

Power Relations in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*

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Abstract: *Barabas, the central figure in Marlowe's play, is presented as embodying Machiavellian political thought and characteristics but in a distorted way. The animosity with which Machiavellian thought was met in Elizabethan England found its way in Marlowe's play. The play does not only present Barabas's Machiavellism in his clash with Malta, but it, also, goes further to ascribe the deceptive, murderous attributes to this Machiavellism. The choice of the figure of Barabas is made purely on the grounds of his religious affiliation.*

Keywords: *The Jew of Malta, Machiavel, Barabas, Abegail.*

In his *Discourses* and *The Prince*, Niccolo Machiavelli laid out his philosophical and political thoughts regarding statecraft and politics. He presented what he believed to be the characteristics of a "good" leader and better ways by which the leader could rule a society. His explanations, he thought, were to give appropriate guidance to statesmen and politicians about their duties and responsibilities. To illustrate that, he put forward a worldly understanding of politics; hence all justifications, as he observed, should be made on realistic grounds. Rather than being submissive to spiritual teachings, one, Machiavelli maintained, should seek how to acquire power; so that a happy life could be achieved. Reaching this aim requires necessarily that everything else, including religion, of course, should be subservient to man's will, *not* the other way round. He considered that living in the material world requires awareness of the realistic conditions in the world rather than adhering to spiritualities and religious thoughts. Thus, according to this secular thought, morality is a relic of the past inherited from the Middle Ages and should be discarded by the practical requirements of living in a, then, contemporary society that is remote both in its needs.

Machiavelli's outlining of his philosophical and political thoughts was obviously a denial of what Christian teachings entail, no wonder that his views were, then, received everywhere in the Christian world with hostility being anti-religion. Machiavelli's rejection of the religious thought was amplified and misrepresented by Christian authorities everywhere in order to cover on the essence of the Machiavellian thought, thus his reputation as anti religion overshadowed his overall ideas and political thoughts. In Tudor England, according to the Christian, medieval, theological understanding, Englishmen agreed that the universe is structured by 'Divine Will'; hence, to them, this was a standard of judging everything; every action or abstention from action was motivated by its compliance with the 'will of God,' therefore political thought was expressed purely within theological frames. The English thinkers of the sixteenth- century

‘required a subservience of the secular to the spiritual.’¹ Nevertheless, there can be no denial that there were few, and rare Elizabethan voices that were incompatible with what religious authorities wanted -like Sir Walter Raleigh as just one example, rather those few were led to think of possibilities outside the Medieval theological frame, this is not to ignore, either, a parallel kind of awareness that things could be seen and regarded independently from the confines of religion in dealing with unresolved questions in human affairs. True those voices did not establish solid grounds for opposing the established authorities and its institutions, but its significance for the readers today is not to ignore existing possibilities that might have been there in a society that was not homogeneous in its socio-political thinking.

The distortion of Machiavelli’s image as hostile to religion was systematically practised by the Elizabethan religious authorities. This was carried out in many forms and it was accompanied by putting a ban on Machiavelli’s works.² In addition to the ban, Christian humanists - like Richard Hooker for example- issued a warning against it, this was prompted by the fear of this realistic philosophy and its secular basis. A warning appeared, also, in the anonymous *Treatise of Treasons Against Queen Elizabeth and the Crown of England* (1572). It advised against having a ‘Machiavellian State and Regiment: where Religion is put behind in the second and last place: where the civil policie, I meane, is preffered before it...’³

By perceiving Machiavellism as a threat, on the basis of its irreconcilability with the moral views of the period, it was, then, a necessary demand for the religious authorities to debase that philosophy. Perhaps, the French book by Gentillet’s *Contre-Machiavel* published (1576) formed the sharpest attack on the Italian infidel -for national and religious reasons.⁴ Gentillet’s book, which was largely used in England, ignored the real essence of Machiavelli’s and instead presented some of Machiavelli’s points out of context. Hence, Machiavellism was taken to be motivating treachery and deception, and to be synonymous with covetousness, horror, and a ‘treacherous way of killing, generally by poison; and atheism.’⁵ In other words, to hinder adopting Machiavellism, the religious authorities took upon themselves the task of warring

1 Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli: A Changing Interpretation 1500-1700* (London:Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), P.262.

2 See Raab, p.52.

3 Raab,p.60.

4 See Mario Praz, *Machiavelli and the Elizabethans* (Folcroft Library Edition, 1928/73)

5 Mario Praz, p.32.

against Machiavellian thoughts and they deliberately debased it by equating it with immorality on the grounds of its remoteness from Christianity; the campaign against that kind of political thought included a clear warning to people not to adopt its social and political methods or thoughts. The propagation against Machiavelli and Gentillet's book played a significant role 'caused the anti-Machiavellian feeling to spread over England.'⁶ However, and despite all the ill-attributes to Machiavelli's name and the ban of his works, there is evidence that they were widely known in England, both in the original and in translations.⁷ It is not irrelevant to remind ourselves here that for the Elizabethans, it was not necessarily to evaluate Machiavelli according to foreignness of his philosophy and political views to their own ways of understanding life, rather it was enough that he was from a Mediterranean county - more specifically Italian; for the English at that time for one reason or another saw themselves as superior to people from the southern countries in the continent. and considered the latter to be dubious, cunning and unreliable.⁸

The Elizabethan theatre was not disinterested in the contemporary apprehensions of its time, thus the organised attack on the Machiavellian secular political thought appeared in the invention, and characterisation, of the stage figure named "Machiavel." He was branded by all the ill-attributes which religious authorities ascribed to the name of Machiavelli. He was introduced to the Elizabethan audiences as a symbol of viciousness and cruelty, thus the Elizabethan stage indirectly took part in the political concerns of the state by absorbing itself subtly with exactly the same kind of concerns the political authorities had; while Machiavelli's political thought was not straightforwardly referred to, the stage Machiavel was used to do the job of degrading Machiavelli's political ideas.⁹ The stage figure called Machiavel was first used by Christopher Marlowe, who, and other Elizabethan playwrights later, designed their Machiavel as carrying or embodying the worst of the above mentioned dishonourable qualities, moreover they transferred these characteristics of the stage Machiavel to the villain protagonist in the plays.¹⁰ Only Machiavel as the symbol, and instigator, of wickedness was new to the Elizabethan audiences, while the evil stereotype was not new to the contemporary audiences, the figure

6 Mario Praz, p.4.

7 See Irving Ribner, 'Marlowe and Machiavelli' in *Comparative Literature* VI. 1954. p.350.

8 See, for example, Gent Thomas Nash, *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Devil* (London: Rose and Crown, 1592),pp.14ff.

9 Compare Catherin Minshul 'Marlowe's "Sound Machevill"' in *Renaissance Drama*. XIII. ed., Leonard Barkan (USA: Northwestern University Press, 1982),p.52.

10 See Praz., p. 27.

already existed in the theatre, the villainy was not unusual for the audiences who were familiar with the Devil and Vice figures from the miracle plays and morality plays.¹¹ In addition, the villain figure shared characteristics with the Senecan hero, especially his violence and his zeal for revenge.¹²

The prologue of Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* presents ideological constructs, put into the mouth of Machiavel to be circulated as his own philosophy. His main interests lie precisely in what can be summed up in one word: "power," related to that is the way to seize it and also how it could be realistically exercised.

Machiavel is an exact copy of Machiavelli as he was known to religious authorities of that time, in depicting him like that, Machiavel was put against the majority of the Elizabethans and their ways of perceiving things in life. To put it differently, contrary to the Elizabethan society which was known for its clinging to theological issues and moral conducts, Machiavel was used to shock such audiences by an entirely antagonistic voice as he discards moral and theological modes in favour of worldly practice. He 'count[s] religion but a childish toy/And hold there is no sin but ignorance'(Prol.14-5).¹³ He rejects the unfounded superstitious old morals and speaks of different scopes within which life should be understood. The ridiculous old legends are looked at with more sarcasm than astonishment by Machiavel, and he is ashamed to hear 'Birds of the air will tell murders past?'(Prol.16) His main attention remains focused on the qualities a leader should have and spells out his judgment regarding the most appropriate merits for leadership as a realistic practice, Machiavel stresses that the right to rule is given to the most powerful rather than to the most fitted ruler, in a statement similar to what is being frequently reiterated even in our own time that "might is right," Machiavel tells the audience: 'Might first made kings, and laws were then most sure.'(Prol.20) Once in power, the ruler should maintain his role by all possible means, regardless of what might be thought of him: 'Let me be envied than pitied.'(Prol.27)

Machiavel's prologue is of a substantial significance; for, it introduces his established ideological formations which will be projected as fundamental beliefs of the protagonist on the one hand. And, it prepares the audience to see 'the tragedy' of his alter ego: Barabas, the Jew. The latter's power is constituted by his wealth that has been accumulated by applying Machiavel's thought: 'Which money was not got without my means.'(Prol.31) The character

11 See Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: A History of Metaphor in Relation to His Villains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985)

12 Compare David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics* (Cambridge: 1968), p.264.

13 All Citations to Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* ed., N.W. Bawcutt (Manchester University Press, 1978).

the audience is asked to judge, then, is a dramatic figure designed to explain the level on which Machiavel's thought operates. Moreover, the audience is not only invited to watch the protagonist's deeds but also is asked to judge him: 'grace him as he deserves.' (Parol.33)

The first impression about Barabas is shaped by his first visual appearance as he enters *'in his counting house with heaps of gold before him.'* He is typified by his extraordinary wealth and his avaricious aspirations to gather more. The picture is worsened more as he is characterised not by modesty and satisfaction of what he has got, but rather by his greed for more money and more wealth. He wants to have 'the merchants of the Indian mines,' (I.i.19) even he does not want his richness to be limited but he wants 'infinite riches in a little room.' (I.i.37) Branding him with inconceivable love for money is even enhanced as he asserts that he does not care about anything else, he maintains that his power is obtained not by occupying ruling positions and crowns: 'we come not to be kings.' (I.i. 128) Rather, his power is acquired by wealth:

'or who is honoured now but for his wealth?

Rather had I, a Jew, be hated thus,

Than pitied in a Christian poverty.' (I.i.112-4)

The words put into the mouth of Barabas would have estranged him further, as he rejects morals and principles and, even worse, justifying that in adding bitterness to the situation as he reminds them that their belief brings nothing but poverty, thus he does not want to be identified with them and prefers their prejudice against, rather than their pity on, him. The generalizations Barabas is identified with in the first scene disclose nothing but his aspirations for unlimited riches.

Parallel to introducing his position, self-distancing and self-identifying in relation to the society where he lives, Barabas' environment is depicted as that of business, trade, mercantile: merchants coming with news about Barabas' 'Argosies' and 'Speranza,' customs, harbour, towns, cities, countries, seas. Barabas's deals and trade bring about his reputation so that he is confident about resolving a problem with the customs, he orders Merchant: 'Go tell 'em the Jew of Malta sent thee, man;/ Tush, who amongst 'em knows not Barabas?' (I.i.66-7) Thus, while his words are plainly used as an indication of his reputation, they carry as well an identification that puts him different from others in religion. Not until a certain stage in the developments of the events in the play has the audience seen anything pronounced by the Maltese which would articulate explicitly hatred or any kind of discrimination against Barabas; it is only his words, gestures, self identification, his words in conducting business etc that indicate his position and estrangement, thus it is unclear whether his self introduction is based on his knowledge of them and how they regard him or a deliberate attempt of his to alienate himself!

No matter how Barabas is regarded by the Maltese, or how he would place himself in relation to them, his situation remains stable till the moment the Turks' arrive and ask for a ten-

years accumulated taxation. The Governor, Ferneze, gradually illustrates to Barabas the Turks' request, it is 'To levy of us ten years' tribute past;/ Now then, here know that it concerns us' (I.ii.41-42). At the very beginning of his explanation of the situation, the Governor speaks in a general way that would indicate any distinction between citizens as he says "us." This could be taken to mean that Barabas is made a "brother" but it would not take the audience long to recognize that he is an "other". He is a brother as he is one of 'us' in the sense that he has to pay, and, an "other" and different from "us" in the way he has to pay (see below). Kind words are used by the Governor as he explains the circumstances that led to him to ask the citizens to be aware of what is going on, and therefore he asks their aid in the catastrophe of such national nature: 'By reason of wars, that robbed our store;/ And therefore we are to request your aid.' (I.ii.48-9) Eventually, it becomes surprising how Ferneze, whose first words are effectively chosen, would turn so tough with Barabas; thus one inclines to think that when the Governor speaks in a very diplomatic way, he is doing that by the necessity of extenuating the severity of the tough measures which will be taken against the protagonist.

The arrival of the Turks demarcates Barabas' position in the Maltese society, and it is the point where he becomes distinct. His money and wealth will be his source of anguish. When Barabas enquires about the amount of money he should pay and asks for a fair treatment and equality like any other citizen, he is encountered with an answer that puts him as an "infidel" other and a "stranger." This is translated through the discussion Barabas holds with the Governor and other top officials as he enquires about the Maltese laws and methods of taxation:

Sec. Knight. Have strangers leave with us to get their wealth?

Then let them with us contribute.

Barabas. How, equally?

Ferneze. No, Jew, like infidels. (I.ii.60-3)

Additionally, the Governor's demand of Barabas to pay the tribute money takes the form of a threat and restriction; in fact, Barabas was left with no room to manipulate or move freely, rather he was asked to pay immediately what they ask him to pay or he will face their penalties. If we to scrutinize the exercise of power in the pyramid of hierarchy within this theatrical milieu where the Turks sit at the top of the pyramid of hierarchy then much lower to that sits the Maltese Governor below him the Maltese people, but again there is a kind of hierarchy within the hierarchy where the Maltese are divided into citizens and foreigners or moral citizens and infidel ones. And, if we to judge the relationships between people occupying various locations on that pyramid of hierarchy, we will be bewildered with the unfairness that structures those relationships. In a similar situation, the Governor himself has been given a period of month to pay by the Turks! Whereas the Turks gave the Maltese Governor duration of one month to pay the tributes, the latter did not credit similar, or less, time to Barabas for managing the issue.

Rather, the Governor's demand was provocative and Barabas was pushed into a corner where he was left with not only with the lack of alternatives but also and more essentially with no freedom at all. The juxtaposition of both attitudes indicates that the Governor's resoluteness and harshness to have an immediate fulfilment of his orders cannot be justified. This attitude of the Governor and the instant report about confiscating the Jew's wealth and house reveal a pre-arranged intention for such encroachment. Where there is a 'decree' there should be typical subjects, like Barabas, for the best application of it. Ferneze *has* the decree. Consequently he exacts an arbitrary way in applying it. The Maltese decree states: 'First, the tribute-money of the Turks shall/ all be levied amongst the Jews, and each of them to pay/ one-half of his estate'(I.ii.69-71). Reading the articles of the decree, then, is but a means effectively held to legalize their act of confiscating his wealth and property. 'Sir, half is the penalty of our decree;/Either pay that, or we will seize on all.'(I.ii.89-90) Unlike the Maltese Governor, Barabas has no decree at all, let alone his religious and racial separation, therefore he is left with no legal means to require equality. The Jew's exoticism is used and held as a pretext to fine, and assault on, him. Therefore, ideological justifications are needed to conceal or, more accurately, to legalize exercising power at its extreme over him.

It is very probable that Barabas' question-like request to be treated equally in taxation payments would not have found any kind of sympathy by the Elizabethan audiences because Barabas has already introduced himself not as equal to, or one of, but different from them, as we have seen above. Besides, the audiences, in general, would not be distracted from enquiring about the responsibility of the Maltese in this case where the danger comes from without (The Turks). By and large, the already ill-drawn image of Barabas is deteriorated further by the test he is put to when the Maltese national affairs were threatened by an exterior force. Indeed, the Turks' first arrival demanding a ten-year tribute from the Governor of Malta shook his status and from that time onwards his situation is unstable; his identity came into question and was redefined in the most discriminate way. As we will see, the attributes with which Barabas was labelled were not so much a source of hatred towards him as that when he was not largely cornered when it came to the national affairs of the state, his bane loomed or became inevitable as his status was linked to, and conditioned by, the Maltese national state affairs. To phrase it differently, the political world of Malta has obviously determined Barabas's position in society.

Depending on Barabas' pinpointed identity, the Maltese take the matter to its extreme by bring religious hatred and evoking historically controversy surrounding theological questions, and defining Barabas as a religiously different "other." Within this context, it becomes a quite basic discourse to bring about the Jews' theological inherited sin: "'tis not our fault, but thy inherent sin.'(I.ii.110)

For through our sufferance of your hateful lives,

Who stand accursed in the sight of heaven,

These taxes and afflictions are befallen. (I.ii.63-5)

Linking the troubles inflicted upon a Christian society to the historical sin would serve, in this situation, no other purpose than accepting the measures taken by the Governor against Barabas. Rather, that would have added more estrangement to the position of the Jew, both theologically and racially. Even Barabas's name would not been a favourable one to Christian audiences.¹⁴ To add more weird and sinful traits to Barabas, he was linked to "moneylending" which was forbidden according to orthodox tenets of Christianity; hence it would have been deplorable to the audiences to hear the very words of the central figure in the play identifying himself as a usurer 'Then after that was I an usurer,'(II.iii.192) and 'A hundred for a hundred I have taken'(IV.i.53). Furthermore, and peculiarly enough, Barabas defines himself:

As for myself, I walk abroad O'night,

And kill sick people groaning under walls;

Sometimes I go about and poison wells; (II.iii.176-8)

Despite all weirdness in his self-presentation and the theatrical conventions of introducing a villain to audiences who are not uninformed about the racial and religious affiliation of the character presented to them, still, it remains unclear whether Barabas's words are ironically used at certain points or he internalises hatred against him and he reflects that by articulating his criminal deeds! These possibilities might be called into question eventually as he starts to translate his words into deeds, as we will see below. Nevertheless, the use of poison as an instrument of murder is mentioned by Machiavelli in *The Discourses* and in *The Prince*¹⁵ and Gentillet misrepresented Machiavelli as recommending killing by poison. Marlowe drew on Gentillet to characterize Barabas as murdering by poison. The poison in the play is explicitly linked to Italy: it was bought 'of an Italian in Ancona once.' (III.iii. 69) The dramatic use of poison thus refers to two sources: the common misconception of the Jews and the distortion of Machiavelli by Gentillet.

Additionally, Barabas links himself directly to Machiavelli in his line:'I learned in Florence how to kiss my hand,/ heave up my shoulders when they call me dog'(II.iii.23-4)¹⁶ In

¹⁴ Barabas's name would have reminded the audience of the condemned Jewish thief who was released by Pontius Pilatus instead of Christ on request of the Jews. See, Charles G. Masinton, *Christopher Marlowe's Tragic Vision: A Study in Damnation* (USA: Ohio university Press, 1972), p.59.

¹⁵ See N.W. Bawcutt, 'Machiavelli and Marlowe's The Jew of Malta' in *Renaissance Drama* III. ed., S. Schoenbaum (Northwestern University Press, 1970)p.28

¹⁶ It should be noted that Machiavelli is Florentine.

this context Barabas's Jewish characteristics appear as a means to create in the audience a hatred against Machiavellian thought. All in all, it is quite conceivable to conclude that the Elizabethan audience would have received the Maltese Governor's decree as a fair law. It wouldn't have been looked inequality to ask a Jew to pay half of his 'estate': 'the offer would have seemed not only just but generous.'¹⁷

In Addition to the degenerated behavioural conducts, morals, none-commitment to state national affairs, with which Barabas is categorized, a physical description was necessary to transform his image from that of a merchant, conducting business to become that of an ironically vilified individual. The unsympathetic characteristics are revealed within the schemes of the theatrical conventions will function to serve as adding more division between Barabas and the audience. The mitigated hidden volatile characteristics of the Barabas of the first scene are now displayed in details. In other words, the modified image of Barabas undergoes different mutational metamorphosis, the wealthy merchant, once his status is threatened, he is revealed as possessing entirely different characteristics from those cross by comparison ones at his first appearance.

A **caricatural** description of the facial features of the Jew is highlighted, and more and more references to that would float in identifying him, thus we see the villain's slave, Ithamore, frequently refers to his master's 'nose' (II.iii.175) and 'subtle-bottle nosed knave.' (III.iii.10) The physical appearance of Barabas then becomes a purposeful element in explicating his villainy because the focus on his nose would not have been reduced only to a racial difference but also because this calls up the graphic description of the Devil in the morality plays,¹⁸ thus the devilish depiction would contribute to the constructed image of Barabas with his villainous aspects and later cruelty. In fact, no single significant reminder of villainy has been neglected in the designation of Barabas's character. The choice is made effective by using the Jewish "stereotype" of that time to exemplify the villain.

Barabas's body language would have disclosed a kind of intolerable character by the audience, moving stealthily, manipulating, plotting, to identify himself as the 'villain.' These theatrical movements and his ways of saying things, communicating with others etc.. are very much augmented features made so in order to frame him with some indications of the absence of clarity and precision, and signs of plotting and manipulating as he speaks aside. He speaks unfinished sentences with excessive use of asides to accentuate his dubious deceptive nature. For instance when he talks to the Governor's son, Barabas says: 'And be revenged upon---

17 Alfred Harbage 'Innocent Barabas' in *Tulane Drama Review* (VIII), 1964. p.52.

18 for displaying the nose of the Devil character see T.W. Craik, *The Tudor Interlude* (Leicester: 1958), pp.51, 132. See, also, for the effect of the artificial nose: J.L. Cardozo, *The Contemporary Jew in Elizabethan Drama* (Amsterdam: 1925), pp.139-140.

[*aside*] governor' (II.iii.145).¹⁹ Barabas's Character can be described briefly as being constructed by the combination of onstage hurtful characteristics and offstage contemporary popular misconceptions.²⁰

Whereas Barabas's story is portrayed as that of one who is religiously and racially different from that of the Maltese among whom he lives but with whom he has almost nothing in common when it comes to the national affairs of the state (as they understand it), the broader story is that which tells of a conflict caused by the exercise of power used by the Turks who tax the Maltese, and the Maltese, in turn, react in such unbalanced way towards the citizens. Had there been no threats by the Turks, there might have been no such problematization of Barabas's situation. Indeed, it is the wealth that Barabas accumulates which puts him as the central attraction for levying the state taxes required by an exterior force. Then it becomes permissible to infringe on others' wealth and find theological, legal, and ethical, or whatsoever, reasons for doing so. That's why the Maltese discourse would stress that the 'Excess of wealth is the cause of covetousness:/And covetousness, oh,'tis a monstrous sin!'(I.ii.124-5) But this discourse is valid only when things are related to others like Barabas where even divinity will give right to the Maltese Governor to confiscate Barabas wealth and property. In many respects, capturing the Jew's wealth and house is channelled in a way that makes it look legitimized. On the theological level, preference is given to the community rather than to an individual: 'And better one want for a common good/Than many perish for a private man.'(I.ii.99-100)²¹ On the social and moral levels. Barabas's house is not given to individuals in what might seem an act of oppressing a citizen in favour of another. Rather, it is made a religious place: 'Convert his mansion to a nunnery;/ His house will harbour our holy nuns,'(I.ii.130-1) i.e., transferring the villain's house into God's house held by religious community.

As mentioned above, Barabas's story surfaces as the major attraction of the play, but at its core, the action in the play is provoked by *one* central motivation: the attraction to gold and the love of acquiring money and wealth. To the question of the Maltese Governor "What wind

¹⁹ This line appears as if completely uttered aside in *The Jew of Malta* ed. N. W. Bawcutt (Manchester University Press, 1978). While only the word 'governor' appears as uttered aside in other editions: for instance, in *The Jew of Malta* ed. Richard W. Van Fossen (London: Edward Arnold Publishers LTD, 1965), and in *The Jew of Malta* ed. T.W. Craik (London & New York: 1966/79).

²⁰ The Jews did not enjoy a good profile in Elizabethan England. In fact, Jews were banned from England at that time; there was no shortage of popular legends and allegations used against Jews. For a broader discussion of the Jews in Elizabethan England see, for example, Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews in England* (Oxford: 1941/78), Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews* (Yale, 1943), p.107. See, also, Sebastian Munster's *Cosmographia* Basle, 1550. pp.133, 457-8., H.Graetz, *History of Jews*, (London:1982), John Gwyer 'The Case of Dr Lopez,' in *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, XVI. 1952, p.183, see also Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea* (Cambridge University Press, 1968).

²¹ See *The Jew of Malta* and *The Massacre at Paris* ed., H.S. Bennett, (London: 1931), and in G. K. Hunter 'The Theology of Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*' in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXVII. (1964), p.236. This is an echo of John, xi. 50, 'It is expedient for vs, that one man dye for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.'

drives you thus into Malta road?" The leader of the Turks explicitly states "wind that drives all the world besides: Desire of gold." (III.v.2-4) Indeed, the 'Desire of gold' wages wars and sets peaceful agreements in the worlds of the play. Though racial, religious, and national elements were brought to the front position in shaping the theatrical events, however they remain minor and subservient to the essential above-mentioned motive. The main conflict in the play, which is supposedly between Turks and Maltese, has come to a 'Truce' in 'hope of gold.' The Governor's decision to break his promise and wage wars with the Turks is made only to 'keep the gold'. It is the love of business and gaining money even by trading with human, that is why, and how, we find the Spaniards' promised support to Ferneze is conditioned by selling 'Grecians, Turks, and Afric Moors' slaves in the slave market of Malta where 'Everyone's price is written on his back.'(II.iii.3) A condition that makes the Maltese' religious and moral claims questionable when their land hosts a slave market where people are bought and sold. Hence, it becomes more obvious that to the Maltese, the Tribute money should not be given to pagan Turks, nor should it be with Barabas! On his part, Barabas considers Gold to be his 'fortune,' 'felicity,' 'beauty,' 'bliss' and he does not hide his thoughts from the very beginning of the play and keeps that as his method of life throughout the play; by contrast, while everyone else around him overtly pretends to be fashioned with morals and religious ethics and claim to disdain wealth as a 'sinful' source, as discussed above, they covertly seek money and wealth. So is the case with all other characters around Barabas. If Barabas is described with greed and criticised for his love of money, the Maltese are no different in their love of money but, for one reason or another, they cannot openly declare that, rather they have to resort to ways of legalizing this aim. On these grounds the Maltese conduct their campaign against Barabas and the tension created by theological prejudice against Barabas is but a pretext to authorize the assault upon him. It is best expressed by Friar Jacomo: 'O, happy hour,/Wherein I Shall convert/an infidel, and bring his gold into our treasury.'(IV.i.161-3) Friar Jacomo did not mention anything related to a change or improvement of human behaviour, rather he was quick to pronounce his aim of seizing upon Barabas's wealth to be added to their own. In other words, conversion to Friar Jacomo is necessarily accompanied by Barabas's giving up his gold to be brought into 'our treasury.' Not different from Friar Jacomo's intention at heart, the Governor and his Knights and Officers claim that Barabas's wealth should be willingly 'ours.' In times of peace, Barabas's growth of wealth is an act of sinful greed and covetousness, but at times of probable war, Barabas should prove a dutiful defender of Malta by, dutifully, accepting to give it up by announcing that his part in protecting Malta will be not by warring against the Turks but by paying money:

1 Knight.

Tut, Jew, we know thou art no soldier;

Thou art a merchant, and a moneyed man,

And 'tis thy money, Barabas, we seek. (I.ii.52-4)

The main conflict, which is between Maltese and outsider forces, is obscured by highlighting sub-conflicts, like that between Maltese Christians and Maltese Jew, and framing them as if they were the main, and by doing that there is not only a kind of shifting the focus from the centre to the margin but also a kind of legitimating what normally cannot be done. On this level the encroachment on Barabas becomes permissible. Thus we Barabas being attacked not only by the Governor, his Knights, and Friars, but also marginal Maltese such as Bellamira, the prostitute, and her pimp Pilia-Borza who want their share even if by threatening and blackmailing him: 'the gold, or know, Jew, it is in my/Power to hang thee.'(IV.iii.37-8)

Ithamore's association with his master is depicted as a sort of partnership rather than a slave/master relationship. Strange as it might seem, they believe they have a common religious enemy being: 'Both circumcised, we hate Christians both.'(II.iii.217) This alliance proves fragile when things come to money affairs so that Ithamore continuously demands 'golden crowns' and that act of dispossessing and Barabas, oddly enough, is viewed as an approved benevolent act. : 'to undo a Jew is a charity, and not a sin.' (IV.iv.76)

Barabas and his daughter, Abegail, are not the only Jews who live in Maltese spheres of the play, there are three other Jews. However, those three others are different from Barabas in the sense that they are can be recognised as one-dimensional characters, they dutifully pay the tallage of their being Jews without noises and prove to be obedient subjects and they secure continuing to live in some form of relative stability; whereas they only act, Barabas, by contrast, reacts to the bias against him. Instead of giving in, Barabas fights back on all possible levels. They insult him religiously, so does he when he articulates his revulsion towards them: 'these hateful Christians' (I.ii.338), 'Swine-eating Christians/ (Unchosen nation, never circumcised.'²²(II.iii.7-8) In his one of those frenzied moments he decides to collaborate with the 'pagan Turks' against Malta, the Christian society, promising to aid the Turks and guide them to enter the city and to help wreaking havoc among them, butchering their wives and children and destroying their churches and homes:

For by my means Calymath shall enter in.

I'll help to slay their children and their wives,

To fire the churches, pull their houses down;(V.i.63-5)

To many critics, his reaction is seen as a vicious act of villainy and revenge, while some others would perceive it as an act of self-defence. It is difficult in our time remoteness to speculate whether the Elizabethan audiences would have been homogeneous in their perception of Barabas

²² Religious disputations were the chief business of the intellectual life in the late sixteenth century London. Besides people were executed for having different religious beliefs. See Harbage, p.52.

ultimately as a villain or there would have been a possibility wherewith at least some of them who would have approached the issue differently! Still, the audience's sympathy towards Barabas might have been wiped out by the series of killing which he skilfully masters. He is reduced to a never ceasing machine of killing. He conspires, kills, or causes the killing of, an enormous number of characters onstage or offstage.²³ Killing and deception are present at any moment Barabas wishes to. He kills: Abegail's two suitors, Abegail, all the nuns, Friar Bernardine and Friar Jacomo, Pilia-Borza, Bellamira, Ithamore, an uncountable number of the Turkish soldiers, Carpenters, and finally he himself is trapped by his own invention of the infernal machine. The massive number of those killed by Barabas would not be a source of admiration even when it is self-defence.

The Governor's hegemonic action over the Jew is maintained, as we have seen earlier, by the weapons called law, decree, moral, etc. whereas the weapon Barabas resorts to is the physical violence exercised against his rivals in a treacherous way of killing. His murderous reaction is recruited to Abegail's suitor. The Jew's daughter, Abegail, was often praised by critics who admired her neutrality or disinterestedness. That is embodied in most what has been said about her by critics, for example, Harry Levin's description of Abegail as "the single disinterested character in the play, who is characterized by the first four words she speaks: 'not for my selfe...'"²⁴ She could be rather viewed, however, by the *last* four words she speaks: 'I die a Christian' (III.vi.40) (see below). The attribute "disinterested," we might clearly notice is most appropriate to the three Jews in the play; in fact she was not different from them in the sense she did not react as her father did, or she was not in direct encounter with the Maltese decrees, laws and biased Governor and Officials. She did not need to react to what has been inflicted upon Jews because her father was the one who was in direct encounter with the kind of discrimination that needed resistance. Like Leving, Roma Gill sees Abegail as 'the one good, morally good character in the play: she is obedient to her father...'²⁵ Abegail pretended to have converted first upon the instructions of her father, in contrast to her final conversion, Abegail's first pretentious conversion is excused by Roma Gill and explained within the legitimate ties of the filial obedience. This is a rather conservative view where Abegail's 'good[ness]' springs from her malleable mind. She listens to her father but when she recognizes that he is cornered and had no room for manipulation she shifted sides. She not only approves of the Maltese ideology, but she

23 When the killing occurs onstage, the emotional reaction of the audience increases, because it involves the theatricality of the visual effect.

24 Harry Levin, *The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe* (USA: 1952), p.70.

25 Roma Gill 'Lectures on Doctor Faustus and Marlowe in Perspective,' Battle. Norwich Tapes 1982.

also propagates for it.²⁶ It is attention drawing how critics are prepared to forgive Abegail's false conversion and celebrate her genuine one, and how they can consider focus on her second conversion more than on her accomplice one! Abegail's step in converting can be framed as a pragmatic one, she wants to place herself within society and not outside it since she knows the future will be to that of the Maltese without her father, her conversion is , more or less a clear practice to what we know in our own time that "might is right." Abegail's description of her Barabas as 'hard-hearted father,'(III.iii.39) would neither harden the Maltese verdict on him nor will it ease either, but it saves her face and puts her as different from her father in the eyes of the Maltese. Abegail's conversion to Christianity can be regarded more as more due to her psychological pressure, she could have converted, among other reasons, because she does not want to be described as the Jew's daughter, or the villain's daughter. Her words about Barabas's beliefs: 'Unkind Barabas,/Was this the pursuit of thy policy'(III.iii.39-40) could have possibly been a message for the Maltese rather than being hearty articulated. Similarly, he conversion would have been to save face rather than looking favourably on the fruitfulness of Christianity 'But now experience, purched with grief,/Has made me see the difference of things.'(III.iii.64-5) Stephen Greenblatt indirectly criticizes Abegail's conversion in his introductory fantasy to an essay where he imagines the Jew to have had two children one is a boy and another is a girl, the girl was sickened by her father's violent action and felt ashamed of him and converted to Christianity (she was Abegail) and the son did not follow the same, rather he set up to analyse the way his father was constructed, to view him within broader socio-economic frames of being the product of a capitalist society with all its greed, violence and brutality (the supposed boy is Karl Marx).²⁷

Converting Jews to Christians, in the play, is an aim of the Maltese. The second article of the decree states that a Jew has to give up either money or religion: 'he that denies to pay shall straight /become a Christian.'(I.ii.73-4) By her conversion Abegail fulfils what the Maltese have targeted at. 'But I perceive there is no love on earth,/ Pity in Jews, nor piety in Turks.' (III.iii.50-1) When Abegail generalizes her statement by saying "there is no mercy on earth" she does not exclude the Maltese Christians, but she is overruled by the bitter reality, therefore she continues her pragmatic way of dealing with the issue. This is further consolidate by her wish that her father would be realistic or he would be convince to change his religion in order to be on the safe side "Abeg. Convert my father that he might be saved." We might understand Abegail's disappointment in life and religion. Therefore she abandons her religion in

²⁶ See (III.iii.39-40), and (III.iii.64-5) quoted above.

²⁷ See Stephen Greenblatt, "Marlowe, Marx, and Anti-Semitism", *Critical Inquiry*, 5. (1978), 291-307 (p. 291).

favour of Christianity: “And witness that I die a Christian.” A statement followed by Friar Bernardine’s comment “Bern. Ay, and a virgin, too, that grieves most” (III.v.39-41)²⁸

Abegail’s conversion is a crucial event in the play. She is unable to find suitable position outside the religious frames, more precisely: the Christian frames. If she apostatized her religion in favour of none, that would have established another perspective, and would have corresponded with what has been -later- attributed to Marlowe of "atheism." Her apostasy, then, would have protected Marlowe’s name not for the Elizabethan audience but for us.

In his conflict with Malta, Barabas’s line is forged by exigent responses to this arising situation or that. He can dubiously handle over Malta to the Turks, and can imprison her Governor too. Neither the Turks nor the Maltese are given preference or priority to each other in Barabas’s mind. Being a true representative of Machiavel, to Barabas it is rather, the personal interests from which his mode of thinking emerges:

Making a profit of my policy ;

And he from whom my most advantage comes

Shall be my friend. (V.ii.112-4)

Policy, which was taken in the sixteenth century to mean deception to serve one’s private ends,²⁹ becomes Barabas’s Guide and companion. His Rivals, on the other hand, take ‘heavens’ as their source of enlightenment and support. Thereby, the prejudice held against the Jew is not only justified but also a heavenly will be exemplified in his abandonment: ‘Converse not with him, he is cast off from heaven.’(II.iii.160) The unequal treatment of Barabas, pursued in the Governor’s biased method of taxation, is made so because the latter is ‘hateful’ and ‘accursed in the sight of heaven.’(I.ii.64) The play depicts the Governor as the moral figure who looks to heaven in misery and in joy. While imprisoned because of Barabas’s deception the Governor exclaims ‘What greater misery could heaven inflict?’(V.i.54) Commenting on Del Bosco’s astonishment at Barabas’s sudden -pretended- death, Ferneze says ‘Wonder not at it, sir, the heavens are just’ (V.i.54)³⁰ While Barabas is depicted as excluding the morals, to him, religion is only a means of

²⁸ Unlike the opinion which says that Friar Bernardine’s comment transforms the situation to a comedy (Roma Gill and many others), I see Friar Bernardine’s words as a confirmation of Abegail’s honesty in the Elizabethan sense of chastity. When Queen Elizabeth I herself was urged by her Parliament for marriage she replied: ‘And in the end, this shall be for me sufficient , that a marble stone shall declare that a Queen, having reigned such a time , lived and died a virgin.’ See J.E.Neale, *Elizabeth I and her Parliaments, 1559-1581* (London: J. Cape, 1953/57),p.49.

²⁹ See Howard S. Babb ‘Policy in Marlowe’s The Jew of Malta’ in *E.L.H.* XXIV (1957),p. 86.

³⁰ In sixteenth century public executions, the punished were taught to repeat sentences before the execution indicating their punishable crimes and that God ordered their deaths. The executioners used such phrases like that of the Governor. See Karen Cunningham ‘Renaissance Execution and Marlovian Elocution: The Drama of Death’ in *PMLA: Publications of Modern Language Associations of America*, 105 (2) 1990.

covering on because it 'hides many mischiefs from suspicion.'(I.ii.282) The action is stimulated by the sharp contrast between the Governor's morality and Barabas's practicality, a challenge which results in a series of losses on the side of the Governor. He can assure Barabas 'O villain, heaven will be revenged upon thee!' (V.ii.25)

To end the conflict between the Christian Governor and the Jew, the latter's own infernal machine and his deception recoil upon him and he falls into a cauldron³¹ In a scene which is regarded like the trials of the criminal in the sixteenth century, while tortured in the boiling cauldron, Barabas keeps on his way of reacting to the Maltese and revenging upon them but this time psychologically. Contrary to what many critics would regard as confession when counting his action in the final scenes, it can be argued that it is a kind of resorting to the last weapon he has to revenge upon his enemies when torturously reminding them of earlier disasters that have been inflicted upon them, thus while dying he makes them suffer psychologically as well:

know, governor, 'twas I that slew thy son;
I framed the challenge that did make them meet,
Know, Calymath, I aimed thy overthrow. (V.v.80-2)

Although Barabas's punishment could be regarded as a spectacle from which the audience could learn a moral lesson, it is also a reminder that people who are discriminated against do not always act, they also react.

This is not the end of the story for the Christian Governor who triumphs over his Turkish enemy; and Calymath is kept to live 'in Malta prisoner'(V.v.118) and Malta is in a Christian hand. This is the moment the Governor waited for; 'Heaven' sided with him: it gives him support and continuity. He celebrates his resumption of power:

So, march away, and let due praise be given
Neither to fate nor to fortune, but to heaven. (V.v.122-3)

Barabas's deceptive and murderous policy recoiled upon him. Murder, which according to Machiavel's prologue can be kept hidden, by all means is unveiled. Barabas's policy fails and the Maltese Governor's moral succeeds: a confirmation that the world is morally ordered. The ending fulfils what the play has already promised with in the prologue: 'And let him not be entertained the worse/ Because he favours me.'(Prol.34-5) Besides, Karen Cunningham has

31 According to H.S. Bennett, in the production of *The Jew of Malta* in 1598 there was a cauldron for the Jew in the Admiral's inventory of 1598.

shown that 'that textual closure is itself part of a scene construction'³² Barabas is finally punished. In fact Machiavel is punished for his attempts to exclude the morals.

In most readings published in the second half of this century, the play is seen as ironic about the Governor and his hypocrisy and pretentious religious characteristics of the Maltese. This is a present view. I tend to believe that the play should be read in relation to its historical context. In this light, the play shows explicitly its ideology: promoting morality.

Barabas's rebellion against Malta is marked not by his temporal success but by the description of that success, its significance is much aggravated by the protagonist's final failure. But, the crux of the matter is not in the play itself, it is rather beyond the text; it is in the ideological conceptions the play induces in its audience³³ Hence, the point of the play is not presenting Barabas's Machiavellism in his conflict with Malta, it is, in fact, the deceptive, murderous attributes to this Machiavellism. By and large, the play is estimated by the way it presents the Machiavellian thought to its audience.

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³² Karen Cunningham. p. 216.

³³ Philip Henslowe, the famous stage manager of the time, in his *Diary* states that the play was performed some thirty six times between 26 February 1591 and 21 June 1596. See *Henslowe's Diary* ed. R.A. Foaks and R.T. Rickert (Cambridge,1961),pp.16-26, 36-7.

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