

**Definition:**

change·ling : n

1. A child secretly exchanged for another.
2. Archaic. A changeable, fickle person.
3. Archaic. A person of deficient intelligence.



This guide was researched by the  
***Changeling* Task Force:**  
Chrystal Hallihan, Heidi Newman,  
Candice Robichaud and Ryan Ryan

and assembled and edited by the  
***Changeling* Editing Team:**  
Sarah Richard, Adam Beers,  
Jeanette Bell and Wendy Robichaud

**St. Thomas University English 2223:**  
**From the Page to the Stage**  
visit our Web site at:

<http://people.stu.ca/~hunt/22230304/change/mainpage.htm>

# *The Changeling*

by **Thomas Middleton and William Rowley**  
a playgoer's guide



## *Synopsis*

**The Changeling** is a dark comedy that veers from sanity to complete and utter madness. The whole plot revolves around a character named Beatrice, who is engaged to a man who she detests, so she starts seeing another man whom she wants to marry instead. She devises a plan to hire someone to kill her fiancé so she can marry the man she loves. She hires a revoltingly disfigured man named De Flores, who astonishes her by saying that he wants her virginity in return for the killing. Beatrice then hires another woman to take her place on the night of her wedding, so her new husband won't find out that she's not chaste. The real climax comes when Beatrice surprises everyone when she falls in love with De Flores. De Flores ends up killing himself, and Beatrice dies too. It is a

sinister plot that twists its ugly head from purity and love to lust, jealousy, revenge, adultery, and finally, murder.

The earliest record of an actual performance of the play was recorded on January 4, 1623/4 by the Queen of Bohemia's company. Christopher Beeston was the owner of The Cockpit, and believed to have the acting rights to the Changeling. After his death in 1638, his son William Beeston took over and became leader of the company. Lord Chamberlain, protected the play for Beeston, by forbidding other companies to perform it. After the closing of the theaters in 1642, many other playwrights and authors were suspected of mentioning the play or its characters in their own writings. There are no records of the play being performed in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. However, William Hayley wrote a plagiarized version, which was performed three times but met with little success.

## Thomas Middleton

He was educated first at Queen's College, Oxford, and was then admitted at Gray's Inn in 1593. By 1600 he published three volumes of verse, and it is believed that he had begun to write for the stage. Middleton was a working playwright by 1602 and in the same year his earliest surviving independent play, *Blurt, Master Constable* was printed.

Middleton was an industrious, prolific writer, writing for both the Boys of St. Paul's and the Admiral's Men. His "citizen comedies" were written for boys' companies between 1602 and 1607. He collaborated with Dekker on the comedies *The Honest Whore* [Part I] (1604), and *The Roaring Girl* (1610). For the adult companies, he wrote his masterpiece, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1611). This comedy exposes bourgeois vice in contemporary London in a satiric tone.

From 1613 on, Middleton wrote many City of London pageants for the Lord Mayor, and served as City Chronologer from 1620 until his death in 1627. During this time, he collaborated with William Rowley on the superb tragicomedy *The Changeling* (1622). Middleton died of natural causes at Newington Butts and was buried there on July 4, 1627.

## William Rowley

He collaborated with many noted dramatists, including Dekker, Ford, and Webster; his best work, notably *The Changeling*, was written with Thomas Middleton. Of Rowley's own plays, *All's Lost by Lust* (1622) is considered to be his best. There is little known of Rowley's early life but there has been much speculation about his role in writing *The Changeling*. Scholars have determined that Rowley wrote the sub-plot and the opening and closing scenes of the play, and Middleton the remainder of the main plot. This was determined by looking at previous works by each author and comparing their language and patterns of speech with that of *The Changeling*. It is believed that Rowley was moral and that is why he would write the opening and closing scenes, so that they would be set against a firm moral background. Middleton, on the other hand, was considered an individualist and more aware of human psychology. It is believed that he took the scenes where the psychological tensions were high, notably those between Beatrice and De Flores.

## People say:

*The Changeling* is probably the most schizophrenic piece of Jacobean drama extant..."

– Ian Shuttleworth, *City Limits Magazine*

"What I love about the play is that it shows no matter what era, when we are caught up in our passions -- revenge, jealousy, lust -- we are close to madness. . . . All the characters in this play are trying to reason away their passion. . . . *The Changeling* illustrates the shift in drama in the Shakespearean era towards a jaded sensationalism. The characterization is sharp and ironic, the dialogue startling, candid and naturalistic."

– Anna MacKay Smith (Director, Theatre@York)

