

T H E
C H A N G E L I N G :

400 años de *The Changeling*
(Thomas Middleton y William Rowley, 1622)

John D. Sanderson (ed.)

As it was Acted (with great Applause)
at the Privat house in DRURY LANE,
and Salisbury Court.

Written by { THOMAS MIDDLETON, }
and { Gent' }
{ WILLIAM ROWLEY. }

Never Printed before.

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UNIVERSITAT D'ALACANT

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MURDER IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: THE CRIME SCENES BEHIND *THE CHANGELING*¹

Berta Cano Echevarría

Since Richard Levin claimed that source studies were not only undertheorized but “virtually untheorized” a few attempts have been made to sort out the field (1998: 226). It did not help that Stephen Greenblatt had described this discipline as “the elephant’s graveyard of literary history” (1985: 163), but, ironically, the New Historicist approach that dominated early modern studies for thirty-odd years treated sources in a more exciting way by equating the texts and its sources as analogue products of material culture and focusing on heterogeneous intertextual links (see Lynch, 1988). More recently, there has been a trend to recover the philological discipline by means of technological engines and databases that produce a variety of associations and parallelisms with the intention of “unlocking the relationships between texts and events bringing the intertextual and subtextual layers into sharper view” (Greatley-Hirsch and Johnson, 2020: 254), a method that produces interesting results but obscures the linear relationship between the text and its origins that earlier studies were so careful to trace.²

In my view, the relationship between a play and its sources can be regarded as similar to the relation between onstage and offstage. There is an undertext that pushes from below and can be seen as a palimpsest for what we actually have on the page, or the stage (see Cano-Echevarría, 2019). Since we have no access to the actual historical representation of a play, being able to trace a source allows one to excavate the history of a play similarly as we may inspect the archaeological strata of an excavation, looking for a relationship between the object and its surroundings; the text that has come down may

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 2. This method has yielded important advances in the field of authorship attribution.

thus be reconsidered in a new light, with the offstage/undertext reminding us of its absence. Sources can be traced to discover what happened at the point of composition, what was added and what was edited out by the author(s), or they can be seen as products of the same material culture. In the case of *The Changeling*, however, there are two cultural backgrounds that converge since the English playwrights took inspiration from two different sources, one written by an Englishman, the other by a Spaniard; both actions happening in Spain, but both resonating for an English audience.³

In this essay I want to revisit the Spanish locations of the play and reconsider the relation between *The Changeling* and one of its sources, John Reynolds' *The triumphs of God's revenege [sic], against the crying and execrable sin of murther* (1621), as if both works were echoing a true crime story based on actual events that may have happened in Spain (perhaps in Alicante) shortly before or at the time of Reynolds' sojourn on the Spanish Mediterranean coast.⁴ In so doing I would like to observe the adaptability of the murder mystery genre in the different cultures and its dependence on authentic stories recorded as real events at the time. In the appropriation and different transformations of the actual events I follow the linear progression from one text or set of events to their adaptation, both culturally and generically. Moving backwards from *The Changeling* to *God's Revenge Against Murder* to the crimes in the coast of Alicante, where a spouse like Beatrice Joana could have encountered her death, I intend to explore how stories circulated, reshaped and adapted as part of the process of cultural transmission between the Mediterranean and the British Isles.

According to Richard Levin, John Reynold's story of "Alsemero and Beatrice-Joana" contained in *God's Revenge Against Murder* should be classified as a Beta source for *The Changeling* (1985: 227). It does not reach the level of an Alpha source because it was used in combination with other sources, in this case a tale contained in *Gerardo, the Unfortunate Spaniard*, translated shortly before from an original Spanish book by Gonzalo de Céspedes y Meneses. Middleton and Rowley combined both sources for the construction

3. Leonard Digges' translation of *Poema Trágico del Español Gerardo y Desengaño del Amor Lascivo* by Gonzalo de Céspedes y Meneses (1614) appeared in 1622, so there was a very short time between its publication and Middleton and Rowley's borrowing. Gary Taylor suggests that Middleton had a knowledge of Spanish, though probably not enough to read the original Céspedes volume (2007: 335-443; 437), but, as Taylor demonstrates elsewhere and has pointed out to me, the speed with which plays were written at the period (varying between two to six weeks) enabled the playwrights to read Digges recently published translation and insert the episode in *The Changeling*. (See Taylor, 2014).

4. For a discussion of the relationship between *Poema Trágico del Español Gerardo* by Gonzalo de Céspedes and *The Changeling* see my essay in "Doubles and Falsehoods: *The Changeling's* Spanish Undertexts" in Hutchings (2019).

of the main plot and, apparently, used no source for the secondary plot of the mad house, a fresh creation for the play, though fairly conventional.⁵ In Levin's classification, the more a play is indebted to its source, the higher it is ranked; and thus, Reynolds and Cespedes y Meneses are both Beta sources because they share the merit of having inspired *The Changeling*. But how do we consider the source for Reynolds' composition, a source that inspires a source? Probably for Levin it would fall into the category of Nu, those sources that "would not make any difference to our understanding of the play because they do not involve a meaningful causal connection in the playwright's creative process" (227). However, my concern here is not with the creative process of the play, but with the process of transmission, and so I intend to explore this earlier stage (the Nu source) to contribute in the excavation of the ground where *The Changeling* was produced.

John Reynolds (1588-c1655) combined his career as a writer with that as a trader. The son of a merchant of Exeter, he probably attended Exeter grammar school before being admitted into Exeter College, Oxford. Although he had composed some poems in his youth, his career as a writer did not begin until after he had settled in France and travelled extensively around Europe in commercial enterprises (Grudzien Baston). In 1621 he published the first book of *The Triumphs of Gods Revenge* containing five stories with a "Preface to the Reader" in which he advanced his plans of writing a total of six books, each containing five "Tragical Histories" if this, his first volume, was successful. Books two and three followed in the next consecutive years and we might infer from the number of times they were reprinted and reissued that they were enormously successful.⁶ However, readers had to wait until 1635 to have the complete collection of six books. In the interim, Reynolds published two political pamphlets, *Vox Coeli* (1624) and *Votivae Angliae* (1624), that were much less in demand than his tales of murder and adultery. His extradition and imprisonment in England for the protestant extremism of these pamphlets may be one of the reasons why he took so long to complete his original project.

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5. John Reynolds and Leonard Digges have more connections than being the combined sources for *The Changeling*. They were born in the same year (1588), both studied at Oxford during the same period, travelled to Spain and were knowledgeable in Spanish (ODNB). Reynolds' work appeared in 1621 and Digges's in 1622 so it is likely that the circulation of these two texts simultaneously, both concerned with lascivious love relations in a Spanish context, must have been a book market sensation at the time of the composition of *The Changeling* and well known by fellow writers.
 6. The ESTC lists a total of twenty-four different reprints in the seventeenth century and thirteen more in the eighteenth. The title changed frequently with the term "adultery" included often in the title, and *Blood for Blood* being also common from 1660 onwards. The selection of tales and a variety of prefaces also differs.

Put side by side, the pamphlets and the crime stories share little, except for a belligerent anti-Catholicism and a singular Hispanophobia.⁷

N.W. Bawcutt, who included excerpts from Reynolds and Cespedes y Meneses as appendixes to his edition of *The Changeling*, saw Reynolds as a moralist more than a novelist and understood his “jerky and episodic technique” as a way to find opportunities for moralizing on the “deceptiveness of fate and inevitability of retribution” (1958: xxxii). Most critics have focused on the moral intentionality of Reynolds (Salzman, Walmsley) because this is what he stresses in his Preface and at every opportunity within the narrative. His purpose, Reynolds declares, is to cause “a good effect in thee [the reader] in causing thee to assume and take on a resolution to hate these sinnes in thy selfe and to detest them in others” (1635: np). But it is obvious that his readers were not looking just for edification in these lurid tales (there was an ample selection of sermons available to serve this purpose) but for the scandal and bloodshed that they provided. Reynolds was probably defending himself of accusations in this sense when, in the “Readvertisement to the Iudicious Christian Reader”, added to the last three volumes, he enigmatically reproaches “uncharitable Zoilists” because they have dared “to condemn and tax some of my Histories for being too long and others for being too short” (1635: np).

Reynolds’ other complaint in this “Readvertisement” concerns those that do not believe in the veracity of his stories, a claim he had made in his 1621 Preface when he declared: “I have illustrated and polished these Histories, yet not framed them according to the model of mine own fancies, but on their passions, who have represented and personated them.” (np) However, it seems this statement had not convinced everyone because he had to reiterate his claim for truth and originality in the 1635 collection; this time defending himself from accusations that he had produced mere translations from French or Italian originals:

I understand there are a generation of people, who have beene so strangely ignorant, as to give out that these my *Histories* are not *Originalls*, but *Translations*, either from Italian or French; all which (with equal Truth and Modesty) I firmly contradict and deny [...]; for contrariwise I found out the grounds of them in my travels... (np)

7. *Vox Coeli* has the Count of Gondomar, Spanish ambassador in England, in conversation with the ghost of Mary Tudor instructing him on how to act in order to secure the final triumph of Spain over England. It has obvious connections with Middleton’s *Game at Chess* also staged in 1624. *Votivae Angliae* criticises English tepid policy against Spain in the question of the Palatinate, while the stories in *God’s Revenge* portray adulterous relationships set in Spain, with the lovers often meeting in a church or a convent.

Despite his insistence on his presentation of fact-based stories, critics have discarded this possibility on the grounds that the stories pile one death on top of another, and the result is too sensationalist and also too formulaic for them to have happened as Reynolds narrates them. But, conceding that there is a fair proportion of invention, exaggeration and accumulation of events, it would be an interesting approach to accept the author's claim that these stories are (at least partially) based on true events. The choice of location away from England fits with Reynolds extensive travelling, though he also confesses that it saves him trouble avoiding to "afflict, or scandalize their [the victims'] living friends" (1621: np). A good deal more critical interest in Reynolds work might have resulted if he had brought his *Histories* to English locations, but even though they are all "fetched from forraine parts" to save the reputation of his compatriots, it is clear that at least the names of the protagonists are significantly altered, a question we will discuss later on.

It is not surprising that Middleton and Rowley chose the only Spanish story in the 1621 collection to adapt for their play. Critics have pointed out that the years 1619-24 were of particular interest in Spanish affairs, with public mistrust towards the planned marriage between Prince Charles and the Spanish Infanta María of Spain (Bromham and Bruzzi, 1990). Hence the authors' interest in combining two stories set in contemporary Spain, both of which claimed to be based on true events, but which could also show tangentially the calamities of a "Spanish Match".⁸ In Rowley's and Middleton's *The Changeling* we are given a number of very specific facts that help us situate the story some twelve years previous to the first staging of the play. In Act I, we learn that Alsemero is preparing a trip to Malta and that his father had been killed in the Battle of Gibraltar (1607) by "those rebellious Hollanders" (1.1.183). Alsemero's intention to find vengeance is frustrated by "the late league", referring to the 1609 truce between the Hollanders and the Spaniards. Moreover, the play moves between scenes in the church and the castle, two locations that work symbolically but that, as we know, are also perfectly identifiable in the city of Alicante, then as now. Whether the audience of *The Changeling* could identify these historical and geographical references is a matter of speculation; those who did must have understood that what was being represented on the stage was a rather contemporary event.

Middleton and Rowley borrowed all these details from Reynolds' story of "Alsemero and Beatrice-Ioana", where Alsemero's peripathetic past was

8. Gonzalo de Céspedes y Meneses claimed in his address to the reader that he was writing from jail about his failed amorous relationships, some true, some invented ("en parte verdaderos, y en parte fingidos desengaños"). His biographers accept that *Poema Trágico* is partly autobiographical (Madroñal Durán).

described at much greater length. The tale begins with a biographical synopsis of Alsemero's life before he meets Beatrice-Ioanna. Born in Valencia, Alsemero travels first to the West Indies to make his fortune and then he enrolls as a soldier to fight in the battles of Larache and Mamora in Morocco. Upon his return to Spain he follows the court to Valladolid to ask the Duke of Lerma for a promotion in order to join the *Tercios de Flandes* in the Netherlands, at which point a truce is signed and Alsemero has to change his plans, deciding to go to Malta and perhaps continue to "Transilvania, Hungarie and Germanie" (108), when he is paralysed by love in the Iglesia Mayor of Alicante. Such a wealth of accurate historical and geographical detail in the characterisation of Alsemero encourages the reader to believe that the plot could perhaps be as verifiable as all the battles, truces and historical circumstances and personalities that Reynolds refers to.⁹

This is a technique that Reynolds uses consistently in the other tales contained in the collection, accurately contextualizing the whereabouts of the protagonists and historical background of his stories, whether they take place in France, Italy, Portugal, Germany or Spain. However, some of his references seem to be better informed than others. As an example, all the places mentioned in "Grand-Pre and Mermanda" can be found in a map of France. However, in our tale of "Alsemero and Beatrice-Ioana" there are a couple of locations that cannot be recognised; one of them is Briamata, the other Glisseran Hill.¹⁰ Briamata is a mysterious place of seclusion and hiding. In *God's Revenge* it is the place where Beatrice Joanna is sent by her father to keep away from any temptations before she weds Alonso Piracquo. Middleton and Rowley also use it as the hiding place for Antonio:

Vermandero [...] Who of my gentlemen
Are absent? Tell me and truly how many, and who.
Servant: Antonio, Sir, and *Franciscus*.
Vermandero: When did they leave the Castle?
Servant: Some ten days since, sir, the one intending to *Briamata*,
Th' other for *Valencia*.
Vermandero: The time accuses 'em, a charge of murder
Is brought within my Castle gate, *Piracquo's* murder. (4.2.1-10)

So, where is this Briamata? What does it stand for? Could it be the location of Alibius' mad house? Is it a real or an invented place? It is only in Reynolds' tale

9. In terms of historical accuracy, the chronology is a bit shaky since the battles of Larache and Mamora took place after the court abandoned Valladolid in 1606, details that English readers would not have been bothered about.

10. I would like to thank Gary Taylor for pointing out this second unknown location of Glisseran Hill.

that Briamata acquires a true significance for the plot and where we find the information that it is ten leagues away from Alicante. Looking at a map of the area we can observe that Benidorm falls exactly ten leagues north of Alicante, towards Valencia. True it is that moving inland a similar distance separates Alicante from Villena or Orihuela, more populated towns in this period than Benidorm, which was a fishing village at the foot of a fortress.¹¹ However, for a merchant like Reynolds, the name of a coastal town with a castle may have resonated more than that of towns in the interior. His knowledge of Spanish must have been patchy and he aimed for an approximate recollection combining the main consonants; the same could have happened with Glisseran Hill (the location of the duel between Alsemero and Thomaso Piracquo), a possible approximation to the noun phrase in the Valencian “la serra”, which means “the mountains”.

If it is possible to trace the comings and goings of the protagonists, as well as locate the story at a specific time, an attempt to reconstruct what happened is worth a try. John Sanderson discovered an entry for a “maestro Jacques Reynaldo” in the archives of the Kingdom of Valencia, where he is registered as entering the port of Valencia twice (24). The news and gossip that Reynolds gathered at the time may well have been the basis of his story of Alsemero and Beatrice-Ioana. Trying to find the names of the protagonists in the records is useless as it is evident that they are invented. Reynolds’ custom, in most of his *Histories*, is to address the men by their second name and the women by their first. Thus, Don Pedro de Alsemero, Don Diego de Vermandero, Don Alonzo de Piracquo and Don Antonio de Flores, in contrast to Beatrice-Ioana and Diaphanta. The first names can be regarded as securely Spanish (except for Diaphanta) but this is not the case with the surnames, which are not Spanish, although they may ring true to an English ear.¹² Reynolds himself comments in his Preface on the necessity of some authors of true stories to be “so cautious to disguise and maske their Actors, under the vayles of other names; and sometimes been inforced to lay their Scenes in strange and unknowne Countries” (1621: np).

Reynolds tells the story of a series of crimes that happened between Alicante, Benidorm (?), and Valencia in the years between 1609 (the year of the truce between Spain and the Netherlands) and 1621 (when the truce elapsed), together with the punishment of the perpetrators. Reading the summary which

11. In 1664 Beatriu Maria Fajardo, who inherited the title of Señora de Benidorm from her father, ordered that forty families should live permanently within the fortress walls (Allemany and Wilson: 23)

12. At a search in the website of the INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística) only the surname De Flores exists in contemporary Spain with just thirty-four people holding it. The rest of the surnames are inexistent.

he provides at the opening, we see that the interest of the story lies for him as much in the punishment as in the crimes, since this is how God's vengeance is made evident:

Beatrice-Ioana, to marry Alsemero causeth de Flores to murder Alonso Piracquo, who was a suter to her. Alsemero marries her, and finding de Flores and her in adultery, kills them both. Tomaso Piracquo challengeth Alsemero for his brothers death. Alsemero kills him trecherously in the field, and is beheaded for the same, and his bodie throwne into the Sea: At his execution he confesseth, that his wife and de Flores murdered Alonso de Piracquo: their bodies are taken up out of their graves, then burnt, and their ashes throwne into the ayre. (105)

One of the major departures between *The Changeling* and "Alsemero and Beatrice-Ioana" is the fact that Alsemero is a villain and receives his due at the end of the story. Only through his accusations before being executed do we learn that de Flores killed Alonso Piracquo at the instigation of Beatrice Ioana, and only through the accusations of Diaphanta do we learn that de Flores and Beatrice Ioana were in an adulterous relationship. Reynolds narrates all this as a fact, but we can retrace Alsemero's steps and examine what could have been known to his contemporaries if such crimes, or similar ones, ever happened.

Rendered in modern terms, Reynolds' basic story is that of a toxic relationship between a gentleman from Valencia and a young woman from Alicante. Even though both cities are close, Alsemero would still be considered a foreigner in the Alicante of the times, and probably unsuitable as a husband for the daughter of Vermandero, the commander of the fortress of the city. Alsemero meets Beatrice in the church of Santa María and decides to court her against her father's wishes, who plans to wed her with a local gentleman, Alonso Piracquo. To keep her daughter away from trouble Vermandero takes Beatrice Ioana to Briamata but this is not enough to stop Alsemero's courtship, which advances through love letters and finally through an encounter made possible by Diaphanta, the servant. It is particularly notable that all the main characters are at one point in Briamata – even Alonso Piracquo is there when he receives a letter from his brother warning him against Beatrice's rumoured inconstancy. Reynolds tells us about an intimate encounter between Alsemero and Beatrice Ioana in Briamata, and about her use of de Flores' infatuation – "a Gallant young gentleman, of the Garison of the Castle, who follows her father" (127) – to murder Alonso Piracquo. Beatrice's suitor is found missing and a search is organized in Alicante, while Tomaso Piracquo suspects Alsemero of having killed him. As no corpse is found Alsemero and Beatrice are free to marry and, three months into the marriage, "Alsemero, like a fond husband, becomes ielous of his wife; so as hee curbes and restraynes her of her libertie, and would hardly permit her to see, yea, farre lesse to conferre or converse with any man"

(132). As the jealousy grows and she seeks help from her father, Alsemero decides to put distance between his wife and her circle by moving to Valencia. Vermandero, worried, sends de Flores to Valencia “to knowe how matters stand betwixt his daughter and her husband” (133). This is when, according to Reynolds, the sexual relationship between Beatrice and de Flores starts. It is Beatrice’s servant Diaphanta who reports the adultery to Alsemero. Once alerted, he devises a trap for the lovers, and finding them

on his bed, in the midst of their adultery, he first dischargeth his Pistols on them, and then with his Sword and Ponyard runnes them thorow, and stabs them with so many deepe and wide wounds, that they haue not so much power or time to speake a word, but there lye weltring and wallowing in their blood.
(137)

Alsemero goes directly to confess his crime to the Criminal judge “(but conceales the murder of Piracquo)” (138). Thanks to Diaphanta’s testimony Alsemero is acquitted, the court considering that he acted as any cheated husband would. Though Alsemero is pardoned by justice, however, he is not free from the suspicion of Piracquo’s murder. Thomaso summons him to a duel which ends up in Thomaso Piracquo’s treacherous killing, the news of which reaches Alicante, where Alsemero is tried again and this time sentenced to death; at the scaffold he discloses the killing of Alonso Piracquo in the castle of Alicante, accusing his wife and her lover of having been the perpetrators.

Bawcutt points out the weak points in Reynolds tale: “Alsemero’s jealousy is quite inexplicable, and he could have easily avoided the duel with Tomazo by telling him that Beatrice and de Flores, who are now both dead, had been responsible for the death of Alonso” (xxxii). But Reynolds had already defended himself in his Preface about the possible weaknesses in his plots:

and therefore if in some places they seeme too amarus, or in others too bloody, I must iustly retort the imperfection thereof on them, and not thyselve on me: sith I only represent what they have acted, and give that to the publike, which they obscurely perpetrated in priuate (1621:np)

So, if any records of these supposed crimes existed they would be scattered between Alicante and Valencia and could only report what would have been in the public domain, namely: Alonso was reported missing in Alicante but despite an organized search for him he was not found. Alsemero killed his wife and her lover de Flores in Valencia and was acquitted by a jury. Subsequently, Alsemero killed Tomaso in a duel and was sentenced to death in Alicante. His confession on the scaffold accusing Beatrice Ioana and De Flores for the murder of Alonso lead to the discovery of Alonso’s corpse in the casemates of the castle. Other than that, Beatrice’s inconstancy, first with Alsemero when she is betrothed to Alonso and later with de Flores when she is married to Alsemero,

was reported by the only witness of her mistress's actions, Diaphanta, who was also in cahoots with Alsemero. As the confessed murderer of Beatrice, de Flores and Tomaso, how could anyone believe Alsemero (who disclosed the location of Alonso Piracquo's corpse) when he claimed he was not the murderer of the rival in his suit for Beatrice Ioana? In modern times we would interpret the sequence of events as the consequence of gender-based violence and judge Alsemero as a dangerous toxic partner and serial killer, but obviously Reynolds and the society he was writing for were much more comfortable with attributing the responsibility of the crimes to the woman who was killed by her husband, Beatrice Ioana.

Criminal records from the early seventeenth century to be found in the archives of Valencia and Alicante can give some clues about the possible source (or sources) of Reynolds' story. Though this is an ongoing investigation, a preliminary search retrieves some cases that present clear similarities with what Reynolds narrated. The city of Valencia had at that time a population of some 10,000 families inside the city walls, while Alicante was much smaller, with 1,372 families (Perez Puchal 14).¹³ However, this was a time of demographic crisis in the territory of the kingdom of Valencia due to the expulsion of the Moors in 1609 (it is estimated that 24,000 families had to leave the region). Even though there is no hint of this turbulent event in Reynolds story, this was the biggest crisis in the period and the cause of crimes and unrest along the Mediterranean coast, since the area lost almost a quarter of its inhabitants, which resulted in the abandonment of productive land, industries and houses, and the ruin of many. The diary of Mossen Porcar, a clergyman in the Church of St Martin in Valencia, is one of the best sources for criminal activities in the city, as (along with festivities, processions and extreme weather conditions) Porcar records diligently all the violent deaths and criminal trials that come to his notice. For modern readers, the amount of murders is extraordinary in a city of around 40,000 people, with deadly crimes reported almost every month. Husbands killing their wives are more frequent than wives killing their husbands (127, 167, 419), and on 22nd May 1617 Porcar reports "a husband killing his wife and the man that he found with her" (440). No more is known about the consequences of this crime. Men killing each other in public duels are also very frequent (209, 370-1, 412, 611), while public executions of criminals are frequent. It is regrettable that this type of information is not as easily traceable about the crimes that happened in Alicante. The *Chronica de la muy illustre, noble y leal ciudad de Alicante*, by Vicente Bendicho, completed in 1640, does not address the criminal history of the town; while the records of court trials

13. The population was counted by "houses" or families in the census of the times. Today the estimations assume an average of four members in each house. (Perez Puchal).

(1352-1695) concerning the whole Kingdom of Valencia, including Alicante, that were kept in the Casa de la Ciudad, were seriously damaged in a fire that resulted in significant gaps in the files, with most of the records from the seventeenth century missing.¹⁴ Still, more research has to be done.

Going back to *The Changeling*, we can marvel at the serendipity of the transmission of news in the period. That Reynolds, who was interested in crimes while he was travelling in the area of the coast of Valencia, gathered part of what he heard to inspire his *Histories* is most probable. That Middleton and Rowley adapted the one Spanish story for the stage is beyond doubt. One may wonder if the geographical and historical references that were transferred from the tale to the play were signs for the playgoers, hinting that this was based on a ‘true crime’ story. However, we have to bear in mind that, coinciding with the staging of the play, Reynolds’ collection of murder crimes was a best-seller, with twenty-seven reprints in the seventeenth century, ten of them before the closing of the theatres in 1642. So, presumably, the play activated the collection of tales and the collection was a kind of feedback for the play, with members of the audience being familiar with Reynolds’ version of the events and also with his insistence on the factuality of his material. *The Changeling*, however, is anything but realistic, with the bizarre virginity test and the implausible bed-trick adding extravagance to an already convoluted plot from Reynolds mixed with de Cespedes’ source and the subplot. The distance between what may have happened in Valencia and Alicante and what was acted by Lady Elizabeth’s Servants at the Phoenix recalls the children’s game Chinese Whispers, in which a word is passed from ear to ear and becomes completely unrecognisable at the end of the line.

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