BAD TO THE BONE?: NEOPLATONISM, THE RENAISSANCE, AND WHAT IT MEANS TO LOOK EVIL

by

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(Under the Direction of Frances Teague)

ABSTRACT

In his seminal work *Action Is Eloquence: Shakespeare’s Language of Gesture* (1984), David Bevington coins the term “the notion of correspondences” to describe the visual moral association at work in many of Shakespeare’s characters. According to this concept, the way a character looks should reflect that character’s inner state; therefore, if a character is physically unusual in the world of the play, then that character has been marked as spiritually corrupt—evil—by God. This thesis examines how this notion operates in three important works of the early modern period: *Titus Andronicus* (1587), *The Changeling* (1622), and *Paradise Lost* (1674). While all of these works ultimately reinforce the notion of correspondences, all three include episodes which threaten to subvert this association. These incidents are crucial in making the works both morally challenging and entertaining for their respective audiences.

INDEX WORDS: neoplatonism, Aaron the Moor, De Flores, Satan, villainy, Shakespeare, Milton, Middleton, Rowley
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</th>
<th>v</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 What’s in a Face?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Matching the Face with the Soul: Neoplatonism, De Flores, and Aaron the Moor</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual and Moral Congruence</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual and Moral Tension</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 “Outward Calm”: Recognizing Satan as Adversary</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satan’s Degeneration and Transformation</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Vindicated, Victorious Villains</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WORKS CONSULTED</strong></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter One: What’s in a Face?

How should blind men know you from fair-faced saints?

- Alsemero, The Changeling 5. 3. 109

While examining how early modern audiences understood Shakespearean characters and their morality, David Bevington explains that “[o]utward beauty ought to signify virtue within, according to neoplatonic theory . . .” (33). By this rationale, it follows that physical disfigurement betrays spiritual deformity within an individual. Early modern writers use these specific visual signals to indicate the moral state of a character. These indicators are based on culturally-held beliefs in God-given marks that are meant to warn others of an individual’s inner corruption; why, then, does Alsemero pose the question noted above to Beatrice-Joanna, the corrupt gentlewoman, and De Flores, the scarred villain of Middleton and Rowley’s The Changeling? One can understand why this question applies to Beatrice-Joanna; she is a physically desirable young lady from a good family whose immorality remains hidden within; De Flores’s scars, however, operate as visible emblems of his spiritual corruption. Alsemero should be able to see De Flores’s villainy, for it is literally written on his face. Shakespeare’s Aaron, a black Moor in white-faced Rome, poses a similar problem for audiences. Any audience member who looks at him would be able to differentiate between him and a “fair-faced saint,” but he, too, elicits incredulity from other characters in the play when he reveals his depravity at the end of Titus Andronicus. Despite reinforcing the notion of correspondences, Aaron also succeeds in convincing other characters to trust him, despite his visible wickedness.
Kurt Spellmeyer claims that John Milton also uses Neoplatonism—and, specifically, this notion of correspondences—in *Paradise Lost*: “Although matter *per se* is actually empty, entities ordinarily regarded as material reflect, however dimly, the archetypal Forms from which they emanate” (55). Essentially, Spellmeyer is claiming that the characters in *Paradise Lost* will look “however dimly” like their souls. Stanley Fish says that “Satan’s ‘shape’ like his mind, is . . . an extension of his place [Hell], which usurps the selfhood in whose name he had declared himself injured” (339). While Fish is not addressing physical deformity here, his observation corroborates a reading of Satan’s neoplatonic implications. Satan is subject to the notion of correspondences in the same manner as Aaron and De Flores.

These writers evoke—not invent—the visual-moral association; it grew from Platonic theories of visible and ideal forms that diffused from classical philosophy and became cultural tropes in the early modern period. A large number of the most prevalent and renowned writers of this era engage tenets of neoplatonism in their works. In his long poem *Astrophil and Stella* (1591), Sir Philip Sidney wrote “It is most true, for since I her did see, / Vertue’s great beautie in that face I prove” (25. 12-13). His contemporary, Edmund Spensers, uses to the visual-moral association in his *Amoretti* (1595):

> And were it not through your Crueltie,

> With Sorrow dimmed, and deform’d it [the fair Idea of your celestial Hue] were,

> The goodly Image of your Visnomy,

> Clearer than Crystal would therein appear. (45. 9-12)

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1 “Diffusion” seems to be, according to numerous scholars, the most appropriate word for describing how Platonism and its offshoots infiltrated England. “Diffusion’s” critical popularity probably stems from the rather indistinct manner that this philosophical tradition indoctrinated itself in the English mind. This makes it difficult to show exactly how early modern writers became familiar with these concepts.
John Donne highlights the soul’s influence on the body in his poem “the Extasie” (1633):

But O alas, so long, so far
Our bodies why do we forbear?
They are ours, though they are not we, we are
The intelligences, they the sphere. (49-52)

Early modern poets and playwrights were not alone in addressing neoplatonic theories of beauty; in Book Four of his work *The Courtier* (1528), Castiglione uses the notion of correspondences in questioning whether virtue can be learned:

Nay, everyone, no matter how wicked, is pleased to be to be thought just, continent, and good: . . . Thus, everyone tries to hide his natural defects, both of mind and body; which is seen in the blind, the crippled, and the twisted, and in others who are maimed or ugly; for, although these defects can be ascribed to nature, yet everyone is displeased at the thought that he has them, because it seems that nature herself bears witness to that imperfection, as if it were a seal or token of wickedness in him. (214)

Castiglione implies that people naturally judge others according to the notion of correspondences, making an audience’s immediate negative judgment of Aaron and De Flores seem inevitable. These writers were not, of course, the only ones engaging in such a discourse, nor were they the first to do so.

From where, then, did English neoplatonism come? Platonism was brought into the intellectual consciousness of the Italian Renaissance in the fifteenth century by Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, both of Florence (“Renaissance Neoplatonism” 435). These
two individuals worked from both the primary texts of Plato and those of their philosophical predecessors, the most notable being Plotinus (Burroughs 185). Ficino, working also from Augustine, chose Platonism as his basic system of philosophy because of its apparent reconcilability with Christianity (Burroughs 186). Ficino’s translations of Plato and other Platonic writers, along with his philosophical explorations of these same texts, became the standard avenues through which intellectuals all over Europe accessed Platonic ideas. For Ficino in particular, religion and philosophy had to work together, for religion kept philosophy’s eyes on God and focused on the proper exaltation of both God and humanity (Burroughs 187). Philosophy, in turn, allowed Ficino to systematize his appraisal of the universe and humanity’s place within it (Burroughs 187). He translated Plotinus’s *Enneads* in 1492, reintroducing that work to the early modern period. The other great figure in Renaissance Neoplatonism, Pico, sought to bring together the tenets of a number the major philosophical schools of his time (Kristeller 215-6). He became versed in Platonism and Neoplatonism through his amity with Ficino (Ibid 216). Pico promoted “an ideal of universal harmony among philosophers” (Ibid 216), and he cultivated friendships with many of these intellectuals, regardless of their theoretical allegiances (Ibid 215).

Neoplatonism’s path to English culture is an indirect one. While available on a very small scale in Greek, Plato’s dialogues were not translated into English during the Renaissance; Latin translations, however, were available in the mid-fifteenth century (Hutton 49). Platonism began to show up in English universities not long after 1500 (Ibid 49). Ficino’s works were not available in English either (Jayne 219). Moreover, relatively few works including ideas that are specifically attributable to Ficino are written in England during the early modern period (Jayne

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2 "Platonism” refers to the writings and ideas attributed directly to Plato and his contemporaries. “Neoplatonism,” for the purposes of this thesis, refers to the intellectual movement that grew out of Plato’s work and whose most
This situation departs widely from contemporary work on the Continent, where Ficino’s influence was pervasive. The English did have some direct exposure to Pico; in 1510, Sir Thomas More wrote a biography of the Italian intellectual and translated some of his work. Critic Sears Jayne observes that “[t]he wide popularity of Platonism in English Literature was due not so much to the popularity in England of Ficino as to the popularity of the Italian and especially the French writers of belles-lettres who had made Ficinian doctrine a familiar literary subject” (237-8). The study of Platonism in England was not inhibited Ficino’s relative insignificance there; along with writers who, like Castiglione, fall into the Ficinian tradition, English scholars apparently looked to Augustine and Cicero for their Plato.

Platonism’s hierarchical structure dictates that each hypostasis grows out of the one above it. All of the hypostases stem from the One, which is inaccessible to the human mind (“Marisilio Ficino on Plato. . .” 560). The highest level of conscious thought is the hypostasis directly below the One, Mind (Ibid 560). This is the level at which intuition—that is, the divine within an individual—operates (“Marisilio Ficino . . .” 560; Spellmeyer 54). Intuition is an innovation of Plotinus that Renaissance thinkers followed, for Plato’s hierarchy names “discursive thought” as the realm of Mind (Spellmeyer 53-4). Plotinus and the Platonists who followed him relocate a vast majority of the powers attributed by Plato to the Mind hypostasis to God, effectively creating a place for an active and tenable God in the Neoplatonic hierarchy (“Marsilio Ficino . . .” 562-3; Spellmeyer 54-5).

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3 Discerning whether Plotinian or Augustinian Neoplatonism was more active in English early modern texts is difficult, as the layers of influence from both are thick and intertwined. Augustine’s comments regarding the emptiness of beauty in Book 10 of The Confessions do have philosophical and literary implications that could be useful to an examination of the overarching neoplatonic threads active in early modern literature. In this paper, however, I am limiting my examination to the early modern engagement with the notion of correspondences—an engagement which relies heavily on Plotinus.

4 This, according to Plotinian thought, is what audience members must look through in order to properly assess the moral stance of a character. Physical deformity makes the corruption more easily discernible.
The third hypostasis in the Platonic hierarchy is the Soul (“Marsilio Ficino . . .” 564). While Plato argues for the insubstantiality of this realm—a basically dualist idea—Plotinus and the Neoplatonists reject this separation, making the body a fragment of this higher hypostasis (Spellmeyer 55). If the Soul determines outward form, then the body will reflect the state of the Soul. Therefore, if the Soul is literally deformed, then so too will be the body in which that Soul resides. Plotinus addresses this specific correlation in his Enneads: “[T]here may be wickedness in the Soul; the forms this general wickedness is to take will be determined by the environing Matter, by the faculties of the Soul that operate, and by the nature of their operation, whether seeing, acting, or merely admitting impression” (1.8.5, pp.60). “[T]he environing matter” is the body that houses the polluted soul, and Plotinus’s assessment allows for virtually any embodiment of spiritual alterity, be it race (as in Aaron), scarification (De Flores), or a discernible transformation (as will be argued about Satan). For in making the body an emblem of the Soul, Plotinus and the Neoplatonists that follow him established their version of Platonism to be wholly monistic, creating the basis for the notion of correspondences: appearance indicates essence.

Bevington, while claiming that Shakespeare intentionally evokes this notion in his plays, also emphasizes the instability Shakespeare’s use of it:

Shakespeare’s stance on the neoplatonic equation of beauty and goodness is consistent with his observations on the language of signs in the theater. The optimistic view, based on the idea of correspondence between true being and its visible form and including the neoplatonic equation of beauty and goodness, validates the process of communication through which we can
hope to recognize characters’ identities, discover states of mind, and thus begin to understand what the author wishes to convey to us through instruction, delight, and the persuasive eloquence of visible forms. The negative view casts doubt on the very enterprise of communication, for it finds in deception and misinterpretation a sign of fallen human nature and hence a strong possibility that the speaker’s intent will not be correctly perceived.

(34)

The relationship between ideal and visible form in a play is, for Bevington, an unstable one. How the playwrights choose to reinforce, challenge, or complicate the notion of correspondences affects audience perception. For example, Shakespeare remains, at best, evasive on the question of correspondence, for his characters both challenge and reinforce it, depending on their looks, actions, and words. The same can be said of Middleton and Rowley, for Beatrice-Joanna’s beauty and apparent depravity certainly question the visual-moral association. This ambiguity, while unsettling for Bevington, is a crucial source of dramatic tension between the characters on stage and the playgoers watching the action. A character that seems to challenge the cultural trope will be a more interesting presence on stage and, therefore, ignite interest. Aaron, De Flores, and, in a different setting, Satan, all interrogate culturally-recognized conceptions regarding the correlation between an individual’s inner corruption and body. While Bevington holds that visible emblems often overshadow spoken signals, a disparity between what a character says and does will undoubtedly challenge audiences to distinguish the “true” nature of a character among the seemingly contradictory actions, words, and looks.

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5Bevington highlights the importance of visual signals over verbal ones while resisting claims of total subordination of one to the other. For more on this, please see Chapter VII of Bevington’s *Action Is Eloquence*, pages 188-192.
In characters such as Aaron, De Flores, and Satan, part of the appeal lies in hearing and seeing villains in action. Much of the tension in Titus Andronicus, The Changeling, and the first five books of Paradise Lost stems from the actions and unexpected moral vacillations of these three characters. Aaron, De Flores, and Satan all provide a dramatic dynamism to their worlds that is otherwise absent. Aaron the Moor arranges or enacts virtually every malicious act against the Andronici and the Roman Empire; scar-faced De Flores seduces a maiden, kills five people (including himself) and ruins the lineage of a family; and Satan, whose shape and face changes as he commits himself to his ill quest, is a key element in the fall of man. They are rogues who attempt to operate outside of the established hierarchies of their worlds; they use the very structures that they loathe to enact their misdeeds. The moral instability inherent in all of the characters in these texts compounds the issues of moral recognition, for there is no moral protagonist in The Changeling. Titus, being the title character, seems to be the moral center of his play, but he is, at best morally suspect as well; he does, after all, kill two of his children and bake Tamora’s sons into a meat pie—hardly behavior that can be held up as exemplary. God is the logical choice for protagonist of Paradise Lost, but there is a large body of critical work that articulates many doubts about the benevolence of Milton’s God.6

While they are fundamental to the action of their respective works, within each villain another tension further complicates their positions in their worlds: their apparent internality. From 4.2 through the end of Titus Andronicus, Aaron focuses on securing the safety of his newborn son. This concern is a radical departure from his most obvious dramatic predecessor, The Battle of Alcazar’s Muly Hamet, whom Emily Bartels calls “the prototypical cruel black Moor” (434). De Flores is, at one point, paralyzed by guilt when he imagines the face of Alonzo

(whom De Flores murdered for Beatrice-Joanna) in the eyes of his brother (Tomazo). Jarringly, Satan laments his own plight in his famous soliloquy in Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*. These incidents do not alter the character’s final actions; Aaron still brags about his misdeeds to Lucius; in *The Changeling*’s final scene, De Flores ultimately kills himself and Beatrice-Joanna and celebrates their union in Hell; and Satan, despite his apparent reservations, still tempts Eve. Why would these writers infuse this element of moral ambiguity? Is it simply for dramatic effect?

The temptation to answer with a simple yes or no reveals the inadequacy of the questions, for a definite answer would create a false binary and drain the works of their moral sophistication. After much complication, all of these villains ultimately commit themselves to evil. Therefore, especially in Satan’s case, their ends come as no surprise. Bevington, however, borrowing from Fish, inadvertently suggests another justification for this complication in *Action Is Eloquence*: “[t]he reading of visible signs is uncertain too because we are fallible readers” (33). This ambiguity within and without the characters functions to test the audiences’ ability to discern the “true” nature of the characters. While we have no way of knowing whether Shakespeare, Middleton, and Rowley intended to subject their audiences to such tests, Milton’s project of creating and testing readers for God-given right reason is common knowledge in Milton scholarship.  

Regardless of intention, interpretive struggle is at the center of the dramatic tension in all three works. The villains’ presence feeds the overall sense of chaos in all of the texts, problematizing moral identification and destabilizing with looks, words, and actions.

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7 For more on this, see Stanley Fish’s seminal work *Surprised By Sin* (1997).
Chapter Two: Matching the Face with the Soul: Neoplatonism, De Flores, and Aaron the Moor

Bevington’s notion of correspondences clearly applies to the characters of De Flores from Middleton and Rowley’s *The Changeling* and Aaron the Moor from Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*. De Flores has a scarred face, while Aaron is black. Their physical alterity could communicate specific details about their class, moral states, or exoticism. Everyone watching the plays would have known immediately upon seeing these characters that these two probably purveyed evil; indeed, both individuals are central in the intrigues and murders that occur in their respective worlds. While their actions seem consistent with both the audience’s aesthetic assessment of their souls and their self-images, the other characters of these two plays do not seem to perceive Aaron and De Flores’s depravity; in fact, on several occasions, their schemes succeed simply because other characters (for example, Alonzo and Titus) choose to trust them. Clearly, the characters within the plays are not completely aware of what the audience takes to be a given: Aaron and De Flores, as exemplified by their visages, are villains.  

This oversight seems curious, especially considering that the Aaron’s color and the “dog face” (2. 2. 146) of De Flores are subjects of comment by others in the plays. Beatrice-Joanna regularly refers to De Flores in connection with poison (Bawcutt xlvii); she is, however, shocked when he comes to claim his prize for killing Alonzo. She declares “Why, ’tis impossible thou canst be so wicked, / Or shelter such a cunning cruelty!” (3. 4. 120-1). When Aaron brings the

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8 I am not suggesting that Middleton and Rowley base their De Flores on Shakespeare’s Aaron. Rather, I am arguing that these playwrights use their characters to complicate the notion of correspondences in similar manners.

news that Titus’s sons will be spared for a hand, Titus declares “O gentle Aaron! / Did ever 
raven sing so like a lark / That gives sweet tidings of the sun’s uprise?” (3. 1.158-160, my 
emphasis).  

Aaron proceeds to chop off Titus’s hand and send it back to him, along with the 
heads of his two sons. If both Aaron and De Flores are so obviously marked as evil, then why do 
most of the characters, at one point or another, believe what they say? The answer clearly lies in 
their words. Almost everyone trusts what De Flores says in some way or another, and Aaron 
advises and arranges much of the Andronici’s misfortune. As long as he is hurting Titus and his 
family, Tamora and her brood advocate Aaron’s “policy and stratagem” (1. 1. 604).

Visual and Moral Congruence

The sources for the two plays suggest that Middleton, Rowley11 and Shakespeare 
intentionally evoke the correlation of face and soul. Middleton and Rowley adapt their De Flores 
from a character in The Triumphs of God’s Revenge against the Crying and Execrable Sin of 
Wilful and Premeditated Murther, Book I, History IV(1621), by John Reynolds (Kinney 626). In 
this work, De Flores has no grotesque scars, and Alsemero is the more prolific murderer 
(Bawcutt xxxli). Middleton and Rowley have altered De Flores in a manner that allows the 
playwrights to invoke the well-known notion of correspondences and then interrogate it by 
simultaneously reinforcing and denying the moral association. De Flores also serves as an 
aesthetic foil for Beatrice throughout the play; this contrast is heightened when she morally and 
sexually aligns herself with her unsightly suitor.

11 “It is generally agreed that Rowley wrote the sub-plot and the opening and closing scenes of the play, and 
Middleton the remainder of the main plot” (Bawcutt xxxix). Since I discuss scenes written by both playwrights, I 
will continue to refer to both when necessary.
Locating the source material for *Titus Andronicus* is a more complicated task than for *The Changeling*. Traditionally, scholars have thought that the most likely source for *Titus Andronicus* is the ancestor of an eighteenth century chapbook called *The History of Titus Andronicus, The Renowned Roman General*. . . Newly Translated from the Italian Copy Printed in Rome* (Bate 83). In this source, “Aaron is a mere tool of the Queen” (Evans et al 1067). Jonathan Bate’s introduction to the Arden edition of this play compiles a substantial argument positing that the play actually precedes the chapbook and that the work stems instead from Shakespeare’s novel combination of the elements from popular plays from his time. Despite the lack of a direct source, Aaron’s blackness alone operates as a clear visual signal of depravity for a Renaissance audience. Aaron’s roots most likely lie in an amalgamation of villains from other plays (Bate 88), as well as his biblical ancestor. Aaron was Moses’ brother and the one whom God commanded to articulate His plan for the Israelites while Moses performed the authenticating miracles (Exodus 4:14-29). During the early modern period, a theater audience would have known both who Aaron was in the Bible and about his proficiency with language; they would expect Aaron the Moor to speak as aptly as he does (Bate 125). Considering the disparity between the goals of the biblical Aaron and Aaron the Moor, the latter must have seemed even more blasphemous, especially when he confirmed his godlessness (5. 1. 74).

The other part of Aaron’s name, “the Moor,” carried its own implications for an early modern audience. According to Emily C. Bartels, “Renaissance representations of the Moor were vague, varied, inconsistent, and contradictory,” ranging from dark-skinned to white and from evil to noble (434). She calls Aaron “the consummate villain,” comparable to “Muly

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12 For a full explanation of the likely sources, see Bate’s introduction, pages 83-92.
13 For an excellent overview of the connotations of blackness in English culture, see David Barthelemy’s *Black Face, Maligned Race*, chapter one. For an analysis of Shakespeare’s possible sources for his Moors, see Emily C.
Hamet, the prototypical cruel black Moor” (434), from Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar* (1489). Aaron’s skin color “reinforces the idea culturally linked to that image, that blackness is not merely skin-deep” (442). Bartels does not, however, attribute Aaron’s physical alterity to the notion of correspondences.

While Aaron the Moor’s color and powers of speech allude to his predecessors for whom he is named, De Flores does not at all refer to a former character named De Flores. His name explains his most important activity. That is, De Flores’s most significant and wicked act is the deflowering of Beatrice-Joanna. His name is not his individual *title* as a character as much as it is his *type* of character. He is his name. Indeed, De Flores violates (through deliberate penetration) four different characters and one character, Beatrice-Joanna, at least twice: he stabs Alonzo (3.1) in order to win the privilege (as reluctantly granted as it was) of performing the implied action of his name upon the person of Beatrice-Joanna (3.5), for whom he then shoots Diaphanta (5.2). In the final scene of the play, he penetrates Beatrice-Joanna with a knife before turning the blade on himself. Before these final two stabbings, however, it is possible that De Flores violates Beatrice Joanna sexually once more while they are in the closet (5.3).

Both Aaron and De Flores comment directly on their own visages and their faces’ moral implications. As expected, Aaron, who seems to revel in his misdeeds, specifically praises his color for being indicative of his spiritual state: “Let fools do good and fair men call for grace, / Aaron will have his soul black like his face” (3. 1. 205-6). Aaron clearly associates his color with wickedness; for him, the correlation between his skin and his internal state is both appropriate and preferable. He sees himself as evilly colored, even though Lucius, Marcus, and Titus, who has just allowed Aaron to cut off his hand, obviously trust the word of Aaron

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regarding their chance to save Quintus and Martius from execution (3. 1. 151-200). The success of Aaron’s ruse hinges upon his ability to convince the Andronici that he is being forthright with them. According the notion of correspondences, Aaron’s blackness should make them suspicious; it does not, and they suffer for their naiveté.

De Flores is also conscious of how neoplatonic beliefs insinuate that he is morally corrupt. Despite this self-awareness, he remains optimistic of his chances for love: “I must confess my face is bad enough, / But I know far worse has better fortune, / And not endured alone, but doted on” (2. 1. 37-9). De Flores does not perceive himself to be marked as evil. Instead, he implies that while his face is a definite disadvantage, it is one that can still be “beloved beyond all reason” (2. 2. 84). He believes that if he is patient and enduring, then he will prevail (eventually) on Beatrice-Joanna.

Both Beatrice-Joanna and Tomazo also sense the danger and wickedness in De Flores. Just after De Flores makes his hopeful declaration in an aside (noted above) and exits, Beatrice-Joanna observes “I never see this fellow but I think / Of some harm towards me, danger’s in mind still; I scarce leave trembling off an hour after” (2. 1. 89-91). Beatrice-Joanna also likens De Flores to a “basilisk” (1. 1. 119), which is “a fabulous reptile that could kill by a glance” (Kinney 627n). While looking at De Flores, Tomazo declares him to be

\[
\ldots \text{ so foul,} \\
\text{One would scarce touch him with a sword he loved} \\
\text{And made account of; so most deadly venomous,} \\
\text{He would go near to poison any weapon} \\
\text{That should draw blood on him . . . . (5. 2. 15-19)}
\]
Other characters are clearly aware of a malevolence emanating from the person (and face) of De Flores that he himself misses.

Aaron, while addressing Tamora in the forest, refers to his “deadly-standing eye” (2. 2. 32); his look is “death-dealing, like the stare of the mythical cockatrice or the petrifying Gorgon” (Bate 170n). It is clear that the connection between immorality and the appearance of Aaron and De Flores is as integral part of the dynamics among the characters of the plays as it is for the audiences. As Bawcutt notes, De Flores is regularly associated with poison by other characters (xlvii), and Aaron himself, as noted earlier, happily correlates his color with wickedness: “Let fools do good, and fair men call for grace, / Aaron would have his soul black like his face” (3. 1. 205-6).

Like Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, De Flores displays impressive eloquence throughout *The Changeling*; he is at his best while claiming his reward for killing Piracquo (3. 4). Despite paltry logic, he succeeds in convincing Beatrice-Joanna that she is trapped in her agreement with him. He implores her to “[l]ook into [her] conscience,” and “read [him] there” (3. 4. 132). If their arrangement were discovered, it would be his word versus hers; she would probably be favored if it were to come to that. De Flores skillfully persuades her that nothing can be done to save her from him at this point: “Can you weep fate from its determined purpose?” (3. 4. 162). Finally, after rhetorically demolishing her protests, he sounds almost tender:

Come, rise, and shroud your blushes in my bosom;
Silence is one of pleasure’s best receipts.
Thy peace is wrought forever in this yielding.
‘Las, how the turtle pants! Thou’lt love anon
What thou so fear’st and faint’st to venture on. (3. 4. 167-171)
Of vital importance to the power of this scene (as well as the rest of the play) is the realization that De Flores’ face does not actually change. Beatrice-Joanna’s acquiescence to his wishes is facilitated by dexterous words, not a sense of duty that demands that she paid the agreed price. Indeed, it is both her need for a ready assassin as well as De Flores’ manipulation of connotations that lead Beatrice-Joanna to miss what De Flores wants as compensation for the murder of Piracquo (2. 2. 57-155). And it implies that she feels considerable guilt for her part in Piracquo’s death, so she does not challenge his assessment.

The “notion of correspondences” suggests that an individual’s appearance exhibits the soul. Thus a Renaissance audience would accurately appraise the physical alterity of De Flores and Aaron; they would know that each man is the villain that he looks to be. Moreover, each character is marked not only by appearance but also by language, both in the way he is named and how he uses language to extend his evil will.

**Visual and Moral Tension**

Earlier, I claimed that the most curious aspect of these two characters’ villainy is the fact that some of their fellow characters did not perceive it. All aspects of Aaron and De Flores seem to indicate complete spiritual corruption and wickedness. They look evil and, for the most part, their actions match their looks. Aaron advises on and initiates only wicked acts; De Flores does little but lust and stab.

This consistency, however, breaks down in the second half of the plays with a rupture in this behavioral pattern. Both Aaron and De Flores, after committing adultery, seem to gain a human dimension that is previously absent. Importantly, it is not the act of adultery that causes Aaron to reveal this aspect of himself, but the product of it: his son. De Flores does not seem
genuinely concerned with his conscience until after he has claimed his reward from Beatrice-Joanna and the ghost of Alonzo appears (4. 1). Both of these characters are prompted to display this hitherto unknown moral complexity by products of their misdeeds, not guilt arising from the acts themselves. The ghost of Alonzo prompts what appears to be De Flores’s first honest reaction of guilt. Aaron is not changed at all by his affair with Tamora; it is only when this relationship produces his “first-born son and heir” (4. 2. 94) that he reveals that he has the capacity to care for another human being.

This sympathy in Aaron has nothing to do with concern about Tamora or the fact that their adulterous relationship is now obvious and subject to the wrath of Saturninus. His subsequent actions—the murders of the nurse and midwife, the arrangement of a substitute child, his flight to the Goths, and his final comments on his life—are consistent with his past evil deeds. Eldred Jones notes that Aaron’s story about his countryman Muliteus and the white child is a lie meant to pacify Chiron and Demetrius and to point them away from his true plans (153). That Aaron tells this story simply to placate the panicked Goths seems entirely likely. He now acts out of love for the child, not simply for his own amusement, calling the child “a beauteous blossom” and “my flesh and blood” (4. 2. 72, 84). Interestingly, Chiron and Demetrius’s reactions to this new side of Aaron are surprise and anger. Previously, they had been indifferent about their mother’s relationship with Aaron; their worry is that this relationship has now produced a child. They did not disapprove of the affair until it produced a token that would endanger them and their mother. Chiron declares that he “blush[es] at this ignomy” (4. 2. 115), the birth of a black child. His comment provokes Aaron to deride their skin color: “Why, there’s the privilege your beauty bears. / Fie, treacherous hue, that will betray with a blushing / The close enacts and counsels of thy heart!” (4. 2. 116-18). They have misread Aaron’s actions up to
this point. It seems unlikely that, given Aaron’s apparent lack of fidelity, he ever acted on behalf of anyone but himself. They believed falsely that Aaron served their mother. His first speech in the play, delivered while alone on stage (1. 1. 500-524), confirms his allegiances. His intent all along has been to use his “imperial mistress” to “see [Saturninus’s] shipwreck and his commonweal’s” (1. 1. 512, 523), presumably for his own entertainment. The child has given him something else for which to enact his “policy and stratagem.” What seems to be the kindling of a moral flame in Aaron is actually love. It does not alter the nature of his actions, rather the motivation for them. His moral vacuity remains apparent, but his obvious feelings for his child belie Aaron’s total depravity.

The child leads Aaron to contradict directly the negativity associated with black skin. When the nurse first presents the child to Aaron, Demetrius, and Chiron, she calls it “[a] joyless, dismal, black, and sorrowful issue / . . . as loathsome as a toad / Amongst the fair-fac’d breeders of our clime” (4. 2. 66-68). Aaron’s responds indignantly, asking “’Zounds, ye whore, is black so base a hue?’” (4. 2. 71). Later in the scene, Aaron declares that “[c]oal-black is better than any other hue” (4. 2. 99). Aaron contradicts his (and the audience’s) moral alignments of blackness with evil, abandoning his earlier equation of his color and internal state (“Aaron will have his soul black like his face”) when he encounters this new life. He embraces a fresh reason for scheming and deceiving: the life of his son, whom he plans to raise “to be a warrior and command a camp” (4. 2. 180). Bartels calls Aaron “the one stable and unambiguous sign of Otherness” in the play (442); while there is no doubt that Aaron is an outsider regardless of who controls Rome, Bartels, appropriately enough, misjudges his stability. He is clearly ambiguous, for his feelings regarding his son expose a dimension of Aaron that is inconsistent with the Moor as he has been to this point. Aaron’s allegiance to his son aligns him more closely with the
audience than the Titus of the first act, who sacrifices the son of a pleading woman and kills his own son in anger. Aaron, on the other hand, does whatever is necessary to guarantee his son’s safety. His status as an mysterious outsider makes whatever he knows—and is willing to tell—important enough to Lucius to make the future emperor swear to raise Aaron’s child. After assuring himself of the child’s well-being, Aaron immediately returns to his former language and happily tells the story of the Andronici’s downfall and his part in it (5.1. 87-120).

De Flores’s moral vacillations are brought on by the procurement of his reward and are exemplified by his multiple allusions to his conscience. They are much more slippery and contradictory than Aaron’s bold change of focus. Both characters gain this new dimension to their personalities after sex. Unlike Aaron, De Flores seems to have an actual moral predicament, not simply a shift in allegiance. In his first comment on morality (which he utters after he has killed Alonzo), there is no question which is more significant for him: “My thoughts are at a banquet for the deed; / I feel no weight in’t, ‘tis but light and cheap / For the sweet recompense that I set down for’t” (3. 4.18-20). He does not have any qualms about what he has done. By mentioning that he should feel bad about killing Alonzo, De Flores could be attempting to convince himself that he does not feel guilty. This possibility, however, loses merit when one looks at De Flores’s lighthearted presentation of Alonzo’s finger that soon follows: “I’ve a token for you. / [. . .] But it was sent somewhat unwillingly, / I could not get the ring without the finger” (3. 4. 26, 27-8). There is no guilt in this offensive joke; nor is there any guilt in the rest of his declarations during this scene. De Flores knows of an interior force called a conscience, but he is untroubled by this entity himself. When the ghost of Piracquo passes over the stage at the beginning of Act IV, the stage directions say that De Flores is “smiling at the accident”; he stops smiling only after he sees the ghost (Bawcutt 67). He remains smugly
satisfied throughout Vermandero’s appointment of Alsemero as Beatrice-Joanna’s new husband. De Flores is then haunted by the ghost of the man he killed for Beatrice-Joanna; when it appears to him and Beatrice-Joanna just before he sets fire to the house, De Flores identifies the apparition as “a mist of conscience” and immediately declares that “[a]ll’s clear again” (5. 1. 60).

De Flores’s moral vacillations do not end there. When Tomazo challenges him, De Flores is once again haunted by guilt: “I cannot strike; I see his brother’s wounds / Fresh bleeding in his eye, like a crystal” (5. 5. 32-3). Here, De Flores is literally paralyzed by the pangs of conscience to which he has previously only alluded. There is no doubt now that De Flores has gained a sense of guilt. This sense of culpability, however, is absent from De Flores in the final scene of the play. When Alsemero confronts him about his murder of Alonzo and his relationship with Beatrice-Joanna, he boldly asserts responsibility for both (5. 3.104-7). Later in that same scene, after confessing his crimes to Vermandero, Tomazo, and the others, De Flores declares

\[
\ldots \text{her honour’s prize}
\]

\[
\text{Was my reward; I thank life for nothing}
\]

\[
\text{But that pleasure: it was so sweet to me}
\]

\[
\text{That I have drunk up all, left none behind}
\]

\[
\text{For any man pledge me. (5. 3. 168-171)}
\]

Once again, De Flores seems to be without guilt regarding his crimes. He does, however, clearly know where (in conventional religious terms) this depravity has led him, for he declares that he and Beatrice-Joanna “are now left in hell” (5. 3. 163).

The concept of a troubled conscience seems antithetical when it is attributed to a character that has shown little emotion outside lust. De Flores’s adoption of the language of
morality—regardless of its earnestness—seems incongruous with his utterances about “his will” (1. 1. 237) at the end of the first scene. This inconsistency in the character of De Flores could be the result of simple collaborative problems. Another possibility is more delicate: it could be that De Flores, when he looks solely at his first murder, feels enormous guilt about committing that single crime. When, however, he compares it to his reward, Beatrice-Joanna’s “honour,” the murder seems inconsequential. It is not that De Flores does not feel guilt; it is just that his remorse, while present, is negligible when he considers it alongside the pleasure he feels at the prospect (and subsequent memory) of Beatrice-Joanna’s body. De Flores feels that sex with Beatrice-Joanna was his life’s zenith; all problems that could (or should) arise as a result of this encounter are rendered inconsequential. This realignment is similar to Aaron’s reevaluation of his color after seeing his son. Aaron’s pleasure at seeing his son and De Flores’s sexual ecstasy eliminate their previous (a)moral certainty (Aaron) or insecurity (De Flores). In addition, the recognition of (an)other, be they mate (Beatrice-Joanna) or offspring (Aaron’s son) alters the villains’ isolation and renders them both morally complex and even sympathetic.

The “notion of correspondences” at work in these two plays adds crucial tension to already complex plays. The playwrights all invoke this correlation between appearance and interior in order to provide strong visual clues that signal specific tendencies in the characters of De Flores and Aaron. The playwrights then use the words and actions of these and other characters to test and complicate this moral judgment. Both Beatrice-Joanna and Tamora, two apparently beautiful women, end up coupled with their respective lovers in both licentiousness

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14 Middleton and Rowley wrote different sections of the play separately; the contradictory elements, therefore, could be a product of inconsistencies between the character as written by each contributor.

15 I consider only his first murder, since it is the only one that seems to haunt De Flores, both literally and figuratively.
and cruelty. Both De Flores and Aaron have (arguably) the most interesting and appealing lines in the plays. Clearly, Middleton, Rowley, and Shakespeare intended to challenge their audiences’ pre-conceived notions about judging a character solely by appearance.

An analysis of visual/moral implications is not limited to these particular characters. Aaron and De Flores are simply two of the most obvious examples of an evaluation of neoplatonism. Richard III offers a similar use of correspondence, while Iago and Othello initially subvert the expected association. Webster appears to have been investigating this very concept in the characters of Bosola and the Duchess. Alterity based on appearance can also extend to religion, as with Marlowe's Barabas, or to gender, as in the case of Lady Macbeth. Virtually any character that exists as Other because of race, sex, or physical abnormality in the world of a play can be analyzed for his or her moral and physical correlation. This corporeal assessment can lead to new perspectives on the important relationship between the body and the soul as writers of the early modern period examined, utilized, and interrogated it.

Reading De Flores as a character capable of such internal turmoil could be overly subtle. It requires enormous sophistication from the playwrights and makes De Flores into a truly psychologically complex figure. This reading is, however, the best way to account for the inconsistencies in De Flores’s declarations regarding his own guilt.
Chapter Three: “Outward Calm”: Recognizing Satan as Adversary

It would seem that the notion of correspondences operates in significantly different ways in an epic than in a drama, for the former is meant to be read, while the latter performed. Furthermore, Milton is obviously in control of the many allusions and allegories that he includes in *PL*; it is impossible to say with the same certainty that the playwrights are, by virtue of the composition process and their reasons for writing, as discernibly self-conscious as the poet attempting to “justify the ways of God to men” (*PL* 1. 26). Stressing this difference, of course, does not imply that the playwrights did not evoke this visual-moral correspondence intentionally; if they did, then they would seem to use this notion for different reasons. An audience will be able to identify more readily a villain who follows the visual-moral association. Furthermore, if a character emerges onstage for the first time with a scarred face, then, before that character has spoken a word, an early modern audience, responsive to the notion of correspondences, immediately begins to form a negative opinion of that character. Therefore, when De Flores and Aaron reinforce that opinion and eventually seem to challenge it through their words and actions, the change is more jarring for the audience, making for (potentially) better theater. Tension breeds entertainment.

Milton, on the other hand, does not share these immediate audience-response concerns. He does not have play-goers sitting in a theater and waiting to be entertained. The reading practices of this era, however, would affect Milton’s composition style and content, for the

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17 I am referring to the ideas posited by Stephen Orgel in his article “What is a Text?” (*Staging the Renaissance*, David Scott Kastan, Peter Stallybrass, eds. New York: Routledge, (1991). 83-87). Essentially, Orgel holds that due to the many individuals involved in the production of a play (actors, stage hands, patrons, etc), it is unlikely that the versions of early modern plays that survived are of the playwrights themselves. Therefore, it is inappropriate to attribute any particular aspect of the play to that individual writer.
practice of solitary, private reading was only just emerging (Chartier 124f). Public reading, especially in a family setting, was still the predominant manner of reading until the middle of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{18} Instead of being in a theater that is waiting to watch and hear a play, many of Milton’s audience members would sit and listen to someone read \textit{Paradise Lost} aloud. Milton presumably wrote this work aware that it would be read in this manner; essentially, this makes \textit{Paradise Lost}, like \textit{Titus Andronicus} or \textit{The Changeling}, a work that was meant to be and was performed. He must, however, be very careful when describing the physical appearances of the characters in \textit{PL} because of the extraordinary prominence of its source material and the possible blasphemy of creating his own version. He must construct these characters according to his own vision as well as within the tradition of theological scholarship that has examined and explained how these individuals look. Furthermore, these descriptions are integral for creating a successful text, for the words themselves must prompt the minds of readers to conjure an image of these characters. Many of these characters are already prominent in the imaginations of the Western world. Milton’s descriptions of them must to some degree engage the popular and traditional iconography of characters such as the angels, Satan, his followers, and Adam and Eve. Importantly, many of Milton’s characters, such as Belial, for instance, are relatively minor entities that have no real physical descriptions (Hughes 183).\textsuperscript{19} Milton’s descriptions of characters like Belial are primarily products of his imagination. At the same time, Milton layers meaning in his epic with as many classical and Christian references as possible, and these layers color the appearance of his characters. The primary function of these physical descriptions remains, however, spectacle. Descriptions of how devils and angels look, sound, and have sex are entertaining. Just because his text is not staged does not mean that it can operate without a

\textsuperscript{18} For more on these concepts, see “Judith Shakespeare Reading” in \textit{Shakespeare Quarterly} 47 (1996), pages 361-373.
visual dimension. Instead of capturing the reader with actual visual spectacle, it must appeal to the mind’s eye. Therefore, his audience concerns differ more in degree from those of the playwrights than in kind.

Merritt Hughes claims that *Paradise Lost* “is an epic built out of dramas” (173). Milton apparently wrote four sketches for a drama of the fall of man and the work only “became an epic only after years of reflection” (Hughes 176). Many other critics have also noted the numerous dramatic characteristics of the Christian epic. This evidence further affects a reading of Milton’s use of the neoplatonic notion of correspondences: when he wrote *Paradise Lost*, Milton had drama on the mind. An interrogation of the visual-moral association as early modern audiences understood it only adds to the entertaining tension of the work. Satan’s story lends itself to just such an examination, for his physical changes during the time period covered by *Paradise Lost* were a much-discussed and well-documented issue in both theological writing and iconography. As John Steadman explains, “[t]he contrast between the original beauty and subsequent hideousness of Lucifer and his angels was a familiar theme in medieval and Renaissance literature” (287).

For the most part, Milton limits his descriptions to the angels, Satan, and his followers. A number of minor characters, however, get short—but neoplatonically important—attention from the poet. The depictions of these characters reinforce the premise that Milton is correlating physical appearance with morality throughout the work. For example, King Chaos has a “visage incompos’d” (2.989). While Milton is trying to describe the indescribable formlessness of an insubstantial being, Chaos’s amorphous quality also indicates both his age and unstable morality.

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19 For more on this character, see “Belial” in *A Milton Encyclopedia* (1978-83), edited by William B. Hunter.  
He does, after all, support Satan’s mission, saying that “[h]avoc and spoil and ruin are my gain” (2.1009).

Through the first part of the epic, the poet also describes Satan’s followers and the individuals that he meets on his way to Eden according to the visual-moral association. Milton claims that Satan’s followers have “visages and stature as of Gods” (1.570). Among his minions are Dagon, who is “upward Man / And downward Fish” (1.462-3), “Mammon, the least erected Spirit that fell / From Heav’n, for ev’n in Heav’n his looks and thoughts / Were always downward bent” (1.679-81), and Belial, “a fairer person lost not Heaven,” but in whom “all was false and hollow” (2.109-110, 112). Belial is especially interesting from a neoplatonic perspective because of his apparently empty beauty.  He looks and sounds beautiful, but he ultimately promotes lazy resignation: he points out the futility of fighting an omnipotent opponent. He then suggests that they stay in Hell and make themselves as comfortable as possible there (2.119-225). After Belial finishes speaking, the narrator dismisses his ideas as appeals for “ignoble ease, and peaceful sloth, / Not peace” (2.228-9). This narrator could be judging Belial’s ideas in two ways: first, the narrator could be commenting from the perspective of one who is both supporting action from the Fallen and one who knows that action is inevitable; second, the narrator could be implying that the truly repentant action would be to go to Heaven and ask for forgiveness instead of waiting on God to take the initiative. Belial’s appearance, proposition, and subsequent dismissal by the narrator all challenge the reader to consider simultaneously the perspective of the narrator, Belial’s traditional associations with

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21 For an excellent examination of the many references to and discussions of Satan’s various forms, see Part VI of John Steadman’s Milton’s Epic Characters (1959), entitled “Satan’s Degradation,” pages 281-315.
22 Augustine sees Belial’s emptiness as the natural end for beauty; it is simply a veneer that covers a lack of substance. See Book 10 of his Confessions (400).
emptiness, and the words of a fallen angel who appears and sounds reasonable. Of course, everyone knows what happens, so, while they do have theologically-interesting implications, Belial’s appeals are, in the end, simply entertaining for the audience.

Satan’s offspring are both highly referential and important in discerning how Milton uses the notion of correspondences. His daughter, Sin, springs Athena-like from Satan’s head when he first considers rebellion (2. 757-8). Satan has no memory of this; she tells him that this is what happened. Through her, Milton gives a substantial physical description of Satan. She says that when she first emerged, she was “[l]ikest to thee [Satan] in shape and count’rnance bright, / Then shining heav’nly fair” (2. 756-57). Interestingly, the other angels “recoil’d afraid / At first” from Sin and named her (2. 759-60). According to Sin, after they became accustomed to her, she “with attractive graces won / The most averse, thee [Satan] chiefly” (2. 762-3). Sin is saying that she was at one point welcome in Heaven. She claims that it was at this point that Satan began to “[him]self in me thy [Satan] perfect image viewing / Becam’st enamor’d” (2. 765-66). Satan, appropriately, fell in love with himself. He impregnated her, and after the war and their banishment, she gave birth to Death (2. 781-89). Her change at the birth of Death into a half woman / half snake with a stinger could allude to that which Satan will become in Paradise and then in Book 10 as well as his most important transformation in Book 4.

Greek mythology was not Milton’s only source for his account of Sin’s creation. In James 1:12-15, James declares

12: Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. 13: Let no man say when he is

\footnote{Again, for more on this, see \textit{A Milton Encyclopedia} (see note 15 for bibliographic information).}
tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

14: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. 15: Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. 24

This translation highlights the obvious sexual undertone that dominates the original Greek text. 25

Milton was aware of these verses and fashioned the birth of Sin and her son Death accordingly (Hughes 250n). Therefore, Milton personifies and genders Satan’s tragic flaw while simultaneously making that individual one of Satan’s victims. He then foreshadows Satan’s most significant physical transformation through the personification of his sin.

Satan’s Degeneration and Transformation

Milton’s most thorough physical and “mental” description, interestingly enough, is of Satan (Carey 133). He seems to be the most psychologically complex character in PL, leading some to declare “that he is superior in character to Milton’s God” (Carey 132). Through this character, Milton provides his most intricate interrogation of the notion of correspondences.

According to Milton, angels have the ability to change their shapes. Milton first mentions this power in conjunction with Raphael in Book 5, when, before visiting Adam and Eve to warn them of Satan’s presence, he “to his proper shape returns” (5. 276). Milton fully explains this power in Book 6, saying that

Spirits that live throughout

Vital in every part, [. . .]

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24 This translation is from the King James Version of The Bible.
25 I would like to thank Nathan Gilmour for his translation of this passage.
They Limb themselves, and color, shape or size
Assume, as likes them best, condense or rare. (6. 344-5, 352-3)  
Satan, as an angel, is able to assume whatever shape he chooses. He does so in order to gain access to Paradise as well as to get close enough to Eve to whisper in her ear (4.800). Satan, however, apparently cannot control some aspects of his appearance, for, in Book 4, his face and shape are altered by his commitment to evil.

Satan’s appearance seems remains relatively unchanged from his time in Heaven to Book 4. After all, Sin and King Chaos both recognize him. According to the narrator, after their expulsion from Heaven, Satan still

above the rest

In shape and gesture proudly eminent

Stood like a Tow’r; his form had not yet lost

All her Original brightness, nor appear’d

Less than Arch-Angel ruin’d, and th’ excess

Of Glory obscured. (1. 589-94)

This epic simile also follows the notion of correspondences, for since Satan has not yet fully resigned himself to evil (as he will in Book 4), his face does not yet fully look the part. For now, along with his diminished angelic glow, Satan’s face only has “[d]eep scars of Thunder” (1. 601), a remnant of the war in Heaven.

In Book 3, Satan fools Uriel, the angel charged with watching over Paradise, by changing his appearance so that he seems to be a simple angel “from the Choirs of Cherubim” (3. 666) who has come to see “[a]ll these his [God’s] wondrous works, but chiefly Man” (3. 663).
Apparently, Satan can still change his appearance to look like an ordinary angel. Uriel allows Satan to enter Paradise, and Milton accounts for Uriel’s mistake, saying

   So spake the false dissembler unperceiv’d;
   For neither Man nor Angel can discern
   Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks
   Invisible, except to God alone,
   By his permissive will, through Heav’n and Earth:
   And oft though wisdom wake, suspicion sleeps
   At wisdom’s Gate, and to simplicity
   Resigns her charge, while goodness thinks no ill
   Where no ill seems. (3. 681-89)

The only indicator of “ill” that Uriel, “the sharpest-sighted Spirit of all in Heav’n” (3. 691), can recognize is visual. Milton makes all of God’s creations dependent on the notion of correspondences for the ability to discern morality. Because Satan appears to be normal, Uriel’s extraordinary sense of sight cannot distinguish Satan’s internal state from his outward appearance.

This episode relates several important points about the world that Milton has constructed. First, as mentioned above, no creature other than God can recognize hypocrisy—that is, a discrepancy between the words and exterior of an individual and that same character’s internal state—without God-given right reason. All but God and those given this ability by Him rely on outward manifestations of internal corruption. Uriel, apparently, has not been given God’s “permission” to see through hypocrisy. Next, Satan, despite being on a mission to corrupt Man, has not lost the shape-changing powers that he had in Heaven. This does not correlate with the
changes of other fallen characters such as Sin. It does, however, align Satan with another of his followers: Belial, “a fairer person lost not heaven,” who, as noted above, argued in Hell that they were fighting a war with a foregone conclusion. Belial could look in Hell just as he did in Heaven. Milton also says that Mammon still looks—literally—as he did in heaven: down, and King Chaos and Sin recognize Satan. The accounts of these characters, when considered alongside Satan’s deception of Uriel, indicate that the Fallen have not changed significantly in appearance because of their rebellion. Of course, why would they need to display visual signs of their corruption? The notion of correspondences indicates that these outward, visible signs are for the benefit of those around the spiritually corrupt individual; who are the Fallen going to see in Hell other than other individuals who are also spiritually corrupt?

Furthermore, the success of this deception indicates that Satan has not fully realized his own corruption. His soliloquy in Book 4, which was originally part of one of Milton’s outlines for a drama of the fall (Carey 134), supports this reading. This curious speech has been the subject of active critical debate for some time. While the soliloquy itself deserves attention, Satan’s subsequent decision and, more specifically, the physical transformation that accompanies it, demand a critical look they have not received. Essentially, Satan’s decision to carry out his plot to corrupt Adam and Eve prompts a change in his visage. After declaring “Farewell Hope, and with Hope farewell Fear, / Farewell Remorse: all Good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my Good” (4. 108-110), Milton notes a physical change in Satan:

Thus, while he spake, each passion dimm’d his face,

Thrice chang’d with pale, ire, envy and despair,

Which marr’d his borrow’d visage, and betray’d

26 For more on this debate, please see John Carey’s essay “Milton’s Satan” in The Cambridge Companion to Milton (1989), edited by Dennis Danielson.
Him counterfeit, if any eye beheld.

For heav’nly minds form such distempers foul

Are clear. (4. 114-119)

Finally, Satan’s face matches his soul. His “borrowed visage,” that of an ordinary angel, cannot hide the change in Satan. Notably, Satan had to decide consciously to defy God again before this physical change could happen. Furthermore, Satan had to be in a location in which other characters would need to recognize his corruption; that is, he needed to be in Eden or Heaven, the only places in the universe that Satan would encounter those whose souls—and, therefore, faces—would look radically different from his.

Satan regains control of himself, and as soon as he does so,

Each perturbation smooth’d with outward calm,

Artificer of fraud; and was the first

That practis’d falsehood under saintly show,

Deep malice to conceal, couch’t with revenge[]. (4. 120-22)

Thus, Satan believes that he has now masked his inner state. Indeed, his face is no longer twisted with “pale, ire, envy, and despair,” but his resolution permanently marks him. Steadman claims that this episode is part of Satan’s “gradual degeneration”; he calls this particular moment “the partial obscuration of his [Satan’s] brightness with his fall” (297). Fish explains that, “Satan’s ‘shape’ like his mind, is now an extension of his place” (339). Satan is unaware that his declaration has transformed him so dramatically. During his soliloquy and unbeknownst to him, Uriel “on th’ Assyrian mount / Saw him disfigur’d” and “gestures fierce / He [Satan] mark’d and mad demeanor” (4. 126-9). Uriel, who was previously deceived by Satan’s looks, now watches
as Satan’s soul deforms his careful façade. Uriel then reports to Gabriel about the angel that he had seen and “discerned his looks / Alien from Heav’n, with passions foul obscur’d” (4.570-1).

Gabriel sends Ithuriel and Zephon to locate this individual; they find him in the form of a toad, whispering into Eve’s ear as she sleeps (4. 800). After Ithuriel touches Satan with his spear, Satan “started up in his own shape the Fiend. / Back stepp’d those two fair Angels half amaz’d / So sudden to behold the grisly King” (4. 819-21). Importantly, it is the narrator who calls Satan “the Fiend” and “grisly King” in these lines, for only the narrator knows that Satan’s looks have been altered by his soul. Neither Ithuriel nor Zephon know him immediately; they ask Satan “Which of those rebel Spirits adjudg’d to Hell / Com’st thou, escap’d thy prison, and transform’d . . .?” (4. 823-24, my emphasis). Satan has, because of the spear’s touch, “return[ed] / Of force to [his] own likeness” (4.812-3). Satan’s “likeness” was changed by his resolution, so he no longer resembles the way he looked in Heaven, in Hell, or at the gates of Paradise. Therefore, when he springs up “transform’d” into his new “true” shape, no one who knew Satan before can recognize him. The villain, unaware of this drastic change, wonders aloud why they do not recognize him (4. 827-833). Zephon replies:

Think not, revolted Spirit, thy shape the same,
Or undiminsh brightness, to be known
As when thou stood’st in Heav’n upright and pure;
That Glory then, when thou no more wast good,
Departed from thee, and thou resembl’st now
Thy sin and place of doom obscure and foul. (4.835-840)

Satan’s resolution has altered him physically. Due to the drastic change in Satan’s shape, brightness, and, apparently, visage, Zephon cannot identify the most infamous angel in the
universe. Zephon’s words also allude to how Satan resembles his “sin”—that is, both his rebellion and his daughter. She told him that it was her resemblance to him that led him to “become enamor’d” with her in Book 2. Now, she resembles him again. Also, Zephon’s comments recall Satan’s declaration during his soliloquy in Book 4 regarding his relationship to Hell: “Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell” (4. 75). Satan himself then

. . . Felt how awful goodness is, and saw

Virtue in her shape how lovely, saw, and pin’d

His loss; but chiefly to find here observ’d

His lustre visibly impair’d.” (4. 849-50)

Satan’s appearance—his shape and angelic glow—now corresponds with his soul. He now recognizes the change within himself. This is Satan’s most important transformation, for it is here that Satan completes his change from Lucifer to Satan.

Steadman has a different reading. He holds that Satan’s most significant transformation does not occur until Book 10 when God changes Satan and all his followers into snakes (Steadman 281; PL 10.504-547). In doing so, Steadman claims that Milton was breaking with his theological and literary predecessors who, for the most part, held that this change occurred around the time of his fall (Steadman 294). Steadman, however, misreads the nature of the change in Satan’s appearance; certainly, Milton says that Satan disguised himself with “outward calm,” but Ithuriel and Zephon’s failure to recognize him suggests a more drastic change in Satan. Gabriel’s identification of Satan by “his gait / And fierce demeanor” (4.870-1), not by his visage, supports this reading. Steadman’s reading cannot account for Uriel’s initial failure to recognize Satan, the Adversary’s change in Book 4, his confusion at Ithuriel and Zephon’s treatment at the moment of his capture, or his “gait” being the characteristic by which Gabriel
identifies him. Satan’s most important physical change is not enacted upon him in a divine act by God; instead, he brings it upon himself through hubristic petulance.

Satan’s face does not need to change for the narrative to work. Nor does he need to have the feelings of self-doubt that he exhibits during his speech in Book IV, yet Milton includes these seemingly extraneous elements. They are, of course, part of Milton’s project to test his readers’ ability to read through their God-given right reason, but Satan’s degeneration and moral transformation also serve another purpose. These episodes challenge readers’ preconceived notions about Satan’s actions and looks; their novelty makes them interesting, unexpected, and highly entertaining moments in the work. The story of the Fall of man is one that everyone knows; therefore, it is difficult to surprise an audience with the basic parts of the story. These products of Milton’s imagination, like other moments of artistic license, make the story new and exciting. Without these elements, Milton would simply be retelling a well-known narrative in a manner that neither challenging nor really entertaining.
Chapter Four: Vindicated, Victorious Villains

“The subject and genre of *Paradise Lost* made it virtually impossible to avoid conceding the devil a major, albeit temporary, victory” (Steadman 295).

Steadman has highlighted a central point for an examination of Satan, Aaron, and De Flores in conjunction with the neoplatonic notion of correspondences. In short, these characters are the only ones who end the narratives even vaguely satisfied with their fates. Everyone else (with the notable exception of God) in the works has suffered—and will continue to suffer—because of the ill deeds of Satan, Aaron, and De Flores. The audience ultimately sees all of the villains punished, but their successes remain troubling.

W. H. Auden also writes on this “theme of a triumphant villain” (Auden 247) in his essay “The Joker in the Pack.” Through *Othello*’s Iago, Auden examines what characteristics comprise a villain as well as how such a character can be so interesting. Auden’s basic definition of a villain is “a malcontent, a person with a general grudge against life and society” (247). This description certainly fits Aaron, De Flores, and Satan; all three have some deep-seated distaste for those around them and their stations in these worlds. Auden holds that this resentment makes these characters “of dramatic interest” (259). While the characters’ enactments of this hostility stand as unsettling, it is their success, despite their obvious depravity, that makes them both disturbing and compelling.
Auden claims that the villain’s greatest moment is when he or she reveals his or her successes (248, 250). These form climactic moments in *Titus Andronicus*, *The Changeling*, and *Paradise Lost*. Aaron speaks for over forty lines in Act 5, cataloging his evil acts and declaring his contempt for everything good (5.1.87, 89-93, 95-6, 98-120, 124-44). De Flores remains true to his name in the final scene of his play, stabbing Beatrice-Joanna before declaring that

“... her [Beatrice-Joanna’s] honor’s prize
Was my reward; I thank life for nothing
But that pleasure. It was so sweet to me
That I have drunk up all, left none behind
For any man to pledge me. (5.3. 167-71)

He then stabs and kills himself, denying Alsemoro’s final wish that De Flores be kept alive “for further tortures” (5.3. 171). De Flores has removed the only eligible woman of noble blood in the play. His success is total, for he obviously feels that the prize was worth the eternal price.

In Book 10, Satan’s speeches to Sin and Death on his way back to Hell and his minions in Hell affirm his satisfaction with his successful quest. In order to punish him within the chronology of *Paradise Lost*, Milton locates Satan’s final transformation to a snake in Book 10 (504-84). Despite the fact that the audience knows that the Son of God will eventually redeem them, Satan is still integral in facilitating the fall of Adam and Eve. His triumph, while short-lived, nonetheless stands within the time period that *Paradise Lost* covers. In *Titus Andronicus* and *The Changeling*, Aaron and De Flores are the only characters that, in the end, get everything that they want. All are damned; only Satan seems to care about this punishment at all, and he committed himself to his evil despite full knowledge of the consequences. Triumph for these characters involves the revelation of knowledge. Aaron knows why the Andronici have suffered;
De Flores knows why Alonzo disappeared and, of course, Beatrice-Joanna. Satan knows that God will recognize his part in Adam and Eve’s fall.

Satan’s self-awareness suggests a point on which these characters differ in degree, not in kind: agency. All three willingly commit themselves to misdeeds with varying amounts of concern for the consequences. Aaron is bad and enjoys it. He makes no attempts to apologize for his depravity; instead, he laments not doing more evil, declaring,

Tut, I have done a thousand dreadful things
As willingly as one would kill a fly
And nothing grieves me heartily indeed
But that I cannot do ten thousand more. (5. 1. 141-44)

Upon securing his son’s safety, Aaron seems to return to his position as “the prototypical black Moor.” He repeats his regret in the final scene of the play and does not mention his son after getting Lucius to swear to protect him; while announcing his feelings during these final moments, the Moor seems to have forgotten his son altogether when he announces “If one good deed in all my life I did / I do repent it from my very soul” (5. 3. 188-9). Through Aaron, Shakespeare has interrogated—but ultimately reinforced—the notion of correspondences. Aaron looks as evil as he is.

De Flores is more morally problematic than Aaron, who can be dismissed as depraved due to his godlessness. Furthermore, Aaron’s racial alterity would probably make him the least disturbing of the three for an early modern audience, for he represents Other for the people watching in much the way he does for the other characters in the play. Middleton and Rowley create a character who commits his sins knowing that he will be damned for them. He actually uses the language of sin to woo Beatrice-Joanna, telling her “You lost your first condition, and I
challenge you, / As peace and [sic] innocency has turned you out, / And made you one with me” (3.4. 138-40, my emphasis). De Flores’s depravity seems more profound because he actually admits it readily, he uses it to get what he wants, and he is not as removed from the members of the audience as a Moor or the Adversary. Ultimately, De Flores, like Aaron and Satan, reinforces the notion of correspondences; his moral awareness is overrun by his desire to live out his name.

Satan is the Adversary and knows it, although his fate is not determined, apparently, until he resolves himself in Book 4. Satan’s evil nature is not the surprising and compelling point; instead, audiences would be shocked by the very fact that he had to go through such a process to fully realize his depravity. Milton constructs Satan’s moral aspect in order to challenge further an audience’s ability to discern immorality behind a façade of epic similes; the invocation of the notion of correspondences actually signals to the audience that Satan has now become the character that they recognize from Genesis. Before his resolution, Satan derived from a precarious and uncomfortable conflation of epic hero and arch-fiend.

The moral instability of the three narratives’ worlds challenges audiences to make concrete, specific moral claims regarding any of the characters, including the “villains.” Satan would seem to be the obvious exception to this vagueness, but Milton undercuts this assertion through Paradise Lost’s first four books by making Satan the attractive focus of the story; he is simultaneously the epic hero and the Adversary. While Titus is obviously the hero of his play, he kills one son out of anger (1.1.295) and kills his own daughter for being raped (5.3.46), rendering his status as heroic questionable. The Changeling has no morally redeeming characters. If a character in this play is not in some way morally reprehensible, then he or she is, like Alonzo and Vermandero, buffoonish.
Yet, even in these volatile worlds, the corruption of Aaron, De Flores, and Satan stands above the rest. All three of these characters initiate a substantial number of the misdeeds within the narratives, with Satan’s actions seeming to be the most metaphysically damaging. In the worlds of the plays, however, Aaron and De Flores equal the havoc created by the archangel; like Satan before them, both destroy the lineages of extremely prominent families. The notion of correspondences complicates the triumphant villain theme by adding a culturally-biased interpretative layer to an already morally-volatile narrative world. It is crucial to making their success appalling, for it causes everyone in the audience wonder why the characters in the works could not see that which is literally written on Aaron and De Flores’s faces and what Adam was warned of by Raphael in Book 6 of *Paradise Lost*.

A distinction must be made between Satan and the other two villains regarding the notion of correspondences. Unlike Aaron and De Flores, Satan, as an angel, can and does actually change shape and appearance because of his depravity. In Satan, Milton shows the clear causality for the physical change, not simply correspondence. The very basis of the notion of correspondences is, of course, causal, for why else, according to this correlation, would a character have a hump or a scarred face? But because Satan is an angel—and, more importantly, the fallen angel—Milton has an opportunity, unlike the playwrights, to show an actual transformation. Aaron and De Flores, being human characters, cannot change visibly in this manner. Milton adds Satan’s curious transformation in Book 4 in order to clearly define the moment that Satan resolved himself to his chosen quest. Up to this episode, Milton’s narrative has clearly highlighted Satan over all other characters. After this change, the focus of Milton’s epic shifts to an account of the Fall and away from the internal vacillations of the Adversary. All of these characters demonstrate their depravity through their actions and words; only Milton
could show a transformation because of the notion of correspondences. All three, however, are subject to forces beyond themselves, for all three are physically different because of their souls, not because they choose to be.

These four writers take what could be straightforward, archetypal evil figures and use particular tenets of neoplatonism to challenge audiences and characters to discern the true internal states of these villains. In doing so, the writers have added a level of exigent sophistication to their works. Without their interrogations of the notion of correspondences, the plays threaten to become fairly nondescript with pedestrian, stock characters. Without Satan’s moral questions, *Paradise Lost* loses its most complex and interesting character. Engaging the notion of correspondences in the villains aligns the audiences with characters within the narratives and challenges them to literally see through the impressive, attractive language and discern the true nature of these depraved souls. The writers’ direct engagement—and eventual reinforcement—of the audiences’ moral judgment, while ideologically challenging, has another, perhaps more important, function: entertainment.
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