

Close reading analysis

Literature



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The duality inherent in the text of *The Changeling* may puzzle the reader, but its paradoxical nature upon closer inspection says a great deal about the characters' mental states. The speech of Beatrice, in particular, is characterized by occasional outbursts which show her loss of control over the situation. These outbursts find their meaning in contrast with Beatrice's perceived skill at manipulation and language. The text in question displays a particular example of this emotionally charged lack of logic, suggesting that Beatrice perhaps does not have as much command over her romantic entanglement as she claims or hopes.

First, Beatrice calls the potential duel between her suitors “the only way to keep [fear] flaming” (Middleton II. ii.), but only one line later says, “Are not you ventured in the action/ That's all my joys and comforts?” (Middleton II. ii) Assuming that “the action” in question does in fact refer to the duel, then in this case she contradicts herself in the span of seconds, claiming one moment that the concept of a duel invokes terror and the following moment that it is a comfort. This duality prompts the question of whether or not she is being intentionally indecisive. If she does not understand her indecision, then this could signify a loss of command over the two men as she struggles to control the actions of both.

This theory finds support in other inconsistencies in Beatrice's speech. Her tendency to inconsistency is, in fact, mentioned early in the text:

ALSEMERO: You seemd displeas'd, lady, on the sudden.

BEATRICE: Your pardon, sir, tis my infirmity, (Middleton I. i)

And later in the same scene, Beatrice describes “a giddy turning in me.” (I. i) These lines suggest that her tendency to inconsistency in the text springs from her confusion regarding her suitors, in particular, her new fondness for <https://assignbuster.com/close-reading-analysis/>

alsemero while she is being courted by Alonzo. The aforementioned “giddiness” foreshadows her later inconsistencies and suggests that she is ill-equipped to handle the difficulties of being courted by a new and appealing suitor.

The text in question is the first inconsistency, and she follows with another: “Why, men of art make much of poison,/Keep one to expel another; where was my art?” (Middleton II. ii) The nonsensical nature of this line betrays a lack of emotional control on the part of Beatrice. The words “where is my art” seem to refer to the art of speech, which would indicate her knowledge that she is not speaking sense. She seems to wish to use her verbal arts to expel some poison, but the nature of the poison is unclear and suggests a further inconsistency in her speech. She could potentially mean Alsemero's plan, or Alonzo himself. The vagueness of this reply, particularly when considering how positively she seems to be regarding her skill at speech, suggests that she is losing her control.

However, if “this action” to which Beatrice refers in the text in question refers to Alsemero's courting of her, then perhaps the inconsistency is not so great. But even if this is the case, she follows with yet another inconsistency: “Here was a course/Found to bring sorrow on her way to death.” (II. ii) If she is so certain that his actions would lead to death, then why would she begin her argument with the assumption that he would live? It seems as though she is losing her control in this passage, which suggests that her emotions are heightened. Particularly as though normally, Beatrice prides herself on her command of the men who court her.

She finds herself in a similar situation later on with her father's servant, Deflores, who is in love with her; she attempts to guide his actions through

flattery and bribery. However, he seems to turn the situation around and deny her attempts, and she despairs, “ Bless me! I am now in worse plight than I was;/ I know not what will please him.” Deflores seems to know that she is losing control:

DEFLORES: There were no rescue for you.

BEATRICE [Aside] He speaks home. (Middleton III. iv)

It seems as though Beatrices pride in her manipulative skill is limited, and when it leaves her, she loses this ability and becomes flustered. In the text in question, this tendency reveals itself in inconsistencies which refer to her lost “ art” of conversation.

SOURCE: Middleton, Thomas. The Changeling.