ON CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE with special reference to *THE JEW OF MALTA*

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INTRODUCTION

Swinburne regards Marlowe as the father of English tragedy and the creator of English blank verse. Marlowe's protagonists are men of exceptional power seeking exceptional power. When we pass an eye over "Marlowe's mighty line," we feel the spiritual adventures of his own generation. *The Jew of Malta*, which is his third play (the date is a much debated point), has such a tendency.

First we see Machiavelli enters as Prologue. Marlowe's intention about this play, as Machiavelli says, was to present not "To reade a lecture here in *Britanie*, / But to present the Tragedy of a Jew."(1) His first play, *Tamburlaine the Great* is the drama of "proud audacious deeds," in which Tamburlaine crosses swords with his enemies, and his second play, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* is the drama of consciousness, in which Faustus revels in necromancy for the mystery of the universe, while *The Jew of Malta* is the drama of worldly desires, in which Barabas tries to enclose "Infinite riches in a little roome."(2) In a sense, the real power of crown in *Tamburlaine* and the aspiration for infinite knowledge in *Faustus* change into money and valuables which are in the world of actuality and truth, and of possibility and prospects. Throughout his first two tragedies, Marlowe never lets us forget the existence of worlds other than the visible—the Heaven which Tamburlaine's pride impels him to defy, the Hell into which Faustus is plunged by his despair. But in *The Jew of Malta* there is no such treatment of one order of being upon another. The protagonist tries to do anything to make a fortune ; the word "policy" is mentioned thirteen times, and serves to associate Barabas with Machiavelli. It must be remembered, however, that this play does not present only the seeking for infinite riches. Marlowe does not take interest in the increase of Barabas' riches. This may be assertained by the fact that Marlowe never shows the way Barabas became rich again after losing his riches. Marlowe has two elements in his plays ; one is the element of seeking for absolute power, beauty and knowledge, and the other is the element of looking into, and criticizing, orthodox faith and moral theory. The former is inspired by classics, and the latter by Machiavellism. It seems that Marlowe, who was called an atheist, wrote *Tamburlaine the Great* and *Doctor Faustus* not only from a heterodoxical standpoint but also as a rebel from the laws of Christian cosmos. Throughout the play, Marlowe's anti-Christianity is found here and there in the form of irony, satire, and paradox. Like his first two plays, didn't Marlowe write *The Jew of Malta* as an opportunity to show his own anti-Christianity? Another problem is the structure of the play. T.S. Eliot says, "If one takes

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The Jew of Malta not as a tragedy, or as a 'tragedy of blood', but as a farce, the concluding act becomes intelligible."[3] P.H. Kocher also puts it : "Actually, the play is more a malicious comedy than anything else, although it calls itself a tragedy."[4] On the other hand, M.C. Bradbrook holds a different opinion from T.S. Eliot's. She says, "*The Jew of Malta* is one of the most difficult of Elizabethan plays. Mr. Eliot's explanation will not cover the obvious change of tone between Acts 1 and 2 and the rest of the play."[5] The structure of this play, therefore, should be approached not by a one-sided view, but in the light of the opposite opinions.

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I

The Jew of Malta begins with a Prologue by none other than Machiavelli himself brought on to the stage, who proceeds to give expression to Marlowe's constant concern to expose the gap between what men profess and what they do.

> Admir'd I am of those that hate me most :
> Though some speake openly against my bookes,
> Yet will they reade me, and thereby attaine
> To *Peters* Chayne : ...
> I count Religion but a childish Toy,
> And hold there is no sin but ignorance.
>
> (Prologue, 9-15)

These last probably represent well what Marlowe thought himself because to put what one thought into other people's mouths on the stage was almost the only way one could express such heterodox sentiments in the sixteenth centur, and Marlowe, it seems, made the most of it in every respect throughout his career.

The starting point of the play is the exit of Machiavelli, who pulls back the arras that curtains the inner stage and thereby discovers Barabas in his counting-house. Barabas in his counting-house with heaps of gold before him, tells over his wealth and the exotic places it came from. He concludes with a line, "Infinite riches in a little roome," which reminds us of Marlowe's fate in the quarrel over a great reckoning in a little room. Barabas, like Tamburlaine, is greedy of sovereignty, but for him it lies not in kingship but in riches.

Meantime his ships arrive at Malta in safe. Then Barabas' compatriots hasten to consult him in an emergency, "for he can counsell best in these affaires."[6] They bring the surprising news that a Turkish fleet has arrived, that the Maltese authorities are entertaining the newcomers in the Senate house, and that all the Jews in Malta have been summoned there. But Barabas can counter state "policy" with the doctorine of individual self-preservation. Things, however, do not go according to his plan. The Turks grant the knights of Malta a month's respite for the collection of the arrears of tribute, and the Governor passes on the levy to the

Jew with the flattering justification. He demands that each Jew should pay one-half of his estate, or else to become at once a Christian ; if he refuses he is to lose all he has. Barabas declares "I will be no convertite,"[7] and to the demand, "then pay thy halfe,"[8] refuses flatly.

Ferneze, the Governor says, "No, Jew, thou hast denied the Articles,/And now it cannot be recall'd,"[9] And the indignant retort leaps from the Jew's lips :

> What? bring you Scripture to confirm your wrongs ?
> Preach me not out of my possessions.
>
> (I. ii.110-111)

As Kocher points out,[10] the Jew has his chance to tell these Christians what he thinks of their affectation of religion and morality. Apparently Marlowe is with Ferneze and the audience against Barabas ; actually he is with none of them completely, but through the Jew he is bantering many Christians with entire safety to himself ; he has no particular sympathy for Judaism, but a great antipathy for Christianity. From one of the Knights, he picks up the catchword that seems to explain the disparity between what they profess and what they really do ;

> I, policie ? that's their profession.
>
> (I. ii. 160)

After the Government has confiscated his goods, Barabas, left with three other Jews, curses his Christian persecutors for their policy. Here we see the Jew's most violent reaction.

> The plague of *Egypt*, and the curse of heaven,
> Earths barrennesse, and all mens hatred
> Inflict upon them, thou great *Primus Motor*.
> And here upon my knees, striking the earth,
> I banne their soules to everlasting paines
> And extreme tortures of the fiery deepe,
> That thus have dealt with me in my distresse.
>
> (I. ii. 162-168)

The other Jews urge patience, recalling the example of Job ; but Barabas belittles the sufferings of Job, who, he says, lost but the merest fraction of Barabas' own wealth. The Jews, finally realizing that neither their presence nor advice will assuage Barabas' fury, leave him "in his irefull mood,"[11] and his whole manner swiftly changes. His hot passion is replaced by calm, collected calculation. Herein he finds a helpmeet in his daughter Abigail. Her name recalls the Biblical Abigail of I Kings xxv whose soft words appeased David's wrath and dissuaded him from revenge. In Marlowe's play she stands apart from all other characters as the only fully sympathetic person. Against the evil day that has befallen he had hidden under a plank in the upper chamber of his house

Ten thousand Portagues beside great Perles,
Rich costly Jewels, and Stones infinite.

(I. ii. 244-245)

As his house has been turned into a convent he instructs Abigail to gain admission to it by applying to become a novice under the pretence that she wished to make atonement for sin and want of faith, "for religion / Hides many mischiefes from suspition."[12] As before he is clearly speaking for Marlowe. And this time he would have the audience on his side also, becuase the reflection is upon an aspect of Catholicism. Her dutiful compliance with his plans demonstrates her trust and obedience, and at the same time it reveals the Jew's heartlessness toward his daughter's feelings.

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II

The soliloquy which opens Act 2 expresses general disillusion :

The incertaine pleasures of swift-footed time
Have tane their flight, and left me in despaire ;
And of my former riches rests no more
But bare remembrance ; like a souldiers skarre,
That has no further comfort for his maime.

(II. i. 7-11)

It is the vocabulary of Faustus, but after this scene it never appears. "Swift-footed" and "despair" are often found in *Faustus*. As Bradbrook points out, "Not only the character of Barabas but the quality of the verse is changed ; pity and human values are dropped. What happens may be defined as the substitution of a technique of action for a technique of verse. The last half of the play shows an interest in stage situations and the manipulation of the narrative."[13] For that reason Marlowe uses asides as a means to stage effectiveness.

Sleepless with excitement, he arrives with a light before midnight at the moment when Abigail has risen to search for, and find, the hidden treasure. Barabas breaks into tumultuous ecstasy :

Oh my girle,
My gold, my fortune, my felicity ;
. . . . . .
Oh girle! oh gold, Oh beauty, oh my blisse!

(II. i. 47-55)

Here we see clearly that wealth is dearer to Barabas than his daughter. Also we recall the mixed emotions of Shylock wailing, "O my ducats, O my daughter."[14] Now we find Barabas become again as wealthy as before, with a new house "As great and faire as is the Governors."[15]

Abigail, released from the convent, is again with him, and is to play a different part in his schemes. Lodowick, the Governor's son, determines to see her beauty for himself, and is hypocritically greeted by Barabas, who is yarning for revenge on the Governor. With equivocal phrases of welcome, and muttered threatening asides, Barabas guides Lodowick to his house, where he bids Abigail feign love for him and plight him her troth, though at the same time he assures Mathias that the girl shall be his, and stirs him to jealousy. When Abigail protests that Mathias and not Lodowick is her lover. Barabas says :

It's no sinne to deceive a Christian ;
For they themselves hold it a priniciple,
Faith is not to be held with Heretickes ;
But all are Hereticks that are not Jewes ;
This followes well, and therefore daughter feare not.

(II. iii. 309-313)

Barabas has, as it were, his own philosophy. He thinks that if Christians thus deceive those who are not of their own faith, a Jew has as good a pretext for cheating Christians.

So far we have seen Acts 1 and 2 . As above-mentioned, many critics point out the deterioration of the character of Barabas after Act 2 . Especially with the entry of Ithamore, a Turk captured in a sea-fight by Spaniards, and bought by Barabas in the Maltese slave-market, as F.S. Boas suggests,[16] there is a subtle change in the atmosphere of the play. So far the Jew, with his idolatry of riches, his racial and religious fanaticism, his passion for revenge, and his "policy", has been a figure of tragic stature. But hereafter the figure of the Jew degenerates. Some critics doubt Marlowe's authorship in the following scenes. At any rate we will see how the protagonist acts in the following scenes.

When the rival lovers begin to antagonize each other, Barabas brings his plot to a head. In the duel (III. ii) they are both slain, to much amazement of their relatives. From the lips of Ithamore, she learns of her father's responsibility for the death of her lover, and this shock calls forth her new awareness of the evil that surrounds her :

But I perceive there is no love on earth,
Pity in Jewes, nor piety in Turkes.

(III. iii. 47-48)

This bitter insight prompts her conversion to Christianity, but it does not destroy her loyalty to her father, in spite of the treachery he has displayed. Barabas suffers two great losses in the course of his career : the confiscation of his wealth, and the conversion of his daughter to Christianity. We have already seen his reaction to the first. The rage he shows at that point far outstrips in intensity and length his reaction to the conversion of his daughter to Christianity. And the earlier crimes of Barabas are eclipsed when through a poisoned pot of porridge, in the guise of a present on Saint Jacques' Even, he does not only his daughter but all the nuns to death. That the Jew should register so much less grief at the loss of his daughter

than at the loss of his gold comes no real surprise. Even though Barabas' world is certainly bounded by three considerations—himself, his wealth, and his daughter—the hierarchy of the three is never in question ; the Jew's loyalty to himself comes before all.

Abigail, however, has had time to disclose her father's practice against her lovers to Friar Bernardine, who without directly violating the seal of confession warns Barabas that he knows of his guilt (IV. i). In terror he offers to be baptized and to bestow his wealth on some religious house. Friar Bernardine contends as to who shall convert Barabas with Jacomo, a friar of another order, who had admitted Abigail to the sisterhood.

1. Fryar. Oh good *Barabas* come to our house.
2. Fryar. Oh no, good *Barabas* come to our house.

(IV. i. 77-79)

The Jew plays off one against the other, as he had done with the two lovers, and seeks to make himself safe by getting rid of both.

Having strangled Bernardine, with Ithamore's aid, at midnight under his roof, he lets him be propped up outside, leaning on his staff, as if alive. Jacomo then arrives eager to convert the Jew and secure his gold for his order. Finding Bernardine blocking his way, he strikes him down with the staff, and confesses to Barabas and Ithamore who rush out that he has killed him. When the friar begs to be let go, the Jew primly refuses. Jacomo pays the penalty for his imagined crime, with Ithamore accompanying him at the gallows-foot and ironically describing his last moments (IV. iv). After that Ithamore goes to the house of the courtesan. Bellamira, whose attendant "bully", Pilia-Borza, has brought him a letter of invitation from her.

Whether Marlowe or another wrote the scenes, mainly in prose, in which Bellamira and Pilia-Borza appear, it seems that they are inferior in quality to what has gone before. But they serve to reveal the crimes of Barabas who had fancied himself safe when Abigail and Bernardine were put of the way. Ithamore, to obtain the favours of the courtesan, blackmails his master into sending him three hundred, and then five hundred, crowns. After drinking with Bellamira and her bully he discloses the full tale of his own and the Jew's villainies (IV. iv). Barabas counters his servant's treachery by visiting the two in the disguise of a French musician, with a posy of poisoned flowers in his hat whose smell will kill them all.

We have seen how Barabas acts with his "policy" especially in Acts 2 and 3. F.P. Wilson says, "The weakness is most apparent in the fourth act .... The tone of the whole act is comic or farcial, with only occasional touches of savage humour. The dramatist's grip over his material is relaxed, and the tragic tension so magnificently sustained in Acts I and II is dissipated by the intermediary scenes."[17] We will see the final analysis of this problem in the following chapters.

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III

Involving hypocrisy, hatred, revenge and many problems, the play turns into the final act. Before the poison of flowers completes its deadly work, Bellamira and her bully have time to tell the Governor of the Jew's misdeeds, in which Ithamore confesses his share. When soon afterwards the death of the poisoned trio is announced, the body of Barabas, who has simulated his own death by drinking poppy and mandrake juice, is borne in and thrown over the city walls to be a prey to birds and beasts.

After that the play, though it does not show the glow and colour of the early scenes, becomes once more an arresting exposition of Machiavellian plot and counterplot. When Selim Calymath returns, after the month's respite stipulated in I. ii. to collect the Maltese tribute to the Turks, the Governor, persuaded by the Spanish Vice-Admiral, has closed the gates and broken his pledge. Barabas is at hand, outside the walls, to guide a company of Turks through a secret passage into the town. For his service Calymath appoints him Governor, and we see the Jew has Fernese as much in his power as Tamburlaine had Bajazeth. But even in his elavation Barabas does not forget the maxims of Machiavellism. He knows that the people of Malta hate him and that he must find means to make his place secure :

> No, *Barabas*, this must be look'd into ;
> And since by wrong thou got'st Authority,
> Maintaine it bravely by firme policy,
> At least unprofitably lose it not :
>
> (V. ii. 34-37)

Therefore instead of taking Fernese's life he promises on receipt of great sums of money to deliver Malta from the Turks, and by a stratagem to destroy Calymath and his men. To the new Governor's invitation to a banquet before he sets sail, Calymath answers in the affirmative. Calymath, with his bassoes, is to be feasted in the citadel, and his soldiers in the more spacious quarters of a monastery, which stands as an outhouse to the town. When Fernese returns with a hundred thousand pounds collected from the citizens, Barabas discloses his policy. At the sound of a warning-piece the monastery is to be fired and Fernese is to cut the cord that will send Calymath to his doom. But Fernese betrays Barabas. He has the charge sounded and cuts the cable at the moment when the Jew is on the gallery floor waiting to welcome the guests. Thereupon there is a caldron discovered. After fruitless cries for help to the Christian onlookers Barabas, determines to die with "resolution", and boasts of his misdeeds :

> I would have brought confusion on you all,
> Damn'd Christians, dogges, and Turkish infidels ;
> But now begins the extremity of heat
> To pinch me with intolerable pangs :
> Dye life, flye soule, tongue curse thy fill and dye.
>
> (V. v. 81-89)

The main impact of his death speech screamed forth while he is boiling in the caldron he had prepared for his enemies, is to reveal how much he glories in his crimes and revels in his curses. Obviously no pity or sympathy is evoked by this death scene, nor does the manner of the Jew's destruction seem out of proportion to the nature of his crimes. As Cole puts it, it it is but fittng that the Jew should stew in his own hideous pot. "The pot itself is fitting in more ways than one. Literally and objectively, it is the trap that ironically catches the trapper, but its conventional symbolic and emblematic significance makes it even more appropriate."[18] It seems that Marlowe has chosen for his Jew a mode of suffering and death which goes beyond mere dramatic shock-value and carries with it appropriate retribution for the specific evils which make up the character of Barabas.

Justice triumphs and evil is destroyed when the cunning traitor is cunningly betrayed. But there is a profound ambiguity in the resolution of the play's political line of action which coincides with the Jew's destruction. The Turks are demolished, the Christians restore to power, and order reign again :

> So march away, and let due praise be given
> Neither to Fate nor Fortune, but to Heaven.
>
> (V. v. 123-124)

But the lines are uttered by Ferneze, one of the major Christian hypocrites of the play, who has helped to restore order only by adopting Barabas' own principles of treachery and deceit. Marlowe's ironic resolution embodies the familiar pattern of the morality play, but gives it an emphasis that is more satirical than moralistic.

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IV

Marlowe was called an atheist by his contemporaries. We wonder why he was branded as an atheist. One of the reasons is that Marlowe let his protagonists say the words which satirize and defame Christians. It may be that such words roused the antipathy of Christians, and consequently he was called an atheist.

Marlowe's anti-Christianity began with *Tamburlaine the Great*. But such lines are found only in a few places, while in *The Jew of Malta* we find them in many places ; in I. ii, II. iii, and IV. i, and so on. As we have seen, *The Jew of Malta* as well as the other plays proves that the critical sense becomes an increasingly powerful force in his mentality and at the same time grows more sardonic. It seems that the dramatist intended these lines on purpose. Thus Marlowe denounces Christians, sneer their hypocrisy into insignificance, and mocks the ugliness of the real intention of Churchmen. Perhaps this anti-Christian attitude of the dramatist, must have enraged Christians, especially Protestants, for they tried hard to get rid of the theaters even if Marlowe did not show his anti-Christian attitude. Francis Bacon says in his *Essays* :

> The contemplative atheist is rare ; ··· and yet they seem to be more than they are ; for all that impugn a received religion, or superstition, are by the adverse part, branded

with the name of atheists.[19]

It may be said that Marlowe was called an atheist by Protestants who got angry at his plays and by other dramatists who were envious of Marlowe's fame.

Many critics have sensed the deterioration of the character of Barabas after Act 2 and think that Marlowe becomes unnecessarily debased. But it seems that Marlowe had the main outlines of the plot in mind before he started to write, and this plot, with its phenomenal procession of murders and treacheries, is not capable of supporting a grand characterization of Barabas. Perhaps Marlowe recognized that in the second act, and threw the character away, and tried the substitution of a technique of action for a technique of verse. F.P. Wilson says. "That 'terribly serious, even savage comic humor', so absent from the last act, so present in the first two acts, might if continued have given power and significance even to villainy so sensational."[20] T.S. Eliot is very near the truth when he calls this play a "farce of the Old English humour, the terribly serious, even savage comic humour .... the humour of.... *Volpone*,"[21] but as Bradbrook points out, his explanation does not cover the whole drama. If we see the drama in relation to drama of the past, especially the morality play, we will agree that it is a malicious comedy, because at almost every point in the action Barabas is either the dispenser or the butt of mockery, many scenes are given over entirely or largely to comic effects, and the author himself frequently drops into a mood of burlesque after Act 2.

(NOTES)

1. *The Complete works of Christopher Marlowe* (Vol. I) : *The Jew of Malta*, ed. by Fredson Bowers (Cambridge U. P., 1973), Prologue, II. 29-30. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in my text.
2. I. i. 37.
3. T. S. Eliot, *Elizabethan Dramatists*, (Faber & Faber, 1962), p. 63.
4. P. H. Kocher, *Christopher Marlowe ; A Study of His Thought, Learning, and Character*, (Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 279.
5. M. C. Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy*, (Cambridge U. P., 1960), p. 156.
6. I. i. 142.
7. I. ii. 82.
8. I. ii. 83.
9. I. ii. 92-93.
10. See Kocher, op. cit., P. 282.
11. I. ii. 209.
12. I. ii. 281-282.
13. Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 158.
14. *The Merchant of Venice*, II. iii. 15. (Arden Shakeapeare)
15. II. iii. 14.
16. See F. S. Boas, *Christopher Marlowe ; A Biographical and Critical Study*, (Oxford U. P., 1960), p. 142.

17. F. P. Wilson, *Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare*, (Oxford U. P., 1951), p. 64.
18. Douglas Cole, *Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, (Princeton, 1962), P. 129.
19. Francis Bacon, *The Essays*, P. 55. The quotation is from [Kenkyusha English Classics: *The Essays, or Counsels Evil and Moral.*
20. F. P. Wilson, op. cit., p. 68.
21. T. S. Eliot, op. cit., p. 64.

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