

‘Servant obedience changed to master sin’: Performance and the Public Transcript of Service in the Overbury Affair and *The Changeling*

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Abstract

The article discusses allusions that Middleton and Rowley’s *The Changeling* makes to the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury by Frances Howard, Countess of Somerset, focusing particularly on the Countess’s servants. It draws on James Scott’s theory of the ‘public transcript’ of authority, which posits that subordinate members of society use rhetoric and performance to struggle for control over the significance of hierarchical political ideologies. The textual archive surrounding the Overbury Affair provides a view of this struggle. The *State Trials* accounts of the legal proceedings record the servants emphasizing their own vulnerability and ignorance of the crime in the hopes of securing either merciful treatment or punishment for their more powerful patrons. The ballad and pamphlet accounts of their statements minimize and erase these sentiments and instead emphasize the servants’ remorse for personal sins. *The Changeling* continues, and in many ways exaggerates the efforts to contain the performance of Weston and Turner, the Somersets’ servants, but in such a way that clarifies the stakes of the struggle. Rather than marking their entire narrative of service as threatening, the play identifies a savvy and deliberate performance of service alone as having a corrupting, nihilistic effect on the aristocracy and the broader social order.

Keywords: Print Culture, Service, Seventeenth Century, Social History, *The Changeling*

1. *Introduction*

Both literary critics and historians have long noted the allusions that Thomas Middleton and William Rowley’s *The Changeling* makes to the events surrounding Frances Howard’s divorce from Robert Devereux, third Earl of Essex, subsequent remarriage to Robert Carr, first Earl of Somerset, and the scandal involving the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury. J.L. Simmons catalogued a long list of connections that Middleton himself had to Overbury and the Somersets – including the facts that Middleton and Overbury



attended Queen's College, Oxford, together in 1598, that Middleton had written the *Masque of Cupid* for the Somersets' marriage in 1614, and that the Earl and Countess were released from the Tower in 1622, the year that *The Changeling* was first performed – when making the case for the topicality of Middleton and Rowley's tragedy (1980, 154-155).¹ The allusion has also interested feminist critics exploring the ideological implications of the virginity tests undertaken by both Frances Howard in her divorce from her first husband and Middleton and Rowley's Beatrice-Joanna after her own marriage.² Discussions of the Overbury Affair and the Essex divorce themselves also frequently mention *The Changeling*, though in these cases the attention often proves more muted. David Lindley's *The Trials of Frances Howard*, for example, discusses Middleton and Rowley's play amongst a wide range of literary texts that Frances Howard's life and story engaged, while Alastair Bellany includes *The Changeling* in a discussion of the cultural memory of the Overbury Affair (Lindley 1993, 114-115; Bellany 2002, 251). These two topics, then, have become closely linked to one another in scholarship focusing both on Middleton and Rowley's play and the topical events to which it alludes.³

In most cases, both literary critics and historians exploring the significance of the Essex divorce and the Overbury Affair focus either on the Somersets themselves (and Frances Howard particularly) or on the court and factional politics surrounding them. Lindley's book, for example, discusses these events as part of a larger feminist reading arguing that historians (perhaps unknowingly) often reproduce seventeenth-century gender biases when discussing the life of Frances Howard. Bellany's book similarly uses the Overbury Affair as a case study in the circulation of court and factional politics within the early modern news culture. Many studies of *The Changeling* also understand the play as alluding to the Essex divorce but do not emphasize the subsequent murder of Overbury, and in neither case is this choice in scholarly focus unwarranted. The murder of Sir Thomas Overbury became the subject of gossip, newsletters, broadside ballads, and pamphlet literature precisely because the scandal involved one of King James's favorites and the

¹ See also Heinemann 1980, 178; Randall 1984, 362; and Bromham and Bruzzi 1990, 18-36, for other variations on topical readings of the play, and note 2 below for readings related specifically to the virginity test.

² See Luttfriing 2011 and Amster 2003, both of whom directly compare Frances Howard to Beatrice-Joanna. Luttfriing discusses the politics of the Essex divorce both in Middleton's time and in histories of the Stuart court written in the 1650s. Amster discusses both the Essex divorce and *The Changeling* in relation to the broader anxieties surrounding women's virginity. See also Lindley 1993, 77-124, on the Essex divorce.

³ Luttfriing refers to the connection as a 'critical commonplace' (2011, 123), and this perhaps captures the dynamic best.

daughter of a powerful political family. Moreover, the most topical reference in Middleton and Rowley's play – Diaphanta's concern that Beatrice-Joanna, 'Will not search me, will she, / Like the forewoman of a female jury?' (4.2.101-102) – alludes to Frances Howard's divorce rather than her involvement in Overbury's murder.⁴ From the beginning, then, the events and news surrounding the Overbury Affair have proved notable because they involved figures closely associated with royal favor and court scandal.

Notwithstanding, this essay will argue that the role that Frances Howard's *servants* and less powerful accomplices played in shaping the representations of the Overbury Affair are worth serious scholarly attention. The most obvious reason for this is the simple fact that these men and women were the protagonists of many of the Overbury Affair's earliest events and representations. Richard Weston – a servant paid by Howard to poison Overbury on a number of occasions – was the first accomplice to be tried and executed because without his conviction none of the other conspirators could be brought to justice. Anne Turner, a friend and lady-in-waiting to the Countess, was tried second, and she was followed by the Lieutenant of the Tower, Sir Gervase Elwes, and James Franklin, the apothecary who sold Turner the poison. Moreover, the vast majority of the printed representations that followed these events focus on these men's and women's statements of remorse – both those made publicly, and others wholly imagined – during their imprisonments and at their executions. Very few of these texts make direct reference to Frances Howard or Robert Carr. Likewise, while the most immediate allusion to this Affair in *The Changeling* centers on Howard herself, the play's broader narrative – in which a young, aristocratic woman enlists the aid of a servant and a lady-in-waiting to help her commit a murder that will allow her to choose her own husband – clearly draws upon the broader narrative surrounding the murder and includes, in the figure of De Flores, a servant, as a central character. While court politics played a key role in shaping this scandal and quite obviously deserves the scholarly attention it has received, the servants and clients of Frances Howard and Robert Carr were also at the forefront of the period's political and imaginary engagement with these events, and thus also deserve serious scholarly attention.

Another reason to reexamine the record of the Overbury Affair from the perspective of the accomplices, however, has to do with the permutations of this archive as one shifts from examining the manuscript descriptions of the trials and executions themselves to the popular printed representations of these events, and finally to their recreation as Jacobean tragedy. Manuscript accounts of the legal proceedings record the servants emphasizing their own vulnerability and ignorance of the crime in the hopes of securing either merciful treatment or punishment for their more powerful patrons. The

⁴ All references to *The Changeling* are to Middleton and Rowley 1998.

ballad and pamphlet accounts of their statements, however, either minimize or erase these sentiments and instead emphasize the servants' remorse for personal sins. These subtle shifts, I will argue, point to an on-going struggle both over the appropriate response to Overbury's murder, and control over the ideological significance of service itself. The servants tried for conspiring in Overbury's murder performed ignorant, helpless social roles in the hopes of gaining the sympathy and mercy of their judges and the public, and in such a way that implicitly laid the blame for the crime upon the Somersets. The courtiers and judges who condemned them to die, and the writers who later altered their statements, on the other hand, worked to deflect the primary blame and punishment for the crime away from the Somersets and onto the servants themselves. *The Changeling* continues, and in many ways exaggerates the efforts to contain the performance of Weston and Turner – but in such a way that clarifies the stakes of the struggle. Rather than marking their entire narrative of service as threatening, the play identifies a savvy and deliberate performance of service alone as having a corrupting, nihilistic effect on the aristocracy and the broader social order. Read as a dynamic archive, *The Changeling* and the various Overbury texts suggest that early modern conceptions of service took shape, not as a stable and fixed ideology, but instead as an ongoing and collective struggle shaped by numerous voices, including those of servants themselves.

2. *Trial, Deposition and Execution Accounts Contained in the State Trials*

One of the complicated aspects of discussing the Overbury trial is that the archive not only records multiple, differing accounts of the same events, but also that there are many reasons to look upon the records that survive as biased and misleading. Bellany has found references to the Overbury Affair in manuscript newsletters, separates, and libels, and in printed pamphlets and ballads, arguing that perception of the case was shaped by a complex oral and written news culture (2002, 85-111). David Lindley has meticulously reexamined the case noting that many commonplace assumptions – especially that Frances Howard began an affair with Robert Carr prior to their marriage (1993, 70-72) – are based less on direct evidence than on patriarchal biases against divorce particularly, and strong women generally. Richard Weston's trial and execution, in particular, proved an irregular and clipped event, first because Weston attempted to stand mute at trial, and second because three men accosted him while he was standing on the scaffold, reportedly interrupting him from making a final speech and distracting him while he said his final prayers. Given the notoriety of the event, the social standing of many of its participants, and the irregularity of many of the political and legal rituals that surrounded it, the simple facts of this case have, not surprisingly, proven a matter of debate amongst scholars.

Given this, the approach that I take in this article is not aimed at separating out the verifiable facts from their scribal, popular, and literary

reproductions so much as at better understanding the struggle shaping and changing the archive itself. My goal is to open up the performances, texts, and literary reproductions surrounding the Overbury Affair in order to expose the struggles engaged in by its more marginalized participants, charting the nature of that struggle even after the executions of many of the conspirators. I will begin by discussing the manuscript accounts – as collected in the 1730 edition of the *State Trials* – of the testimony, trials and executions of Richard Weston and Anne Turner –, both because these records purport to include the speech of the participants in ways that many subsequent texts do not, and because these legal rituals themselves constitute complex political struggles in their own right. Next, I will discuss several pamphlets, ballads, and poems based on the case that clearly alter the claims put forward by Weston and Turner in favor of more straightforward and traditional set of moral statements. The final section will argue that *The Changeling* can be understood as an illuminating participant in this same social struggle.

The most obvious struggle taking place in the trial and execution of Richard Weston actually involved different aristocratic factions, and seems to push Weston's own interests and voice entirely to the margins. When he first appeared in court and was asked to offer a plea, Weston only said, 'Lord have Mercy upon me! Lord have Mercy upon me! ... being then demanded how he would be tried, he answered, He referred himself to God, and would be tried by God; refusing to put himself and his Cause upon the Jury or Country, according to the Law and Custom' (Emlyn 1730, 314; henceforth *ST*). Weston's decision to 'stand mute' rather than face trial was reportedly made under the advice of 'Serjeant Yelberton an obliged servant to the House of the Howards ... in order to prevent the Prosecution from reaching any farther' (*ST*, 314). The tradition of 'standing mute' was a legal loophole available to accused felons who hoped to avoid trial. Rather than risk being found guilty, the accused could refuse to enter a plea and instead undergo the painful process of *peine forte et dure* which, according to J.M. Beattie, 'Meant he was taken to a dungeon, chained spread-eagled to the floor, and loaded with a gradually increasing weight of iron until either he agreed to plead or he died' (1986, 337). While it is often unclear what motivated people to stand mute, in this case the Howard family seems to have hoped that keeping Weston from being found guilty might 'prevent the Prosecution from reaching any further' in pursuing the murder.⁵ If Weston – the only man accused of physically poisoning Overbury – had never been found guilty, then it might prove difficult to prosecute Frances Howard or Robert Carr as part of a criminal conspiracy.

⁵ On the ambiguities of standing mute, see Beattie 1986, 337-338. For an example of a prisoner standing mute and being pressed in a seemingly confounding way, see Dugdale 1604, B3r.

Chief Justice Coke, eager to prove Weston's guilt and convinced that 'Some Great Ones, guilty of the same Fact as accessory' had convinced him to stand mute, worked to convince Weston to stand trial, first by describing the physically painful pressing by stones that the state imposed on those who stood mute, and then by reading Weston's pre-trial examination even though the trial had not technically begun (*ST*, 314-318). When even this did not convince Weston to offer a plea, the trial was delayed so that authorities could continue to pressure him to stand trial. The Sheriffs of London eventually convinced Weston to enter a plea and he was found guilty at a second trial. The struggle between the Howard family, the Somersets, and Chief Justice Coke continued, however, all the way to the scaffold, where several clients of the Earl of Somerset questioned Weston in the hopes of throwing doubt upon the justice of his trial (Bellany 2002, 226). Both in his irregular, constantly interrupted trial and testimony, and in his physical body, Weston in many respects became a vehicle through which opposed court factions struggled to manipulate public perceptions and the legal system itself.

If, in his trial, Weston played something of a subordinate role in a proxy struggle between Chief Justice Coke and court factions aligned with the Somersets, though, this does not mean that his role was wholly or even primarily a passive one. While there are certainly moments – particularly when Coke reads Weston's deposition despite his standing mute, and the interruption of Weston's scaffold prayers – where Weston gets pushed into a passive role, other moments involve him more actively embracing a subordinate role. A sheriff of London named William Goare describes how, during attempts to convince Weston to enter a plea, 'Weston answered, He hoped he would not make a Net to catch little Birds, and let the great ones go' (*ST*, 320). The phrase proves somewhat ambiguous because the second 'he' could refer either to Goare or to Weston himself. If 'he' refers to Goare, Weston seems to be attempting to shame the sheriff into acting more mercifully by pointing out that he's pressuring Weston, 'a little Bird', while seemingly letting the more powerful Somersets – 'the great ones' – go. If 'he' refers to Weston, then the statement suggests that Weston chooses to stand trial because he does not want to endure the somewhat gruesome ordeal of being pressed while allowing his patrons to escape punishment entirely. In either case, Weston shows an awareness of his social status in comparison to the Somersets and a willingness to allude to this in order to place pressure on figures of authority. While it is not clear if he hopes to gain mercy or justice, Weston's statement quite clearly and powerfully draws attention to the injustice of punishing a servant rather than his more powerful patrons.

Weston's testimony in depositions and in trial similarly emphasized his low status in ways that more clearly imply he should not be found guilty of a crime. In the trial itself, Weston pled not guilty because he was 'Ignorant or Unawares' (*ST*, 321) of the contents of the liquid and food prepared for Overbury, claims that reinforce statements recorded in his depositions:

The Countess did request him to give *Sir Thomas Overbury* a Water, but not to drink it himself; she promised to give him a good Reward, and he suspected it was Poison ... [he] told the Lieutenant of it, and [the Lieutenant] set the Glass into a little Study. He confesseth he told Mrs. *Turner* he had given it him, and demanded his Reward ... He confesseth to have received of the Countess in Rewards ... in all 180 *l.* (*ST*, 320)

The testimony consistently places Weston in a submissive position; the Countess gives him the poison without informing him of its contents, and he does this for pay rather than another motive. Even the seemingly moral choice not to give Overbury the water gets made by Weston's superior rather than himself. The only agency that Weston grants himself – lying to Anne Turner about administering the poison – reinforces his status as a hired agent, primarily seeking money while hoping to avoid moral responsibility. These statements differ from those moments where Weston stands mute or gets silenced through aristocratic influence. While he clearly portrays himself as lacking knowledge, agency, and being of a 'little' status, these claims represent an active rhetorical strategy on Weston's part to convince his judges that the Countess should be held accountable for the murder rather than Weston himself.

In adopting this pronounced, seemingly deliberate posture as socially subordinate, Weston participates in forming what I will refer to throughout the remainder of this essay as the 'public transcript' of early modern service. The concept of a 'public transcript' was developed by J.C. Scott to describe social relations in hierarchical societies in such a way that subordinate groups can be understood to actively participate in shaping the conditions and even the terminology that governs their lives, rather than passively accepting a fixed ideology put forward by dominant authorities.⁶ Rather than acting out of an internalized belief in a hegemonic culture, Scott sees people in socially subordinate positions as

understanding at some level the usefulness of naiveté, simplicity, and backwardness in appeals to the [king]. If the official view of the peasants as childlike, unenlightened, God-fearing, and basically loyal led to a philosophy of rule that emphasized both strictness and paternal indulgence, this official view was not without its advantages

⁶ Scott's understanding of a 'public transcript' shares some elements with the theory of the 'public sphere', put forward by Jürgen Habermas, and also differs in important respects. Both conceptions share a sense of 'public' that is, 'Open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs' (Habermas 1991, 2). For Habermas, 'public' usually implies a contrasting sense of the 'private' (see esp. 11-14 and 43-50), where for Scott the 'public transcript' often conceals a 'hidden transcript' characterized by dissatisfaction and resistance. On the other hand, Habermas more thoroughly traces the institutional nature of the 'public sphere', particularly in its bourgeois phase, where Scott seeks to put forward a more cross-cultural and trans-historical theory about the dynamic relations of dominant and subordinate groups. For my thoughts on the 'hidden transcript', see note 8 below.

to peasants in a tight spot. By invoking their simplicity and loyalty they might hope to invoke his generosity and forgiveness as well as that of the judges and police officials they might encounter ... In this respect, we must not see the myths of the [king] and peasant as an ideological creation of the monarchy, then appropriated and reinterpreted by the peasantry. These myths were rather the joint product of historic struggle rather like a ferocious argument in which the basic terms ... are shared but in which the interpretations follow wildly divergent paths in accordance with vital interests. (1990, 99-100)⁷

Peasants, in Scott's view, actively participate in shaping political culture by selecting and emphasizing those elements of the dominant language that suit their immediate interests and then struggling in various ways to pressure figures of authority into accepting their point of view. Despite its uneven terms, the public transcript of hierarchical authority in this view can be understood as fluid, collectively shaped, and performative in nature.⁸

⁷ Scott writes this statement while discussing the specific case of the 'Czar-Deliverer' in Russia (96-103). I have chosen to replace his use of the word 'czar' with 'king', in order to make the statement more applicable to an English context, and less distracting to the reader. While this, quite obviously, removes the statement from its local context within Scott's book, I do not feel that it changes the fundamental meaning of the 'public transcript' as Scott conceives of the term. Scott uses *numerous* examples from across cultures – including references to American slavery, colonial Burma, various European peasantries, and many others – to offer a general theory of domination and resistance. Given Scott's own cross-cultural terms, and the fact that numerous social historians have adopted these same terms when describing early modern England, I feel that this linguistic change is warranted.

⁸ I am using the term 'performative' here in a sense similar to that developed by Judith Butler's notion of a 'performative citation', in *Bodies That Matter*. Butler argues that 'Performativity is thus not a singular "act", for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition' (1993, 12), implying that power takes shape in a dialogue between present actions and broader, socially constructed norms. Scott himself uses theatrical language throughout his book, and states a clear belief that in many cases peasant performances of *naïveté* and simplicity are misleading and deliberately deceptive. When he first introduces the term, for example, Scott says, 'The public transcript, where it is not positively misleading, is unlikely to tell the whole story about power relations. It is frequently in the interest of both parties to tacitly conspire in misrepresentation ... The theatrical imperatives that normally prevail in situations of domination produce a public transcript in close conformity with how dominant groups would have things appear. The dominant never control the stage absolutely, but their wishes normally prevail. In the short run, it is in the interest of the subordinate to produce a more or less credible performance, speaking the lines and making the gestures he knows are expected of him' (1990, 2-4). In the same book, Scott puts forward his more widely known concept of a 'hidden transcript', to refer to those moments when dominant and subordinate alike find themselves 'off-stage', and can make statements inappropriate for public venues (4-10). While I obviously find Scott's understanding of a 'theatrical' political culture that masks a 'hidden transcript' intriguing, I have chosen the more commonly accepted term 'performative', because I find Scott's stronger notion of a 'theatrical' political culture problematic in many respects.

Social historians of early modern England – including Andy Wood and John Walter – have been deeply influenced by Scott's theories, arguing that many interactions between authority figures and subordinate groups can be understood as types of negotiation and struggle over the significance of a shared ideological language. Walter, for example, says that patriarchal ideology provided subordinate and marginalized groups weapons which could be used to spur more powerful members of society to act:

The subsistence of subordinate groups underwrote a political culture which, paradoxically, could be read as emphasizing the duties of the powerful and the rights of the weak ... The weapons took a variety of forms, but all represented attempts to recall individuals who were the focus of popular grievance to observance of what were represented as common (and moralised) standards by which economic relations ought to be ordered and to remind authority of its obligations in their defence. (2006, 200)⁹

When Weston told William Goare that, 'He hoped he would not make a Net to catch little Birds, and let the great ones go', and insisted that he was ignorant of the Countess's plans and only – imperfectly – worked for a wage, he actively remade the public transcript of service in such a way that held his patrons to a higher moral standard than their servants. Weston fashions the Somersets as 'great', and knowingly, actively arranging the poisoning of Overbury in the hopes that either he himself will be spared a harsh treatment or, that failing, that his patrons will also be punished.

Further evidence that Weston's testimony participates in a dialogic struggle over a public transcript of service appears in the fact that his claims often match those made in the numerous texts that describe proper master-servant relations. The claim that Weston only participated in the poisoning for a wage, for example, draws upon a highly moralized charge made to masters that they had an obligation to sufficiently reward those that worked for them. In the domestic manual *A Health to the Gentlemanly Profession of Servingmen* (Anonymous 1598), for example, the author insists, 'I am none of these miserable Maisters that so inhumanely burieth in oblivion unrewarded the long, good, and duetifull service of my olde servant: But if you be such as either thus, or otherwyse abuseth those good creatures that God hath lent you ... Let these my caviats worke some remorse or conscience' (A2r-v). William Basse's *Sword and Buckler, or Serving-Mans Defence* similarly places

For an excellent discussion of some problems with this strong version of a 'theatrical' subordinate culture and a 'hidden transcript' of resistance, see Wood 2006. For an excellent discussion of the 'essentially contested nature', of the term 'performance', see Strine, Long, and Hopkins 1990, 183. On the different uses of the term 'performance', including Butler, speech-act theory, and anthropological approaches, see Madison and Hamera 2006.

⁹ See also Wood 2001, 78-80.

the taking of wages at the center of the master-servant relationship, 'You give him wages and food: That's most true, / And other matters to sustain his living: / Why, els he is not bound to follow you' (1602, C1r). Wages here are not an indifferent legal contract, but a moral obligation that ties masters to their servants. Masters must adequately care for their servants in order to avoid charges of inhumanity and abuse, and the wage has a reciprocal hold on the servants themselves, 'binding' them to the person sustaining them materially and financially.

The corollary to the master's duty to offer rewards for service, of course, was that servants themselves were called by these same social commentators to behave with obedience and humility towards those they served. Bas charged servants:

This man of all things must abandon pride
 Chieflie in gestures, and in acts exterior:
 For greater states can by no meanes abide
 Ambition in a person so inferiour. (1602, B1r)

Thomas Fosset went so far as to argue that good servants must even endure suffering at the hands of their masters, 'If when ye do wel ye suffer wrong and take it patiently, this is acceptable to God ... for here unto yee are called, God hath called you to this, that is, to obey and to suffer' (1613, 10). William Gouge argued that servants, 'Labour to bring their judgement to the bent of their masters judgement, and to thinke that meet and good which he doth' (1622, 636), essentially suggesting that servants ought to adopt their master's thoughts and opinions as part of their humble status. When Weston claimed to be innocent or deserving of sympathy because he worked for pay, was 'Ignorant or Unawares' of the full import of his actions, and was 'Little', he effectively laid claim to moral conventions put forward throughout the culture that charged servants to be humble, obedient, and consider themselves as bound to those who sustained them. Weston importantly made *selective* claims upon these moral precepts. Gouge explicitly says, 'If masters command their servants never so peremptorily to doe any unlawfull thing, that is, any thing forbidden by Gods word, they may not yeeld to it' (637), mentioning murder, theft, and even using false weights and measures as examples of commands that servants are bound to refuse, and numerous manuals and religious tracts emphasize that servants are not absolutely bound to obey.¹⁰ The selective nature of Weston's testimony, however, further demonstrates the active role he played in attempting to remake the public transcript of service. While he obviously draws on a shared language of service that positions

¹⁰ See especially Strier 1988.

him as humble and obedient, in mounting a defense he sought to interpret that language in a way that relieved him of moral responsibility and, at least implicitly, deflected guilt onto his patrons.

Anne Turner's trial shows a similar pattern, and if anything more clearly shows a woman trying to lay claim to a servant's role in order to gain mercy and sympathy from her judges and the public. The most memorable part of Anne Turner's trial involved Coke introducing letters and pictures that Turner and the Countess of Somerset had allegedly obtained from the astrologer Simon Forman to help secure the love of Robert Carr and another man for the Countess and Anne Turner. Among the documents that Coke introduced were 'Certain Pictures of a Man and Woman in Copulation', and other 'enchanted Papers', and when he showed this material, 'There was heard a crack from the Scaffolds, which caused great Fear, Tumult and Confusion among the Spectators, and thro'out the Hall, everyone fearing Hurt, as if the Devil had been present and grown angry to have his Workmanship shewed' (ST, 322-323). Despite this salacious evidence, Turner herself was recorded as very submissive in her own defense. After Coke ended his case calling her 'A Whore, a Bawd, a Sorcerer, a Witch, a Papist, a Felon, and a Murderer, the Daughter of the Devil *Forman*', Turner simply asked him, 'To be good unto her, saying, she was ever brought up with the Countess of *Somerset*, and had been of a long time her Servant, and knew not that there was Poison in any of those things sent to Sir *Thomas Overbury*' (ST, 324). Like Weston, Turner claims to have been ignorant of the poisoning, but she also emphasizes her long history in the Countess's household and explicitly describes herself as a 'Servant'. Turner's social status thus stands alongside potentially mitigating circumstances as part of a plea that judges 'Be good to her', by extending gentle treatment and 'Favour' (ST, 324) in the form of a commuted sentence.

Turner made similar claims at her execution, suggesting that these types of public statement worked not only as part of an immediate defensive tactic aimed at escaping punishment, but also as part of a larger strategy to establish service and subordination as deserving sympathy and understanding. On the scaffold, she told spectators,

Not to rejoice at her Fall, but to take example by her; she exhorting them to serve God, and abandon Pride, and all other Sins; relating her breeding with the Countess of *Somerset*, having had no other Means to maintain her and her Children, but what came from the Countess: and said farther, That when her hand was once in the Business, she knew the revealing of it would be her Overthrow. The which, with like other Speeches, and great Penitency there shewed, moved the Spectators to great Pity, and Grief for her. (ST, 324)

In most respects, Turner clarified the rhetorical claims to service that Weston's trial and execution had sought to put forward, but could only suggest, due to its constant interruptions. She not only claimed to have participated in the event for

money, but also emphasizes that she relied upon the Countess's favors to live. She furthermore insists that this reliance put her in a situation from which she could not reasonably escape, since 'the revealing of it would be her Overthrow'. Although Anne Turner also admitted her own pride and offers herself as an example, the report here suggests that what moved her audience to pity most directly was her vulnerability and helplessness at the hands of her aristocratic patrons.

The *State Trials* accounts of the trial, detention, and executions of Richard Weston and Ann Turner thus suggest that the Somersets' servants sought to escape their fate – and failing that to gain public sympathy – by emphasizing their adherence to accepted conventions of service and the vulnerability of people of their social status in order to place responsibility for their actions onto their masters. The point here is not to suggest that Weston and Turner made these claims cynically or with a performative energy meant to deceive the court and public. Instead, it is to observe that for both, the performance of public roles as servants and the fashioning of dependent, vulnerable identities paradoxically took part in an active struggle whereby subordinate members of society made claims upon those in power and sought to reshape the moral significance of the public transcript of service.

3. *Pamphlets and Poetry*

These types of manipulation did not, of course, occur in a free exchange of political authority, nor should they be understood as a transparent window into the political actions of servants in early modern England.¹¹ In Weston's case specifically, our access to his statements remains filtered through the efforts of the Howards to silence him, and in neither case were these claims effective in gaining mercy from the Chief Justice or the King. The struggle cut both ways and, in the Overbury Affair, it continued even after Turner and Weston had been found guilty and executed. Numerous popular texts reimagined and recreated the public performances of the conspirators in the Overbury trials, and although these texts differ from one another significantly, most alter the statements of Turner and Weston in a way that works to contain the power of their original performances.

Perhaps the most interesting of these texts is a poem entitled *Sir Thomas Overburies Vision* by Richard Niccols (1616), because here alterations that work to contain the original performances stand alongside others that clarify and sharpen the original claims Weston and Turner had made upon their masters. The long narrative poem tells of a dream where Thomas Overbury's spirit approaches the poet, and then takes him to the Tower where the spirits of the four tried conspirators each address him by offering repentant speeches about their fall. The first spirit is Richard Weston, who repents his greed and his willingness to be used in the murder. Having Weston's spirit charge himself

¹¹ For more on the limitations of understanding manipulations of the public transcript of authority, see Wood 2006.

with greed alters his original claim to have been working as a paid servant, implicitly bound to obedience. When Weston's spirit, for example, says

O strong inchantment of bewitching gold!
 For this, the Syre by his owne sonne is sold,
 For this, the unkind brother sells the brother,
 For this, one friend is often by another
 Betray'd to death, (Niccols 1616, 22-23)

the moral lesson applies to a wide range of people, rather than to servants alone. As such, where the original statement had alluded to pay as a reciprocal obligation that bound servants especially to obedience and humility, *Overburies Vision* suggests that taking wages participates in a universally applicable sin. While both statements fashioned Weston as weak, this account presents his weakness as a flaw deserving of punishment, where the original had sought to use it to avoid punishment.

If this alteration of the unique relationship between servants and pay works to contain the moral claim that Weston had made on his masters, however, a second lesson that the poem draws amplifies the same claim. When he addresses Overbury, Weston's spirit refers to himself as an 'Instrument' (20) of Overbury's enemies, and he later speaks to all servants,

Ye hapless instruments of mighty men;
 Ye sponges, whom the hands of greatnes, when
 That they by you have wiped out the spot
 Of that disgrace, which did their honour blot,
 Do squeeze so long, untill that ye be drie,
 And then as needless things doe cast ye by. (23)

The image of Weston as a sponge that blots the blood and dishonor of his powerful masters, until eventually he has been bled dry, rather intriguingly combines the sentiments put forward in his own trial with those uttered by Anne Turner. Much like Turner, Weston's spirit uses a metaphor that suggests he's been pressured into participating in the crime, made subject to his master's will rather than exercising his own. The fact that this sponge has been used to clear the master of dishonor, leaving him clean while the servant gets cast aside, picks up the historical Weston's claim that the 'little Birds', would be caught by the law while the 'great ones' would not. If the poem's concerns about greed transform an image of service into a universal moral lesson, then, its reference to the instrumentality of servants casts a more critical eye on those who used Weston and yet have escaped without punishment.¹²

¹² The references to the instrumentality of servants continue to cast some criticism on the servants themselves. Hamlet, for example, calls Rosencrantz, 'A sponge ... that

The speaker next encounters the spirit of Anne Turner, and again issues related to status and service are placed alongside more personal moral lessons. Niccols imagines Turner first complaining about the role that powerful patrons play in bringing down a client:

Neither thirst of gold, nor hate to thee
 For injuries receiv'd, incensed me
 To seeke thy life; but love, deare love to those
 That were my friends, and thy too deadly foes:
 With them in Court my state I did support,
 Ah, that my state had never known the Court! (27)

Turner's spirit later complains that 'Too much idle ease' (29) helped produce her sinfulness, blaming both the direct influence of her powerful patrons and the leisurely lifestyle that their patronage afforded her. Issues of status thus play a central role in this version of Turner's repentance, and at least initially blame falls most directly on wealth itself and the influence of her friends. At the ending of the speech, she returns to this theme, warning readers, 'Thinke how the friendship, and the auncient love / Of some great Lady long enjoy'd may moove' (36) in order to suggest that powerful patrons might corrupt any person. Likewise, Turner's spirit insists upon a certain passivity in the murder itself:

I went on, and did agree
 To be an actor in thy Tragedie,
 Thou injur'd ghoast; yet was I but a mute,
 And what I did was at an others suite:
 Their plots I saw, and silent kept the same,
 For which my life did suffer death and shame. (37)

In these passages, at least, the narrative of Turner's crimes closely resembles the one she put forward of herself as a woman only marginally involved in a murder predominantly carried out by wealthy courtiers, and primarily motivated by economic pressures that she did not entirely seek. If Niccols imagines that Turner no longer hopes for mercy, he nevertheless incorporates evidence originally in Turner's trial to invite his readers' pity and sympathy.

Other elements of Turner's speech, though, work to offer a more straightforward moral lesson based on lust. After she comments on the role

soaks up the King's countenance, his rewards, his authorities. But such officers do the King best service in the end. He keeps them like an ape, an apple in the corner of his jaw, first mouthed to be last swallowed. When he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you, and, sponge, you shall be dry again' (*Hamlet*, 4.2.10-18). Here, the criticism falls on both Rosencrantz and the King.

that 'idle ease', played in her downfall, for example, Turner's spirit laments that one of the results of her life at court was the development of a taste for expensive clothing:

First pride aray'd me in her loose attires,
Fed my fond fancie fat with vaine desires,
Taught me each fashion, brought me over seas
Each new devise, the humorous time to please. (31)

Turner claims that extravagant dress eventually promoted lust and sorcery, 'So did my loose desire / ... burst forth and burne me in the flame. / I left my God t'aske counsell of the devill' (34). The lurid accusations made by Coke at Turner's trials are all now placed into Turner's own mouth. The effect conjoins Turner's own narrative of being misled by her wealthier and more powerful mistress with a more personal condemnation of sartorial excess, lust, and devil-worship.

The overall effect of *Overburies Vision* then reshapes the testimony of Weston and Turner with ambiguous results. On the one hand, the poem clarifies and sharpens issues that were raised only implicitly at the trial: the Weston of the poem actively warns servants against masters who use their servants as instruments and 'sponges' where his historical counterpart only implied his patrons should be held responsible for his actions; Niccols's Turner expresses a wish that she had 'never known the Court!' where Turner herself had only said this left her vulnerable. On the other hand, both Weston and Turner admit to wholly personal faults in *Overburies Vision*. Direct condemnation of particularly aristocratic vices gets mixed with more personal warnings and statements of remorse from servants themselves.

Other texts more completely transform the images of Weston and Turner in ways that more or less erase their claims to have been servants dependent on the Countess of Somerset. An anonymous text entitled *The Bloody Downfall* (Anonymous 1615a) appends prayers that Turner and Weston allegedly spoke in prison to a longer treatise denouncing murder and ambition. The primary treatise speaks only in general terms and seems an unfit moral to attach to either Turner or Weston directly, since the author describes ambition as a sin associated with young male courtiers, 'Then begins hee with gifts to winne hearts, by fayned humility to avoyd hatred, by offices of friendship, to bind his equalls, by cunning insinuations to worke his superiors ... being growne to this steppe higher, the authority likes him not, without the still, wherein if in any crosse him, looke for poyson in his cuppe' (Anonymous 1615a, A4r-v). Given the loose connections between the main text and the Overbury case, and the fact that Overbury's, Turner's, and Weston's names all appear on the cover page, the pamphlet was quite likely trying to capitalize on the notoriety of the case by attaching well-known names to a vaguely moralizing text.

Nevertheless, the pamphlet's content reveals two rather interesting patterns. First, Anne Turner's own laments are rewritten as acts of ambition in and of themselves: 'Climbers hye, / Beyond their reach must downe, and so doe I', based on enjoyment of the pleasures of the court, 'I ... dranke in richest plate: / Wore ritche attires, tasted all worldly pleasures, / But ne're had care to hoord up heav'nly pleasure' (D1r). Fashioning Anne Turner as ambitious in her enjoyment of the luxuries of court life effectively completes the ideological reversal that had begun in *Overburies Vision*. Where Niccols had refashioned Turner's own claims to economic vulnerability and coercion into a kind of seduction by and complicity with her powerful patrons, this version of Turner laments her active attempts to rise in social status and blames them for her fall. A broadside ballad entitled *Mistris Turners Farewell to all Women* (Anonymous 1615b) does something similar by having Anne Turner denounce her former pride in her beauty and clothing for her downfall. In both cases, blame falls on the client, here fashioned as an upstart, where earlier iterations of this same lament had placed blame squarely on the patron.

Weston's presence in this pamphlet proves more muted, possibly because he does not fit in with its general sermon denouncing ambition. Where the anonymous author gives Turner both a lengthy poem and a prayer, Weston's presence only comes in the form of a prayer that aligns his crimes with archetypal sinners and asks for grace and mercy, 'With *Caine* I have beene a Murderer, and with *Judas* a Betrayer of the Innocent ... I have been the Divells instrument, and am now become the Scorne of Men ... God of my Soule and Body, have mercy therefore upon mee, Save me, O save me' (Anonymous 1615b, D4v). The only connection between this prayer and other representations of Weston comes in the reference to his being, 'the Divell's instrument', a phrase that had been used by Niccols and captures the general sense of 'littleness', often associated with Weston. In *The Bloody Downfall*, however, the instrumentality of servants holds a more personal moral lesson than it does in the other works. Towards the end of its discussion of ambition, the author says, 'Is it not also great pittie that for want of grace some of a servile (yet an observing condition) should from the golden meane of low estate wait at the elbow of Greatness, and bring fuell to their fire of iniquity' (C1v). Servants are here described as adding to the wickedness of the ambitious, rather than being drawn towards sin by the powerful. The sentiment gets reinforced later, 'O wherefore should simplicity thus blind up their eyes of understanding, to be thus the instruments of such dangerous drifts' (C2r). The ignorance and instrumentality that Weston and Turner had both used to generate sympathy and plead for mercy are here portrayed as actions of servants who 'bring fuel' to ambition and 'blind up their eyes' themselves. In this pamphlet, the very different moral expectations for masters and servants are transformed into variations of a single sin – ambition – in such a way that Turner is fashioned as having shown it, while Weston is implicitly held responsible for aiding its wickedness.

This selective editing of Anne Turner and Richard Weston's testimony in popular print provides another example of the struggle for control of the public transcript of service. Here, the struggle focuses on the role that social hierarchy plays in assigning moral accountability to masters and servants, and paradoxically the servants themselves emphasize their status as obedient, weak, and economically dependent, while later poems and pamphlets respond by emphasizing their individual moral agency and universal subjectivity. This dynamic obviously counteracts a notion that discourses of social hierarchy always and necessarily worked to benefit a hegemonic social elite. In their trial and scaffold testimony, Weston and Turner had actively participated in shaping the culture of service in the hopes of displacing blame primarily onto the Countess of Somerset. While these efforts did not manage to gain them pardons and save their lives, a text like *Overburies Vision* (Niccols 1616) demonstrates that they did have a subtle shaping force on the culture, capable of denouncing masters that treat servants as instruments and denouncing wealth itself as having a corrupting moral influence. Popular depictions of Weston and Turner could, however, also work to contain their efforts to shape the public transcript of service. *Overburies Vision* muddies the moral force of their original testimony by placing it alongside more individual, universal moral lessons. *The Bloody Downfall* (Anonymous 1615a) also offers universal moral lessons, and on top of this implies that servants contribute to their masters' wickedness by 'blinding themselves' and 'bringing fuel to their fire of iniquity' through the act of service itself. Rather than operating as a static, hegemonic discourse, then, the ideological understanding of service took shape in the Overbury Affair as a dialogue, written and rewritten by different people – including servants themselves – who sought to privilege different elements within the public transcript of service depending on their situational and social interests.

4. The Changeling

Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling*, in its topical allusions to an imaginary recreation of the Overbury murder, participates in this same struggle, but in a way that helps to clarify its broader political and social significance and the role servants played in shaping it. Specifically, the play does this by separating the image that Richard Weston and Anne Turner put forward – of servants as unknowing and powerless participants in the murder – from an image of servants capable of posturing and playing this same role in order to exert a form of moral authority and control over their masters. Within the world imagined by the play, servants who are treated as instruments of their masters pose little threat to the social order, and are generally depicted with sympathy. The real threat to the social order comes from the manipulation of the servant's role in a way that suits the interest of the servant himself, rather than any particular master. Taken as a whole, the play's

depiction of service suggests that the Overbury trials and their subsequent rewritings enacted a struggle, not over the ideological understanding of service itself, but instead over the possibility that servants might use performance to control the public's feelings about and understanding of the public transcript of service.

The play makes this distinction by embodying a naive, instrumental form of service and a more deliberately performative form of service in two distinct characters. The most pliable servant in the play is Beatrice-Joanna's lady-in-waiting Diaphanta, also the character who makes the allusion to Frances Howard's virginity test, 'She will not search me, will she, / Like the forewoman of a female jury?' (4.2.101-102). In addition to inviting this direct comparison between Beatrice-Joanna and the Countess of Somerset, Diaphanta's role in the play also draws on several other images that appeared both in the Overbury trials and the printed manuals on service. When undergoing the chastity test, for example, Beatrice-Joanna tells Diaphanta to ingest the contents of 'Glass M', without telling her the contents of the glass, recalling the moments when Turner and Weston claimed to have been given vials for Overbury without knowing they contained poison. Although Beatrice-Joanna assures Diaphanta the contents of 'Glass M' are safe by drinking them, Diaphanta pointedly says, 'I will not question what 'tis, but take it' (4.2.105), obeying her mistress without hesitation. While the moment stops short of making a direct allusion to the trial, it nevertheless repeats an association of service with uncomplicated loyalty and credulity. Diaphanta's reaction to the virginity test serves a similar function. Her gaping, sneezing, and giddy laughing all provide the model that Beatrice-Joanna will later imitate to convince Alsemero of her virginity, but this fact is never shared with the lady-in-waiting. Diaphanta even obeys her mistress's order following the bed trick, 'Hie you to your chamber; / Your reward follows you' (5.1.79-80) only to meet with De Flores, who shoots her and sets her room on fire to cover up the murder. In more or less every sense, Diaphanta proves the unwitting instrument that the Overbury conspirators had styled themselves – unquestioningly handling mysterious liquids, carrying out commands without realizing their purpose, and meekly obeying all orders.

Another, broader association between Diaphanta and traditional depictions of service is her association with monetary reward. Before using Diaphanta in the chastity test, Beatrice-Joanna gets her to agree to take her place in bed by pretending to be afraid of losing her virginity, and offering a thousand ducats to any woman willing to take her place on her wedding night. Although Diaphanta finds the offer strange, she ultimately volunteers, saying:

I do not know how the world goes abroad
 For faith or honesty; there's both required in this.
 Madam, what say you to me, and stray no further?
 I've a good mind, in troth, to earn your money. (4.1.90-93)

Diaphanta's honesty and faith – both supported by her place in Beatrice-Joanna's household, in opposition to those who 'go abroad' – provide the preconditions for the 'good mind' that she has for earning a wage. Far from being at odds with one another, loyalty, service, and a desire for money mutually reinforce one another. The play makes this same connection when Pedro provides the expenses with which to care for Antonio in the madhouse. The servant Lolio tells him: 'An officer in this place may deserve something; the trouble will pass through my hands', and Pedro responds: 'Tis fit something should come to your hands then, sir', and gives him money (1.2.93-95). Service and reward prove indelibly linked in the political imaginary and language of the play; it even shows up in the promises of the nobleman Jasperino, who takes an elicited love letter to Alsemero saying, 'The joy I shall return rewards my service' (2.1.5). Although he does not expect monetary payment, the variation maintains an assumed connection between service and some sort of reward. Much as we saw in the testimony of Weston and Turner, reward provides a key signifier for the loyalty and actions of service.

My point is not that Diaphanta should be understood as an ideal servant, but rather that her model of service proves unthreatening to the social order established within the play. There's a certain naiveté to Diaphanta's role in both the virginity test and the bed trick born out of her willingness to obey her mistress without question and her desire for reward. Those judgments that the play makes of Diaphanta focus on her sexual appetites, rather than her status as a servant. When she promises to help Beatrice-Joanna, Diaphanta uses a *double entendre* that implies she desires Alsemero, 'I shall carry't well, / Because I love the burden' (4.1.122-123) and the ending of the play suggests that she has been punished appropriately for her actions.¹³ While Diaphanta would not have acted on these desires had she not been unquestioning in her obedience, the play offers no moral statement that chides servants for excessive credulity in the manner of *The Bloody Downfall*. The values of service emphasized by Weston and Turner at their trials thus appear in *The Changeling* without the obvious, didactic embellishments seen elsewhere; at best, men like Don Pedro and Jasperino actively support them, while at worst they lead Diaphanta to become an unwitting accomplice of her mistress, shamed for lust but not her willingness to serve.

¹³ Beatrice-Joanna refers to her as a 'False bride' (5.3.161), and Alsemero says: 'I, a supposed husband, changed embraces / With wantonness, but that was paid before' (5.3.200-201) in his summation of the play. Michelle Dowd argues that Diaphanta is characterized as 'Unreliable and sexually voracious' (2011, 140) and participates in a pattern that the theater constructed of lusty servants: 'These narratives serve a cautionary function, warning audiences about the uncertainties and instabilities that these female workers potentially bring to English homes' (2011, 142).

The harmlessness of Diaphanta proves particularly striking when compared to the actions of De Flores, her more threatening counterpart. De Flores actively rejects virtually every characteristic of traditional service that Diaphanta embodies. Where Diaphanta seems either misled or willfully ignorant of Beatrice-Joanna's uses of her, De Flores proves fully aware of the fact that Beatrice-Joanna lies to him when asking him to kill Piracquo, and yet he plays along in the hopes of manipulating her later. When she insists that his appearance has improved, for example, he turns to the audience and says, 'Not I; / 'Tis the same physonomy, to a hair and pimple, / Which she called scurvy an hour ago' (2.2.75-77), and when she repeats the same compliments again, he says, 'I was blest / To light upon this minute; I'll make use on't' (2.2.90-91). From the first, De Flores humors her flattery in the hopes of gaining advantage over her, and his promises of service are littered with a sexual innuendo that denotes this. When she comments on how, 'Hardness becomes the visage of a man well; / It argues service', he responds, 'I would but wish the honour of a service / So happy as that mounts to' (2.2.92-93, 96-97). When she promises a reward following the completion of the murder, 'Thy reward shall be precious', he responds, 'That I have thought on; / I have assured myself of that beforehand, / And know it will be precious; the thought ravishes' (2.2.130-132). De Flores not only proves aware of and anticipates the transgressions Beatrice-Joanna hopes to enlist him in, he welcomes them in order to eventually 'use', 'mount', and 'ravish' her.

After committing the murder, De Flores also makes a point of rejecting monetary reward. When Beatrice-Joanna offers him three thousand florins, he scorns her,

Do you place me in the rank of verminous fellows,
To destroy things for wages? Offer gold?
The life blood of a man! Is anything
Valued too precious for my recompense? (3.4.64-67)

De Flores claims that no sum of money can properly pay him for taking a man's life, and refuses to join the rank of 'verminous fellows', who would commit sin for salary. When he's offered double the wage, he responds: 'You take a course / To double my vexation' (3.4.73-74). Where all of the other servants in the play – not to mention both of the servants in the Overbury trials – had understood wages as a central aspect of their social role, De Flores explicitly refuses payment in the wake of carrying out his mistress's commands.

Many critics have seized upon these rejections in order to argue that De Flores operates as a fearful image of either upward mobility or social inversion. Michael Neill, for example, has argued that in refusing pay De Flores rewrites himself in a role of courtly lover, 'His response is charged with the kind of outrage that results when someone deliberately violates the rules of a well-established social ritual ... "Salary", "wages", "hire": to soil oneself with such

considerations is to be reduced from the stately rank of gentleman to the rank of a menial, some louse-ridden peasant or mercenary tradesman' (2005, 130). In this reading, De Flores lays claim to a role as a chivalric lover, ennobled by the elimination of his rival and owed possession of Beatrice-Joanna's love as a result. Mark Thornton Burnett offers a similar reading of De Flores as a servant, 'Possessed of an agency that infects the collective ... he is constructed as posing a threat to the coherence and integrity of the community' (2006, 299). Pointing to a warning that Thomas Fosset issues to servants – 'When a servant raigneth, that is despiseth his maisters government, and followeth his own will, and his owne wayes, it is a thing so evill, and so disorderly, that it maketh the earth to be mooved, the whole house, yea sometimes the whole towne, or city to be disquieted' (Fosset 1613, A4r) – Burnett reads De Flores as an image of a 'world turned upside down', where the lowly dictate terms to their social superiors. In both readings, De Flores proves threatening because he hopes to place himself at the top of the social hierarchy; for Neill, he fashions himself as a traditional member of the nobility, while for Burnett he embodies a threatening image of social inversion where servants rule.

While anxiety about servants obviously surrounds De Flores and proves essential to the work performed by the play, I would argue that understanding him primarily as an upstart, looking to rule or topple the social order, overlooks a key aspect of the threat he poses. While De Flores does, indeed, reject his role as a paid, deferential servant in an effort to establish mastery over Beatrice-Joanna, he does this only after performing service in a manner fully compatible with the ideals put forward in the handbooks and in the testimony of Richard Weston and Anne Turner. When Beatrice-Joanna informs him of her desire to end her engagement, De Flores drops to his knees and begs to be employed: 'Put it not from me; / It's a service that I kneel for to you' (2.2.116-117). When she then warns him of the bloody nature of the service, he insists that this only increases his desire:

If you knew
 How sweet it were to me to be employed
 In any act of yours, you would say then
 I failed and used not reverence enough
 When I receive the charge on't. (4.2.120-124)

For the audience, this speech carries a complex double meaning. De Flores has already stated a belief that Beatrice-Joanna's desire to break her engagement will eventually lead her into an insatiable desire for all men:

For if a woman
 Fly from one point, from him she makes a husband,
 She spreads and mounts them like arithmetic –
 One, ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand. (2.2.60-63)

De Flores begs to serve Beatrice-Joanna, then, explicitly in the hopes of bringing this insatiable desire about, meaning that he does indeed 'fail' as a servant because he uses 'not reverence enough'. She, however, does not hear the earlier speech and assumes that he desires money: 'Belike his wants are greedy / ... Possible his need / Is strong upon him' (2.2.125-127). De Flores's language, importantly, allows for this interpretation, since it can easily be understood as a strong and loyal desire for employment from his mistress. He also conspicuously takes Beatrice-Joanna's payment prior to the murder (2.2.127). If De Flores reveals to the audience here a desire to ravish Beatrice-Joanna that subverts social hierarchy and decorum, the realization of this depends upon his successfully performing the very desire for employment and reward expected of someone from his social station. The very servility that De Flores will later reject, he first performs masterfully.¹⁴

De Flores continues to perform the role of an obedient, deferential servant throughout the remainder of the play. Where a man usurping the role of aristocratic lover might challenge Piracquo to a duel and overpower

¹⁴ 'Eye-service' provides a term that often approximates this type of performance in both early modern service manuals and literary criticism. Michael Neill refers to this term in order to describe Iago's celebration of servants that 'Keep their hearts attending on themselves, / And throwing but shows of service on their lords, / Do well thrive by them' (2004, 222). Elizabeth Rivlin similarly uses this term in reference to anxieties about service and performance: 'The epistemological issue the didactic literature raises is how masters can distinguish between a servant who fully inhabits his socially subordinate role and a servant who disguises an insubordinate will behind a duplicitous, convincing performance of service', and then pointing to an oft-quoted passage from St. Paul: 'Servants, be obedient unto them that are *your* masters, according to the flesh, with feare and trembling in singleness of your hearts as unto Christ, / Not with service to the eye, as men pleasers, but as the servant of Christ, doing the wil of God from the heart' (2012, 14). Some manuals use 'eye-service' in this way, referring to those who seek to rule the household in the absence of the master. Richard Brathwaite, for example, charges masters: 'If you meet with such a *Servant*, that saith in his heart, *My master doth deferre his comming; and shall begin to smite the servants and maidens, and to eat, and drinke, and be drunken;* you are not to use remisnesse to such a *Servant*, but to cut him off, lest you give example unto others' and later describes, 'an *evill servant*' as one 'Whose service is only to the eye, and not for conscience sake, is a scatterer of his substance whom he serveth, aiming only at his owne private profit' (1630, 160). In other cases, however, writers use 'eye-service' more generally. Gouge, for example, says: 'The world is full of such eye-serving servants, who while their masters are present, will be as Bees: but if he be away, then either idling at home, or gadding abroad, or nothing but wrangling, and eating, and drinking with the drunken' (1622, 617) referring to 'eye-service' as a way to conceal laziness and other forms of failing to serve honestly from the master. Thomas Fosset similarly says: 'Servants, for the most part, are so bad and carelesse, and such as doe not their worke for love and for conscience sake as they ought to doe, but onely for feare and fashion-sake, with service to the eye as men-pleasers' (1613, 44), making a distinction between honest servants good at their job and shirkers. Given the ambiguity of the term during the early modern period, I've chosen to relegate a discussion of it to the notes. For further discussion of 'eye-service' see Schalkwyk 2008, 14.

him, De Flores agrees to take him on a tour of the castle – saying, ‘I am your servant sir’ (2.2.162) – and then stabs him in the back. When Tomazo de Piracquo, Alonzo’s brother, suspects foul play and looks for his brother’s murderer, he turns to De Flores for help, calling him, ‘Honest De Flores! ... / Come hither, kind and true one; I remember / My brother loved thee too well’ (4.2.37-43). Although De Flores admits in an aside that talking to Tomazo leaves him feeling guilty, ‘I smell his brother’s blood when I come near him’ (4.2.41), he conceals this entirely; Tomazo continues to insist on De Flores’s honesty even after he’s walked off stage, ‘That De Flores has a wondrous honest heart; / He’ll bring [the murder] out in time, I’m assured on’t’ (4.2.57-58). De Flores even manages to maintain an appropriate public facade later in the play when Tomazo strikes him in a fit of unfocused anger, responding to the blow, ‘I will not question this. I know you’re noble; / I take my injury with thanks given, sir, / Like a wise lawyer, and as a favour’ (5.2.34-36).¹⁵ While De Flores’s sexual usurpation of Beatrice-Joanna clearly claims a form of authority over her father, her suitors and her body, he consistently hides this from them beneath an act of respect for their superior status. Rather than establishing a fear of an upstart or the potential for hierarchy to be inverted, these scenes raise the fear that privileges as they exist, and as the powerful experience them, are capable of being rewritten by the lower sorts without their even having to alter their assigned behaviors or directly challenge figures of authority.

Viewed in this way, *The Changeling* helps to explain the constant rewritings and erasures in the various texts about Richard Weston and Anne Turner in the wake of the Overbury Affair. Rather than struggling to erase or counteract the narrative put forward by Weston and Turner, these texts work to contain the potentially disruptive power that servants could wield by selectively performing their assigned roles within the public transcript of service. By claiming that their actions were undertaken in a submissive ignorance and out of a need for monetary reward, Weston and Turner fashioned themselves as loyal servants to their social superiors, and indeed their statements survived in manuscript accounts and in *Sir Thomas Overburies Vision*. Nevertheless, these performances explicitly sought to make Weston and Turner appear sympathetic and deserving of mercy, while implicitly deflecting blame for the murder onto the Countess of Somerset and her husband. Left unchecked the performances of Weston and Turner might have easily created a feeling that the Overbury trials were indeed ‘A

¹⁵ Tomazo, at this point, has no idea that De Flores has murdered his brother; after striking him, Tomazo ironically states, ‘All league with mankind I renounce for ever, / Till I find this murderer; not so much / As common courtesy but I’ll lock up. / For in the state of ignorance I live in, / A brother may salute his brother’s murderer, / And wish good speed to th’ villain in a greeting’ (5.2.43-48). Tomazo, of course, has done this earlier in the play. He has also struck his brother’s murderer, and then shown regret for doing so afterwards.

Net to catch the little Birds, and let the great ones go'. By adding statements of remorse and personal repentance – and in some cases deleting the original sentiments – popular texts like *Overburies Vision*, *The Bloody Downfall* and others worked to contain the performative power of the original testimony and the feelings of sympathy, mercy, and injustice that it sought to produce.

In *The Changeling*, the ideological and performative aspects of the testimony of Weston and Turner are projected onto Diaphanta and De Flores respectively. The former character comes closer to the model of a true servant, proving malleable and motivated by the promises of monetary gain. Ultimately, Diaphanta operates as an instrument of her mistress's crimes, rather than a full participant in them. De Flores, on the other hand, rejects signifiers of service in private even as he masters them in performance. This ability to change, in Alsemero's words, 'Servant obedience / To a master sin' (5.3.198-199), not only allows him to anticipate the full implications of his mistress's flattery and offers of reward, but it also helps him leverage his service into a form of blackmail and hidden control over her body. The play thus remakes the ideological content of the Weston and Turner testimony harmless, while marking the performative mastery of service as threatening.

In an ambiguous and exaggerated way, then, *The Changeling* participates in the containment of servants' efforts to control and shape the public transcript of service. Middleton and Rowley's play draws upon the performative efforts of Weston, Turner, and many other members of the lower strata of early modern society, and reimagines them as scheming, murderous, and noxious. De Flores importantly knows that killing Alonzo de Piracquo is degrading and the murder haunts him throughout the play. When Beatrice-Joanna offers him reward for the murder, he seems offended partly by the idea that money can repay the stain on his conscience. Offered Piracquo's diamond, he responds: 'Twill hardly buy a capcase for one's conscience' (3.4.44). Far from unintentionally degrading himself, though, De Flores has out sought guilt as the means through which to manipulate Beatrice-Joanna. When she responds to his demand that she reward his service with her virginity by pointing to his low birth, De Flores responds: 'Tush, fly not to your birth, but settle you / In what the act has made you; you're no more now. / You must forget your parentage to me' (3.4.134-136). De Flores insists that she has lost nobility 'to me' as a result of their shared crime, a meaning that he reinforces by responding to her horrified: 'With thee foul villain?', by seemingly accepting the title, provided that she does too: 'Yes, my fair murd'ress' (3.4.140-141). The point here is not to overthrow the social order, but to so thoroughly debase both himself and Beatrice-Joanna to the point that she will have trouble refusing him, a fact made clear when he threatens her: 'If I enjoy thee not, thou ne'er enjoy'st. / I'll blast the hopes and joys of marriage. / I'll confess all; my life I rate at nothing' (3.4.147-149). Only by reducing them both to 'nothing' in the eyes of traditional authority can he overcome her revulsion and achieve his desire.

This nihilistic quality of De Flores's service and demand for reward reduces servants' efforts to shape the public transcript to an insatiable, wholly physical, self-destructive lust. Numerous feminist critics have discussed the fact that De Flores enacts early modern society's most misogynistic beliefs about women's sexual desires and rape, and this strikes me as correct.¹⁶ For my purposes here, though, what seems most significant is that De Flores's manipulations of 'honesty' and service seem aimed at tainting and poisoning the social order rather than seeking to overturn or rule it. De Flores continues to perform servitude fully after ravishing Beatrice-Joanna, and even submits reluctantly to payment when she insists to Alsemero and Vermandero that his 'heroism' in putting out the fire in Diaphanta's room deserves it: 'Rewarded? Precious, here's a trick beyond me! / I see in all bouts, both of sport and wit, / Always a woman strives for the last hit' (5.1.125-127). In De Flores, performative efforts to shape the public transcript appear as a force with no desire to rule, no desire for wealth, and only a temporary desire to assert one's will: as a result, he cannot be bargained with, nor can he be recognized until he has already poisoned the social fabric. In imagining De Flores in this way, and then killing him, the play fashions a scapegoat that works to expunge the threat posed by subordinate members of society who sought to performatively shape the public transcript of early modern service.¹⁷

The fact that *The Changeling* works to demonize and contain servants' efforts at shaping the public transcript of service should not, however, be understood as an argument that the types of performance undertaken by Weston and Turner were fully contained within the broader political landscape of early modern England. In fact, I would suggest quite the opposite. A character like De Flores provides evidence that these performances captured public attention and were imagined as threatening to established authority. While Weston and Turner did not gain pardons as a result of their testimony, they did muster significant public sympathy, and eventually this may have promoted the palpable anger at the Countess and Earl of Somerset – who were eventually pardoned – and through them at the crown itself. As Alastair Bellany has noted, manuscript accounts suggest that the London crowd did not wholly submit to the obvious injustices in the verdicts handed down in this case. A newsletter discussing the pardon of the Somersets records that, 'Everybody is of the opinion they shall both live, howsoever they wish in their hearts' (Bellany 2002, 244). Another newsletter reports that at the same time, when 'A coach carrying the queen, two ladies, and a lord – but rumoured to contain the countess of Somerset and her mother – drove

¹⁶ See especially Malcolmson (1990), Burks (1995) and Dolan (2011).

¹⁷ On De Flores as a kind of poison that needs to be thrown away, see Neill (1991, especially 115-117).

into London, the people “flocked together and followed the coach in great numbers, railing and reviling ... putting all in fear” (Bellany 2002, 244). The penitent speeches of Anne Turner, and the feeling that Richard Weston had put forward that the Overbury case would catch the ‘little Birds, but let the great ones go’, provide variations on these feelings of dissatisfaction and anger at the crown’s treatment of the lower sorts. All of these feelings are the result of expressions of servants’ political agency and action. If, in De Flores, we see a caricatured and exaggerated representation of servants as a force of contagion and anxiety, the existence of this representation provides evidence of an on-going struggle taking place within early modern political society which, at certain moments, gave members of the nobility reasons to be afraid even as – or perhaps because – people sought to further their own interests by performing the role of servant.

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