although a definitive answer to the question of the role which female stereotyping plays in Elizabethan drama is beyond the scope of this paper, some indication may be found in a study of representative plays. In the great tragedies of the period, excellent examples can be found of skillful motivation of central characters whose actions are consistent and inevitable, given their individual personalities as the authors reveal them throughout the plays. Thus, we can accept Othello's murder of the woman he loves, not as a brutal crime, but as an obligatory act of honor consistent with the strongly ethical military man Shakespeare has revealed. Hamlet delays the revenge of his father's murder for five acts, but he could not have done otherwise since he has been well established as a man who operates primarily on an intellectual rather than a physical plane.

Yet some of the actions of the characters in the masterpieces of the era surprise us. Marlowe's Isabella changes abruptly from Edward II's long-suffering, loving wife to the mistress of his mortal enemy. Desdemona, although a happy wife and a paragon of virtue, flirts, nags, and lies. Kyd's Bel-imperia cries for revenge for her dead lover in one breath, then takes another lover in her next. Some of these sudden
shifts in emotions, allegiances, and behavior suggest that the authors depended on certain stereotypes concerning women to explain this behavior, stereotypes which were recognized and understood by their audience.

Many of the Elizabethan plays contain female characters whose motivations are possibly established by stereotype rather than careful development. The specific plays to be dealt with in this study are *The Spanish Tragedy*, by Thomas Kyd; *Edward II*, by Christopher Marlowe; *Bussy D'Ambois*, by George Chapman; *The Changeling*, by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley; *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, by Thomas Heywood; *The Duchess of Malfi*, by John Webster; and *Othello*, by William Shakespeare. I will attempt to analyze these in order to determine the overt stereotypes revealed by the characters' speeches, the implied stereotypes which are revealed by events and actions, and the role these stereotypes play in the motivation of the women involved.

My choice of plays for close investigation is based on two criteria. First, all are plays in which a woman or women are either the protagonists or play a principal role in the downfall of the hero, primarily because of their so-called lustful nature. Such a stipulation rules out a study of many interesting women. Hotspur's Kate, for example, is an excellent study in character, but her role is to further the establishment of Hotspur's own character rather than to serve as an active participant in the action. Gertrude sets up the tragedy
in Hamlet through her lust for Claudius, but this contribution happens before the play opens. She subsequently reacts rather than acts. This study will be confined to analyzing the motivation of women who are active throughout the plays in directly bringing about the tragic downfall of themselves and/or the heroes.

Second, I have chosen a broad representation of the major Elizabethan playwrights, using those plays which are generally acknowledged as their best works. Acknowledged masterpieces were chosen since they can be assumed to contain the best motivation of which the author is capable, whether of male or female characters. Who can say, for example, if Tamora in Titus Andronicus acts erratically because her motivation suffers from female stereotyping or from Shakespeare's lack of mastery of his craft? A possible exception to this rule might be The Spanish Tragedy, wherein all motivations are generally cloudy. I have included it both for its wealth of female stereotypes and for its importance as a popular pattern for revenge tragedy. Furthermore, I have interpreted the term "Elizabethan" broadly, stretching it to include the Stuart plays The Duchess of Malfi and The Changeling.

Most criticism of Elizabethan drama tends to ignore or treat as commonplace certain female stereotypes. Several examples will serve to illustrate. Hallett D. Smith finds no difficulty with Mrs. Frankford's instant seduction in
A Woman Killed with Kindness since "she would be immediately recognized as belonging to a familiar type," that is, recognizable to Elizabethan audiences as patterned on Jane Shore, Edward IV's notorious mistress. Thus, he accepts the problem of stereotyping as the solution. Gamaliel Bradford swallows the stereotypes whole when he finds Beatrice-Joanna in The Changeling a "compelling study of feminine willfulness and giddy caprice, ungoverned and unsteadied by moral habit or profound affection." A. C. Bradley makes a similar mistake on the opposite side of the coin. He believes that Desdemona is "helplessly passive . . . because her nature is infinitely sweet and her love absolute." Millie Barranger, in her study of women as focal points in tragedy, identifies certain usages of stereotypes by various authors but makes no attempt to analyze them as such. She finds that

... the female protagonist [is] essentially a passive agent by the nature of her sex [and] best conveys the confusion of moral and emotional properties of a frail humanity which inevitably lead to the tragic convergence of excess and the forces of evil.


5Millie Barranger, "Women as a Tragic Focus in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama," Diss. Tulane 1964, p. 33.
Without specifically mentioning sexual stereotyping, M. C. Bradbrook nevertheless deals with the problem. She attributes much unconvincing motivation to conventions which were accepted by Elizabethan audiences and playwrights alike, arguing that unity was not required in many cases where the tragedy was based on folk traditions, stock stories, or historical events familiar to the audience.\textsuperscript{6} Thus, gimmicks such as Alsemero's virginity test in \textit{The Changeling} could be taken for granted. Furthermore, she points out,

\begin{quote}
\ldots if a story \textit{were} true, the dramatist was under no obligation to make it dramatically convincing. \ldots
\end{quote}

The dramatist could therefore use astounding coincidences, leave action unmotivated, or mix time and place; since the story was true, such actions could not affect its credibility.\textsuperscript{7}

The stereotyping of women might be considered to be a convention which falls into the category of "folk tradition."

In order to examine female stereotypes in motivation, it is first necessary to determine what they were. This can be done in two ways. First, the plays studied are in themselves sources of both expressed and implied stereotypes of women. These will be pointed out and discussed at length later in this study. Second, there is a large body of Renaissance didactic and homiletic literature concerning women and the interests of


\textsuperscript{7}Ibid., p. 39.
women of the time which reveals the accepted mores and behavior of the sex, from which conclusions regarding stereotypes can be drawn. To examine these, I must rely on secondary sources, and am particularly indebted to the intelligent work of Carroll Camden and Ruth Kelso, from whose books the following summary is in large part drawn.\textsuperscript{8}

Both Camden and Kelso find that a heated written debate, similar to the one the current women's movement has spawned, began around 1400 and continued through the sixteenth century. Women were attacked, advised, and admonished, frequently in vile and derogatory terms. By no means was the Elizabethan woman without her contemporary defenders and admirers, some of whom included women themselves. The participation of women in the debate is a plausible reason why the argument was so furious. The revival of interest in learning which characterized the Renaissance filtered down to include women, and their desire for education was apparently viewed as a threat to men. Kelso analyzes the situation thusly:

It may well be suspected that the flood of satire and the other flood of advice to wives on marriage, modeled on St. Paul's pattern, rose in the renaissance in part from alarm that women were breaking out of bounds and needed to be kept or set back in their place.\textsuperscript{9}


\textsuperscript{9}Kelso, p. 10.
From the antifeminist writers of the period, Camden extracts a long list of women's major faults, which I paraphrase. 10

1. Women are stubborn and perverse, and a man cannot please them no matter how he tries.
2. Women want their own way, but if they are allowed a certain amount of self-determination, they are unable to use it wisely.
3. Women talk too much.
4. Women are unable to keep a secret.
5. Women love clothes and attend church only to show them off.
6. Women will not hesitate to lie, deceive, or dissemble to get their way.
7. Women are jealous, a trait they share with men, but which is worse in women because they are naturally weak and lack self-control.
8. Women are lustful.

Camden further adds,

Perhaps the vice most often laid at women's door is that of eroticism. Elizabethan writers begin by quoting Proverbs, "Who can find a virtuous woman?" and go on to speak of women's "insatiable lust" and "Lewde behauior," calling them "incontinent," "Insatiable & vnsatisfied," and more hot than goats; they continue that "wyman be more desyrous of carnall lust then men," and that apparently they are born on the earth more to "entertain and nourish voluptuousnesse and Idleness" than to be trained in matters of importance. 11

10 Camden, pp. 24-27. 11 Ibid., p. 27.
Kelso's findings are similar. She states that the major faults which Renaissance writers found in women are licentiousness, instability, gluttony, pride, vanity, avarice, greed, seditiousness, quarrelsomeness, vindictiveness, and talkativeness. The following is her summary of attitudes "drawn indiscriminately from the Bible, ancient philosophers, churchmen, courtiers, poets, and scribblers of every sort."

The nature of woman had to be crooked for she was made of Adam's expendable rib, which, unfortunately for her, was crooked. Her warping was shown in the pride that refused to serve Adam as she was created to and urged her to rule, and the discontent that aspired to divinity. Nature, taking over after the creation, goes on making women, but always by mistake. Her intention is to create men, since she aims at perfection, but some weakness or error reduces her product only too often to a woman. The elements in this woman are badly mixed; humidity and cold prevail over heat and dryness with the result that she is timid, even cowardly, by disposition and shrinks from the great exploits that make the name of man glorious. Built in frailler fashion than man, her body is not apt for great toil and exertion, and her brain power is small to suit. Hence lacking reason to guide her, she is governed by her passions alone.

An almost obsessive topic of discussion among the Renaissance writers on women was chastity--how to instill it in children, how to maintain chastity in marriage, how a widow remains properly chaste--all further proof of the widespread notion of women's licentiousness. Parents were warned against expressing physical affection toward their daughters, lest it

12 Kelso, p. 12. Both Kelso and Camden include bibliographies of original sources, including many unpublished manuscripts. Kelso's bibliography is the more inclusive, and lists the sources by the topics they deal with.

13 Ibid., pp. 11-12.
arouse latent lust among the toddlers. For the same reason, parents should not embrace in front of the child. Some writers went so far as to say that the father should never smile at his daughter. The young girl should have her playmates carefully screened, and play should always be under the supervision of an unquestionably virtuous adult, preferably the mother. As the child grew older, she should be secluded from all except her immediate family. She should not even be allowed to sit by the window, for fear of contamination from passers-by. It would be best if she could be kept from church attendance, but if she must go, she should be chaperoned and hurried to and from with her eyes downcast.\footnote{Camden, p. 41; Kelso, pp. 40-41, 48.}

Much as all advisers would seem to have preferred to keep all girls, and women too, strictly at home, safe from sights that would put worldly and flighty ideas into their heads, and from the observation of men, tempted and offering temptation, they recognized the impossibility of turning the house into such a prison, and admitted the necessity of occasionally going abroad, if only to church. The rule was to go out as seldom as possible.\footnote{Kelso, p. 48.}

Once the Renaissance woman married the man of her parents' choice, she was expected to love and obey her husband without question. If her husband chose to take a mistress, the wife was expected to keep silent about it. One writer advised the wife to invite the mistress to live in the home and treat her
with loving kindness, so that the erring husband could ultimately see the superiority of his wife. But the wife could not show pleasure in the marriage bed, because to do so would cause her husband to doubt her chastity.\textsuperscript{16}

If widowed, a woman could best guarantee her reputation for chastity by entering a convent. The second best choice for the widow seeking to avoid criticism of her chastity was to remain unmarried and devote her life to service to others. The worst choice a widow could make was remarriage, since this proved her lustful nature.\textsuperscript{17}

This excessive concern about the fate of widows is perhaps attributable to the fact that only the widow had a chance to be free from the domination of father and/or husband. Indeed, widows were directly responsible for the rise of power of the middle-class English women in the business world, since they were permitted to carry on their husbands' business or trade.\textsuperscript{18} Remarriage would put the widow back under the domination of a man; hence the general admonitions against remarriage seem contradictory to the doctrine of male supremacy. However, Kelso points out, the ideal of female chastity took precedence.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., pp. 44, 103.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., pp. 121, 131-132.
\textsuperscript{18} Kelso, p. 131; Camden, p. 148.
"Always, it must be remembered, the supreme, first, and last test of women's worth was chastity."  

The debate on the status of women during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries may have resulted from the desire to keep women in their place in the face of their growing awareness through education. But underneath this surface concern the Elizabethan allegiance to the concept of order must be considered. The place of women in the Great Chain of Being is apparently unquestioned: they are definitely below men. That this place is so taken for granted as to be unworthy of mention is evidenced by E. M. W. Tillyard's work on the subject. He traces the stations on the chain from angels to rocks, but never once mentions the place of women. Apparently, they are toward the end of the link which contains mankind, such a commonplace that it goes without saying. Remaining unclear in Tillyard's study is the place of noble women in the Elizabethan concept of order which ranks rulers above common men. Kelso's work reveals that, under the law, a woman was entitled to the rank of her husband. A lowborn woman who married a nobleman gained his rank, which she kept if widowed, as long as she did not return to her father's household. If she, or a woman born to high rank, married a commoner, she

19Kelso, p. 132.

lost her noble position. Consequently, the concept of order regarding the divine right of kings did not apply to women, who in all cases rose or declined in their degree in the chain of being through the men who ruled their personal lives.

\textsuperscript{21} Kelso, pp. 33-34.
CHAPTER II

THE STEREOTYPE AFFIRMED: "SECOND LOVE SHALL FURTHER MY REVENGE"

Bel-imperia in The Spanish Tragedy and Isabella in Edward II share a common desire, their wish to avenge wrongs done to them. In this they share a common dilemma: how can they achieve their desires within the context of their roles as powerless women? Whether or not their powerlessness derives from unfair female stereotyping is moot; the fact is that in the context of the plays they are powerless. Consequently, they must derive their power from men. Both Bel-imperia and Isabella form sexual liaisons with men during the course of their individual quests for revenge; hence they lay themselves open to the charge that they affirm the stereotypes of women as licentious and inconstant. These charges are implied in Edward II but are openly expressed in The Spanish Tragedy.

Kyd scatters overt female stereotyping throughout The Spanish Tragedy. In Act I, scene iii, Lorenzo and Balthazar see Bel-imperia drop a glove in front of Horatio, and she tells him to keep it. Balthazar is discouraged by this signal of Bel-imperia's preference, but Lorenzo reminds him that women are capricious.
You know that women oft are humorous. These clouds will overblow with little wind; Let me alone, I'll scatter them myself.
(I.iii.105-107)

In Act II, Bel-imperia's father Don Cyprian displays another stereotype. The king and the Portuguese ambassador are discussing the proposed marriage between Bel-imperia and Balthazar. When the king asks Don Cyprian if Bel-imperia loves the Portuguese prince, he responds with the generalization that women are deceptive.

Although she coy it, as becomes her kind, And yet dissemble that she loves the prince, I doubt not, I, but she will stoop in time.
(II.iii.3-5)

After Horatio's murder, Lorenzo sets into motion his plot to eliminate his accomplice, Pedringano. He sends a page who carries a box which supposedly contains Pedringano's pardon. The page is instructed not to look in the box; but of course he does, giving the playwright the opportunity to insert another stereotype. To justify his curiosity, the page cites his youth, "for we men's-kind in our minority are like women in their uncertainty--that they are most forbidden, they will soonest attempt" (III.v.4-7).

Hieronimo's famous "What's a son?" speech contains yet another stereotype.

1This and all subsequent references both to The Spanish Tragedy and Edward II are from Elizabethan and Stuart Plays, ed. Charles Read Baskervill, et al. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965).
A thing begot within a pair of minutes--thereabout; 
A lump bred up in darkness, and doth serve 
To balance these light creatures we call women. 

(III.x.6-8)

These ironic lines emphasize the importance of sons at the expense of women, the "light creatures." Given the context of its usage, the implication of "light" would seem to go beyond the fact that women are generally physically smaller than men. Certainly a woman in advanced pregnancy rarely appears "light" in a physical sense of size, so Hieronimo must be referring either to "lightheadedness" or a character deficiency akin to that recognized in current slang which dismisses someone as "a real lightweight." Either way, the implication that women gain status through their role as mothers of sons is inescapable.

Bel-imperia herself gives lip service to a stereotype of her kind in the preceding scene. Lorenzo apparently convinces her that Horatio's murder was for her own good. Then, encouraged by Lorenzo's successful placation of Bel-imperia, Balthazar begins to court her. To his remark that he fears he cannot win her love, she answers

To love and fear, and both at once, my lord, 
In my conceit, are things of more import 
Than women's wits are to be busied with. 

(III.ix.107-109)

In addition to whatever prejudices his audiences brought in with them, Kyd's characters remind them of others by making several unflattering generalizations about women. Women are deceitfully capricious, perverse and uncontrollably curious, inconsequential outside their role as mothers, and intellectual
inferiors to men. Are these stereotypes to be considered part of the motivation for Bel-imperia's actions?

Briefly sketched, the Bel-imperia plot is as follows. At the opening of the play, Bel-imperia loves Andrea, who is killed in the Spanish-Portuguese war by Balthazar. She vows revenge for her dead lover. Captured by the Spanish, Balthazar falls in love with Bel-imperia, a match greatly desired by their elders for political reasons. But Bel-imperia switches her affections to Horatio, Hieronimo's son. She arranges a lovers' tryst with Horatio, which is interrupted by his murder and her kidnapping by Lorenzo and Balthazar. In captivity, she manages to get a note to Hieronimo, naming the killers. She is finally released after feigning agreement with Lorenzo's argument that Horatio's murder was a necessary defense of her honor. She accepts her betrothal to Balthazar while plotting revenge with Hieronimo. They carry out the revenge through the play within the play. She stabs and kills Balthazar, then herself.

Bel-imperia is sufficiently motivated and her actions logical within the context of the plot, except for the sudden development of her affair with Horatio. Certainly it is natural for a young woman eventually to take another lover if death claims the first, but Bel-imperia's haste in doing so is unconvincing. But she has excellent reasons, given her powerless position as an unmarried daughter and hence her father's chattel, for going along with the betrothal to Balthazar until the
revenge plot could be activated. It was a logical move for her to dissemble with her brother in order to gain her freedom; she had no other choice since her note to Hieronimo was ignored by the distraught father for his own good reasons. She must gain her freedom by any means at her disposal in order to avenge herself, and deviousness was the appropriate action available to her. This is not the dissembling of the stereotype female; Hieronimo, after his attempts to inform the authorities are blocked by Lorenzo, also dissembles by hiding the nature of his complaint and by feigning madness. Those in power must be lulled into complacency in order for the revenge plot to succeed. That they were so easily duped (Lorenzo's explanation for Bel-imperia's absence, for example, is woefully inadequate) might be attributed to their sexist attitude toward Bel-imperia as an unfeeling chattel to be bartered, but Bel-imperia's actions are not of themselves open to charges of sexual stereotyping during this phase of the play.

It is her motivation during the beginning of the play which is insufficient and believable only if the stereotypes are accepted. There is sufficient evidence that Bel-imperia's love for Andrea was deep and sincere. The ghost of Andrea opens the play by describing his relationship with her.

In secret I possessed a worthy dame,  
Which hight sweet Bel-imperia by name.  
But in the harvest of my summer joys  
Death's winter nipped the blossoms of my bliss,  
Forcing divorce betwixt my love and me.  
(I.1.10-14)
The passage has strong implications of a sexual relationship through use of such terms as "I possessed," and "the harvest of my summer joys." The choice of the "divorce" metaphor raises the relationship from one of simple physical passion to one of a stronger underlying commitment, since "divorce" brings to mind the idea of a previously-existing marriage. Of course, the pair was not married, but the choice of "divorce" to describe their separation by death shows that Andrea is not speaking of a casual affair.

Bel-imperia herself echoes Andrea's sentiments with the same blasted-flower imagery, describing him "Who, living, was my garland's sweetest flower,/ And in his death hath buried my delights" (I.iii.4-5). Her first thought is revenge. She responds to Horatio's description of the final battle with "Would thou hadst slain him that so slew my love!" (I.iii.30). Yet in the same scene, Bel-imperia gives Horatio her scarf, which Andrea had carried as her token, "For after him thou hast deserved it best" (I.iii.49). At first, this speech can be read to mean that Bel-imperia believes that Horatio is deserving because of his gallantry in battle. But after he leaves, Bel-imperia makes her meaning clear.

Ay, go, Horatio, leave me here alone,
For solitude best fits my cheerless mood.
Yet what avails to wall Andrea's death,
From whence Horatio proves my second love?
Had he not loved Andrea as he did,
He could not sit in Bel-imperia's thoughts.
(I.iii.58-63)

Already Bel-imperia's "sweetest flower" has a replacement. She
does realize that her sudden switch is not altogether seemly, since Andrea remains unrevenged. But she quickly comes up with the ideal solution, marvelously tidy and self-serving.

Yes, second love shall further my revenge!
I'll love Horatio, my Andrea's friend,
The more to spite the prince that wrought his end.
(I.iii.66-68)

Peter Murray sees Bel-imperia's switch to Horatio as part of an overall linkage of love and hate as a chain of motivation which runs throughout the play. Consequently, he finds unremarkable the fact that Bel-imperia's love object changes so rapidly. "The love of Bel-imperia for Andrea dies with him, but it inspires both her hatred of his slayer and her love for Horatio, who, as a friend, also loved Andrea." Murray cites Balthazar's motivation for his part in Horatio's murder as further evidence of the love-hate motif. "Balthazar, a study in the way unrequited love can make a person kill for jealousy, knows that this murder will frustrate his love for Bel-imperia, but he cannot help himself." Additionally, Murray points out, Hieronimo is driven to hate because of his love for Horatio. Certainly, his analysis has validity, but it does nothing toward explaining Bel-imperia's motivation within the context of the play itself. While valuable for the purpose of analysis of theme and structure,

3 Ibid., p. 35.
an externally-imposed framework cannot be considered adequate to explain the lack of internal motivation.

Arthur Freeman thinks Bel-imperia's motivation is essentially Machiavellian. He calls her "refreshingly straightforward," and takes her at her word when she says, "I'll love Horatio, my Andrea's friend,/ The more to spite the prince that wrought his end" (I.iii.67-68). The problem with Freeman's analysis is that Bel-imperia's love for Horatio is established as genuine, and her good reasons for the switch sound more like rationalization than Machiavellian plotting. In order to make her plot work, she had only to favor Horatio outwardly by dropping her glove for him, and then spurning Balthazar's advances. It was totally unnecessary for her to arrange the tryst in the garden, a meeting she thought would not be observed. It must be assumed that Bel-imperia knew that her liaison with Horatio was inappropriate on the grounds that his rank as son of a minor court official was lower than hers as daughter of the Duke of Castile. This knowledge on her part is proven by the later scene between Bel-imperia and Lorenzo in which both are in agreement that her silence concerning the murder of her lover is guaranteed by her risk of lost honor if the affair should come to light. That Bel-imperia's agreement is feigned does not alter the fact that neither party doubted the validity

of Lorenzo's argument that her honor was potentially besmirched. Therefore, Bel-imperia knew that she risked a great deal if she actually fell in love with Horatio; that she did so despite the risk shows that any Machiavellian benefits which resulted from the love affair were secondary.

Therefore, Bel-imperia's falling in love with another man immediately after she hears an eyewitness account of her previous lover's death remains unexplained and can be attributed only to the fact that she is a woman and must be, according to the stereotype, lustful and capricious. Lustful she may be, but her character as developed further in the play is not that of a capricious woman. We have seen that she was willing to risk dishonor for the love of Horatio. Furthermore, she was strong enough to die for her revenge, although Hieronimo did not intend it. These attributes in a male character would be considered signs of strength, not willful inconstancy. Therefore, Bel-imperia's motivation at the beginning of the play is insufficient to explain her switch of affection and is believable only if the stereotypes are accepted.

Isabella in Edward II is another woman who some critics believe changes the object of her affection with unseemly rapidity. Others feel that her harshness toward Edward when she and Mortimer are in control is unconvincing. But close examination of the play and existing criticism shows that the character of Isabella is instead skillfully done, with ample foreshadowing of her behavior.
Isabella's impossible position as the losing partner in the Gaveston-Edward-Isabella triangle is well established. That the relationship between Edward and Gaveston is homosexual is hardly worth discussing; indeed Leonora Brodwin takes it for granted.\(^5\) Certainly, the relationship is decadent, as is shown early in the play by Gaveston's plans for entertaining Edward.

And in the day, when he shall walk abroad,
Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad;
My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns,
Shall with their goat feet dance an antic hay.
Sometimes a lovely boy in Dian's shape
With hair that gilds the water as it glides,
Crownets of pearl about his naked arms,
And in his sportful hands an olive tree,
To hide those parts which men delight to see.\(^6\)

The pair uses references to heterosexual lovers from classical mythology to describe themselves. Gaveston would have swum from France to be with Edward "like Leander" on receiving Edward's "amorous lines" (i.6-8). When greeting Gaveston on his second return, Edward tells him that his emotions are like those of Danaë's lovers who,

When she was locked up in a brazen tower,
Desired her more, and waxed outrageous,
So did it sure with me. (vi.53-55)


\(^6\)The Baskervill edition of the play is divided into scenes without acts.
Isabella, with a similar classical reference, accurately defines the triangle.

Like frantic Juno will I fill the earth
With ghastly murmer of my sighs and cries;
For never doted Jove on Ganymede
So much as he on cursed Gaveston.

(iv.178-181)

All evidence in the play supports the idea that Isabella's grief is real. Both her own remarks and those of the more disinterested nobles show that she is the loving, devoted wife. She realizes that Gaveston has replaced her in her husband's heart, but she reacts with grief instead of anger. Rather than part from Edward's presence, she pleads for Gaveston so that at least Edward will be happy and, being so, will tolerate her. She shows her awareness of the situation in her first speech:

For now my lord the king regards me not,
But dotes upon the love of Gaveston.
He claps his cheeks, and hangs about his neck,
Smiles in his face, and whispers in his ears;
And, when I come, he frowns, as who should say,
"Go whither thou wilt, seeing I have Gaveston."

(ii.49-54)

When the nobles tell her that they plan to remove Gaveston by force, she opposes their plan

... for rather than my lord
Shall be oppressed by civil mutinies,
I will endure a melancholy life,
And let him frolic with his minion.

(ii.64-67)

There is no hint of an existing romance between Isabella and Mortimer in the early part of the play. It is Gaveston who plants the thought in Edward's head. The nobles, with the aid of Rome, have convinced Edward to exile Gaveston. Isabella
walks in on the parting friends, and Edward angrily calls her a "French strumpet." "On whom but on my husband should I fawn?" she asks. Gaveston replies, "On Mortimer, with whom, ungentle queen--/ I say no more. Judge you the rest, my lord" (iv.145-148). Isabella objects and Gaveston apologizes, but the damage has been done. Edward seizes on the suggestion.

Thou art too familiar with that Mortimer, And by thy means is Gaveston exiled. But I would wish thee reconcile the lords, Or thou shalt ne'er be reconciled to me. (iv.154-157)

Isabella at once acts on Edward’s threat, and in her intercession scene with the nobles we find corroborating evidence that there is nothing improper about her relationship with Mortimer. When she, distraught, approaches the nobles, Pembroke remarks, "Hard is the heart that injures such a saint" (iv.190).

The intercession scene is important on two more counts. First, although Pembroke absolves her of any present misconduct, the scene foreshadows her future relationship with Mortimer. Clifford Leech points out that Isabella singles out Mortimer as the noble to whom she makes her plea, addressing him as "sweet Mortimer" (iv.225). This approach implies a pre-existing rapport, friendship, or at least mutual regard of which she is aware, although she has no romantic thoughts of Mortimer at the time. Leech continues,
There is no hint yet of any infidelity on Isabella's part, yet she makes free use of her power over Mortimer, and Marlowe thus prepares us for a closer relationship between them.\(^7\)

On the second count, Isabella is shown to have a greater dimension than that of a passive sufferer, foreshadowing her later collusion with Mortimer against Edward. Claude Summers maintains that the plot which Mortimer outlines to the nobles is Isabella's own.\(^8\) Since the conversation is whispered, there is of course no way to know how much of the scheme was suggested by her or how much depended on Mortimer's embellishments. But certainly Isabella stood by unprotesting during Mortimer's interpretation of the plan to the other nobles, and this fact justifies Summers' conclusion.

Her action here indicates that Isabella is never the complete innocent she is commonly reputed to be in the beginning of the play. . . . Whatever negligence or clumsiness he may be guilty of in delineating his minor characters, Marlowe is not guilty of implausibly transforming an innocent Isabella into a wicked schemer.\(^9\)

It can be argued that Isabella was simply giving the nobles a good reason to lift Gaveston's exile and did not intend the plot to carry through. Either way, Summers' analysis of Isabella as schemer holds. But unquestionably, her

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\(^9\) Ibid., p. 310.
surface motive was to regain Edward's favor through pleasing him, and she leaves hopefully.

Her hopes are short-lived. With Gaveston's return begins a renewal of Edward's insults to her. At the end of scene vi, the three are together in the presence of Spenser and others, and Edward again accuses her of a romance with Mortimer. "Thus do you still suspect me without cause," she answers (vi.222). The conversation turns to the subject of Mortimer's threat, and Edward and Gaveston discuss the possibility of murdering him. Isabella's loyalty to Edward is shown by her significant silence on the subject. She is satisfied by Edward's dissembling apology and shows no concern about Mortimer's fate.

The civil war breaks out, and scene viii finds Gaveston, Edward, and his men fleeing from Tynemouth. Until Isabella speaks first, Edward pointedly omits her from his farewells to those remaining behind. "No farewell to poor Isabel, thy queen?" Edward uses the opening to insult her yet again. "Yes, yes, for Mortimer, your lover's sake" (viii.13-14). She is left alone and again restates her faithfulness and love to Edward in soliloquy. Mortimer arrives with the nobles, and the following dialogue takes place.

MOR. JUN. Madam, stay you within this castle here.
QUEEN. No, Mortimer, I'll to my lord the king.
MOR. JUN. Nay, rather sail with us to Scarborough.
QUEEN. You know the king is so suspicious
As, if he hear I have but talked with you,
Mine honor will be called in question;
And therefore, gentle Mortimer, begone.
MOR. JUN. Madam, I cannot stay to answer you, 
But think of Mortimer as he deserves. 

QUEEN. [Aside.] So well hast thou deserved, 
sweet Mortimer, 
As Isabel could live with thee forever! 
In vain I look for love at Edward's hand, 
Whose eyes are fixed on none but Gaveston; 
Yet once more I'll importune him with prayers. 
If he be strange and not regard my words, 
My son and I will over into France, 
And to the king my brother there complain 
How Gaveston hath robbed me of his love. 
But yet I hope my sorrows will have end, 
And Gaveston this blessed day be slain. (viii.50-69)

This is the scene which some critics believe shows a too-rapid change of heart on Isabella's part. Mortimer's "think of Mortimer as he deserves," might well show more feeling for Isabella on his part than is due a queen by a loyal subject. But his suggestions up to that point were entirely proper and could have sprung solely out of the concern of a nobleman for the safety of his queen. This possibility is shown by his first suggestion that she stay at the castle. He suggests she join his party only after she says she will follow the king rather than remain in safety. Isabella's reaction to Mortimer's plea that she think of him as he deserves indicates that she interpreted the remark as having a personal meaning. But these lines (59-60) do not mean that Isabella returns Mortimer's feeling. Instead, her answer shows that Isabella recognizes that Mortimer's behavior has been superior to that of the king. Edward's actions have jeopardized the stability of the kingdom, while Mortimer's actions have been attempts to remove the divisive factor from the kingdom. At the same time, Edward
has been insulting and indifferent toward Isabella, while Mortimer has been gallant and supportive. Therefore, Isabella's character remains consistent. She is not saying "I would like to live with you forever," but "You are certainly more deserving of my love than is Edward." This is an objective, not emotional, evaluation. The rest of her speech shows that her emotional attachment still lies with Edward.

Leech's analysis of the same scene supports the conclusion that Isabella has not at this point switched her affection to Mortimer.

We have seen how she has long been conscious of Mortimer's feeling for her, how Mortimer for her is always "gentle" or "sweet" Mortimer, how Edward has taunted her with his love for Gaveston and accused her of infidelity. Now she finds herself deserted, with Edward's reproach still in her ears. This is the turning point for her, though she does not know it yet.10

Isabella's moment of truth comes in France after her brother, the King of France, and other powerful French nobles refuse to aid her, their non-interference purchased with Edward's gold. The prince, overestimating his influence on

10Leech, p. 191. Although Leech's assessment of the situation seems valid on the whole, he may be attaching too much significance to the usage of "gentle" and "sweet." It is true that throughout the play "gentle" and "sweet" are normally used by familiars of good will in addressing each other; however, "gentle" is commonly used in Elizabethan literature to refer to one's condition of birth, and its usage in Edward II follows this pattern. Isabella first calls Mortimer "sweet" (11.81) in the scene wherein she joins the Archbishop in an attempt to dissuade Mortimer from open rebellion. In this context, the usage appears to be more ironic than intimate.
Edward, suggests they return to England. But in despair, Isabella has accepted the truth about her relationship with Edward.

Ah, boy thou art deceived, at least in this, To think that we can yet be tuned together. No, no, we jar too far. . . .
Unhappy Isabel, when France rejects, Whither, oh whither dost thou bend thy steps? (xiii.8-12)

Isabella at this point is abandoned and rejected by both her husband and brother. In the Elizabethan world order, these men are her natural protectors, and without them she is powerless and hopeless. Considering her state of mind, it is entirely believable that she turns to Mortimer, who sweeps in with a plan to restore honor both to herself and to England.

By the time they successfully challenge Edward, Mortimer and Isabella are openly lovers, according to Kent's evidence that they "do kiss while they conspire" (xvi.21-22). Although she still expresses outward concern for the King's welfare, she consents to Mortimer's advice to "Be ruled by me, and we will rule the realm" (xix.5). Her only stipulation is the assurance of her son's safety.

Sweet Mortimer, the life of Isabel, Be thou persuaded that I love thee well, And therefore, so the prince my son be safe, Whom I esteem as dear as these mine eyes, Conclude against his father what thou wilt, And I myself will willingly subscribe. (xix.15-20)

Thus, Isabella makes a complete turnabout, from a loyal, devoted wife who is willing to sacrifice her own happiness
for her husband's pleasure to a woman who plots with her lover for her husband's downfall. However, she is sufficiently motivated for her change. Edward's preference for Gaveston is clear, and he has publicly humiliated Isabella. She does everything in her power to win Edward's favor, and there is no evidence in the play that his accusations concerning Mortimer are true. Only when she is alone and friendless in France does she accept the truth that Edward is forever alienated from her. At this point in her despair, Mortimer arrives as her savior. She does at this time become Mortimer's lover, but she has already recognized that the differences between her and Edward are not to be reconciled. In this instance, her behavior is motivated by plot and character; it is not dependent on the stereotype of woman's inconstancy.

But the motivation of Isabella is once more challenged by critics who believe that her complicity in Edward's death is inconsistent with the loving wife previously portrayed. F. P. Wilson sees Isabella as suddenly a she-Machiavel.

Cruel as well as unfaithful, she has nothing to learn in the art of turning and dissembling. In public she is full of concern for the state of the country and the king's misfortunes, of thanks to "the God of kings" and "heaven's great architect"; in private, there is no villainy of Mortimer's which she does not aid and abet.11

Yet we have already seen that Isabella's capacity for scheming has been foreshadowed in the scene in which she persuades the nobles to reinstate Gaveston. Therefore, this side of her nature should not come as a surprise, particularly given the overwhelming nature of her grievances against Edward. Wilson's charge that she is a full partner in Mortimer's villainy seems to overstate the case. It is true that Isabella wants Edward dead, but her motivation springs not from a Machiavellian plot on her part but from her simple desire to save herself and her son. As she herself points out, "But, Mortimer, as long as he survives,/ What safety rests for us or for my son?" (xix.42-43). Furthermore, she is unaware of the nature of Edward's horrible torture and murder, so even though she agrees that Edward must die, she does not "aid and abet" in either the planning or the execution of the murder. Although she plots with Mortimer for Edward's death "so 'twere not by my means" (xix.45), her plotting ends at that point; indeed she clearly indicates that she does not want to be bothered by the details.

Another indication that Isabella is not in complete complicity with Mortimer is the lack of warmth in their relationship. Although Kent observes that they are openly lovers, and she herself tells Mortimer "I love thee well," she has no soliloquy affirming her love for Mortimer similar to those by which she has previously emphasized her feelings for Edward. Additionally, she does not answer Mortimer's brief parting
speech as he is led off to be beheaded (xxiii.64-66). As Leech points out, "Certainly it would be difficult to find two other lovers in Elizabethan drama who parted with words so chill."

Consequently, the bond between the pair appears more that of a mutual self-serving rather than love, and as a result Isabella's influence over Mortimer is slight.

Therefore, Isabella seems throughout the play to be adequately motivated, unflawed by sexual stereotyping. She is driven to extreme measures but is given good reason for her extremes. She forms a sexual liaison with Mortimer, but there is no implication in the play that she does so because she is a woman and is therefore licentious. Instead, the liaison is motivated by Mortimer's previous kindness toward her, together with his power to save her life and the life of her son. She avenges her honor by taking Mortimer as a second lover just as Bel-imperia begins to avenge Andrea's death by her love for Horatio. But unlike Bel-imperia, Isabella is motivated without the taint of sexual stereotyping.

Leech, p. 196.
CHAPTER III

THE SEVERAL FACES OF ADULTERY: "HERE THE RESTRAINED CURRENT MIGHT MAKE BREACH"

Since Renaissance critics of women frequently took the sex to task for their lustful natures, it is not surprising that lust and its attendant sin of adultery were often the precipitating factors in tragedy. In the cases of Bel-imperia and Isabella, lust as motivation was secondary to the prime motivation of revenge. But in the next three plays to be examined, the heroines indulge in lust for its own sake and consequently bring about their own downfall.

Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois*, like *The Spanish Tragedy*, has problems over and beyond stereotyping in motivation, including what Robert Ornstein has called its "basic moral ambiguity."¹ This ambiguity is discussed by Sidney Homan, who points out that "What we hear of Bussy and what we most often see are at odds."² None of the characters, including Bussy, behave in exemplary fashion. Monsieur is a villain because he stands for corruption, which Bussy opposes; yet Bussy is brought down through his illicit affair with Tamyra, which results in his


death and her dishonor. But given the corrupt nature of the French court, her choice seems less "Should I have an affair?" than "With whom should I have an affair?"

There are two expressed stereotypes in Bussy. One is spoken by the pandering Friar, who is the go-between for the affair between Bussy and Tamyra. The Friar explains to Bussy that although Tamyra has arranged the meeting because of her love for Bussy, Bussy must go along with the deception that she seeks the meeting merely because she is concerned that she might have been the cause of a quarrel between Bussy and another courtier. Tamyra requires such a deception because of the basic moral confusion which exists in women, according to the Friar:

In anything a woman does alone,
If she dissemble, she thinks 'tis not done;
If not dissemble, nor a little chide,
Give her her wish, she is not satisfied.
To have a man think that she never seeks,
Does her more good than to have all she likes.
This frailty sticks in them beyond their sex,
Which to reform, reason is too perplex.
Urge reason to them, it will do no good;
Humor, that is the chariot of our food
In everybody, must in them be fed,
To carry their affections by it bred.

(II.11.179-190)³

Unquestionably, Tamyra fits the stereotype of the woman who dissembles her own guilt to the point where she almost succeeds

³This and all subsequent references to the plays discussed in this chapter (Bussy D'Ambois, The Changeling, and A Woman Killed with Kindness) are from Elizabethan and Stuart Plays, ed. Charles Read Baskervill, et al. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965).
in fooling herself. But, given her presence in the corrupt French court, it seems inevitable that she fall since the environment encourages immoral behavior.

The loose moral environment which exists in the French court is established early in the play. Monsieur makes Bussy the offer to "Leave the troubled streams,/ And live, where thrivers do, at the wellhead" (I.i.83-84). In Bussy's cynical reply, he asks whether he will have to learn a long list of courtly perversions, including

[to] please humorous ladies
With a good carriage, tell them idle tales
To make their physic work; spend a man's life
In sights and visitations that will make
His eyes as hollow as his mistress' heart.
(I.i.92-96)

Monsieur replies, equally as cynically, that Bussy "needs't not learn;/ Thou hast the theory; now go there and practice" (I.i.104-105).

Bussy gets his first opportunity to practice in a key scene wherein King Henry and the Guise are playing chess, with the rest of the court in attendance. During the ensuing repartee full of sexual innuendo, Tamyra has but two speeches, and the first is completely innocent: "Has he never been courtier, my lord?" (I.ii.80). Montsurry replies that he has not, and Beaupré's next question begins the conversation of double entendre.

BEAU: And why did the toy take him in th' head now?
BUS: 'Tis leap year, lady, and therefore very good to enter a courtier.
HEN: Mark, Duchess of Guise, there is one is not bashful.
The titillating conversation continues between Bussy and the Duchess until the Guise takes offense. He threatens to have Bussy whipped, but Bussy and the Duchess continue to chat about the number of mistresses a man is allowed to have. The Guise returns briefly to his game, achieves a quick checkmate, and leaves abruptly (I.11.101-195).

One would think the preceding scene (in addition to establishing the moral climate of the court) foreshadowed an affair between Bussy and the Duchess. But it is Tamyra who is to be Bussy's lady. The liaison comes as a surprise, for Tamyra both takes a minor role in the courtly repartee and subsequently rejects Monsieur's suit, pleading that she is a loyal wife.

Monsieur argues that, as brother to the king, he is in a position either to do Tamyra great good or great harm. But she answers that a faithful wife cannot be corrupted: "Mine honor's in mine own hands, spite of kings" (II.11.9). Monsieur maintains that her presence in court is evidence enough that her husband's honor is not the motivating force in her life.

All men know
You live in court here by your own election,
Frequenting all our common sports and triumphs,
All the most youthful company of men,
And wherefore do you this? To please your husband?
'Tis gross and fulsome. If your husband's pleasure  
Be all your object, and you aim at honor  
In living close to him, get you from court;  
You may have him at home. (II.i.24-32)  

Tamyra replies that living in court does not prove sexual license.  

A lady cannot live  
As she was born, and with that sort of pleasure  
That fits her state, but she must be defamed  
With an infamous lord's detraction.  
Who would endure the court if these attempts  
Of open and professed lust must be borne?  

(II.ii.52-57)  

Tamyra's argument upholding her chastity is further reinforced by her subsequent interview with her husband. She complains to him about Monsieur's unwelcome attentions to her. Montsurrury replies that she must bear with him since he is a prince, then pompously adds, "My presence is so only dear to thee/ That other men's appear worse than they be" (II.ii.68-82). She sends him complacently on his way to the business which will occupy him all night, assuring him that she will be desolate until his return. Only as Montsurrury leaves does she reveal that Monsieur was absolutely correct in his evaluation of her. She has arranged, through the Friar, a tryst with Bussy.  

Bussy, supposedly a contrast to the corruption of the French court, is revealed as a willing adulterer. Critics such as Ennis Rees have argued convincingly that, although Bussy is a better man than most in the court, he is still subject to human frailties, particularly pride. Therefore, his affair
with Tamyra would not seem to bestow on her any mystical symbolism, as Irving Ribner argues:

Tamyra, whose inconsistency has so puzzled critics of the play, is cast by Chapman as a symbol both of the natural force which man cannot evade and of the conflict between the demands of this force and those of the social order. Her frenzied protestations, first of loyalty to her husband, then of passion for Bussy and of shameful remorse for her transgressions are reflections of this conflict for which she stands.⁴

Tamyra may stand for conflict, but her "frenzied protestations" of loyalty to her husband do not indicate inconsistency. There is no indication in the play that Tamyra intends to deceive anyone with her protestations of marital fidelity except the two men—Monsieur and Montsurry—it is to her advantage to deceive. Rees is somewhat closer to the mark when he calls Tamyra one of Chapman's most convincing and effective creations. She fights sin all the way, or at least suffers greatly from remorse. But from the beginning she is in sufficiently deep to make a complete withdrawal difficult, and one sin is fast to beget another.⁵

Bussy's and Tamyra's downfall comes from information supplied by maids, who in so doing illustrate the second major stereotype working in the play: that women can be manipulated through empty promises since they have no sense of honor.


Monsieur, Montsurry, and the Guise decide they will seek the path to Bussy's downfall by beguiling information on the secret intrigues of the court ladies from their maids. The plan works. Pero, Tamyra's maid, willingly tells Monsieur that her mistress has seen Bussy in her chamber. Annabelle, maid to the Duchess, repeats to Montsurry the gossip that Bussy neglects the Duchess; therefore, he must be interested in either Tamyra or Beaupré.

Neither maid has been motivated to tell these dangerous secrets by any hint of animosity toward her mistress, but each tells all because of the noblemen's "shows of love and liberal promises" (III.i.169). Pero apparently realizes the magnitude of her defection, since she tries to rationalize it: "I may speak and much the rather because my lady hath not trusted me with that I can tell you, for now I cannot be said to betray her" (III.ii.194-197).

Thus we see in Bussy two fundamental female stereotypes on which the plot depends: form is more important than substance to women, and women may be easily manipulated since they have no sense of honor. Although a basic agreement on these concepts is necessary for the plot, Chapman motivated Tamyra beyond this agreement. Certainly Tamyra's dissembling behavior in setting up the meeting with Bussy justifies the Friar's charge that she prefers appearance to reality. However, she is also motivated by having a dull and easily-deceived husband and by living in the loose moral climate of the court.
On the other hand, the maids' behavior is not motivated except through stereotype. There is no hint in the play that they have grudges against their mistresses, but they are willing and eager to tell dangerous secrets on the strength of vague promises of romance and advancement.

Although Tamyra's actions are not admirable, she is far from an evil woman. By contrast, Beatrice-Joanna in The Changeling would seem to personify all the unflattering generalizations about women which are contained in the stereotypes. Yet Middleton skillfully motivates the immoral, self-centered female.

Beatrice-Joanna is betrothed to Alonzo de Piracquo, but meets and falls in love with Alsemero, who returns her love. In order to extricate herself from the first engagement, she strikes a bargain with Deflores, her father's servant, whose physical ugliness is particularly repulsive to her. Deflores kills Alonzo and claims Beatrice-Joanna's sexual favors as his prize, despite her shocked protest.

Since Alonzo has disappeared (an event which seems to upset nobody except his brother Tomaso), Beatrice-Joanna and Alsemero are wed. In order to conceal her lack of virginity, she must substitute her maid, Diaphanta, on her wedding night. When Alsemero learns about the affair between Beatrice-Joanna and Deflores and confronts the pair, Beatrice-Joanna admits first the murder and finally her adultery.
It is Deflores who speaks the stereotypes about women. As Act II, scene ii opens, Deflores overhears the mutual declaration of love between Beatrice-Joanna and Alsemero. Beatrice-Joanna is still engaged to Alonzo at this point, and Deflores observes that both men cannot be satisfied unless Beatrice-Joanna should "transgress." If she does, he reasons, it will be to his benefit, since

\[
\text{\ldots if a woman}
\]
\[
\text{Fly from one point, from him she makes a husband,}
\]
\[
\text{She spreads and mounts then like arithmetic}
\]
\[
\text{(One, ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand),}
\]
\[
\text{Proves in time sutler to an army royal.}
\]
(II.i.60-64)

Later in the same scene, Beatrice-Joanna and Deflores have made their bargain for Deflores to kill Alonzo. Although he realizes she has not understood what his fee is to be, Deflores anticipates not only his reward of Beatrice-Joanna's body, but her ultimate pleasure in the act.

\[
\text{Hunger and pleasure, they'll commend sometimes}
\]
\[
\text{Slovenly dishes, and feed heartily on 'em--}
\]
\[
\text{Nay, which is stranger, refuse daintier for 'em.}
\]
\[
\text{Some women are odd feeders. (II.i.151-154)}
\]

Both of Deflores' observations derive from the stereotype of women as creatures of lust rather than reason. If a woman is capable of straying from her husband's bed, she is capable of becoming whore to an army, Deflores' reasoning goes. And if a man can satisfy a woman's lust once it is aroused, it does not matter to her if he is unattractive in other ways.

As it happens, Deflores was right about Beatrice-Joanna, so his remarks serve more as foreshadowing than stereotyping.
Beatrice-Joanna becomes an "odd feeder," but the transformation of her attitude toward Deflores from loathing to loving is adequately motivated, consistent with Beatrice-Joanna's chief quality—a strong sense of self-interest. Caroline Cherry analyzes her along similar lines:

As the beautiful daughter of a powerful man, she has been flattered and complied with all her life and thus has developed unrealistically high notions of herself and has never had to develop a moral system or the ability to think rationally. Thus . . . she is a study of an inexperienced, insufficiently educated, legally powerless person suddenly confronted with a situation involving her future happiness and with evil and sexual experience.6

And so Beatrice-Joanna's involvement with Deflores gets deeper, but does so logically, step by step, consistent with her character of moral insensitivity and selfishness. It does not occur to her to ask her father to release her from her first engagement. As her father's possession, she must resort to subterfuge (in this case murder) to have her way. She is not a stupid woman; she realizes that her freedom to act is limited by her sex. To be a man, she tells Deflores,

O, 'tis the soul of freedom!
I should not then be forced to marry one
I hate beyond all depths; I should have power
Then to oppose my loathings, nay, remove 'em
Forever from my sight. (II.11.109-113)

Deflores removes her object of loathing and demands his price, which in turn creates another problem for her on her wedding night. When Diaphanta, a virgin, is substituted for

Beatrice-Joanna, she enjoys her role so much that Beatrice-Joanna decides she must die for it. Beatrice-Joanna reasons that Diaphanta's passionate nature makes her untrustworthy.

No trusting of her life with such a secret
That cannot rule her blood to keep her promise.
Beside, I have some suspicion of her faith to me,
Because I was suspected of my lord,
And it must come from her.  (V.i.6-10)

As usual, Deflores arranges matters so that Beatrice-Joanna can retain her veneer of respectability. "I'm forced to love thee now,/ Cause thou provid'st so carefully for my honor"  (V.i.46-47), she tells him, words which might be taken ironically. However, at Deflores' exit, Beatrice-Joanna's meaning becomes clear as she adds, "Here's a man worth loving!"  (V.i.74).

Therefore, Beatrice-Joanna fulfills Deflores' expectations of her, not because she must fit the stereotype, but because Deflores understands her as an individual. According to Leonora Brodwin,

With him Beatrice need hide nothing and yet can feel perfectly safe. He sees and accepts the faults she herself recognizes and tactfully supports her delusions of pride. After the distress of having to hide her faults from Alsemero, the relief of being able to expose her worst faults and desires before Deflores, and have him accept them as natural, causes her to open her heart to him with true gratefulness. 7

The Isabella sub-plot is another indication that the women in The Changeling are not motivated by stereotype. Isabella is the young, beautiful wife of an old husband. Her sexual favors are sought by Lollio, her husband's trusted servant, and

by two gentlemen, Antonio and Franciscus, who are disguised as madmen. She is annoyed that her husband sets Lollio to guard her. Yet when she discovers Antonio's purpose, she does not take advantage of her opportunity, although, as she notes, "Here the restrained current might make breach, / Spite of the watchful bankers" (III.iii.249-250). Unlike Beatrice-Joanna, Isabella recognizes lust for what it is, and is able to control the sexual appetites she arouses. Although she plays along momentarily with Antonio's game when she disguises herself as a madwoman, she knows that she, the woman, would be the ultimate loser in an extra-marital sexual liaison. Youthful but wise, she cynically summarizes the plight of the Elizabethan woman, who is constantly pursued but expected--at forfeiture of life and honor--constantly to resist. She points out:

Would a woman stray,
She need not gad abroad to seek her sin;
It would be brought home one ways or other.
The needle's point will to the fixed north;
Such drawing artics womens' beauties are.

(III.iii.250-254)

Although Middleton's Beatrice-Joanna is a contemptible, evil woman by any standard, Middleton himself should rank high in his treatment of women as individuals. In sharp contrast to the evil-but-believable Beatrice-Joanna stands

8 In The Lust Motif in the Plays of Thomas Middleton (Salzburg, Austria: Dr. James Hogg Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1973), Barbara Joan Beines points out that this scene can also be interpreted to mean that Isabella wanted an affair with Antonio but changed her mind when Antonio did not recognize her.
Heywood's Anne Frankford, who is presented in *A Woman Killed with Kindness* as a simpering cipher who begins the play as a perfect stereotype of a perfect wife.

Sir Charles lists Anne's attributes in his tribute to her at the wedding feast:

First, her birth
Is noble, and her education such
As might become the daughter of a prince;
Her own tongue speaks all tongues, and her own hand
Can teach all strings to speak in their best grace,
From the shrill'st treble to the hoarsest bass.
To end her many praises in one word,
She's Beauty and Perfection's eldest daughter.

(I.16-23)

Anne accepts the tribute modestly, as a good Elizabethan wife should, and says that her only pleasure is to please her husband.

I would your praise could find a fitter theme
Than my imperfect beauty to speak on.
Such as they be, if they my husband please,
They suffice me now I am married.
His sweet content is like a flatt'ring glass,
To make my face seem fairer to mine eye;
But the least wrinkle from his stormy brow
Will blast the roses in my cheeks that grow.

(I.29-36)

Her brother Francis takes her submissive attitude for granted.

A perfect wife already, meek and patient!

\[\ldots\]

Sister, 'tis good;
You that begin betimes thus, must needs prove Pliant and duteous in your husband's love.

(I.37-39-41)

The Baskerville edition of the play is divided into scenes without acts.
Wendoll is added to the happy household, for no other reason than to satisfy Frankford's whim. Frankford observes:

I have noted many good deserts in him.
He's affable, and seen in many things;
Discourses well, a good companion,
And, though of small means, yet a gentleman
Of a good house, somewhat pressed by want.

(iv.27-31)

Frankford is lavish in his generosity to Wendoll. He tells Wendoll that he has the freedom of Frankford's purse and table (iv.36), his choice of Frankford's menservants and horses (iv.67-70), and he instructs Anne to "Use him with all thy lovings't courtesy" (iv.78).

Although the dislike of Wendoll by Nick and the other servants sounds a warning to the audience that Frankford's faith in Wendoll is not entirely justified, Frankford continues the generous friendship. Indeed, when Frankford is called away, he virtually issues Wendoll an invitation to seduce his wife. Anne innocently relays Frankford's message.

... he wills you as you prize his love,
Or hold in estimation his kind friendship,
To make bold in his absence, and command
Even as himself were present in the house;
For you must keep his table, use his servants,
And be a present Frankford in his absence.

(vi.78-83)

Anne is quickly seduced. Critics have various explanations to account for the embarrassing ease with which Anne succumbs. One of the most interesting is Brodwin's. Anne, she explains, has only been Frankford's "precious ornament," and since he accepted her love as an ornament, "it may--like an ornament--
be lost or stolen. His attitude toward his wife is of a piece with his general attitude toward the world. . . . Frankford gives not of himself but of his possessions."

Hence Anne may be seduced with only an "O, Master Wendoll! O!" (vi.156) because there was a lack of passion in her "perfect" relationship to Frankford, Brodwin believes.

She . . . counters his suit only with a weak reminder of Wendoll's obligation to her husband, not with the strength of committed love. She has not thought of yielding to him but neither has she any prop to stay her downfall. . . . She has, from the beginning, believed in the sanctity of marriage, has tried to be a good wife, and has been happy in this attempt because she feels she loves her husband. But this love is a product of admiration rather than a felt sympathy. . . . It is not a love capable of countering the passion that Wendoll has roused in her breast."

Brodwin's analysis fails to consider that the passion to which she refers was rather more in Wendoll's breast than Anne's. Furthermore, as Hallett D. Smith observes, "her seducer, Master Wendoll, does not seem to have the combined craft of Ovid and Iago, yet the seduction follows rapidly upon the first temptation, and there is little evidence that Mrs. Frankford has undergone a serious struggle with herself." Smith believes Heywood has no reason to make Anne's struggle convincing "because she would be immediately recognized as belonging to

10Brodwin, p. 104.

11Ibid., pp. 105-106.

a familiar type," that represented Jane Shore, mistress of Edward IV, who was familiar to audiences through ballads and poems.

There is no evidence in the play to indicate that Anne enjoyed her sin. During the card game filled with double entendre, Anne makes two comments, neither of which shows the hidden relish of Wendoll's remarks. First she says, "I can play at nothing so well as double-ruff" (viii.154), which can be taken either boastfully, ironically, or self-accusingly. But her meaning becomes clear when she later says, "Would I had never dealt!" (viii.185).

Frankford sets his trap to catch the lovers and announces his intention to leave home overnight. Wendoll is so eager to hop into bed that he almost gives away the affair to Cranwell (xi.93), but Anne's attitude is one of resignation.

Well, you plead custom;
That which for want of wit I granted erst,
I now must yield through fear. Come, come, let's in;
Once o'er shoes, we are straight o'er head in sin.
(xi.111-114)

The instant Frankford catches the pair in the bedroom, Anne is all remorse. She does not defend herself, nor does she point out that Frankford encouraged the affair through his unrestrained generosity to a friend who took advantage of the situation. She offers no excuses or explanations. Her penitence is even more rapid than her fall. She accepts, even welcomes, whatever punishment her husband feels is just.

"'Tis welcome, be it death" (xiii.132).
Anne is first the perfect wife; next the passionless, joyless adulteress; then the immediately, totally penitent wife; and finally the sinner redeemed through suffering. Far from being sufficiently motivated throughout these changes, she is a two-dimensional character used as a foil to Frankford's self-righteous "kindness." Smith's evaluation comes close as he points out that it is unnecessary to motivate Anne during the seduction scene, since she is an easily-recognizable Jane Shore type. More than a Jane Shore type, she is the stereotype of the perfect Elizabethan wife. The perfect wife is still a woman whose virtue, according to the stereotype, is a fragile thing easily lost. Consequently, Anne's downfall is motivated solely through the stereotype of a weak-willed, licentious woman rather than from facets given to her individual personality.
CHAPTER IV

THE RISKS OF INDEPENDENT ACTION:
"A GREAT PRICE FOR A SMALL VICE"

The Duchess in The Duchess of Malfi and Desdemona in Othello are as free from the sexual stereotype as any characters in Elizabethan drama. Yet through its function of determining standards of behavior for women, stereotyping plays an important role in the motivation of both dramas. Both the Duchess and Desdemona have many facets to their personalities, including strengths and weaknesses, but they are basically chaste women and loving wives. Although the two women are innocent victims of persecution, their own actions make them vulnerable to misinterpretation when they refuse to be ruled by the standards of society which they reject. They are strong individuals who make independent decisions about their own lives, even in the face of disapproval by the ruling men in their lives. In doing so, they violate taboos arising from female stereotyping in the society in which they function and thereby assist in bringing about their own downfall.

The audience is reminded of several female stereotypes in Othello which are overtly voiced. Iago is frequently the spokesman for the stereotype of the eroticism of women. On two occasions, he uses stereotypes to encourage Roderigo's hope
ultimately to possess Desdemona. Toward the end of Act I, Iago tells him:

When she is sated with his body, she will find
the error of her choice. She must have change,
she must. . . . (I.iii.356-358)¹

In the next act, Iago tells Roderigo that Desdemona loves Cassio. Roderigo dismisses the idea as ridiculous, but Iago reinforces his previous suggestion that women's lustful appetites require continual variety:

Her eye must be fed, and what delight shall she have
to look on the Devil? When the blood is made dull
with the act of sport, there should be, again to
inflame it and to give satiety a fresh appetite,
loveliness in favor, sympathy in years, manners, and
beauties, all which the Moor is defective in. Now,
for want of these required conveniences, her delicate
tenderness will find itself abused, begin to heave
the gorge, disrelish and abhor the Moor. Very nature
will instruct her in it and compel her to some second
choice. (II.1.227-238. Italics added.)

Disappointed in Desdemona's deception of him, Brabantio
reacts with the stereotype that women are dissemblers.

Oh, treason of the blood!
Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters' minds
By which you see them act. (I.1.170-172)

He immediately expresses the idea that Othello may have used
witchcraft to cause her deception.

Are there not charms
By which the property of youth and maidhood
May be abused? (I.1.172-174)

Brabantio apparently takes the witchcraft charge seriously since it is later the subject of the Senators' examination of Othello (I.iii.94-106). But Brabantio's first thought is that his daughter is, as are all daughters, willfully deceitful.

Iago lists a veritable catalog of female stereotypes in his Act II banter with Desdemona. He charges that women are "pictures out of doors" (painted with cosmetics), "Bells in your parlors" (loud and clamorous), "saints in your injuries" (self-righteously critical), "devils being offended" (unable to accept criticism in return), and "Players in your house-wifery, and housewives in your beds" (shirking household duties, but overenthusiastic in conjugal duties) (II.i.110-113). When Desdemona objects, Iago emphasizes the last charge: "You rise to play, and go to bed to work" (II.i.116). Carroll Camden points out that Desdemona cannot win in the exchange, since in the stereotyped view held by Iago, "even a perfect example of womanhood is good enough only to perform the chief duties of her sex by rearing children and overseeing petty household affairs." Iago expresses the fate of a good woman less kindly: "To suckle fools and chronicle small beer" (II.i.161).

Othello himself expresses a stereotype regarding the lustfulness of women during the Act III scene in which Iago convinces him that Desdemona has been unfaithful.

Carroll Camden, "Iago on Women," JEGP, 48 (1949), 57. Camden interprets the exchange between Desdemona and Iago as the expression of the debate between feminists and anti-feminists of the period.
Oh, curse of marriage,
That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
And not their appetites! (III.iii.268-270)

But Shakespeare gives women an opportunity to answer with a stereotype about the lustfulness of men. It is spoken by Emilia, that marvelous combination of common sense and uncommon loyalty.

’Tis not a year or two shows us a man.
They are all but stomachs and we all but food.
They eat us hungerly, and when they are full
They belch us. (III.iv.103-106)

Although Emilia is guilty of expressing a stereotype, she knows that there is no appreciable difference in the sexuality of men and women. She impulsively speaks the lines cited immediately above in order to comfort Desdemona after she is suddenly confronted with Othello's anger. Emilia later has a more thoughtful appraisal of human nature.

Let husbands know
Their wives have sense like them. They see and smell
And have their palates both for sweet and sour,
As husbands have. What is it that they do
When they change us for others? Is it sport?
I think it is. And doth affection breed it?
I think it doth. Is 't frailty that thus errs?
It is so too. And have not we affections,
Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?
Then let them use us well. Else let them know
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.
(IV.iii.94-104)

The stereotypes cited above, together with Emilia's exposure of the inaccuracy of stereotyping in the face of the basic similarity of the natures common to both men and women, serve an obvious function in the delineation of characterization of those who speak them. But they are also crucial to
the understanding of the motivation of the play. Desdemona dared to be true to herself in the face of the stereotype. She chose her own husband and (as will be shown later) took an active part in the realm of men, both actions of an unconventional woman.

The present-day student of Shakespeare who seeks to shed new light on the motivation of any of Shakespeare's major characters is bound to be frustrated. Since Desdemona has been exhaustively analyzed from numerous points of view, the only task remaining is that of sifting through the existing criticism and adding the leavening of yet another individual opinion.

Critics' views of Desdemona range from that of A. C. Bradley's "helplessly passive" creature whose "nature is infinitely sweet and her love absolute"\(^3\) to Stephen Reid's guilt ridden Oedipal figure who acquiesced in her own death to relieve her sexual guilt.\(^4\) Indeed, subsequent critics cite Bradley's "helplessly passive" description as a point of departure from which to argue their own positions with as much regularity as Iago's examiners start with Coleridge's memorable description of the villain as a "motiveless malignancy." To lift such a concept from context distorts Bradley, who also deals with her boldness in defying her father and her lie about

the handkerchief. He attributes her boldness to a new-found courage resulting from the strength of her love for Othello and her lie to her child-like innocence.

She seems to know evil only by name, and, her inclinations being good, she acts on inclination. . . . In Desdemona's place, Cordelia, however frightened at Othello's anger about the lost handkerchief, would not have denied its loss. Painful experience had produced in her a conscious principle of rectitude and a proud hatred of falseness, which would have made a lie, even one wholly innocent in spirit, impossible to her; and the clear sense of justice and right would have led her, instead, to require an explanation of Othello's agitation. . . . But these moments are fatal to Desdemona, who acts precisely as if she were guilty . . . because they ask for something which . . . could hardly be united with the peculiar beauty of her nature.5

Turnbull is another critic who is loath to think ill of Desdemona. He devotes pages to an imaginary physical description of her ideal beauty, then continues,

Compared with Desdemona, the ideal women of ancient art—the Antigone and Electra of Sophocles, for example, or the Iphigenia and Helena of the supposed misogynist Euripides—even she who was spoken of as "the fairest and most loving wife in Greece"—are . . . essentially harsh and masculine to the modern eye. . . . They lack the finer womanly sensitivity, the trustful submissiveness, and purely passive courage of the Venetian maiden.6

5Bradley, p. 167.

6William Robertson Turnbull, Othello: A Critical Study (London: William Blackwood and Sons. 1892), p. 341. One might dismiss Turnbull's evaluation as a product of a long-gone era, yet as late as 1971 Janet Overmyer in "Shakespeare's Desdemona: A Twentieth Century View," University Review, p. 305, said: "Poor Desdemona is one with the sweet young girls who marry older men seeking heightened protection, love, and excitement their experience can provide; but even more than most she lacks the necessary womanly craft to allay her husband's fears of his inability to please so young a bride."
Only in a footnote can the courtly Victorian bring himself to acknowledge Desdemona's faults, wherein he admits that in her courtship "she probably practised some craft and cunning both in word and deed," and later "evades the truth from a sort of natural timidity" when asked about the handkerchief.\(^7\)

Richard Flatter takes Desdemona's "craft and cunning" more seriously in his convincing argument that Iago's well-timed reminder that "She did deceive her father, marrying you" (III.iii.206) is the primary reason for Iago's success. Othello's faith is shattered, Flatter says,

\[ \ldots \text{not by Iago's words, not by Cassio's stealing away, not by any vague suspicion or fit of jealousy, but by an undeniable, indisputably true fact: that she is capable of deceiving. To bring him [Othello] to this conviction is Iago's masterstroke. Everything else is a mere sequel.}^8 \]

Flatter also brings up the question of Desdemona's sexuality, another popular subject for the critics. He thinks that Othello's proper response to Iago's insinuations should be a punch in the nose, and he believes that because Othello instead listens attentively, "we may deduce that in the opening stages of their love and married life Desdemona's part was more responsive than is usually expected of a young and inexperienced girl."\(^9\)

\(^7\)Ibid., pp. 354-355.
\(^9\)Ibid., p. 101.
R. N. Hallstead comes to a similar conclusion in his argument that Desdemona's interest in sexual love destroys the goddess-like pedestal on which Othello placed her, consequently making him susceptible to Iago's manipulations. Hallstead says that Othello deceives himself in believing that there are no sexual overtones in his love for Desdemona and is shaken by the discovery of its existence. This point is proven, according to the critic, by Othello's hasty action in dismissing Cassio during the brawl which immediately follows the consummation of the marriage. Arguing that Othello should have settled the matter at a hearing the next morning, Hallstead continues, "The clear inference from Othello's action during the brawl is that Desdemona's sexuality came as a surprise to him and that it worked a profound change." Hallstead's argument that Othello's hasty action is a result of Desdemona's unexpected sexuality seems inconclusive. Othello does in fact act more abruptly than he did during his cool handling of the encounter with Brabantio's men in Act I, but his irritability might just as easily be explained by the interruption of his own pleasure. Additionally, Hallstead does not explain why


11 Ibid., p. 115.
Othello's treatment of Desdemona in the same scene is unchanged, although one would expect some modification of his attitude toward her if Hallstead's theory is correct.

An extreme view of Desdemona's sexuality comes from Reid, who says that Desdemona sought punishment and therefore did not defend herself against Othello. Reid claims for her a susceptibility to the physical attractions of Cassio and, of all people, Lodovico, and therefore she sought death to appease her guilt for her erotic nature. Her erotic nature is shown, according to Reid, in the sexually-oriented conversation between Iago and Desdemona in Act II, which he contends that Desdemona enjoys. This enjoyment is shown by the following exchange:

EMIL. You shall not write my praise.
IAGO. No, let me not.
DES. What wouldst thou write of me if thou shouldst praise me?
IAGO. O gentle lady, do not put me to 't,
     For I am nothing if not critical.
DES. Come on, assay. (II.1.117-121)

Both Desdemona's speeches cited above encourage Iago to continue, Reid argues, since the conversation could have been cut off at either point. Despite Iago's warning that he will be "critical," Desdemona actually urges him to "assay."12

Although Reid offers adequate evidence that Desdemona does pursue the conversation with Iago, his argument that Desdemona seeks death because of guilt feelings about sex cannot be taken seriously since his basic premise is wrong. Desdemona does in

12Reid, pp. 249-258.
fact beg for her life, pleads her innocence (although in a manner easily misconstrued by Othello), and attempts to stall for time (V.ii.78,58-61,66-76,80,82-83). Yet Desdemona's sexuality must be considered in a study of stereotyping since, in deceiving her father to make a secret marriage of her own choice, Desdemona seriously jeopardized her reputation for chastity according to the Elizabethan stereotype. Ruth Kelso finds that if a daughter "makes a secret marriage for pleasure, she must expect that such a husband will suspect her of inchastity and never have confidence in her, and she may look to have such love suddenly lost and turned to hate."¹³ We have also seen that further proof of a woman's inchastity, according to the stereotype, was her pleasure in her marriage bed, the "catch-22" of Elizabethan marriages.¹⁴ In order to determine whether or not Desdemona enjoyed her conjugal duties to the extent that her chastity could be open to question, it is necessary to examine her actions.

When Desdemona asks to accompany Othello to Cyprus, she says in part,

That I did love the Moor to live with him,
My downright violence and storm of fortunes
May trumpet to the world.

... ..........................
So that, dear lords, if I be left behind,
A moth of peace, and he go to the war,
The rites for which I love him are bereft me.

(I.iii.249-251,255-258)


¹⁴Ibid., p. 103. See Chapter 1, p. 11.
David S. Berkeley argues that "rites" should be instead "rights," since "rites" implies that her complaint is that she will be deprived of the consummation of her marriage and subsequent conjugal relations, while "rights" has the broader implications of responsibilities and duties. Berkeley's point that Desdemona's wish to accompany Othello is not based on sexual desire on her part could also be supported by the use of "rites," since "rites" might be interpreted as implying her worshipful devotion to Othello. However, Othello's response to Desdemona's speech does have sexual overtones. He reassures the Senators that he does not wish her company in order to "please the palate of my appetite,/ Nor to comply with heat. . ." (I.iii.263-264).

When Desdemona next appears, she is exchanging sexually-charged repartee with Iago. Camden's claim that she is upholding her sex in the best traditions of feminism is appealing, yet Desdemona does not present a convincing argument for her side, but rather does little more than scold Iago for his opinions. Although it has been shown that there is some evidence that Desdemona encourages the conversation, her reason for doing so may have been simply to keep her mind off the possibility that Othello has been lost in the storm. Nevertheless, the conversation can at least be considered as proof of her lively interest in the male-female relationship.


16Camden, p. 57.
After the wedding night, she is certain that she has the power to win Othello to Cassio's cause, a certainty which is evidence of a bride in a honeymoon euphoria. In a conversation with Cassio, she also refers to her sharing of Othello's bed in a matter-of-fact manner (III.iii.24).

None of the above reasons for attributing a normal erotic nature to Desdemona seem strong enough for a case to be made on internal evidence that Desdemona's sexual response cast doubt on her chastity and consequently was a factor in her downfall. However, Desdemona does depart significantly from the stereotype in her independent actions.

Desdemona's independence is established early in the play, not only in her secret marriage, but also in her insistence on accompanying Othello to Cyprus. Leonora Brodwin points out the impact of her strong will on Othello:

He does not see Desdemona's presence as a help but only a hindrance to his "serious and great business," and in a striking vow promises not to allow her to "corrupt and taint my business," nor to "Make head against my estimation" (I.iii.268,272,275). In his self-centered manifestation of his worth he has no need of Desdemona. She is casually assigned "with what else needful of your good Grace shall think/ To be sent after me" (I.iii.287-288). Beneath this casual assignment is Othello's growing concern, as reflected in his vow, lest Desdemona gain an influence over him greater than that of a "light-wing'd toy" (I.iii.269). In her forthright demand to go with him, despite his public announcement that she is to remain behind, he sees an emergent individuality which confounds his conception of Desdemona and threatens his sense of personal sovereignty.17

M. L. Ranald cites further examples of how Desdemona departs from the Elizabethan ideal woman. She speaks alone with her father's guest, broaches first the subject of love with Othello, apparently has the personal freedom to come and go alone, marries secretly without banns, interferes in her husband's affairs (both in her insistence on going to Cyprus and in interceding for Cassio), meets with Cassio without her husband's permission, and openly disobeys her husband when he tells her to drop the subject of Cassio.\(^{18}\) Ranald concludes that

Desdemona, by her flouting of these strictures, gives Iago the opportunity to play up her apparent shortcomings in order to arouse Othello's suspicions. At the same time Shakespeare is making use of material that would seem to have been currently known to his audience, who could therefore well understand what later generations have considered excessive gullibility of Othello.\(^{19}\)

As a military leader, Othello was accustomed to obedience from those in his command. As a husband, he should receive the same obedience from his wife, according to the Elizabethan ideal. Instead, he is confronted with a woman who makes her own independent decisions, behavior far from the acceptable standard. Othello could believe Iago's charges were true because she violated the stereotype. Desdemona did in fact deceive her father to marry Othello, a fact which Iago uses (in connection with her own decision to plead Cassio's case) in order


\(^{19}\)Ibid., p. 132.
to discredit her totally in Othello's eyes. The unanswerable question of the extent of her erotic nature is immaterial given these deviations from the norm of the Elizabethan ideal wife. Her "small vice" of making independent decisions was sufficient to exact a fatal price.

In the Duchess of Malfi, on the other hand, there is no doubt that the Duchess recognizes and delights in her own sexuality. When her brother Ferdinand makes a remark that "women like that part which, like the lamprey, / Hath never a bone it 't," the Duchess' "Fie, sir!" shows that she recognizes its phallic implications, although Ferdinand replies that he meant the tongue (I.i.i.275-277). During her courtship with Antonio, she admits her sexual desire with only "half a blush":

This is flesh and blood, sir;
'Tis not the figure cut in alabaster
Kneels at my husband's tomb. Awake, awake, man!
I do here put off all vain ceremony,
And only do appear to you a young widow
That claims you for her husband, and, like a widow,
I use but half a blush in 't. (I.i.i.392-398)

The bedchamber scene in Act II opens with a charming picture of married lovers. The Duchess is still gently teasing Antonio: "To what use will you put me?" To his rather unimaginative, "We'll sleep together," she retorts, "Alas, what pleasure can two lovers find in sleep?" (III.i.i.8-10). The mood is so relaxed and mellow that even Cariola, their confidante, joins the fun.

CARI. Wherefore still when you lie with my lady
Do you rise so early?
ANT.

Count the clock oft 'nest, Cariola,
Are glad when their task's ended.

(III.i.17-20)

Thus, the "laboring" husband testifies that his wife takes pleasure in her marriage bed, but he is obviously unconcerned with the stereotype which holds that this kind of woman is unchaste.

There are several stereotypes spoken by various characters in the play. Many serve to define the character who speaks them. Falling into this category is the Cardinal's preoccupation with the inconstancy of women, which serves to emphasize that he, by taking a mistress, is himself inconsistent to his vows of celibacy. To the Duchess' words "I'll never marry," the Cardinal replies,

So most widows say;
But commonly that motion lasts no longer
Than the turning of an hourglass--the funeral sermon
And it end both together. (I.ii.242-245)

Later he extends the charge of the inconstancy of widows to all women.

Sooth, generally for women;
A man might strive to make glass malleable
Ere he should make them fixed.

We had need go borrow that fantastic glass
Invented by Galileo the Florentine
To view another spacious world i' th' moon,
And look to find a constant woman there.

(II.iv.13-19)

Bosola is highly critical of the whole sweep of mankind, including himself, but seems to take special delight in harrassing the Old Lady. Indeed, the Old Lady seems to serve
no function other than to set up a forum for Bosola’s insults toward women. He first subjects her to a tirade on the vanity of women, with an attack on her use of cosmetics: "To behold thee not painted inclines somewhat near a miracle" (II.1.36-37). He constructs an elaborate metaphor comparing her attempt to disguise her lined face with the reconstruction of an old boat (II.1.46-48) and vividly expresses his personal disgust for "painted" women.

One would suspect it [her closet] for a shop of witchcraft, to find in it the fat of serpents, spawn of snakes, Jew’s spittle, and their young children’s ordures; and all these for the face. I would sooner eat a dead pigeon taken from the soles of the feet of one sick of the plague than kiss one of you fasting. (II.1.51-59)

In the next scene, the Old Lady twice tries to avoid a conversation with Bosola, but when he persists with his remark about "what strange instrument it was should swell up a glass to the fashion of a woman’s belly" (II.11.10-12), she finally protests, "You are still abusing women!" (II.11.14).

Ferdinand directs most of his criticism specifically at the Duchess. He does, however, include the entire sex in a general condemnation:

Foolish men,
That e'er will trust their honor in a bark
Made of so slight, weak bulrush as is woman,
Apt every minute to sink it! (II.v.35-36)

One might assume that she and Castruchio actually do "couple" (II.1.82) as Bosola suggests, a fact which could serve to justify Julia’s becoming the Cardinal’s mistress as the injured third party to the Julia/Castruchio/Old Lady triangle. Such a notion seems farfetched and irrelevant to the rest of the play.
In addition to the character-defining stereotypes listed above, there are two others which address themselves more directly to the motivation of the play. One is spoken by the Duchess herself, near the end of her death scene:

I would fain put off my last woman's fault:
I'd not be tedious to you. (IV.ii.241-242)

The stereotype implied here will be dealt with later in the paper. The other is Ferdinand's condemnation of widows who remarry: "They are most luxurious/ Will wed twice" (I.11.237-238). Since the Duchess does remarry, Ferdinand's outward motivation for his subsequent persecution (with Bosola as his agent) of the Duchess is superficially justified by this proof of her lustfulness which dishonors the family name. However, the intensity of this persecution, particularly when contrasted to the Cardinal's relative permissiveness, suggests that there is some stronger motivation for the Duchess' torturers.

The motivation of both Ferdinand and Bosola has been subjected to scrutiny by many critics, while the Duchess has been frequently seen as a predominantly passive character. Francois Camoin calls Malfi "clearly Bosola's play--it is about him that the moral issues swarm. . . ."21 Travis Bogard finds that Bosola's function is that of "arousing the spirit of greatness in the Duchess," and that he is motivated by his strong sense

of morality. According to Bogard, Bosola's position "is the epitome of irony: betraying himself by his loyalty to Ferdinand, being true to himself in his betrayal of the Duchess. Ferdinand's incestuous lust for his sister has been adequately dealt with by Elizabeth Brennan, who points out that his crimes against the Duchess and her family "do not constitute a brother's revenge for his sister's dishonour but the revenge of a husband for his wife's adultery." Eugene Wright and Giles Mitchell have traced Ferdinand's degeneration from an overpowering incestuous desire into lycanthropy, finding that his increasing madness motivates his desire to drive the Duchess mad in turn.

A widely-held view of the Duchess is that she is somewhat headstrong and reckless in her second marriage, but that she certainly does not deserve the retribution dealt out by Ferdinand. She is seen as the passive victim of the villains. Robert Ornstein compares her to

a heroine of Shakespearean comedy, graceful, witty, wanton and innocent at the same time, who woos and wins her husband in spite of himself. She capriciously ignores


the challenge of an aristocratic life, but the challenge of death—the supreme challenge of Jacobean tragedy—she accepts boldly and triumphantly.25

Most critics pass lightly over the problems of the shadow cast on the Duchess' chastity by her second marriage and the fact that she violates degree by marrying beneath her without her brothers' permission. Irving Ribner reminds us that

Webster's source in William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* had censured the Duchess for her lust, her neglect of the responsibilities of her station, and her avoidance of the rites of the church; of this censure there is no hint in Webster's play.26

Ornstein considers Antonio "unworthy" of the Duchess, but points out that

only Ferdinand and the Cardinal speak of the sin of marrying twice and they do not convince us that the Duchess should be condemned as unfaithful to a nameless, dead husband who is mentioned casually in passing. Nor do they convince us that she earns her torments by breaking the laws of social decorum.27

Clifford Leech is another who argues that the informality of the marriage is not a consideration in the torment of the Duchess, since "the dramatist seems fully in sympathy with his Duchess when she asserts that her solemn exchange of vows with Antonio makes the formal blessing of the church supererogatory."28


27Ornstein, p. 141.

Further, Leech asserts that her marriage to one of lower social standing "shows only a mild disregard for 'degree.'"  

In contrast to the critics who regard the Duchess as a slightly misguided innocent caught in a whirlpool of evil is Bogard's analysis of the play as an internal conflict within the Duchess. He finds that the play is the resolution of Cariola's question of "whether the spirit of greatness or of woman/Reign most in her" (II.i.440-441). He argues that her "spirit of greatness" finally overcomes her "spirit of woman." He sums up the Duchess' predicament thusly:

The spirit of greatness or the spirit of woman: the spirit of implacable defiance of the worst of fate or the spirit of submission; the spirit of courage or the spirit of fear; of integrity or death. These are the forces which are brought into sharp conflict within Webster's heroine. It is the spirit of woman which will threaten to destroy her integrity. Through her womanish fears, evil will cause her to betray her greatness and bring her, possessed of a "fearful madness," to the verge of the destructive escape insanity provides.

Although the analyses of the critics cited have different emphases, all are complementary to each other and all contribute valuable insight into the motivation of the major characters. The characters are free from sexual stereotype and are instead well developed with marvelous complexity. However, there are two usages of stereotyping in the play which must be further considered.

The first function of stereotyping in Duchess, as has been mentioned, is that of providing Ferdinand with a surface motivation for his persecution of the Duchess. She ignores the conventional wisdom during Webster's time that a widow best preserves her reputation for chastity by refraining from a second marriage. Ferdinand's excessive concern with the Duchess' chastity, as Brennan, Mitchell and Wright have shown, is a disguise for his deeper feelings. Nevertheless, the Duchess herself chose to disobey her brothers and marry secretly, thus contributing to her own destruction.

However, critics are in agreement that the Duchess' second marriage is sympathetically treated. Even the Cardinal accepts the normality of remarriage for widows (I.i1.242-245) and suggests that the Duchess might make a secret marriage (I.i1.256-258). Further, the Duchess herself is apparently unconcerned about her reputation, secure in the knowledge that she and her husband are satisfied with their relationship. This unconcern is shown in Antonio's conversation with Delio, wherein Antonio shows no offense at the slanders which are being widely circulated about his wife. Instead, he takes pleasure in the success of their deception.

The common rabble do directly say
She is a strumpet.

Of love or marriage between her and me,
They never dream of. (III.i.25-26,36-37)
Except for his low birth, Antonio is a suitable husband for the Duchess. He is established at the play's opening as a worthy man. Recently returned from the French court, he admires its order, which he contrasts with the corruption of the Italian court (I.1.5-21). He excels at the tilts (I.11.6-7) and is too honest to be considered for the post of Ferdinand's intelligencer (I.11.171-172). He is a good judge of character, recognizing Bosola's potential for baseness (I.1.90-91) and Ferdinand's "perverse and turbulent nature" (I.11.111-112).

Clearly, the marriage must be viewed sympathetically. It is a loving union blessed with three children and a prospering estate under Antonio's wise management (III.1.28-35). On the other hand, the brothers are repeatedly shown to be corrupt and evil. Consequently, Webster's use of the "luxurious" widow stereotype is seen to be complex. Ferdinand's apparent belief in the stereotype initiates the action of the plot, while the fact that the Duchess disproves the stereotype through her wholesome marriage serves to heighten the horror of Ferdinand's subsequent degeneration.

The second stereotype spoken in the play which must be examined in terms of motivation is that spoken by the Duchess to her executioners shortly before her death: "I would fain put off my last woman's fault:/ I'd not be tedious to you" (IV.11.241-242). The lines cannot be read ironically, since they come at the end of the speech in which she accepts her
death with great dignity. By "tedious" she obviously means that she will not make a lengthy speech. But her choice of "my last woman's fault" evidently means that the Duchess accepts the idea that women have faults that are uniquely theirs.

If the Duchess accepts the idea of "women's faults," then perhaps the relative passivity with which she accepts her brothers' persecution is the result of her sense of guilt for these faults. When Bosola overtakes the Duchess and Antonio during their flight from Ancona, Antonio makes good his escape, while the Duchess awaits her capture by her armed pursuers with these words:

O, they are very welcome.  
When Fortune's wheel is overcharged with princes,  
The weight makes it move swift. I would have my ruin  
Be sudden. (III.v.94-97)

It can be argued that the Duchess' acceptance stems from the fact that her brothers are extremely powerful and influential. However, her sense of guilt is clearly stated just before her capture.

Must I, like to a slave-born Russian,  
Account it praise to suffer tyranny?  
And yet, O heaven, thy heavy hand is in 't!  
I have seen my little boy oft scourge his top,  
And compared myself to 't. Naught made me e'er  
Go right but heaven's scourge-stick. (III.v.75-80)

The origin of the Duchess' guilt feelings is not spelled out in the play, although there is some indication that the guilt stems from the fact that she disobeyed her brothers by marrying in secret. She herself points out that her habit of obedience is strong. When Bosola arrives with the executioners,
whom he identifies as "a present from your princely brothers," she answers,

Let me see it.
I have so much obedience in my blood,
I wish it in their veins to do them good.

(IV.ii.181-185)

Another example of her habit of obedience is seen when she is surprised in her own bedroom by the threatening Ferdinand. Although she argues her case, her answers to his vilification are not those of a righteously indignant adult who has been falsely accused but those of a child to a forbidding parent.

Why might not I marry?
I have not gone about in this to create
Any new world or custom.  (III.ii.109-111)

Why should only I
Of all the other princes of the world
Be cased up, like a holy relic?  (III.ii.136-138)

The Duchess does not question her brother's right to abuse her verbally but instead underlines the reason for her acceptance of it.

You are in this
Too strict, and, were you not my princely brother
I would say, too willful.  (III.ii.116-118)

The Duchess is able to disobey her brothers in secret but cannot shake off her conditioning of obedience to defy them openly. It might be argued that Antonio as the Duchess' husband should be the ruling man in her life, but apparently Webster gave precedence to the concept that commoners rank below nobility. Antonio himself had a high regard for order (I.i.4-22), and what some critics see as his cowardly behavior
in agreeing readily to the Duchess' plot to put him out of harm's way when Ferdinand discovers the marriage can be explained by his obedience to her as his ruling prince. His obedience is contrary to Kelso's finding that Renaissance women assumed the rank of their husbands on marriage. According to the lawyers of that age, Kelso summarizes,

a lowborn woman was ennobled by marriage with a nobleman, retained his rank as a widow, and still belonged to his family and house unless she remarried or chose to return to her father. . . . This nobility that depended on a husband was lost by remarriage with a man of lower birth. On the other hand, if a woman of high birth married with a plebeian she did not ennoble him but lost her own nobility, and their children followed the condition of the father.\(^{32}\)

However, there is no hint in the play itself that the Duchess lost her rank because of her marriage, and we are presumably to take literally her triumphant assertion that "I am Duchess of Malfi still!" (IV.ii.155). As far as order is concerned, the Duchess' obedience to her brothers as noblemen is consistent with Antonio's obedience to her as his Duchess.

The Duchess and Desdemona share a common "small vice": their determination to make their own independent decisions about whom they will marry. Desdemona continues to make her own decisions, which are not wrong in themselves but are open to misinterpretation since her behavior violates the stereotype of proper behavior for an Elizabethan wife. The Duchess makes

\(^{32}\)Kelso, pp. 33-34.
herself vulnerable to persecution by her decision to marry, but her subsequent downfall depends less on violation of the stereotype than on Ferdinand's insane persecution. However, her undefined sense of guilt opens the intriguing possibility that she herself among all the characters in her play was the only one who really believed that her independent decision deserved punishment.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In the seven plays examined, female stereotyping is most frequently used in three ways: in characterization, in motivation, and as a substitute for motivation. The most frequent use of stereotyping is that of defining character, wherein a character openly expresses an unflattering generalization about women. Most often, the characters who resort to stereotypes are unsympathetic to the audience, and their pronouncements add to our dislike of them. Furthermore, their stereotyped opinions reveal negative aspects of their own personalities. Male characters who focus on the lustfulness and promiscuity of women, for example, show themselves either to have those faults in their own personalities or to be unhealthily preoccupied with the subject. Among these can be included Iago in Othello, and the Cardinal and Bosola in The Duchess of Malfi. Hypocrisy is also revealed through a character's use of stereotype. The Friar in Bussy D'Ambois, for example, takes women to task for their dissembling natures while he himself fails to see his own immorality in arranging for the adultery of others. More rarely, the stereotypes are used to heighten sympathy for the character as, for example, when Hieronimo, in expressing his grief for Horatio, in The Spanish Tragedy,
s Says,

A thing begot within a pair of minutes—the about;
A lump bred up in darkness, and doth serve
To balance these light creatures we call women.

(III.x.6-8)

Not falling entirely in the category of the other men
who make frequent use of lust stereotypes is Deflores in The
Changeling. Although he remarks on the lustfulness of women,
and is certainly preoccupied with the subject, Deflores' 
expressions of stereotypes accurately predict the behavior of
one specific woman, Beatrice-Joanna, and so serve the additional
purpose of foreshadowing.

Occasionally, a woman will give voice to a stereotype.
In The Spanish Tragedy, Bel-imperia uses one in order to feign
ignorance more effectively with Lorenzo and Balthazar as she
stalls for time to put her revenge plan into motion. And
Emilia in Othello even comes up with a stereotype about the
lustfulness of men which is at least as outrageous as those
her husband speaks about women.

The second major use of stereotypes is as a substitute
for motivation. As we have seen, some of the motivation of
the women characters are inadequate in terms of their character
as revealed by their deeds and words. The most glaring
example is Anne Frankford in A Woman Killed with Kindness.
Since she is given no internal motivation either for her
succumbing to the seduction of Master Wendoll or for any other
key actions, it must be concluded that the audience has to accept her actions because she is just a weak woman. To a lesser extent, Bel-imperia in *The Spanish Tragedy* and the women in *Bussy D'Ambois* are motivated through stereotype. Bel-imperia is adequately motivated through most of the play, but her rapid switch of affection early in the play has no internal motivation except for the fact that her first lover is dead. And, as Hamlet says of Gertrude, "A beast that wants discourse of reason/ Would have mourned longer" (I.11.150-151). In *Bussy*, the serving women who betray their mistresses have no motivation beyond the stereotype that women have no sense of honor. Although Tamyra is given motivation in the corrupt nature of the court and a dull husband, one tends to feel that these reasons are adequate to explain a casual affair but not the intense level of emotion she portrays in Bussy's death scene.

In two of the plays in which the characters are extremely well-motivated, *Othello* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, the third major use of stereotypes is found. In these plays, the stereotyped society in which the heroines function is interwoven throughout these stories of two women who deliberately choose to love and marry unwisely. Although Desdemona and the Duchess are free from stereotyping within their own characters, they cannot escape the confines of the stereotype. Because they dare to deviate from the expected behavior patterns, they provide excuses if not reasons for their persecution by the
men who wish them harm. The reality of their innocence does not protect them.

Curiously, one play among the seven has neither spoken nor implicit stereotyping of women. Isabella in Edward II is subjected to numerous insults by Edward and Gaveston, but they are directed specifically toward her, not toward women in general. She was forced to behave in a manner which might tend to reinforce the idea that women are lustful, but her adulterous relationship with Mortimer was forced by her powerless position, a reality within the context of the play rather than a stereotype.

Not surprisingly, considering the preoccupation with chastity of the Elizabethan mind, the overwhelming majority of the expressed and implied stereotypes found in the plays concern the licentiousness of women. Next in frequency is the idea of women as inconstant and capricious. Also mentioned are the stereotypes of women as dissembling, lacking a sense of honor, intellectually inferior, extravagant in dress and/or the use of cosmetics, talkative, and lacking importance outside their role as wives and mothers.

As might be expected, the plays which rely heavily on stereotyping as a substitute for motivation of women are those which contain more problems in other areas as well. The plays which use stereotyping only for characterization and those in which the existence of stereotyping is subtly blended into
the overall plot show more general consistency of craftsmanship. Consequently, it can be concluded that reliance on stereotype reflects a lack of skill on the part of the playwright rather than a deliberate attempt to perpetuate those stereotypes.
LIST OF WORKS CITED


