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NEW MERMAIDS

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE
THE JEW OF MALTA

EDITED BY JAMES R. SIEMON

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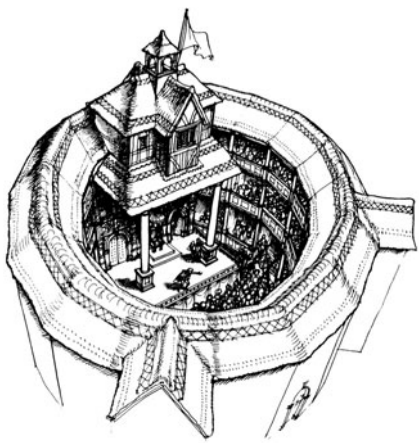
NEW MERMAIDS



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by C. Walter Hodges

NEW MERMAIDS

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The White Devil
The Witch
The Witch of Edmonton
A Woman Killed with Kindness
A Woman of No Importance
Women Beware Women

NEW MERMAIDS

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

THE JEW OF MALTA

Edited by James R. Siemon
Boston University

BLOOMSBURY
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Methuen Drama
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

75 Fifth Avenue
New York
NY 10010
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

First New Mermaid edition published 1966

Second edition 1994

This third edition with a new introduction published 2009

Reprinted by Bloomsbury Methuen Drama 2011, 2013

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: PB: 978-0-7136-7766-9
ePDF: 978-1-4081-4489-3
ePub: 978-1-4081-4490-9

A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Printed and bound in Great Britain

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the help and encouragement of colleagues, friends and students. From early to late, Professor Brian Gibbons offered suggestions and enthusiastic support. Professor David Bevington shared his knowledge and insight at a particularly important time in the evolution of the project. Professor Emily Bartels read over the introduction and generously allowed me to read her work in progress. And, with characteristic generosity, Professor William Carroll provided help and prevented more than a few errors. Students in my classes in Renaissance drama at Boston University provided a never-failing stimulus to further thinking about *The Jew of Malta* and, particularly, to consideration of the issues it raises for our own day.

JAMES R. SIEMON

FOR
RUTH A. SIEMON
AND
RALPH M. SIEMON

INTRODUCTION

The Author

In 1564 Christopher Marlowe was born to the Canterbury family of John Marlowe, a shoe-maker who would hold positions of professional and civic authority, but who was sued for nonpayment of debts and rent.[1] Marlowe entered King's School in 1578, and won a scholarship. In 1580 he enrolled at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, with an Archbishop Parker scholarship. He received the B.A. in 1584; thereafter, his absences occasioned rumours that he had fled to the Catholic seminary in Rheims. The Privy Council defended him, ordering the granting of his M.A. in 1587, insisting that he had done 'good service . . . touching the benefit of his country'. He was evidently involved in international intrigue at the very highest official level, but he was also writing poetry and drama. Marlowe's translations of Ovid's *Amores* and Lucan's *Civil Wars* and *Dido Queen of Carthage* (based on Virgil's *Aeneid*) were probably written before his move to London and the enormous success of *Tamburlaine I* and *II* in 1587–8.

Between 1587 and his murder on 30 May 1593, Marlowe wrote four more plays and the epyllion *Hero and Leander*, saw *Tamburlaine* printed (1590) and got arrested five times. He shared a room with the playwright Thomas Kyd in 1591, and by February 1592 *The Jew of Malta*, which frequently echoes Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, was being performed. No record authenticates performance of *Edward II* before the end of 1592 or of *Doctor Faustus* before Marlowe's death. *The Jew of Malta* (1591?) probably follows *Tamburlaine* in composition and precedes the other two plays. In January 1593 Philip Henslowe, financier of the Rose theatre, records *The Massacre at Paris* as 'ne', i.e., new to performance or newly revised.

Marlowe was arrested in 1589 for involvement in the quarrel that led to the killing of William Bradley by the poet Thomas Watson. During his brief imprisonment, he became acquainted with the gentleman counterfeiter and Catholic activist, John Poole. Marlowe was arrested three times in 1592: in January at the report of co-conspirator Richard Baines, for counterfeiting in the Dutch town of Flushing, a centre of espionage; in May for threatening a constable and beadle in London; and in September for assault in Canterbury. No substantial penalty resulted. Lord Treasurer

1 What follows is based on David Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, 2004; David Riggs, 'The Poet in the Play: Life and Art in *Tamburlaine* and *The Jew of Malta*' in *Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson: New Directions in Biography*, ed. Takashi Kozuka and J.R. Mulryne, 2006, 205–24; William Urry, *Christopher Marlowe and Canterbury*, 1988. See also Constance Brown Kuriyama, *Christopher Marlowe: A Renaissance Life*, 2002.

Burghley released him from the capital counterfeiting charge. However, amid concerns about religious division, the Privy Council ordered Marlowe's arrest in 1593. Having been charged with blasphemy and atheism by Thomas Kyd (himself undergoing investigation and torture) and the informer Richard Baines, Marlowe appeared on 20 May before the Council and was ordered to report daily.[2] On 30 May he was invited to a Deptford tavern by three men, two of whom had participated in clandestine activities. He was stabbed through the eye socket, dying instantly. The coroner's jury ruled his killer, Ingram Frizer, acted in self-defence. Marlowe was buried 1 June 1593, at the Church of St Nicholas, Deptford. Frizer received a royal pardon two weeks later.

By the time of his death, Marlowe had acquired a wide, but dichotomous, reputation. Despite successful plays and acclaim from George Peele (who called him the 'Muses darling'), appreciation for him, like that exhibited in *The Second Part of the Return from Parnassus*, is mixed with strong moral disapproval:

> *Marlowe* was happy in his buskined muse,
> Alas unhappy in his life and end.
> Pitty it is that wit so ill should dwell,
> Wit lent from heaven, but vices sent from hell.[3]

Contemporaries invoked atheism, disrespect for authority, cruelty, violence and Machiavellian policy in characterizing the man. These terms suggest aspects of Marlowe's works – cosmic irony, sardonic humour, intellectual aspiration, spectacular violence, impassioned verse and detached analysis – which have won four hundred years of increasingly positive response.[4]

2 See Paul H. Kocher C*hristopher Marlowe: A Study of His Thought, Learning, and Character*, 1946, pp. 33–68; and R.B. Wernham, 'Christopher Marlowe at Flushing in 1592', *English Historical Review* 91 (1976), 344–5.

3 Cited from Millar Maclure, ed., *Marlowe: The Critical Heritage 1588–1896*, 1979, p. 46.

4 Annotated bibliographies of Marlowe criticism include: Jonathan F.S. Post, 'Recent Studies in Marlowe (1968–1976)', *ELR* 7 (1977), 382–99; Kenneth Friedenreich, *Christopher Marlowe: An Annotated Bibliography since 1950* (1979); Ronald Levao, 'Recent Studies in Marlowe (1977–1986)', *ELR* 18 (1988), 329–42; Bruce E. Brandt, *Christopher Marlowe in the Eighties: An Annotated Bibliography*, 1992; Patrick Cheney, 'Recent Studies in Marlowe (1987–1998)', *ELR* 31 (2001), 288–328.

Date and Sources

The Prologue mentions the Duke of Guise (assassinated December 1588) as 'now' dead; Philip Henslowe's account of daily productions at the Rose playhouse, his 'diary', records performances beginning 26 February 1592. Composition is thought to have taken place between 1589 and 1591. Henslowe records some thirty-six performances between 26 February 1592 and 21 June 1596, allowing for an interim from July 1592 to December 1593 during which the London theatres were closed. This indicates that the play was initially popular: ten profitable performances between February and June 1592, revival in the month of playing allowed during the closing, and performances in 1594, 1596 and in 1601, when Henslowe records purchasing 'divers thinge[s] for the Jewe of malta'.[5]

Unlike Marlowe's other plays, this has no single source.[6] However, *The Jew of Malta* is filled with allusions and engages in dialogues with contemporary issues and discourses. History contributed the famous 1565 Turkish siege of Christian Malta that loosely provides the setting along with potentially interesting ambiguities. The failed siege of Malta was understood as a victory of Christianity over Islam, but it also occasioned rumours of financial complicity between Jews and Turks, responding to aggressive raiding by Malta's Knights that had made Malta an infamous market for enslaved captives.[7] Some have asserted relationships between Barabas and a historical Jew, either Joseph Nasi, a Jewish financier, appointed Duke of the Island of Naxos by Selim, son of Sultan Suleiman II, and an agent of the Ottoman empire; or David Passi, a self-serving double-agent of Constantinople, whose greed, betrayal and sudden downfall were the stuff of 1591 reports from Venice.[8]

Jews who practiced their faith had been banished from England since the thirteenth century and would not be readmitted, except as converts, until 1656, but *The Jew of Malta* draws upon widely-shared discourses of European anti-semitism. Although there is some evidence of covert worship among London's Jewish population, the inherited English prejudice, unlike its Continental varieties, lacked a genuine local object upon which to vent itself.[9] Nevertheless, the English stage frequently referred to Jews

5 See *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. RA. Foakes, 2nd edition 2002, p. 170.

6 For sources and analogues, see *Christopher Marlowe: The Plays and their Sources*, ed. Vivien Thomas and William Tydeman, 1994; rpt. 1999, 295–337.

7 On the siege, see Brian Blouet, *The Story of Malta*, 1967; for rumours that Suleiman financed the siege with loans from Jewish bankers, see p. 53; compare Cecil Roth, 'The Jews of Malta', *TJHSE* 12 (1928–31), 187–251, p. 216.

8 For references to Nasi, alias Joao or Juan Miguez, see Cecil Roth, *The House of Nasi: The Duke of Naxos*, 1948.

9 The category of 'Jew' in sixteenth-century England is a complex construct, with political,

and Judaism, and, in fact, the prosecution of Queen Elizabeth's Jewish physician, Dr Roderigo Lopez, in 1594, may have contributed to the popularity of *The Jew of Malta* and of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1598?).[10] No surviving Elizabethan dramas treat Jewish protagonists as extensively. Robert Wilson's morality play, *The Three Ladies of London* (1584?), provides an exceptionally 'positive' portrayal which is perhaps relevant because its Turkish Jew exposes money-grubbing Christian hypocrisy. The language of the stage – like that of Elizabethan culture generally – routinely associated Jews with diabolical opposition to Christianity, cruelty (even ritual cannibalism and mass poisoning), treachery, usury, avarice, legalism, sharp practice, tribalism and physical repulsiveness.[11] There is also a larger European context derived from contacts with Jews who traded, gathered intelligence and were sometimes associated with Ottoman interests in the Mediterranean region.[12] Marlowe's play draws on the anti-Semitic inheritance as well as contemporary suspicions in constructing Barabas, but the ends to which this material is put will require further discussion.

The play's other sorts of allusions have varied sources. Its many proverbs, like its classical allusions, are always loaded with implication; for

theological, economic and moral dimensions. Professing Jews were banished from England from 1290 to 1656, but so-called 'new Christians' or Marranos – outward converts, usually of Portuguese origin – inhabited England throughout the intervening period. On Jewish communities, some apparently practicing their religion secretly, see Lucien Wolf, 'Jews in Elizabethan England', *TJHSE* 11 (1924–7), 1–91; Cecil Roth, 'The Middle Period of Anglo-Jewish History (1290–1655) Reconsidered', *TJHSE* 19 (1955–9), 1–12, and his *History of the Jews in England*, 1964; Harold Pollins, *Economic History of the Jews in England*, 1982; David S. Katz, *The Jews in the History of England, 1485–1850*, 1994; compare the case described by Alan Stewart in 'Mediterranean Trade' (*Remapping the Mediterranean World*, ed. Goram V. Stanivukovic, 2007, pp. 171–3). For positive Elizabethan attitudes towards Judaism, see Theodore K. Rabb, 'The Stirrings of the 1590s and the Return of the Jews to England', *TJHSE* 26 (1974–8), 26–33; also David S. Katz, *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England 1603–1655*, 1982.

10 See John Gwyer, 'The Case of Dr Lopez', *TJHSE* 16 (1945–51), 163–84. For staging of the plays during the Lopez period, see Roslyn Knutson, 'Influence of the Repertory System on the Revival and Revision of *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Dr Faustus*', *ELR* 18 (1988), 257–74. For Shakespeare's and Marlowe's plays in relation to one another, see Thomas Cartelli, 'Shakespeare's *Merchant,* Marlowe's *Jew:* The Problem of Cultural Difference', *ShakS* 20 (1988), 255-60; James Shapiro, 'Which is *The Merchant* Here, and Which *The Jew*?', *ShakS* 20 (1988), 269–82.

11 In 1579 Stephen Gosson mentions a lost play, *The Jew,* as illustrating 'the greediness of worldly chusers and bloody minds of usurers' (Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage,* 4 vols., 1923, IV, p. 204). For such charges, see James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 1996, esp. pp. 92–130.

12 See Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theatre and the Multicultural Mediterranean*, 2003, esp. pp. 163–98.

example, see the end of the first scene with its proverbial wisdom about violence (I.i.131; see Tilley, N 321) and self-interest (I.i.185; see Tilley, N 57); its classical references to Iphigenia (I.i.137) and quotations from Ovid (I.i.106–10) and, in Latin, from Terence (I.i.188). Biblical allusions are everywhere, and also powerfully ironic, as, for example, when Barabas dismisses Job's trials as lesser than his own (I.ii.182–99) or when his confrontation with official Malta echoes Christ's passion (I.ii.97–125). [13] The play also employs elements from older drama, like the Croxton Play of the Sacrament, or from contemporary drama, like Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, or from Marlowe's own works (see Ithamore's parodic verses).[14] The most obvious allusion is the invocation of Niccolò Machiavelli.

It is difficult to reconcile Marlowe's 'Machevill', who opens the play, or the action which follows with the actual writings of Machiavelli. There are two difficulties: Machiavelli treats religion as vital to statecraft, while Machevill dismisses it as a 'childish toy'; Machiavelli says nothing about economics, while Machevill claims Barabas has amassed a fortune by Machevill's 'means'.[15] Marlowe's distortion of Machiavelli derives from popular anti-Machiavellian polemic exemplified by Innocent Gentillet's *Anti-Machiavel* (1576); how Marlowe treats that polemical bogeyman will require attention.[16]

13 For Marlowe's strategic allusions, see Judith Weil, *Christopher Marlowe: Merlin's Prophet*, 1977.

14 On Marlowe's indebtedness to morality play structure, see David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe*, 1962, pp. 218–33; for the play's innovations, see Ruth Lunney, *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition*, 2002, 93–123; and Edward Rocklin, 'Marlowe as Experimental Dramatist: The Role of the Audience in *Jew of Malta*' in Kenneth Friedenreich, Roma Gill and Constance B. Kuriyama, eds., *'A Poet and a filthy Playmaker': New Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, 1988, pp. 129–42.

15 On the political usefulness of religious authority, see, e.g., *The Prince* XI; for Machiavelli's self-proclaimed lack of knowledge 'about profits or about losses' and his fitness only 'to reason about the state', see Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, 1977, p. 41.

16 N. W. Bawcutt argues that Marlowe shared his contemporaries' mixed acquaintance with Machiavellianism, compounded of reading Machiavelli as well as polemical accounts ('Machiavelli and Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*', *RenD* 3 (1970), 3–49); compare Catherine Minshull, 'Marlowe's "Sound Machevill"', *RenD* 13 (1982), 35–53, who sees a contrast between the actual theories of Machiavelli (embodied in Ferneze) and popular distortions derived from Gentillet's account of Machiavellians as greedy and loving evil for its own sake. See also Bob Hodge, 'Marlowe, Marx, and Machiavelli: Reading into the Past' in David Aers et al., eds., *Literature, Language and Society in England 1580–1680*, 1981, pp. 1–22, who sees the play's plot contradicting the logic of the Prologue to suggest a sense of ideology as false consciousness in Barabas's confusions. Thomas Cartelli argues that Barabas adopts Machiavellian discourse and a spirit of 'moral abandon' rather than true Machiavellian principles (*Marlowe, Shakespeare and the Economy of Theatrical Experience*, 1991).

A more subtle contemporary dimension is provided by the play's engagement with the heteroglot socio-economic discourses of Elizabethan London. The frequent struggles involving London's population of 'strangers', struggles that had produced an atmosphere of crisis in the early 1590s, inform the play's language and action. Its treatment of the merchant stranger Barabas as well as its depiction of Maltese anti-Semitism may be seen in the context of anti-foreigner sentiments locally registered in public insurrection, Parliamentary debate, and the officially censored *Sir Thomas More* (1590–3?), with its depiction of English violence against London's foreign population.[17]

Summary of the Plot

Introduced by a choric figure embodying murderous Machiavellian villainy, Barabas, the rich Jew of Malta, opens the play exulting in his enormous wealth, only to have it suddenly expropriated (along with his home) by the hypocritically Christian Maltese, who need his money to pay imperial tribute demanded by the Ottoman Turks. Barabas plots to regain his wealth by having his daughter pretend conversion to Christianity and thereby access gold he has hidden in his former house, now a nunnery; he also exploits her beauty to entrap fatally two sons of prominent Christians. Aided by a captured Turk, Ithamore, purchased from Malta's thriving slave market, Barabas manages to kill off the entire nunnery (including his daughter, who had alienated him by converting to Christianity) as well as two corrupt friars whom he entices with the prospect of his own lucrative conversion. Ithamore, seduced by a scheming prostitute, turns against Barabas and blackmails him to get money for his whore and her pimp. Barabas, ludicrously disguised as a French musician, kills all three with poisoned flowers, but is arrested for murder of his daughter's lovers. He escapes by feigning death as the Turks invade Malta, then betrays the island to the invaders, who install him as the new governor. However, he stupidly decides that he would be better off living under the former Christian Governor, whose son he had killed but whom he now entrusts with a plot to betray the Turks and regain power. Thinking thereby to earn the Governor's gratitude, Barabas blows up the Turkish troops with explosives, but the Governor catches him in the trap designed for the Turkish leaders, precipitating Barabas through a trapdoor and into a boiling pot where he dies cursing.

17 On anti-foreigner violence in the 1590s, see Ian W. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, 1991, esp. pp. 131–48; Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities* in *Sixteenth-Century London*, 1986. See also the appendix below, pp. 133–6.

Staging

The stage history of *The Jew of Malta* before the twentieth century is sparse. The earliest sixteenth-century performances (1592–8), by various companies, were mostly at the Rose, where Edward Alleyn was the principal actor; evidence records frequent, well-attended performances, two physical circumstances (the cauldron and Barabas's 'artificiall . . . nose'), and we infer a third (a red wig and beard like that worn by Burbage as Shakespeare's Shylock).[18] One seventeenth-century production (by Queen Henrietta's company at the Cockpit or Phoenix and at Court) provides the single early text (1633). Evidence suggests other undocumented performances, perhaps in excerpted form, as well as German productions.[19] Before the twentieth century, the only English performance was Edmund Kean's 1818 production of Sampson Penley's adaptation 'founded on Marlowe's tragedy' but rendering Barabas a tragic victim of a corrupt society.

Penley substituted a prologue abjuring anti-Semitism, and added a scene detailing the love of Lodowick and Mathias for Abigail. He eliminated blasphemous self-comparison to Job, the farce of the poisoning of the nuns, the on-stage strangling of Bernardine, the poisoned flowers and the fatal cauldron. Barabas's catalogue of atrocities was treated as a rhetorical test of Ithamore, and Barabas was granted 'tragic solemnity'.[20] To my knowledge, there have been no clear theatrical successors to this approach, but recent productions have performed the play in tandem with Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, sometimes even doubling the roles of Shylock and Barabas (Eric Porter, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1965; F. Murray Abraham, New York, 2007). Other productions, including that of the Classic Theatre, directed by Maurice Edwards (New York, 1987), that of the King Alfred's Performing Arts, directed by Stevie Simkin (Winchester, 1997) and that of the Almeida Theatre, directed by Michael Grandage (1999), have offset the play's negative treatment of Jews, not by avoiding the play's farcical elements, but by re-contextualizing them. Edwards set the play in the 1930s, gave the Maltese blackshirts and made Barabas a Jewish ham actor; Simkin set the play as if performed in 1939 Nazi-occupied Warsaw, offering the stage Jews a chance at dignity through subverting their textually-imposed stereotypes by overplaying or underplaying their expected 'roles'; Grandage cut Machiavell's Prologue and managed to suggest a Barabas needing love from Ithamore and

18 See Michael Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre*, 1982, p. 81.

19 See Bawcutt's edition, p. 3.

20 See James L. Smith, '*The Jew of Malta* in the Theatre', in Brian Morris, ed., *Christopher Marlowe*, 1968, pp. 3-23, p. 9.

resisting the Nazi ovens.[21] The dominant note of modern productions has been exactly the farce Kean sought to avoid and that T. S. Eliot called the essence of the play.

The twentieth century's first American production was at Williams College, 1907; the first British production was the 1922 Phoenix Society performance in London (Smith, p. 4). That 1922 production was played as 'a monstrous farce' that emphasized the 'brutality' of Barabas and prompted audience laughter at the deaths of the lovers and the poisoning of the nuns (Smith, p. 11). Later productions did more to mix tonalities, but farce remains, even when satire is intended. One frequent satiric target is registered in the programme notes to a 1954 Reading University production, describing Barabas as transformed from a 'suffering and oppressed human figure into . . . [a] "prodigious caricature"' as an inept Machiavel who presents a 'satirically posed problem: Who then are the real villains of the story, the true followers of Machiavelli?' (Smith, p. 13). The speaker for the Prologue was significantly listed as '?', but many productions take Ferneze for the truer Machiavellian. The Marlowe Society production (Cambridge, 1975) directed by John Chapman, stood Machevill at Ferneze's elbow; the American Shakespeare Repertory production (1985), directed by Douglas Overtoom, doubled the parts; the Barry Kyle production (Stratford-upon-Avon, 1987, and later in London) concluded with Ferneze removing his wig to reveal himself the Machevill of the Prologue.[22] Still other productions take the play's comic energies as broader than such a narrowly defined target would allow.

Sick humour furnished inspiration for the 1964 productions of Peter Cheeseman (Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent) and Clifford Williams (RSC Aldwych Theatre; recast in Stratford 1965). Williams used speedy conjunctions and slapstick to emphasize contradictory elements and emotions: Barabas spits into the fatal porridge, Bernardine drops Abigail's body 'with a bump', Barabas and Ithamore shake hands behind Jacomo's back after framing him, Barabas performs as a Flamenco dancer while the deadly flowers circulate (Smith, pp. 15–18). Cheeseman wanted to release the audience from ordinary moral constraints by taking them into the world of the sick joke and to prompt them to understand Barabas as 'a cynical self-serving businessman' changed into a 'half-crazy gangster' by 'grasping Christian hypocrites' (Smith, pp. 19–20). This definition does

21 See Carolyn D. Williams (on Simkin), *CE* 55 (1999), 75–7; Peter J. Smith (on Grandage), *CE* 57 (2000), 126–8; and Lois Potter, 'Marlowe in Theatre and Film' in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Patrick Cheney, 2004, p. 271.

22 References, respectively, from *RORD* 18 (1975), 61; *RORD* 28 (1985), 165; and *TLS* (31 July 1987), p. 820.

not do justice to the production's misanthropic generality: the part of Machevill was acted by the same actor (the dramatist Alan Ayckborn) who played, not Ferneze, but the Spaniard Del Bosco and one of the Jews (Smith, p. 5). Similarly broad in its indictment of humanity, Williams's self-designated 'gangster epic' rendered Barabas as a professional wrongdoer among amateurs; one reviewer called him a 'clear sighted opportunist within a society that would act in the same way if it dared'.[23] Barabas exhibited a suave, well-groomed, confident demeanour, rich attire and a silver-tipped forelock, while opposing characters were weakened or diminished. Ferneze ended the play brandishing aloft a cross-shaped sword hilt, but the production cut some of his most aggressive lines (III.v.29–33; V.i. 1–2), subordinated him to both Del Bosco and Katherine (II.ii and III.ii) and had him cringe and back away from Barabas (V.v.20). Farce served a satire that aimed beyond Ferneze's Christian hypocrisy to indict 'dollar civilization' (Smith, p. 20–21).

In keeping with the play's broad targets and fluid use of space (e.g. in the frequent mid-scene location changes – I.ii from senate-house to outside; II.iii from slave market to the door of Barabas's house; V.i from inside to outside Malta), modern productions have tended to the abstract. At its simplest, this has meant adding twentieth-century physical references, such as the 1984 Peter Benedict version that ended with Barabas in a microwave, or the 1985 American Shakespeare Repertory production that started with Barabas totalling figures on a pocket calculator and ended with his death in an electric chair wired to a time bomb intended to destroy everyone.[24] More spectacularly, non-English-speaking productions have embraced expressionist resources to make their points. The 1976 Paris production, directed by Bernard Sobel, began with a dignified, cosmopolitan Barabas, who transforms himself in response to having his fortune extorted: the vengeful figure emerged from a trapdoor and put on an enormous cardboard nose, hunchback, limp, and claw-like hands.[25] Perhaps the most spectacular recent adaptation, André Werner's 2002 opera for the Munich Biennale, presented a non-linear, visually stunning confrontation between domination embodied in 'Machiavelli' and resistance arising from the players, the world and religion (Christianity, Judaism and Islam). Machiavelli initially controls the other actors, the action and the virtual architecture of rear-projecting screens; his gestures and movements command lighting that defines space and the reflective bodily surfaces of the other actors. However, eventually the characters

23 *The Times*, 2 October 1965.
24 *The Sunday Times*, 18 March 1984; *RORD* 28 (1985), 165.
25 See Potter, op. cit., p. 271.

revolt, removing their reflective garb, mocking Machiavelli, even controlling the virtual architecture themselves; ultimately, even the stage itself rebels, subordinating the isolated Machiavelli to a stage densely filled with the colours representing the three religions.[26]

The Play

The 1633 quarto text of Marlowe's play is entitled *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta*, but by the time of its first modern revival (1818) it was neither famous nor considered tragic.[27] One hundred years later, T.S. Eliot also refused to call it a tragedy.[28] The issue was the nature and object of the play's humour. Kean's revival struggled to create tragic dignity from the play's representation of that transhistorical object of anti-Semitism the 'rich Jew' who 'smiles to see how full his bags are crammed'. The production added Sampson Penley's prologue, disclaiming intention to 'cast opprobrium o'er the Hebrew name' and asserting moral universality: 'On every sect pernicious passions fall, / And vice and virtue reign alike in all'.[29] The action was revised, especially in the last two acts, to give Barabas greater dignity as a victim. Eliot's influential twentieth-century assessment focused on these same final acts to conclude that the play was no tragedy, not even a 'tragedy of blood', that popular Elizabethan revenge genre, but 'farce' of 'terribly serious, even savage comic humour'. Subsequent criticism and staging have responded to the issues that concern these pioneering instances of modern production and interpretation.

Kean's revision in the interests of Barabas's dignity and universality and Eliot's redefinition of genre point to crucial features of Marlowe's play. Humour is everywhere, and it is savage. Barabas delights in the deaths of his victims:

> There is no music to a Christian's knell:
> How sweet the bells ring now the nuns are dead
> That sound at other times like tinkers' pans! (IV.i. 1–3)

He invokes homey proverbs while committing mayhem:

26 See http://www.muenchenerbiennale.de/standard/en/archive/2002/marlowe-der-jude-von-malta/ ; for digital images, see http://www.artcom.de/index.php?lang=en&option=com_acprojects&id=29&Itemid=144&page=6; compare Stefanie Kuhn, 'Extended presence: The instrumental(ised) body in André Werner's Marlowe: The Jew of Malta', *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 2 (2007), 221–36.

27 See Smith, '*The Jew of Malta*', pp. 7–11, on Kean's performance.

28 Eliot's remarks are from 'Christopher Marlowe' in *Selected Essays*, 1964.

29 Smith, '*The Jew of Malta*', p. 7.

BERNARDINE
What do you mean to strangle me?
ITHAMORE
Yes, 'cause you use to confess.
BARABAS
Blame not us but the proverb, 'Confess and be hanged'.
Pull hard. (IV.i.144–7)

Even when he turns to high moral rhetoric, Barabas reminds the audience of the homicidal intentions beneath his words with strategic asides: 'As these have spoke so be it to their souls. / (I hope the poisoned flowers will work anon.)' (V.i.40–1). But Eliot calls the play's farcical violence 'serious'. What is perhaps most serious about the play is its insistent conceptual assault on the values and opinions of its audience.

The play's humour may be savage, but anthropologists have taught us that what appears 'savage' to one culture or group about another may be merely a product of cultural difference. The play differs from classical standards of high tragedy, whether defined by Aristotle, Sir Philip Sidney or Eliot, yet its relentless ironies make it much more than mere farce, sick comedy or crude racism. The ironies of a dramatic world where intention and strategy repeatedly come to unexpected, often catastrophic conclusions (e.g. Barabas's plans to conceal his wealth, to have his daughter feign conversion, to employ Ithamore, to profit from Ferneze's captivity, etc.) are compounded by reiteration of key terms (e.g. 'policy', 'profession'); by frequent and often wildly misappropriated allusions (e.g. Ithamore's ridiculous botch of Marlowe's 'Come live with me' or Barabas's twisted proverbs and bible verses); and by extensive, innovative use of asides. A clearer sense of what all these ingredients might add up to emerges if the play is evaluated not against some timeless definition of tragedy but in relation to the various tragic forms that it evokes, as well as in relation to institutions, concerns and discourses important to London of the 1590s – its theatre, religion and politics.

Marlowe's 'famous' play, arguably the most popular of the 1590s, repeatedly evokes alternative forms of tragedy, while remaining distinct from any of them. Friar Jacomo's exchange with Barabas raises the possibility of a tragedy resembling Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, with its arrogant Oedipus, who will not see his own errors, confronted by the literally blind prophet Teiresias, who perceives the source of Theban pollution all too clearly: