VIOLENCE AND THE OVERREACHER IN THE PLAYS OF CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

PETER COLLINS, B.A.

Violence and the Overreacher in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe

By

Peter Collins, B.A.

A thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of English Language and Literature
Memorial University of Newfoundland

January 1990

St.John's Newfoundland

ISBN 0-315-59204-4

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Dr. Elizabeth Popham for her virtually limitless patience during those many long afternoons of coffee and Christopher Marlowe. Her insightful commentary, delivered with her characteristic grin, contributed enormously to this thesis and to my knowledge of the period. I also thank Michael Nolan (M.A.) for his proofreading and criticism of my work. Finally, I must thank the multitude of family and friends whose continual inquiries as to the progress of my thesis irritated me into finishing it.

Abstract

Elizabethan scholarship has, for the most part, overlooked the importance of violence in the period's drama. Although recent scholarship displays an awareness of this glaring oversight, the study of Christopher Marlowe's use of dramatic violence remains, for the most part, limited to uneven commentaries, of no more than a page or two, in the major works of Marlovian criticism. The standard critical approach has been to dismiss the dramatic violence of his plays as either the regrettable product of a violent social milieu or the result of the influence of the violent Senecan and native dramatic traditions.

The generally dismissive critical attitude towards violence in Marlowe's work and, by extension, in all Elizabethan drama, is clearly inadequate. I shall attempt to rectify this oversight by examining the use of dramatic violence in Marlowe's plays in order to show how thoughtfully the playwright employed violence for a variety of theatrical and thematic purposes. As a primary focus I will use the "overreacher," a term originally coined by Harry Levin in his seminal study of power and aspiration in Marlowe's works, to illustrate how integral is the analysis of Marlowe's use of dramatic violence to the study of character and theme in his plays.

In Tamburlaine: Part One Marlowe uses violent language

to define an overreaching figure of incredible power and attraction, while in Part Two his increasing use of disturbing staged violence suggests a questioning of the overreacher's amorality. In The Jew of Malta Marlowe makes extensive use of comic violence to refashion a morality Vice within a Renaissance context. Here the exploitation of the comic aspects of violence (a common feature of the dialogue and stage action in all of Marlowe's plays) undercuts any negative audience reaction to the protagonist's crimes and even allows the audience to identify, to some degree, with the fantastically villainous Barabas. In Doctor Faustus the comic violence of the "eldritch" and "comedy of evil" traditions plays a vital role in depicting the degeneration of the Marlovian overreacher. With The Massacre at Paris and Edward II the overreacher has been debased from visionary to villain. In these plays Marlowe questions the overreacher's power and engenders sympathy for the pathetic Edward, despite his weak misrule of England, by portraying him as the hapless victim of the overreacher's violence.

Table of Contents

Introduction

> One of the baffling aspects of our species is its continuing attraction to violence. Though we admit it reluctantly and many persons genuinely dislike to participate in violent scenes, few of us indeed are immune to its inherent fascination.[1]

The use of dramatic violence is an aspect of the Elizabethan theatre which has, for all its prominence, attracted remarkably little critical attention. The dearth of criticism in this area is particularly noticeable in studies of the often overwhelmingly violent plays of Christopher Marlowe. Harry Levin gives this facet of Marlovian drama little attention save to note that he believed the canon's more horrific scenes would have been "decently obscured" in performance. Paul Kocher refers to Marlovian stage violence only in passing, attributing its presence in the plays to the dramatist's own violent spirit. Even J.B. Steane, who allows the subject more than a brief mention, does not consider the manifold uses, both theatrical and thematic, that Marlowe makes of dramatic violence.[2] The general critical approach to

---

[1] J. Glenn Gray, "Understanding Violence Philosophically," in his On Understanding Violence Philosophically and other Essays (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p.1.

[2] Harry Levin, Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher (1961; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p.124; Paul Kocher, Christopher Marlowe: A Study of his Thought, Learning and Character (1946; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), p.241; J.B. Steane, Marlowe: A Critical Study (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1964), pp.84-5, 114, 171. For some amusing accounts of the lengths a few

this aspect of Marlowe's plays is to acknowledge briefly the prominence of violence in his work, and then dismiss it, with a note of condescending apology, as either the product of the demands of an extremely violent social environment upon an energetic young playwright, or else the unfortunate legacy of the violence in the Senecan or native literary traditions.

While this approach raises many valid points, it does not explain fully the complex subtleties, thematic significance, and theatrical power of Marlowe's dramatic violence. In order to illustrate the importance of the analysis of dramatic violence to the study of these aspects of his plays, I will examine Marlowe's use of violence to depict major characters and themes. Particular emphasis will be placed upon the role of dramatic violence in creating a shift in audience sympathy from the overreacher to his victims over the course of the six stage plays; Marlowe's use of comic violence in the refashioning of the popular medieval Vice figure; and violence as a tool in the reworking of the de casibus theme, the

---

critics will go to deny the existence of the more sanguinary aspects of the Elizabethan stage see Leo Kirschbaum, "Shakespeare's Stage Blood and its Critical Significance," PMLA, 64(1949), 517-29.

Those critics who afford Elizabethan stage violence some study are usually confined, for reasons of space, to giving Marlowe's employment of it only a page or two of text. See Gerald Levine, "Violence and Sensationalism in Elizabethan England," Diss. New York 1968, pp.148-51; Maurice Charney, "The Persuasiveness of Violence in Elizabethan Plays," Renaissance Drama, NS2(1969), 68-9; Huston Diehl, "The Iconography of Violence in English Renaissance Tragedy," Renaissance Drama, NS2(1980), 34-5, 42-3.

"eldritch" tradition, and the tradition of the "comedy of evil."[3]

In Tamburlaine the Great: Parts One and Two dramatic violence defines Tamburlaine as the ultimate overreacher.[4] In Part One, it is largely Marlowe's deft employment of violent speech, instead of violent stage action, which allows the audience to sympathize more with the overreaching tyrant than with his hapless victims. Tamburlaine is significantly removed from personal involvement in his atrocities because their full horror is never brought home to the audience by means of visual stage violence. In Part Two, however, Marlowe's enthusiasm for his overreacher seems to have waned, for Tamburlaine is shown, for the first time, with the blood of

---

[3] Levin's landmark study of ambition and power in Marlowe's plays provides a widely accepted point of reference, that of the "overreacher" figure, from which to illustrate the importance of dramatic violence in the appreciation of Marlowe's achievements.

The apparent shift in Marlowe's sympathies was initially noted by Michel Poirier in his "Edward II" in "Edward II": Text and Major Criticism ed. Irving Ribner (New York: Odyssey Press, 1970), p.85. I have expanded upon it considerably here.

[4] This thesis will not examine Marlowe's first play, Dido Queen of Carthage, as it was never staged in the popular theatres of London and therefore lacks the violent theatricality that is so much a part of Marlowe's later plays, and which is the focus of this study.

As few scholars agree on the exact chronology of Marlowe's plays, they will be looked at in an order which does not violate the few facts we have concerning the chronology, and which agrees with the evolutionary development of the overreacher figure and Marlovian stage violence as outlined in this thesis. The dating of the plays will be discussed at the beginning of their respective chapters.

innocents on his hands. It is the violence of action, rather than the violence of language, which is stressed in this play, resulting in a curious sense of moral ambiguity in audience reaction to the overreacher as they are torn between a fascination with his power and a revulsion at his cruelties.

In The Jew of Malta and Doctor Faustus Marlowe uses violence to refashion aspects of earlier dramatic traditions within the framework of Renaissance tragedy. The fantastical Barabas of The Jew is more a Morality Vice than a Renaissance overreacher. Here Marlowe employs dramatic violence in an unrealistic manner, and always with a eye to its comic possibilities, in order to undercut audience distaste for his bloodthirsty protagonist. In Faustus violence is similarly depicted in a comic fashion. Here, however, it is used in the central portion of the play to underscore the degeneration of Faustus' overreaching vision, as expressed in the play's opening scenes, to the base trickery of a Vice-like figure. Faustus' debasement from great man to ridiculous Vice is marked by that comic violence which is an integral part of the "eldritch" tradition, and serves as illustration of the corrupting impotence of diabolical power which scholars refer to as the "comedy of evil." While in the Tamburlaine plays the ambitious overreacher was the "scourge of God," in Faustus the overreacher is a sympathetic victim of an oppressive cosmic order which strikes down those who aspire beyond their place in the "Chain of Being."

Violence plays an equally prominent role in characterizing the overreacher in The Massacre at Paris and Edward II, but the predominant attitude is now one of distaste for the amoral ethos of this creature. In sharp contrast with the generally sympathetic characters of Tamburlaine, Faustus, and even Barabas, the overreaching figure of Guise in The Massacre is undeniably repulsive. Marlowe's depiction of his cold, calculating use of violence is underscored, and not undercut, by comic touches that are disturbing rather than humourous, and which point more to the thematically "sericus" comedy of Faustus than to the belly-laughs of The Jew. Marlowe's introduction of contemporary religious conflict into the play also helps to ensure that his largely Protestant audience could only have seen Guise as a villain, and his victims, therefore, as sympathetic figures. In Edward II the play's protagonist and its overreacher figure are, for the first time, separate individuals. Edward, who initially has the taint of "unnatural vice" about him, is rendered sympathetic by means of the monstrously violent sufferings imposed upon him by the traitorous, overreaching Mortimer. The doomed king's resemblance to the hedonistic victims of earlier overreachers, Mycetes and Calyphas from the Tamburlaine plays, and Henry III from The Massacre, demonstrates that Marlowe's victims, like his overreachers, are part of an evolutionary progression that spans the Marlovian canon. The overreacher's inhuman disregard for the basic humanity of his victims helps

to engender a more profound sense of sympathy for these characters with each succeeding play until, with Edward and Mortimer, our sympathies have shifted entirely from overreacher to victim.

However, prior to delving into Marlowe's complex use of dramatic violence with a view to displaying the deficiencies of the standard critical approach, it is first necessary to examine in detail the two influences most widely held "responsible" for Marlovian dramatic violence: Elizabethan social violence, and the violent Senecan and native dramatic traditions.

Chapter I

Origins of Elizabethan Dramatic Violence

> So shall you hear
> Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
> Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,
> Of deaths put on by cunning and [forc'd] cause....
> (Hamlet V.ii. 380-83)

The extent of a society's influence upon its writers is always difficult to assess. Still many scholars express the conviction that there is a definite correlation between Elizabethan social violence and the violence of the Elizabethan stage. Lily Campbell observes, with reference to Shakespeare, that a playwright's work "can be understood only against the background of his own time. His ideas and his experiences are conditioned by the time and the place in which he lives."[5] Gerald Levine echoes this in arguing that the dramatic violence of the period was a "literary ... corollary to the violence expressed in the environment."[6] Stephen Greenblatt expresses a similar view with his perception of Marlowe's Tamburlaine as a "mirror" whose violence and restlessness is a reflection of the changing dynamics of

---

[5] Lily Campbell, Shakespeare's "Histories": Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy (Los Angeles, 1947; rpt. San Marino, Calif.: The Huntington Library, 1965), p.6.

[6] Levine, "Violence," p.146.

Elizabethan society.[7]

Certainly one of the most notable aspects of the Elizabethan environment was the pervasiveness of violence at all levels of society. The last decades of the 16th century saw continual warfare, heavy taxes, bad harvests, rampant inflation, rising prices, and returning waves of plague, all of which contributed to widespread hardship, even famine in the 1590's, and a general increase in social violence and civil unrest.[8] One product of this situation was the large

---

[7] Stephen Greenblatt, "Marlowe and the Will to Absolute Play," in his Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), p.194.

[8] Joel Hurstfield and Alan Smith, eds., Elizabethan People: State and Society (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), pp.27-30, 45-7, 50, 53-5.

Foreign observers of Tudor England were often surprised at the extraordinary level of violent turmoil in English politics. One Venetian diplomat, experienced in the casual butcheries of Renaissance Italian politics, expressed such astonishment in a report home at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign: "Hence also have resulted many depositions of great men and promotions of the unworthy, many imprisonments, exiles, and deaths. It is also a fact, incredible though true, namely, that during the last twenty years three Princes of the blood, four Dukes, forty earls, and more than three thousand other persons have died by violent death. It may therefore be easily imagined that no foreigner could rule this kind of people, when even their own countrymen are not safe." "Report by Michiel Soriano to the Signory," (1559), Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, 1558-80, as quoted in Hurstfield, Society, pp.32-3.

The troubled state of Elizabethan society was widely noted by continental observers of the time. The Venetian ambassador to Spain reported: "Everyone is agreed that at this juncture England is shaken by religious feuds, by plagues, and other internal troubles." Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, IX (1592-1603), p.119, as quoted in David Bevington, Tudor Drama and Politics (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), p.230.

number of homeless vagabonds roaming the countryside. Given the generally hysterical atmosphere of the Elizabethan polity, which was preoccupied with fears of rebellion, popish plots, and the Spanish menace, these people were seen as a political threat rather than a social problem and were brutally repressed.[9] Elizabethan social violence found its most common expression in the frequent nationwide sweeps to suppress vagabondage, such as the one in 1569 when, it is reported, some thirteen thousand "rogues and masterless men" were arrested around the country.[10] This vagrancy was punished with whipping, stocking, branding, ear-boring, forced labour in the galleys, slavery, deportation, and even hanging.[11] As Symonds

---

It is one of the amusing ironies of history that while the English of the 16th century were horrified by the Italian taste for poisonings, political murders and Machiavellianism, the Italians, for their part, were shocked by the blatantly savage nature of English society and politics. Benvenuto Cellini, whose Autobiography vividly reflects both the brilliance and the violence of life in 16th century Italy, speaks with loathing of the English as "questi diavoli--quelle bestie di quegli Inglesi."

[9] A.L. Beier, "Vagrants and the Social Order in Elizabethan England," Past and Present, 64(1974), pp.6-15.

[10] Beier, "Vagrants," p.5. It is interesting to note that a statute passed a few years later, in 1572, to suppress these vagabonds, included wandering troupes of actors (ie. those players not associated with a nobleman's company) in its proscribed list of anti-social elements. See An Acte for the punishement of Vacabondes and for Releif of the Poore & Impotent (1572, June 29) as quoted in E.K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage: Vol.IV (1923; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), pp.260-71.

[11] Beier, "Vagrants," p.15. Beier suggests the intriguing theory that the Elizabethan authorities were particularly oppressive towards the "masterless" and "idle" poor because these people, by their very existence,

observes: "Laws in merry England were executed with uncompromising severity. Every township had its gallows; every village its stocks, whipping post, and pillory."[12] Some scholars see, in the public nature of these sentences, a macabre parallel to the Elizabethan stage:

> The high number of such executions reflects not only judicial "massacres" but the attempt to teach through reiterated terror. Each branding or hanging or disemboweling was theatrical in conception and performance, a repeatable admonitory drama enacted on a scaffold before a rapt audience.[13]

This theatrical analogy is substantiated by contemporary accounts of public executions. The spectators, who were always

---

challenged the validity of the official, hierarchical cosmology which the politically insecure Elizabethan regime used as a justification of its right to govern. For a critical examination of the Elizabethan world-picture as popularized by Tillyard et al, see Wilbur Sanders, The Dramatist and the Received Idea (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1968).

[12] John Addington Symonds, Shakespeare's Predecessors in the English Drama (London, 1884; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1968), p.34.

[13] Greenblatt, Renaissance, p.201. See also Levine, "Violence," p.104.

Elizabethans were so conditioned by the frequency of judicial murder that public executions became a popular entertainment. Holinshed records that the execution of three men for robbing a booth at Bartholomew Fair was seen by a crowd of some twenty thousand. Henry Machyn reports a similar figure in attendance at a mass execution of thirteen people. See Raphael Holinshed, Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland (London, 1587, 1808; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1976), Vol.III, p.806; also Henry Machyn, Diary: 1550-1563, ed. John G. Nichols (London, 1848), p.108, as quoted in Levine, "Violence," p.102.

numerous, often had a great deal of influence upon the fate of the condemned. If the victim made a good speech to the crowd and behaved well, the audience might take pity on him and cry out for the executioner to forego the usual preliminary torture and kill the man quickly.[14] At one execution it is recorded that the victim had made a very pleasant speech and therefore "was immediately TURNED OFF, in the presence of above Five Hundred Spectators ... who for the Generality were very well pleased to see him make so good an EXIT."[15] Of course, should the victim's performance displease his audience, they would demand horrific tortures before finally allowing the condemned man to be put out of his misery.[16] These didactic "dramas" of mutilation and death generally failed in their intended purpose of inhibiting the spread of crime; but they clearly succeeded in accustoming the English populace to the sights and sounds of human butchery.[17]

---

[14] Levine, "Violence," p.108.

[15] William Parry, The Last Words of William Parry (1585), p.2, as quoted in Levine, "Violence," p.102.

[16] Levine, "Violence," pp.108-9.

[17] Christopher Hibbert, The Roots of Evil: A Social History of Crime and Punishment (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963), p.27. This "godly butchery" of criminals and traitors would sometimes even include the dismemberment of their genitals as an added degradation to the usual tortures, disembowellings and decapitations. (Hibbert, Evil, p.26).

During Elizabeth's reign, however, the number of these executions actually declined in comparison with the wholesale slaughters of the earlier Tudors. This decline, it

Of course, an Elizabethan did not need to go to a public execution in order to enjoy some bloody violence. Contemporary accounts reveal a society racked at all levels with violence and discontent. It has become almost a commonplace in studies of the period to note the predilection Elizabethan Londoners had towards rioting. Frequently these riots would begin with minor quarrels as in the instance of a tailor and a clerk who, in the summer of 1584, "fell out about a harlot." As was often the case, this dispute quickly escalated into a full-blown riot involving some 300 people, and culminated in the sacking of Lyon's Inn, one of the legal institutions attached to the Inner Temple.[18] Such uninhibited behaviour may have had its origins in the period's attitude towards social violence. Lawrence Stone considers that, for the Elizabethan, "readiness to repay an injury real or imagined was a sign of spirit" and, that given such an atmosphere, it is hardly surprising to note the pervasiveness of violence in Elizabethan society.[19]

---

has been suggested, stimulated the development of Elizabethan stage violence by forcing potential spectators to satisfy their jaded tastes with dramatic substitutes for the real violence. See Levine, "Violence," pp.19-20.

[18] "William Fleetwood, City Recorder, to Lord Burghley, June 18, 1584," as quoted in John Dover Wilson, ed., Life in Shakespeare's England: A Book of Elizabethan Prose (Cambridge, 1911; rpt. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969), p.93.

[19] Lawrence Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641 (Oxford, 1965; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p.223. Stone's analysis of the origins of the violent Elizabethan spirit continues with this novel observation: "This absence of restraint was all the more serious since men in the sixteenth century were so exceedingly irritable.

Nor was such violence limited to criminals and the lower classes, for the "behaviour of the propertied classes, like that of the poor, was characterized by the ferocity, childishness, and lack of self-control of the Homeric age."[20] The Elizabethan aristocracy engaged in violent feuds reminiscent of Romeo and Juliet, aided by companies of armed retainers, with a bloodthirsty passion that was truly remarkable. Sieges and pitched battles occurred in town and countryside, often in broad daylight, unchecked by judicial or royal authority.[21] The main arteries of London itself resounded with the cries of many bloody clashes:

> It was in Fleet Street that there took place in 1558 the armed affray between Sir John Perrot and William Phelippes, supported by their retainers; in Fleet Street that John Fortescue was beaten up by Lord Grey and his men in 1573; in Fleet Street that Edward Windham and Lord Rich carried on their repeated skirmishes in 1578; in Fleet Street that Lord Cromwell got mixed up in an armed affray in 1596; in the Strand that Lord Grey and his attendants attacked the Earl of Southhampton and his boy in 1600; in the Strand that Edward Cecil, future Viscount Wimbledon, lay in wait with ten soldiers to catch Auditor Povey.[22]

Their nerves seem to have been perpetually on edge, possibly because they were nearly always ill. The poor were victims of chronic malnutrition, the rich of chronic dyspepsia from over-indulgence in an ill-balanced diet: neither condition is conductive to calm and good humour." (p.224).

[20] Stone, Crisis, p.223.

[21] Stone, Crisis, pp.223-34.

[22] Stone, Crisis, pp.231-2.

Even the most prominent Elizabethan dramatists could not help but be caught up in this web of social violence. Marlowe, who played a part in the death of William Bradley in a rapier and dagger fight in 1589, was himself killed four years later, under suspicious circumstances, during a dispute in a tavern. Ben Jonson, who opposed the trend in the popular theatre towards sensational violence, killed an actor in a real-life fight to the death.[23]

Another frequent source of violent disturbances in Elizabethan society was the discharged soldiery of the Queen's many foreign campaigns. In the 1590's these men, experienced in war and violence, brought their skills home to England and terrorized the countryside.[24] Many of these soldiers gravitated towards the populous and wealthy city of London and added their numbers to the existing multitude of unemployed vagrants.[25] In 1589 Drake's expedition to Portugal returned and his unpaid soldiers were discharged, having been allowed to retain their weapons in lieu of back pay. Some five hundred of these men drifted up to London and threatened to loot Bartholomew Fair. Martial law was declared and two thousand

---

[23] John Bakeless, The Tragicall History of Christopher Marlowe (Harvard, 1942; rpt. Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1964), Vol.1, pp.99-100, 182-4; Julia Briggs, This Stage-Play World: English Literature and its Background 1580-1625 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983), p.59.

[24] Hurstfield, Society, pp.37-8.

[25] A.V. Judges, Introd., The Elizabethan Underworld (1930; rpt. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p.xvii.

more soldiers were called up by the authorities to repel the horde. The threat, however, was to continue unabated for the next six months with even London, at one point, finding itself under siege.[26] This dangerous discontent among the unemployed soldiery was touched upon by Marlowe in Edward II:

> **Gaveston.** And what art thou?
>
> **Third Poor Man.** A soldier, that hath served against the Scot.
>
> **Gaveston.** Why, there are hospitals for such as you.
> I have no war, and therefore, sir, be gone.
>
> **Third Poor Man.** Farewell, and perish by a soldier's hand,
> That wouldst reward them with a hospital.
> (I.i. 33-38)

Whether or not these lines, written shortly after the incident at Bartholomew Fair, were prompted by the riotous soldiery is a matter of speculation. However, living in such a violent environment must have influenced, to some degree, Elizabethan playwrights such as Marlowe, and this influence is evident in their works.[27] The influence of social violence

---

[26] Judges, Underworld, pp.xvii-xviii.

[27] Marlowe's famous "rashnes in attempting soden pryvie iniuries to men" ("Second Letter from Thomas Kyd to Sir John Puckering," in Millar Maclure, ed., Marlowe: The Critical Heritage 1588-96 [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979], pp.35-6) has led some critics to the conclusion that the extensive stage violence present in his plays is more a reflection of the playwright's own violent spirit than a "mirror" of the violent Elizabethan society. It may be profitable to consider this view when studying certain controversial aspects of Marlowe's work such as his

upon Elizabethan dramatists and their work may derive either directly from their personal exposure to this violence, or indirectly through the demands of their audience whose taste for violent drama was whetted by the violence present in the environment. As Levine notes, "there emerges from the plays a reiterated behavioral pattern which is similar to the described responses in the Elizabethan community, in which the habit of violence was both a conditioned attitude as well as a conditioning force."[28]

The violence of the Elizabethan society and stage most frequently overlapped in the liberties of London which were crowded with brothels, theatres, and bear-baiting houses. It

---

"blasphemies" and his unorthodox "free-thinking" on matters of Elizabethan policy. However, the degree to which Marlowe's violent spirit was more a unique personal character trait than the product of a violent social environment, is clearly impossible to ascertain. See Kocher, Thought, pp.4-5, 241. For an interesting variant on this view of personality influencing art, see also Clifford Leech, "Marlowe's Edward II: Power and Suffering," Critical Quarterly, 1, No. 3 (1959), 182.

[28] Levine, "Violence," p.271. Harbage does not accept the view that the Elizabethans were a particularly violent people. In Shakespeare's Audience (p.153), he argues: "Each age has its own brutalities. The Elizabethans were forced to live more intimately with theirs and they acceded to the conditions of their existence.... Beneath its 'callouses' human nature must have been the same in Shakespeare's day as in ours."

Though much of the twentieth century world has seen far more grotesque, violent horrors than anything an Elizabethan could have imagined, still many modern Western audiences would probably have a higher sensitivity towards violence, both real and imagined, than most Elizabethan audiences. There exists a qualitative difference between seeing atrocities on the television news and viewing murders and tortures in person as an everyday occurrence.

is thought that plays were often staged in these bear-baiting pits before Henslowe and Burbage built their theatres (and even after), and it is highly probable that these entertainments shared not only the same stage but the same audience as well.[29] An audience that would frequent such a place would undoubtedly insist upon a good deal of "blood and thunder," and therefore "it is good policy to amaze those violent spirits, with some tearing Tragaedy full of fights and skirmishes."[30]

It is in these "violent spirits" that we most frequently find a taste for dramatic violence combined with a predilection towards violent behavior. Accounts of their antics record many dramatic performances

---

[29] Richard Hosley, "The Playhouses," in The Revels History of Drama in English: Vol.III 1576-1613, gen. eds. Clifford Leech and T.W. Craik (London: Methuen, 1975), pp.125-6.

[30] Edmund Gayton, Pleasant Notes upon Don Quichote, pp.271-2; as quoted in A Source Book in Theatrical History, ed. A.M. Nagler (New York: Dover, 1959), p.131.

Harbage takes exception to this attitude: "Bearbaiting and bullbaiting were cruel, but they were enjoyed not as cruelty but as sport.... and interest in it was not a matter of class distinction.... The attitude towards animals, shared by Shakespeare himself, was still strictly utilitarian" (Audience, p.153). Tillyard, in his The Elizabethan World Picture (1943; rpt. London: Chatto and Windus, 1967), p.21, echoes this sentiment contending: "The instincts that send common humanity to see a bear-baiting or a prize fight ... are all much the same: now and in the age of Elizabeth."

These arguments, however, may also be used to justify Roman gladiatorial games as "sport" rather than as savage butchery. Surely the common attraction drawing both the Romans to their circuses, and the Elizabethans to their pits and innyards, was the appeal of exciting violence.

> ...which commonly end in six acts, the spectators frequently mounting the stage and making a more bloody catastrophe amongst themselves, then the Players did. I have known upon one of these Festivals, but especially at Shrove-Tide, where the Players have been appointed ... to act what the major part of the company had a mind to; sometimes Tamerlane, sometimes Jugurth, sometimes the Jew of Malta, and sometimes parts of all of these.... and unlesse this were done, and the popular humour satisfied ... the Benches, the tiles, the laths, the Stones, Oranges, Apples, Nuts, flew about most liberally....[31]

While this passage indicates the popularity of Marlowe's plays with such crowds, it also points out that this audience's dramatic tastes were superficially inclined towards the selection of parts (probably the more sensational elements) of plays rather than the appreciation of an entire dramatic performance. The widespread destruction which these audiences are supposed to have inflicted upon the theatres hardly seems to be the work of frequent playgoers who would enjoy attending the theatre again and again. Rather, the fact that such riots are usually recorded as occurring on holidays points to the conclusion that such destruction was the work of tradesmen and apprentices[32] who would seldom be regular

---

[31] Gayton, Pleasant Notes, pp.131-2.

[32] The Elizabethan apprentices, referred to in one contemporary court document as "the scum of the world," had a truly remarkable talent for getting into the authorities' bad books. From their Shrove Tuesday antics such as the dousing of bawds under water-pumps to their full-scale riots, they seem to have been a part of almost every public disturbance in London during the Elizabethan era. Often riots involving apprentices occurred near the public theatres, causing civic authorities to link the one with the

patrons as they were employed during the weekdays when most Elizabethan plays were performed.[33] A critical reader of these accounts might also ask how long could Elizabethan playhouses and drama have survived if the destructive audiences of such reports were the norm rather than the exception?

While many of the contemporary records of violence perpetrated by Elizabethan audiences may be discounted as being unreliable, the prominence of violence in Elizabethan drama nonetheless suggests that playwrights such as Marlowe were influenced, to some degree, by their audience's tastes which were stimulated by continual exposure to social violence. Ben Jonson, a critical observer of Elizabethan

---

other and erroneously see the theatres as inspirations to violence.

The ease with which this connection could be made can be seen in contemporary accounts of rioting: "...very near the Theater or Curtain at the time of the plays there lay a prentice sleeping upon the grass and one Challes at Grotstock did turn upon the toe upon belly of the same prentice, whereupon the apprentice start up and after words they fell to plain blows. The company increased on both sides to the number of five hundred at least." "Fleetwood, June 18, 1594," as quoted in Wilson, Life, p.92. See also Michael Hattaway, Elizabethan Popular Theatre: Plays in Performance (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p.49.

[33] Cook notes, in support of this argument, that in Henslowe's theatre new plays were never performed on holidays. "It seems strange that Henslowe would pass up the chance to pack his house with holiday crowds at double the usual admission prices--unless, perhaps, he was appealing to an inexperienced audience who did not care what they saw, so long as the price was not prohibitive." Ann Jennalie Cook, The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London, 1576-1642 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981), pp.226-8, 253. See also Hattaway, Theatre, pp.46-50.

dramatic trends, condemns this influence upon the period's drama:

> For they [the ignorant with pretensions of understanding] commend writers, as they do fencers, or wrestlers; who if they come in robustiously, and put for it with a great deal of violence, are received for the braver fellows....[34]

Harbage, of course, disagrees with Jonson's jaundiced view of the popular Elizabethan audience, declaring that it is "more accurate to say that the audience expected and accepted brutality than that they demanded and enjoyed it."[35] However, this argument is only accurate in that the Elizabethan audience would have "expected" to see violence presented onstage as a reflection, or an extension, of the violent society in which they lived. It is also true that audiences would not widely patronize an entertainment that they did not, on the whole, enjoy. The very pervasiveness of violence in the drama of the Elizabethan period would have made it very difficult for an audience to enjoy a play without having some appreciation for the artistry with which its violence was presented. Elizabethans were fascinated, not only by the horror of violent acts, but also by the political context of the violence and the ingenuity of the murderers.

---

[34] Ben Jonson, "To The Reader," The Alchemist, ed. Douglas Brown (London: Ernest Benn, 1968), p.4.

[35] Harbage, Audience, pp.153-4.

As Fredson Bowers observes:

> The Elizabethan who attended public executions as an amusement was used to the sight of blood and would scarcely flinch from it on the stage. Rather, he would demand it, for he was keenly interested in murders for any other motive than simple robbery.[36]

This Elizabethan "interest" in violence found a further literary outlet in pamphlets which depicted, in great detail, famous murders, tortures, and executions which occurred throughout the politically and religiously racked European continent. Although it is recorded that some forty pamphlets and broadsides dealing with common murderers and their gory executions were published between 1577 and 1596, it was those "torture-execution" pamphlets concerned with high politics and religion which dominated the market. The titles of some of these works are suggestive of their sensational nature: A discovery and playne Declaration of sundry subtill practices of the Holy Inquistion of Spayne; The Destruction and sacke cruelly committed by the Duke of Guyse and his Company; News from Scotland Declaring the damnable life of Doctor Fian a notable Sorcerer, who was burned at Edinbrough in Januarie

---

[36] Fredson Bowers, The Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy (Princeton, 1940; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959), p.16.

last.[37]

Support for the argument that Elizabethan social violence influenced playwrights indirectly through the tastes of audiences, as well as through direct personal impact, may be found in contemporary records of receipts taken at various Elizabethan plays. An analysis of Henslowe's Diary for the year 1591 reveals the widespread popularity of violent dramas:

> In 1591 ... Henslowe records fifty-three performances (17 different plays) of all types, of which twenty-nine (four plays only) were violence dramas--or 54% of the total. Henslowe's part of the takings for the fifty-three performances amounted to 87/15s, of which 58/16/9d was for the dramas of violence and 28/18/3d for the assorted others. In other words, 54% of the performances accounted for 70% of the receipts.[38]

Harbage's review of Henslowe's receipts from the Admiral's Men for the period June 15, 1594 to July 28, 1597 reflects a similar picture. The most popular "old" plays performed during

---

[37] Levine, "Violence," pp.95-8, 127-34.

The widespread popularity of these pamphlets and tracts prompted the disgust of one A. Ar. in 1630: "It is indeede as if one attained or held honours by murders, treasons, adulteries, thefts, lies and the like; or by slobering them ouer, as som write of the smothered murder of Marques Hambleton and others." The Practise of Princes (1630), p.21; as quoted in Bowers, Revenge Tragedy, p.16.

It should be noted that there is a perennial interest in violent accounts of actual murderers and their crimes. Witness the modern fascination with Jack the Ripper, and the popularity of books about mass-murderers, of which Truman Capote's In Cold Blood is perhaps the most famous example. In many respects our tastes and those of the Elizabethans are virtually the same.

[38] Levine, "Violence," p.145.

the period were, in order of gross receipts: Doctor Faustus, Tamburlaine Part I, Jew of Malta, Spanish Tragedy, Tamburlaine Part II, and The Massacre at Paris.[39] This analysis demonstrates not only the popularity of Marlowe's plays years after his death, but also the popularity of violent drama during a period of violent civil unrest, for extensive stage violence is the one element which all of the above plays have in common. Producers such as Henslowe, who viewed the theatre as a business enterprise, would not have ignored the message implied in these gate receipts. Companies and playwrights would have felt the pressure to compromise with popular tastes and the profit imperative, if for no other reason than to keep food on the table in hard economic times. It should therefore come as no surprise to note that from 1587 on a large number of these violent dramas were regularly produced in Elizabethan theatres.[40]

However, while it is clear that Elizabethan social violence had considerable influence over the presentation of violence on the Elizabethan stage, it should not be regarded

---

[39] Harbage, "Appendix IV: Audience Approval," Audience, p.178. Harbage's epigraph to this appendix, taken from Gosson, Playes Confuted in Five Actions (1582), is an interesting comment on the Elizabethan audience: "At Stage Plaies ... the worst sort of people have the hearing of it, which in respect of there ignorance, of there ficklenes, of there furie, are not to bee admitted in place of judgement." Given Harbage's well-known "democratic" views on the Elizabethan theatre, one can almost see him smiling to himself as he transcribed this bit of Jonsonian elitism.

[40] Levine, "Violence," p.145.

as being the sole influence. Although most periods in history are marked by violence, few societies have produced dramas quite so violent as that of the Elizabethan era. Scholars, therefore, also point to the traditions of classical Senecan tragedy, as well as that of the earlier English drama (the Mystery, Morality, and Miracle plays), as being additional influences shaping Elizabethan dramatic violence.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca was a Roman playwright and Stoic philosopher who wrote in the first century A.D. His commentaries on morality and ethical problems fascinated medieval and Tudor scholars. Both John Calvin and Erasmus produced editions of his work; Francis Bacon expressed his great debt to Seneca in his dedication to his Essays; and Queen Elizabeth herself was introduced to Seneca by her famous tutor, Roger Ascham.[41] With this general appetite for Seneca's philosophical writings came an increasing interest in his dramatic work. The universal prestige of the former reflected upon the latter, and soon Seneca was established, in the Elizabethan mind, as the preeminent classical model for their own drama.[42] As T.S. Eliot notes, "No author exercised a wider or deeper influence upon the Elizabethan mind or upon the

---

[41] F.L. Lucas, Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy (1922; rpt. New York: Haskell House, 1972), p.56. See also Michael Grant, ed., Latin Literature: An Anthology (1958; rpt. Bungay, Suffolk: Penguin, 1981), pp.288-9.

[42] Douglas Cole, Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe (1962; rpt. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), p.49.

Elizabethan form of tragedy than did Seneca."[43]

Seneca's plays, nine of which survive, are most widely known for their sensational themes, horrific violence, and long-winded rhetorical style. The Elizabethans, however, were unaware of the fact that his tragedies were never written to be enacted upon the stage. Seneca's plays were originally chamber-dramas recited among fashionable audiences in intimate surroundings. As there was no real action in these plays, the burden of the plot was carried by the language of the drama. This lack of a physical stage allowed Seneca to comply with the classical Greek prohibition against the portrayal of violence onstage. It also accounts for Seneca's bombastic rhetorical style and the lengthy, lurid descriptions of grotesque violence and suffering which are reported as having taken place "offstage," and which, no doubt, helped to retain his audience's interest through long, dramatic recitals.[44] We may see an example of this "offstage" violence in a passage from Thyestes:

> **Messenger:** With a savage blow
> The king drove in the sword, and pressed it home
> Until his hand was at the throat; the body
> Stood, with the sword plucked out, as if deciding
> Which way to fall, then fell against the king.
> Immediately the brutal murderer

---

[43] T.S. Eliot, "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation," in his Essays on Elizabethan Drama (1932; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1956), p.3.

[44] Lucas, Seneca, p.57. See also Cole, Suffering, p.50; Eliot, "Seneca," p.6.

> Seized Plisthenes and dragged him to the altar
> To add his body to his brothers, struck
> And hacked the head off; the truncated corpse
> Fell forward to the ground, and from the head
> That rolled away a faint last sob was heard.
> (Thyestes IV.)[45]

Scholars of the Elizabethan period, proceeding from the misapprehension that Seneca's plays were stage-dramas rather than chamber-dramas, staged many of Seneca's tragedies at their universities, and they, and their students, began writing plays in imitation of their classical mentor. Early Elizabethan imitations of Seneca devotedly followed the Senecan style of high rhetoric and gory violence, as well as his practice of reporting this violence verbally rather than physically presenting it onstage.[46] However, reservations against the open display of violence onstage soon vanished and the effect on the audience was electric. In a performance of Alabaster's Roxana, a typical pastiche of Seneca, at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1592, a gentlewoman in the audience was said to have been so shocked by the cannibalistic orgy of violence which concludes the play that she immediately "fell distracted and never recovered."[47]

Lucas argues that the influence of Senecan violence

---

[45] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Thyestes, from Four Tragedies and Octavia Trans. E.F. Watling (Bungay, Suffolk: Penguin, 1966), p.77.

[46] Lucas, Seneca, p.58.

[47] Lucas, Seneca, p.58.

passed from the universities and spread, by way of the Inns of Court, into the popular theatres of London.[48] Other scholars contend that this view places too much importance on the example of Seneca. Levine suggests that the widespread violence of Elizabethan society may have played a role in converting rhetorical Senecanesque violence into its later, more demonstrative, popular counterpart.[49] Cole claims that it was the openly staged violence of the popular theatres, already in existence by this point, which pressured the academic, Senecanesque playwrights towards the direct presentation of violence onstage.[50] Eliot professes similar reservations when he argues that at the worst Seneca can only be accused of giving the playwrights of the English Renaissance a respectable justification for pandering to an Elizabethan passion for violence which would "have been indulged even without Seneca's authority."[51]

---

[48] Lucas, Seneca, p.100.

[49] Levine, "Violence," p.10.

[50] Cole, Suffering, p.50. There existed considerable tension between the popular theatres and the academic stage. Oxford University so frowned upon the public stage that, from 1587-93, it paid "blackmail" to itinerant acting companies in order to keep them away from Oxford. This tension suggests that there was enough contact between the two to give Oxford authorities cause for alarm. See John Cunliffe, The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy (1893; rpt. Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1965), p.56; Lucas, Seneca, p.100.

[51] Eliot, "Seneca," pp.6, 25. See also Cunliffe, Influence, pp.125-6, 56, 59; Lucas, Seneca, pp.103-4, 123; Frederick Boas, An Introduction to Tudor Drama (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), p.2.

Indeed, the literary influence of Senecan dramatic violence may have been complemented, to some degree, by the tradition of the native English theatre which immediately precedes, and to some extent is coeval with, Elizabethan drama. Scholars have traditionally separated the pre-Renaissance, native English drama into three categories: "mystery" plays, based upon Scriptural stories; "miracle" plays, presenting stories from the lives of saints; and "morality" plays which were concerned with the struggle between vice and virtue.[52] This drama had its beginnings as

---

Given Eliot's reservations, it is curious to find Henry Wells, in his "Senecan Influence on Elizabethan Tragedy: A Re-Estimation," SAB 19 (1944), 71-84, grouping Eliot with Lucas and Cunliffe as part of that "school" which exclusively traces the Senecan influence, and attributes to Seneca the responsibility for such "faults" of Elizabethan tragedy as its bombast and violence. Wells' statement that "Cunliffe says nothing as to the non-Senecan elements" is incorrect (see references above,. Also, Lucas does not, as Wells implies, ignore other influences such as the native English drama. In fact, although Lucas devotes most of his work to Seneca, he quite clearly states that Elizabethan drama was a "union of the classical with the popular stage" (Lucas, Seneca, pp.103-4). Wells' attempt to polarize earlier criticism into "Two somewhat narrow and extreme points of view" (the Senecan/native tradition axis) probably derives from a desire to more clearly define critical territory of his own. This misrepresentation contributes to the erroneous belief that there are well-defined, monolithic blocks of criticism in this field.

[52] It is frequently argued that this tripartite division is arbitrary and artificial. Some critics contend that a medieval Englishman would not have seen any real distinction between these forms. While this may be true, we must concede that it has long been scholarly practice to impose order upon the rather chaotic history of literature. Bearing in mind the basic artificiality of such categorizations, they can be useful in reducing an intimidating banquet of material into digestable portions. See Robert Potter, The English Morality Play (London:

early as the 10th century in presentations which were part of Church liturgies during important religious feasts such as Easter. The roots of Elizabethan dramatic violence lie partly in these early devotional traditions of the Church, for the sermons of clerics of the time, with their morbid embellishment of the details of the flogging and Crucifixion of Christ, clearly show an understanding of how such horrors can be used to grip an audience.[53] These gory, titillating accounts, when carried over into dramatic reenactments, lent to these early dramas a degree of violence which is startling to modern readers but which would probably have been expected, and indeed welcomed, by contemporary audiences familiar with the excessively violent depictions of these stories in Church sermons. In time these primitive plays, usually performed by the clergy, evolved into more elaborate and secularized dramatic forms which enjoyed great popularity.[54]

Medieval English plays certainly show something of the Elizabethan fascination with the power of theatrical violence. Those Mystery plays which deal with the Passion and death of Christ display an awareness of that intense emotional impact which can only be achieved through a skilful handling of

---

Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p.7.

[53] Derek Brewer, English Gothic Literature (Hong Kong: Schocken, 1983), p.238.

[54] Edward Albert, A History of English Literature, 4th ed. Revised by J.A. Stone (1923; rpt. London: George Harrap, 1971), p.62.

violent theatrics. All of these plays exploit the cruelty of Christ's sufferings before his Crucifixion in a manner that is unique to the English tradition. The dramatic effect of these sufferings is heightened by making use of Christ's passionate silence which was part of earlier religious folklore. This silence was sometimes filled, as in the Wakefield play of the scourging, by Christ's tormentors using violent language to emphasize the force of their blows:[55]

2nd Torturer. Bind him to this pillar.

3rd Torturer. Why standest thou so far?

1st Torturer. To beat his body bare,
Without a pause.

2nd Torturer. Now fall I the first to flap on his hide.
...
No, I am athirst to see the blood down glide
So quick.

3rd Torturer. Have at! [Strikes Jesus.]

1st Torturer. Take thou that! [Strikes.]

2nd Torturer. I shall knock thee flat,
So strong is my trick. [Strikes.][56]

---

[55] A similar presentation of this scene occurs in the Chester cycle. See Rosemary Woolf, The English Mystery Plays (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1972), p.253-8.

[56] The Twenty-Third Play: The Scourging in Martial Rose, ed. The Wakefield Mystery Plays (London: Evans, 1961), p.53; The Scourging (Wakefield) in David Bevington, ed., Medieval Drama (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), p.558.

These native English dramas remained popular throughout the 16th century, and it is very likely that Elizabethan playwrights such as Shakespeare and Marlowe had some acquaintance with their portrayal of dramatic violence.[57]

The arguments that Elizabethan dramatic violence was greatly shaped by the combined influence of a violent social environment and the native and Senecan literary traditions are certainly valid. However, these arguments do not address the fact that Elizabethan playwrights also made use of violence for a myriad of thematic and aesthetic purposes. Scholars often ignore the point that the importance of dramatic

---

[57] Brewer, Gothic, p.239. The suggestion that Marlowe was influenced by the presentation of violence in the earlier native dramatic traditions is not a new one. Clifford Leech sees a direct parallel between the sadistic treatment of the still-living body of Christ in the York Crucifixion, and the exquisite, inhuman brutality of Marlowe's employment of dramatic violence in Tamburlaine and Edward II. Clifford Leech, Christopher Marlowe: Poet for the Stage, ed. Anne Lancashire [New York: AMS Press, 1986], pp.60-61.

Shakespeare certainly shows a familiarity with features of the earlier drama. In Hamlet's address to the three Players (Hamlet III. ii. 13-14) he writes: "I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant. It out-Herods Herod. Pray you avoid it." Termagant was a rather noisy and violent Saracen deity from the Mystery Plays. Herod was a popular mainstay of many Mystery Plays, such as The Slaughter of the Innocents, and was characterized by his insanely violent rages. For example, from the Coventry Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors (ll. 779-83): "I stampe! I stare! ... I rent! I rawe! and now I run wode!" and then "Erode ragis in the pagond and in the strete also" (Harold Jenkins, ed., Hamlet, The Arden Edition [New York: Methuen, 1982], p.288). Perhaps the bombast of characters such as Marlowe's Tamburlaine owes as much to this native tradition of overacting as to any classical Senecan influence.

violence in Elizabethan plays lies not in the source of the violence but in the purposes to which it was used onstage. While dramatists such as Christopher Marlowe were certainly influenced by the violence of their social and political environment and earlier literary traditions, they would take these influences and refashion them in their plays to suit their own needs and desires. To illustrate the complex role of violence in Elizabethan drama, I will examine how Marlowe employs dramatic violence in his plays as an aid in the presentation of theme and character. In particular, I will show how Marlowe uses violence to define the figure of the overreacher and his changing relationship with his victims, which entails a complete shift of audience sympathy from the former to the latter over the course of six plays. So that the gradual nature of this evolutionary process may be made clear I shall move chronologically, beginning with the plays that introduce us to the overreacher: Tamburlaine the Great: Parts One and Two.

Chapter II

Tamburlaine the Great: Parts One and Two

> ...see
> Damascus' walls dyed with Egyptian blood,
> Thy father's subjects and thy countrymen:
> The streets strowed with dissevered joints of men,
> And wounded bodies gasping yet for life.
> (Part One V.ii. 255-9)
>
> I know sir, what it is to kill a man,
> It works remorse of conscience in me,
> I take no pleasure to be murderous,
> Nor care for blood when wine will quench my thirst.
> (Part Two IV.i. 27-30)

Christopher Marlowe most probably wrote Tamburlaine the Great: Part One while still attending Cambridge in 1587, and saw it first staged later that same year.[58] He quickly followed the success of his first stage play with a sequel, Tamburlaine: Part Two, either in late 1587 or early 1588.[59] Elizabethan drama, or at least that theatrical renaissance in the last years of the 16th century which dominates the

---

[58] J.W. Harper, Introd., Tamburlaine by Christopher Marlowe (London: Ernest Benn, 1971), p.viii.

[59] The Prologue to Part Two indicates the popular success and "general welcomes Tamburlaine receiv'd / When he arrived last upon our stage." The Preface to Robert Greene's Perimedes the Blacksmith, with its line: "daring God out of heauen with that Atheist Tamburlan," suggests Greene's knowledge of Tamburlaine's "blasphemous" challenge to Mahomet at the end of Act V, Scene one in Part Two. As Perimedes was first published in 1588, it may be infered that Part Two first saw the light of day either early that year or late in the previous year. See Robert Greene, "To the Gentlemen readers," in his Perimedes the Blacksmith (1588), as quoted in Maclure, ed., Heritage, p.29.

literary history of the entire era, was yet in its infancy. Kyd's trend-setting play, The Spanish Tragedy, is roughly contemporary and several years were yet to pass before Shakespeare was to rise to prominence.

An understanding of the place of the Tamburlaine plays in the literary chronology of the period is of great importance in any analysis of Marlowe's use of dramatic violence.[60] Part One clearly shows the great degree to which Marlowe was influenced by literary traditions such as the rhetorical set-speech and the de casibus theme.[61] In Part Two,

---

[60] The evolution of drama in the Elizabethan era is discussed in Wolfgang Clemen's English Tragedy before Shakespeare: The Development of Dramatic Speech Trans. T.S. Dorsch (London, 1961; rpt. New York: Methuen, 1980), pp.41-3. Clemen argues that there is a progression in the period's drama from the "speech-stage" to the "acting-stage," and that the predominance of the declaimed set-speech gradually gave way before the increasing popularity of demonstrative action at around the time of the Tamburlaine plays. For further discussion of the transitional aspects of Marlowe's Tamburlaine see also Jocelyn Powell, "Marlowe's Spectacle," TDR, 8, No.4 (1964), 195; David Bevington, From "Mankind" to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962), p.217; Levine, "Violence," p.180.

[61] Despite the Elizabethan hierarchy's rather hysterical reaction to the very thought of social or political change, the Tamburlaine myth, which entailed the toppling of established monarchs by a commoner of virtu, was very popular among the "middle-classes." "Upwardly mobile" commoners, whom the regime both needed and affected to despise, saw their dreams embodied in the myth. Gabriel Harvey gave voice to his own ambitions in expressing his admiration for Tamburlaine's "will to power" in 1576, some eleven years before Marlowe was to give the character dramatic immortality. See F.P. Wilson, Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare (1951; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp.17-18.

Lucas echoes this, attributing Tamburlaine's popularity

while these traditions are still prominent, Marlowe can be seen to be exploring more fully the manifold uses of naturalistic action and demonstrative stage violence. The latter play reveals the dramatist's growing fascination with the potential of stage violence to captivate an audience and, at the same time, carry a variety of thematic and symbolic meanings. Most important of these is the concept of the Marlovian "overreacher," which was first presented to the Elizabethan audience in these dramas. Dramatic violence characterizes the relationship between Tamburlaine and his victims, and the study of this violence makes evident the playwright's increasing disenchantment with his overreacher figure over the course of the two plays.

Given the preeminent influence of Senecan drama in the universities, it is not surprising that something of Seneca's style is evident in Tamburlaine: Part One, which Marlowe probably wrote while still at Cambridge. Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this influence lies in the notable absence of extensive stage violence in the play, at least when

---

to the overreaching spirit, the zeitgeist, of the age:

> Not "Nothing too much" but "All to the utmost," is the cry of the time: and Hubris, the Greek vice of 'insolence' is a Renaissance virtu: "turn back, there is no sailing beyond the pillars of Heracles" sings Pindar: and Dante's Ulysses dies for his presumption: but Columbus, like Faust and Tamburlaine, steers fearlessly into unknown immensity to find and win.

See Lucas, Seneca, pp.106, 108.

compared with that of Part Two or any of his later plays with the notable exception of Edward II, for the tradition of Senecanesque tragedy dictates that violence must be incorporated into the dramatic dialogue rather than be enacted onstage.[62] Moreover, while scholars dispute the extent to which Marlowe was actually influenced by Seneca, virtually all agree that the bombastic rhetoric of the Tamburlaine plays owes much to the classical-academic tradition.[63]

However, one must not ignore the influence of the earlier, native English drama upon Marlowe's use of violent dramatic speech in both Tamburlaine plays. The bombastic boasts and violent rages which are generally associated with Marlowe's overreaching protagonist are strikingly similar to

---

[62] Lucas, Seneca, p.58.

[63] Lucas believes that, apart from Tamburlaine's incessant ranting, there is little in the play which is "specifically Senecan." Cunliffe suggests that Marlowe chose to be influenced only by those aspects of Senecan tragedy that would appeal most readily to popular favour. Hence Marlowe rejected Seneca's philosophical reflections but retained his bombastic rhetoric. Battenhouse disagrees somewhat with both men, contending that, while Marlowe certainly inherited a taste for bombast and spectacle from the Senecanesque tradition, the Tamburlaine plays also reveal the profound degree to which Marlowe was influenced by Senecan morality. Clemen, however, does not attribute the bombastic set-speeches of Elizabethan plays such as Tamburlaine: Parts One and Two entirely to the Senecan influence. In such violent rhetoric, he argues, we may also see the influence of native dramatic forms. See Lucas, Seneca, p.129; Cunliffe, Influence, p.59; Roy Battenhouse, Marlowe's "Tamburlaine": A Study in Renaissance Moral Philosophy (1941, rpt. Nashville: Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 1964), pp.193-4; Clemen, Speech, pp.48-9.

the arrogant speeches of Herod from the Mystery plays:

> **Tamburlaine.** The god of war resigns his room to me,
> Meaning to make me general of the world,
> Jove viewing me in arms, looks pale and wan,
> Fearing my power should pull him from his throne.
> ...
> And such are objects fit for Tamburlaine.
> Wherein as in a mirror may be seen
> His honour, that consists in shedding blood,
> When men presume to manage arms with him.
> (Part One, V.ii. 386-9, 411-14)

> **Herod.** Peace, I bid, both far and near,
> Let none speak when I appear:
> Who moves his lips while I am here,
> I say, shall die.
> Of all this world both far and near,
> The lord am I.
> ...
> My mighty power may no man gauge,
> If any cause me rant and rage,
> Dinged to death will be his wage,
> And lasting woe:
> His blood will flow my wrath to assuage,
> Before I go.[64]

In other plays Herod surpasses Tamburlaine's blasphemous speech with his assertion that "I am ... he thatt made bothe hevin and hell,/ And of my myghte powar holdith up this world

---

[64] The Fourteenth Play: The Offering of the Magi in Rose, ed., Wakefield, (ll. 1-6, 37-42) pp.199-200.

rownd."[65] This similarity in violent dramatic dialogue strongly suggests that Marlowe was influenced, to some degree at least, by the traditions of the native English drama.

The importance of violent dramatic dialogue in Part One lies in the fact that it is through these speeches, the most memorable characteristic of the play, that we are presented with the basic substance of Tamburlaine's character.[66] If, as may be generally agreed, the character of Tamburlaine represents the living embodiment of power and violence, and if the set-speech is the basis for his character, then it is entirely appropriate that much of the dramatic violence in Part One actually lies in the language of the drama itself.

Throughout Part One Marlowe seems to be drawing a connection between words and violent action; between

---

[65] From the Ludus Coventriae, as quoted in Woolf, Mystery, p.203. Bevington goes further than simply arguing that the language of the Tamburlaine plays shows the influence of the earlier native drama. He contends that the very structure of the plays suggests that the native English dramatic traditions exercised considerable influence upon Marlowe's crafting of Tamburlaine: Parts One and Two. See Bevington, "Mankind", p.217.

[66] Clemen, Speech, pp.113-114. The royal set-speech was an expected characteristic of the "monarchs" of the Elizabethan stage. The Renaissance tendency to perceive a correspondence between a person's external appearence and actions, and his inward character, demanded that an actor portraying a king convey a sense of majesty in eloquent, highly poetic, language. See Patricia Barry, The King in Tudor Drama Salzburg Studies in English Literature: Elizabethan Studies, 58 (Salzburg: Salzburg Univ., 1977), p.191.

rhetorical ability and the "will to power."[67] Marlowe introduces this idea in the opening lines of Part One where we are introduced to the ineffectual Persian monarch, Mycetes, who is depicted as being incapable of expressing his thoughts in words:

> Brother Cosroe, I find myself aggrieved,
> Yet insufficient to express the same:
> For it requires a great and thundering speech:
> Good brother tell the cause unto my lords,
> I know you have a better wit than I.
> (I.i. 1-5)

Mycetes is shown to be unable to make the "great and thundering" speeches which, as he quickly loses his throne to his more loquacious brother, are revealed to be the foremost qualification for kingship. Later in the same scene, when

---

[67] For an insightful study of this aspect of Part One see David Daiches, "Language and Action in Marlowe's Tamburlaine," in his More Literary Essays (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1968), pp.42-69. See also Johannes Birringer, "Marlowe's Violent Stage: 'Mirrors' of Honor in Tamburlaine", ELH, 51(1984), 223.

Wolfgang Clemen argues that "Tamburlaine's passionate, highly eloquent declarations ... stand as substitutes for action" (Clemen, Speech, pp. 117, 158). Bradbrook agrees, contending:

> Tamburlaine's battles are fought much more in his defiant speeches than in 'alarums and excursions' which occasionally reproduce them at the level of action.

See Muriel Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1935; rpt. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980), pp.139-40.

Mycetes gives his captain, Theridamas, his marching orders, this relationship between rhetoric and violent power is reiterated:

> Go, stout Theridamas, thy words are swords
> And with thy looks thou conquerest all thy foes....
> (I.i. 74-5)

In the next scene, when Theridamas confronts the outnumbered Tamburlaine on the battlefield, Tamburlaine's lieutenants scorn the power of words. Tamburlaine, significantly, is not so dismissive:

> **Tamburlaine.** Then shall we fight courageously with them,
> Or look you, I should play the orator?
>
> **Techelles.** No: cowards and faint-hearted runaways
> Look for orations when the foe is near.
> Our swords shall play the orators for us.
> ...
> **Tamburlaine.** Stay Techelles, ask a parley first.
> (I.ii. 128-32, 137)

Tamburlaine's troops enter unexpectedly in the very next line and suddenly Tamburlaine, the thoughtful strategist in conference with his officers, is transformed into Tamburlaine the general, with the ability to declaim a rousing battle-speech at a moment's notice:

> We'll fight five hundred men-at-arms to one,
> Before we part with our possession.
> And 'gainst the general we will lift our swords,
> And either lanch his greedy thirsting throat,

> Or take him prisoner, and his chains shall serve
> For manacles till he be ransomed home.
> (I.ii. 143-8)

These passages depict a leader who possesses an instinctive comprehension of the power of speech to control men, as well as an awareness of the need to economize this power and employ it only when necessary. His decision to parley rather than fight proves wise, for Theridamas surrenders himself and his superior force without a battle, being overcome by Tamburlaine's "mighty line":

> Won with thy words, and conquered with thy looks,
> I yield myself, my men and horse to thee....
> (I.ii. 228-9)

Moreover, while dramatic speech, in the above lines, supersedes physical violence, it also serves, in Part One, as an onstage analogue to that violence which may be imagined as taking place offstage. This aspect of the relationship between the two can be seen in the battle between Bajazeth and Tamburlaine in Act III. Prior to the battle, both monarchs hand their crowns over to their queens, with Tamburlaine, before heading offstage, commanding Zenocrate to "manage words with her as we will arms" (III.iii. 131). Their queens do not exist as individual characters in their own right but are

merely extensions of their husbands' characters.[68] We see this when Tamburlaine triumphs over all his enemies at the end of Part One and his victory is symbolized by Zenocrate's crowning; and earlier, when Bajazeth "brains" himself in his despair, it is not surprising to see Zabina choosing to exit, shortly thereafter, in exactly the same manner.

While the battle between the monarchs takes place offstage, their feminine counterparts proceed to "manage words" onstage in a verbal free-for-all which is the dramatic representation of the unseen, imagined battle.[69] It is of note

---

[68] Powell, "Spectacle," 204, 208.

[69] It is significant that the battle-scenes in Part One are dealt with so swiftly by Marlowe. The offstage fight with Bajazeth is actually the longest battle of the play. The two other major battles take place within a single line of stage direction. The battle with Cosroe (II. vii.) is briefly depicted: "Enter to the battle, and after the battle, enter Cosroe wounded...." The battle with the King of Arabia and the Soldan of Egypt (V. ii.) is described with similar brevity: "They sound to the battle. And Tamburlaine enjoys the victory...."

There exist a number of possible explanations for this swiftness of action. Perhaps Marlowe desired speed of action in order to maintain a swiftly moving plot. Of course, Marlowe may simply have been limited in his depiction of large battle-scenes by a lack of extras and props, and/or by the constraints of a small, crowded stage. While this limitation of resources seems to be the most plausible explanation, we can never be certain that it is the only one. (See note 77)

One may argue that though the stage directions are brief, the portrayal of the battles need not have been. Yet some critics contend that the brevity of these stage directions does suggest "a rapid movement across the stage, the battle symbolized by a few sword blows and the blast of an alarum." See David Zucker, Stage and Image in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe Salzburg Studies in English Literature: Elizabethan Studies, 7 (Salzburg: Salzburg Univ., 1972), p.38.

that Marlowe has the queens fight, not with the long, bombastic speeches of their imperial husbands, but rather with the insult-slinging style of Thameside fishwives in fancy dress:

> **Zabina.** Base concubine, must thou be placed by me
> That am the empress of the mighty Turk?
>
> **Zenocrate.** Disdainful Turkess and unreverend boss [fat woman],
> Call'st thou me concubine that am bethrothed
> Unto the great and mighty Tamburlaine?
>
> **Zabina.** To Tamburlaine the great Tartarian thief?
>
> **Zenocrate.** Thou wilt repent these lavish words of thine...
> And sue to me to be your advocates.
>
> **Zabina.** And sue to thee? I tell thee shameless girl,
> Thou shalt be laundress to my waiting-maid.
> (III.iii. 166-77)

Doubtless Marlowe's audience found this verbal catfight immensely entertaining.[70] But apart from any comic intent, Marlowe may have chosen to employ the quick, jabbing language

---

[70] Marlowe attempts to play up the comic aspects of this exchange by not allowing the audience perceive the life and death struggle simultaneously taking place offstage in any way, for the duration of the verbal catfight. Bajazeth and his soldiers are the last to leave the stage area, and the battle is never heard of again until sounds from offstage, almost two dozen lines later, return the queens, and the audience, to the main action of the drama. The common, fishwife nature of these "noble" ladies is further accentuated with the introduction of the queens' lowly-born maids into the general cattiness. Marlowe's deft handling of this integration of base comedy, and violent symbolism, in the same scene reveals something of his skill as a dramatist.

of this verbal contest with the thought that it would better reflect the give and take of the actual, offstage battle than would the much longer, boasting, set-speeches which comprise so much of the dialogue of the play.

The use of violent dramatic speech in place of violent stage action in the Tamburlaine plays also contributes to the perplexing moral ambiguity which seems to surround the character of Tamburlaine. The most frequently recurring word, used in a violent context in the plays, is "blood." We see it used in Zenocrate's cry of "another bloody spectacle" towards the end of Part One, or with Bajazeth's boast to "drink the feeble Persians' blood" just before his fateful battle with Tamburlaine. It is most often used, however, in reference to the violent conqueror himself: "Bloody and insatiate Tamburlaine," as Cosroe titles him in Part One (II.vii. 11). It is possible, however, that Marlowe is implying connotations other than the obvious with his use of this disgust-laden term in conjunction with his violent protagonist.[71]

In Part One we see Cosroe moaning with his dying breath:

> My bloodless body waxeth chill and cold,
> And with my blood my life slides through my wound.
> (II.vii. 42-3)

---

[71] This ambiguous use of the word "blood" was initially noted by Robert E. Knoll, in his Christopher Marlowe (New York: Twayne, 1969), p.51. I have expanded upon the idea here.

Later, a starving, imprisoned Bajazeth similarly complains: "My veins are pale, my sinews hard and dry" (IV.iv. 95). In Part Two Tamburlaine's physician warns him that his life force is almost spent and death is fast approaching:

> Your veins are full of accidental heat,
> Whereby the moisture of your blood is dried....
> Your artiers which alongst the veins convey
> The lively spirits which the heart engenders
> Are parched and void of spirit....
> (V.iii. 84-5, 93-5)

In Marlowe's Doctor Faustus we are shown Faustus signing away his soul to Lucifer in his own blood, the only security the devil would accept. While Faustus' blood congeals too quickly after he cuts himself, a sign of his hesitant spirit, Tamburlaine's blood flows only too freely when, in Part Two, he foreshadows Faustus' act of self-mutilation. Tamburlaine's blood is "the god of war's rich livery" (III.ii. 116), and it flows from him with the same ease with which Tamburlaine conquered half a world. He even invites his sons to dip their hands in his blood and partake of his virile power:

> Come boys and with your fingers search my wound,
> And in my blood wash all your hands at once,
> While I sit smiling to behold the sight.
> (III.ii. 126-8)

Tamburlaine's superhuman indifference to an obviously profusely bleeding wound is not only a striking illustration

of his power, but also points out how "blood" is often used in the Tamburlaine plays as a symbol of strength and life.

So it may be quite likely that whenever Marlowe refers to "bloody Tamburlaine," he could be using the term as a mark of praise and respect for his protagonist's violent life-force as well as a condemnation of Tamburlaine's horrific atrocities. This evident ambiguity in the very language of the play, with reference to the actions and character of Tamburlaine, may go some distance in explaining the widely divergent critical reactions to the plays and their leading character.

While much of the violence in Part One finds expression in the play's dramatic speech, there is one example of visual stage violence that illustrates Marlowe's early interest in the thematic and theatrical power of demonstrative violence: the bizarre suicides of Bajazeth and Zabina. When Tamburlaine defeats this imperial couple we are presented with a clear illustration of the popular de casibus theme: the proud and mighty being brought low by Fortune's (Tamburlaine's?) pitiless, inexorable wheel. However, it is not enough for Marlowe that these monarchs be merely brought down from high estate. In order to strengthen the visual impact of the theme, and emphasize the degree of their fall, he further humiliates them by playing up that part of Tamburlaine folklore which depicts Bajazeth being used as a footstool and encaged like an animal, living off the scraps from his conqueror's table

(IV. ii.).

The de casibus theme is conveyed not only visually but, as would be expected in Part One, in the very language of the play. Bajazeth, though defeated and encaged, remains defiant, flinging violent curse after curse upon his conqueror. Though in most situations such defiance would appear noble or heroic, Marlowe succeeds in manipulating it to reflect further upon Bajazeth's abysmal weakness while, at the same time, underlining his protagonist's overwhelming power. We see this in Tamburlaine's response to Bajazeth and Zabina's extravagant curses in the banquet scene:

> **Zenocrate.** My lord, how can you suffer these
> Outrageous curses by these slaves of yours?
>
> **Tamburlaine.** To let them see, divine Zenocrate,
> I glory in the curses of my foes,
> Having the power from the empyreal heaven,
> To turn them all upon their proper heads.
> (IV.iv. 27-32)

Tamburlaine's sheer indifference, indeed perverse pleasure, at Bajazeth's curses serves to further illustrate the deep gulf between the former's absolute power and the latter's absolute impotence.

There is some critical debate over whether Marlowe is actually making a thematic point in stressing Tamburlaine's utter humiliation of his imperial victim. Leech argues that Marlowe uses Bajazeth's debasement to deliberately tarnish the

heroic image of Tamburlaine in the eyes of the audience.[72] Steane offers the interesting suggestion that Marlowe utilizes the violent humiliation of Bajazeth as an appeal to the darker side of his audience's nature. In examining the cruel baiting of Bajazeth during the banquet scene he remarks:

> The violence and distastefulness of the scene are the more marked in that they take place at a banquet where orderly ceremony should prevail: this is a violation of everything civilized. The appeal is an appaling one. Nevertheless it is an appeal: to those forces which make us bully, attract us towards the infliction of pain and discomfort upon others ... to the evil and disruptive within our nature....[73]

While Steane sees this appeal as being, on the whole, successful in motivating an audience's admiration for the sanguinary Scythian, Knoll does not see any appeal at all. He contends that the Turkish Emperor is a figure of contempt, intentionally portrayed by Marlowe as being consistently bloodier and crueller than even Tamburlaine in order to justify his fall and subsequent humiliation at the hands of Marlowe's hero.[74] It is Bajazeth who says of his own men:

---

[72] Leech, Poet, pp.60-61.

[73] Steane, Study, p.84. Birringer's analysis of the emblematic spectacle of the banquet scene displays a similar moral confusion. He attempts of resolve this dilemma by approaching the play as a farce whose "savage comic humour" anticipates that of Marlowe's later play, The Jew of Malta. See Birringer, "Mirrors," 226-32.

[74] Steane, Study, p.62; Knoll, Marlowe, p.48.

> Let thousands die, their slaughtered carcasses
> Shall serve for walls and bulwarks to the rest....
> (III.iii. 138-9)

It is the Turk who "thirst[s] to drink the feeble Persians' blood" (III.iii. 165), and would later "Willing feed upon ... [Tamburlaine's] blood-red heart" (IV.iv. 12). Tamburlaine's caging of Bajazeth, degrading though it may be, is nothing when compared to the Turk's threat to castrate the Scythian:

> He shall be made a chaste and lustless eunuch,
> And in my sarell tend my concubines:
> And all his captains that thus stoutly stand,
> Shall draw the chariot of my empress,
> Whom I have brought to see their overthrow.
> (III.iii. 77-81)

We see here that it is Bajazeth who first suggests the chariot device which Marlowe was to have Tamburlaine use in Part Two. Still, Bajazeth's intention is the more humiliating for he appears to regard his defeated enemies as being not even worthy enough to draw his chariot, for he intends to give them over to his empress. This depiction of the Turk as the most horrific of monsters was probably intended to divert sympathy from the monarch when he is brought low, and thereby deflect any criticism which might be laid against Tamburlaine over his brutal degradation of his one-time rival.

Bajazeth and Zabina's novel method of suicide, their

"braining" themselves against the walls of the cage, can be simply seen as a fascinating piece of stage sensationalism which "has its ludicrous aspects, and no doubt certain hardy Elizabethans laughed uproariously."[75] However, in their deaths one also perceives Marlowe's talent for "multiplicity of statement," for he exploits not only the humour of the scene, but also its potential as an illustration of the de casibus theme. The former imperial couple, deprived, in their utterly humiliated state, of a knife or even a rope, simply have no other option for suicide than to escape their captor in this ignominious fashion:

> **Bajazeth.** Now Bajazeth, abridge thy baneful days,
> And beat thy brains out of thy conquered head:
> Since other means are all forbidden me....
> (V.ii. 222-4)

Their fall and degradation, carried up to the very moment of death, is thus absolute.

While Tamburlaine: Part Two is similar to Part One, in the later play Marlowe employs dramatic violence in a different manner, and to a different end. This may be best illustrated by contrasting Marlowe's depiction of similar acts of violence from both Part One and Part Two.

---

[75] Knoll, Marlowe, p.54. It is admittedly difficult to restrain laughter at such a bizarre suicide as: "she runs against the cage, and brains herself." We see in this one of the first dramatic manifestations of Marlowe's famous taste for black comedy.

In Part One the slaughter of the Virgins of Damascus is, in Senecanesque fashion, reported to the audience as taking place offstage. It follows a long set-speech by the First Virgin which is pitiful yet unmoving in its lifeless formality, set as it is amidst a drama of violent and exciting language. The Virgins' plea for mercy, and their deaths, are likewise remarkably unmoving as Marlowe allows them only a quick, bleating whimper of protest, and then the bloody deed is swiftly done:

> **Tamburlaine.** Techelles, straight go charge a few of them
> To charge these dames, and show my servant Death,
> Sitting in scarlet on their armed spears.
>
> **Virgins.** O pity us!
>
> **Tamburlaine.** Away with them, I say, and show them Death.
>
> [Techelles and others] take them away
>
> ...
>
> Enter Techelles
>
> What, have your horsemen shown the virgins Death?
>
> **Techelles.** They have my lord, and on Damascus' walls
> Have hoisted up their slaughtered carcasses.
> (V.ii. 53-7, 66-8)

This last comment of Techelles is particularly noteworthy for, while it illustrates the brutality of Tamburlaine and his men in their treatment of innocent humans as so much slaughtered beef, it also indicates that not only is the act of violence never seen, but that the tangible product of that violence,

the Virgins' "carcasses," have also been kept out of sight of the audience. Clearly, if Tamburlaine requires his lieutenant to inform him of the fate of his victims, then they cannot have been hung on Damascus' walls anywhere in sight of the stage. The result of this summary, invisible execution is that the murders, while somewhat troubling, would probably not greatly shock an audience. As Muriel Bradbrook notes:

> There is no hint in the verse of the physical sufferings of the virgins; they are a set of innocent white dummies, without sticky blood like Duncan's. Their death is not shocking because it is not dramatically

realized.... Their acting was probably as formal as their speech.[76]

The fact that the act of violence is never visualized, together with its speed and hints of black comedy, lends to the suspicion that Marlowe, in Part One, is attempting to

---

[76] Bradbrook, Themes, p.133. See also Knoll, Marlowe, p.52. It is interesting that Marlowe immediately follows the slaughter of the Virgins with Tamburlaine's long soliloquy declaring his love for Zenocrate as well as his own inherent nobility. The sudden transition between the two, radically disparate, scenes is startling:

> **Tamburlaine.** But go my lords, put the rest to the sword.
>
> Exeunt [all except Tamburlaine]
>
> Ah fair Zenocrate, divine Zenocrate....
>
> (V.ii. 71-2)

The shift out of the soliloquy and into the scene of Bajazeth's "braining" is equally abrupt:

> **Tamburlaine.** To feel the lovely warmth of shepherds' flames...
> Shall give the world to note for all my birth,
> That virtue solely is the sum of glory,
> And fashions men with true nobility.
> Who's within there?
>
> Enter two or three [Attendants]
>
> Hath Bajazeth been fed today?
>
> (V.ii. 123-9)

The speed, and the humour, of these rapid transitions would not have been lost upon an Elizabethan audience. The remarkable change in Tamburlaine, from casual murderer to lovesick swain, is quite amusing. Marlowe is clearly getting a laugh from playing off the tradition of pastoral love (remembering that Tamburlaine the bloody conqueror was born but a humble shepherd) that he subscribed to in his own pastoral poem "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love." These rapid transitions, and the sharp contrast in subject matter, probably exist mainly for Marlowe's comic purposes. However, the ancillary effect of this humour in undercutting, to some degree, the violent horror of the preceding and later scenes would doubtless not have gone unnoticed by Marlowe.

portray the attractive power of his violent hero while simultaneously limiting any possible emotional backlash against Tamburlaine by an audience disturbed at the limitless scope of his cruelty and brutality.[77] If this was Marlowe's original intent in Part One then, in terms of audience reaction to modern productions of the play, he is successful. Though audiences are openly confronted with the barbarity of Tamburlaine's violence in such scenes as the caging and

---

[77] This quite plausible argument clearly contradicts the theory that Marlowe, in Part One, was simply following in the well-worn path of the Senecanesque tradition which dictated that dramatic violence be reported as taking place offstage rather than being visually depicted onstage. See Lucas, Seneca, p.58; Cole, Suffering, p.102.

Several other theories have been offered to explain the notable lack of demonstrative stage violence in Part One. Daiches contends that the absence of violent action in the Tamburlaine plays is attributable to what he believes to be one of the central thematic points of the plays: that "any given example of power in action must be trivial beside the exalted human imagination that aspires to it" (Daiches, "Language," pp.44-5).

Another frequently proposed theory is that limited resources during early performances of Part One in halls or inn-yards may have constrained Marlowe's employment of demonstrative stage violence in the play (see Zucker, Image, pp.49-50). It may be that as a young, theatrically inexperienced university graduate Marlowe was forced to initially stage Part One under primitive conditions. However, it is more likely that, given the early close relationship between Marlowe, the Admiral's Men, Philip Henslowe the theatrical impressario, and Edward Alleyn, the young actor whose rivetting performances as Tamburlaine contributed greatly to the plays' success, Tamburlaine: Part One had its first performances in Henslowe's bankside playhouse, the Rose, which opened in the same year as Part One (1587). If this is true, as is quite likely, then Marlowe would have had access to the finest theatrical resources of his time, thus eliminating the possibility that, in Part One, his depiction of stage violence was restricted by a primitive theatrical environment.

"braining" of Bajazeth and the slaughter of the Virgins, the predominant reaction seems to be an embarrassed fascination with the "bloody and insatiate Tamburlaine."[78]

In contrast, in Part Two the Governor of Babylon is hung upon the walls of his city, exactly as the Virgins were hung upon the walls of Damascus in Part One, with the notable difference that in this play both the killing and the display of the corpse take place in full view of the audience. It is significant that the Governor's plea for mercy, delivered at more length and with more feeling than the Virgins' whimper in Part One, occurs after an initial wounding. Marlowe is obviously interested in extending the violence of the scene, and exploiting his audience's anticipation for the inevitable execution, in order to derive the maximum possible dramatic and emotional effect:

> **Amyras.** See now my lord how brave the captain hangs.
>
> **Tamburlaine.** 'Tis brave indeed my boy, well done,
> Shoot first my lord, and then the rest shall follow.
>
> **Theridamas.** Then have at him to begin withal.

---

[78] As one reviewer observed: "...the audience was all the more painfully confronted with the cruelty, wilfulness, even 'madness' of Tamburlaine and the world he creates (or de-creates). We were partisan, to our amusement, and invigorated--to our cost." See J.S. Cunningham and Roger Warren, "Tamburlaine the Great Rediscovered," Rev. of Peter Hall's production of Tamburlaine at the National Theatre, London, Oct. 1976-Jan. 1977, Shakespeare Survey, 31(1978), 159-61; see also Nancy Leslie, "Tamburlaine in the Theater: Tartar, Grand Guignol, or Janus?", Renaissance Drama, NS4 (1971), 105-120.

Theridamas shoots

Governor of Babylon. Yet save my life and let this wound appease
The mortal fury of great Tamburlaine.

Tamburlaine. ...shoot at him all at once.
They shoot

So now he hangs like Badget's governor,
Having as many bullets in his flesh,
As there be breaches in her battered wall.
(V.i. 148-59)[79]

Clifford Leech's shocked reaction to the merciless brutality of this scene stands in sharp contrast to Bradbrook's response to the slaughter of the Virgins:

> This is not mere sensationalism, a carrying to an extreme of the crude slaughters of the popular stage. Like the treatment of Christ's still-living body in the York Crucifixion, it implies a special hardness of heart, an abrogation of the killer's or torturer's own humanity as he disregards the livingness of the substance he is handling....[80]

---

[79] This scene may actually have been staged using real guns "charged with bullett." A letter written by Philip Gawdy in 1587 describes the accidental shooting of two adults and a child during the Governor's execution scene in a performance of Tamburlaine: Part Two. See E.K. Chambers, Letter, The Times Literary Supplement, 28 Aug. 1930, p.684.

[80] Leech, Poet, p.61. It is quite likely that, as with the death of the Virgins, Marlowe is undercutting the emotional impact of the Governor's murder with comedy. When Tamburlaine first describes how the Governor shall be killed, the Governor is initially defiant. But upon sensing Tamburlaine's earnestness he quickly changes his tune to bribery in an attempt to save his skin. Just as with the Virgins (see note 76) it is the rapid transition between radically disparate tones and attitudes which creates the humour:

The radical difference in these two reactions to similar acts of dramatic violence most probably derives from the fact that one is reported as occurring offstage, while the other is enacted onstage in full view of the audience. The remarkable power of visually presented violence, which could so dramatically affect a viewer's emotional reaction to a given scene, was widely acknowledged by Renaissance writers. It was believed that visual images, especially violent or grotesque images, were much more memorable than imaginative abstractions and were therefore particularly "effective

---

Governor of Babylon. Vile monster, born of some infernal hag,
And sent from hell to tyrannize on earth,
Do all thy worst, nor death nor Tamburlaine,
Torture or pain can daunt my dreadless mind.

Tamburlaine. Up with him then, his body shall be scarred.

Governor of Babylon. But Tamburlaine, in Limnasphaltis' lake,
There lies more gold than Babylon is worth,
Which when the city was besieged I hid,
Save but my life and I will give it thee.
(V.i. 110-18)

The sudden change from nobly defiant Governor to cringing coward is certainly amusing. Moreover, it reduces the Governor's stature in the eyes of the audience, for either he hid the gold for himself while pretending to have faith in his city's ability to resist Tamburlaine, making him something of a war profiteer, or else he was entrusted with the wealth of the city and is betraying that trust in order to save his own life. All of this detracts substantially from his value as a "noble" victim of the "bloody Tamburlaine." Perhaps Marlowe is attempting, even in the more demonstratively violent Part Two, to limit the bloody tarnishing of his protagonist's image.

vehicles for the expression of moral ideas."[81] This attitude is very much a part of the Tamburlaine plays, for in them "spectacle and the logic of spectacle carry a great part of the burden of communication."[82] However, it should be remembered that though there was an aesthetic tradition in the 16th century towards the reduction of "conceits intellectual to images sensible," Marlowe was also quite capable of using traditional visual devices for his own immediate theatrical purposes. As one critic observes: "Marlowe used the old allegorical reliance on visual impressions for dramatic purposes which are not always allegorical."[83] A prime example of Marlowe's adaption of traditional visual devices is the famous "chariot of kings" image from Part Two.

F.P. Wilson, in describing Tyrone Guthrie's production of Tamburlaine at the Old Vic in 1951, recalls that the scenes which stand out the most in his memory seem to be the violent ones. Of these, he particularly remembers the spectacular entrance of Tamburlaine in a chariot drawn by defeated kings

---

[81] Francis Bacon, The Advancement of Learning, ed. William Wright (1876; rpt. Oxford: 1900), II. xv. 3, as quoted in Diehl, "Iconography," 33; see also Diehl, "Iconography," 33, 36. While Diehl believes that this 16th century emphasis on violent dramatic images is a Renaissance concept, other scholars consider it to be an inheritance from earlier, Morality Play, traditions. See Powell, "Spectacle," 197.

[82] Powell, "Spectacle," 197.

[83] Brown, "Actors," 165.

as "a remarkable picture of man's violence against man."[84] The humbled monarchs pull Tamburlaine's chariot along, with bits in their mouths, as their conqueror whips these "pamper'd jades of Asia" to greater speeds. This image of defeated kings being further humiliated by being harnessed to the chariot of their victorious rival was a common image in emblem books of the 16th century.[85] It was used to illustrate the ever-popular de casibus theme which dictated the fall of the mighty and the overly-ambitious through the machinations of Fortune. This image had found its way into early Elizabethan drama long before Marlowe's Tamburlaine. In Liberality and Prodigality (1567) Fortune appears onstage in her chariot drawn by debased kings.[86] The Gray's Inn production of Kinwelmersh and

---

[84] Wilson, Shakespeare, p.134; Diehl, "Iconography," 34.

[85] Diehl, "Iconography," 34.

[86] Frederick Kiefer, Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1983), p.129. This device may have had its origins in the pervasive influence of Petrarch's Trionfi. Traditional Renaissance illustrations of these triumphal poems included the chariot, the allegorical figure (Love, Death, etc.), the beasts drawing the chariot, and the crowd of victims of the triumphal figure. These images, which themselves derived from the classical Roman tradition of the Triumph (Kiefer, Fortune, p.135), contributed to much of the popularity of triumphal processions and pageants in Elizabethan England. Shakespeare knew something of the Trionfi tradition as he adapts it, with the idea of Fortune, in 2 Henry VI where the Duke of Gloucester recalls his ambitious wife's early, fortunate days when the people "did follow thy proud chariot-wheels / When thou didst ride in triumph through the streets" (II.iv. 13-14). See D.D. Carnicelli, ed., Lord Morley's "Tryumphes of Fraunces Petrarcke" (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), pp.39-40, 54-9.

Gascoigne's Jocasta (1566) began with a dumb show of an ambitious king being drawn in his chariot by four conquered kings.[87] It is likely that the use of this chariot device in Jocasta was the source for Marlowe's employment of it in Part Two as the earlier drama had been reprinted in 1587, a short time before Marlowe wrote his play.[88]

Certainly Marlowe makes use of this tradition, with all of its allegorical significance, to support his characterization of Tamburlaine as a conqueror capable of usurping the powers of Fortune.[89]

> I hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains
> And with my hand turn Fortune's wheel about,
> And sooner shall the sun fall from his sphere
> Than Tamburlaine be slain or overcome.
> (Part One I.ii. 174-7)

It may be argued, however, that Marlowe's use of the chariot device in Part Two is actually a sign of his increasing disenchantment with his overreaching protagonist. If, as discussed above, Marlowe's first reference to the chariot image in Part One (III.iii. 79-80) is used to emphasize the cruelty and tyranny of Bajazeth in an effort to render his

---

[87] Cole, Suffering, p.108.

[88] Cole, Suffering, p.109.

[89] T.W. Craik, The Tudor Interlude: Stage, Costume, and Acting (1958; rpt. Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press, 1967), p.96; see also Kiefer, Fortune, p.134.

character unsympathetic, then this suggests a similar application in Part Two as part of a deliberate attempt to reduce Tamburlaine's superhuman, heroic stature to that of a mere mortal king, subject to the powers of Fortune and Death. Marlowe uses the later entrances of Tamburlaine in the chariot of captive kings to show how Tamburlaine himself has finally fallen victim to the power of Fortune.[90] For example, on the eve of his conquest of Babylon (V.i.) Tamburlaine enters in his chariot, the ideal image of the triumphal hero. However, when Tamburlaine reenters a short time later, in the same chariot, we see that the irresistable conqueror has himself been conquered by disease and is slowly dying:

> **Tamburlaine.** What daring god torments my body thus
> And seeks to conquer mighty Tamburlaine?
> Shall sickness prove me now to be a man
> That have been term'd the terror of the world?
> (V.iii. 42-5)

The answer, of course, is "yes." Marlowe is making ironic use of the traditional symbolism of this violent image to reinforce the thematic point that Tamburlaine, in Part Two, is no longer the invincible superman that he was in Part One. He also uses the violent visual power of the image to lend emotional impact to the de casibus theme. However, one suspects that Marlowe would have had nothing to do with the

---

[90] Diehl, "Iconography," 35.

chariot device, regardless of any literary traditions, were it not for the fact that the image possesses considerable dramatic power. The scene demonstrates "Marlowe's quite obvious bent for sensationalism; nevertheless it is [this] sensationalism that defines the character of Tamburlaine."[91]

The importance of stage violence in the interpretation of the Tamburlaine plays is best illustrated in consideration of whether or not the audience is intended to admire the bloody Scythian. Almost every act of dramatic violence in the plays is manipulated by Marlowe ultimately to reflect upon the character of Tamburlaine. In Part One most of these acts are never dramatically realized, and are often undercut by black comedy, rendering our dominant feeling one of general admiration for Tamburlaine's vision and power. In Part Two, however, Marlowe stages his violence in such a manner as to detract from our sympathy with his leading character. The finest example of this changing attitude, as communicated in an act of stage violence, occurs with Tamburlaine's murder of his son, Calyphas.

The figure of Calyphas is perplexing for, however attractive the young playboy may seem, we are always aware of the possibility that this attraction derives from our

---

[91] Cole, Suffering, p.108.

anachronistic reading of the play through modern eyes.[92] Certainly the suggestion of cowardice in his character would have made him something less than noble in the eyes of an Elizabethan audience. But the lines he is given by Marlowe undermine the amorality of his father's violent career:

> **Calyphas.** I know sir, what it is to kill a man,
> It works remorse of conscience in me,
> I take no pleasure to be murderous,
> Nor care for blood when wine will quench my thirst.
> (IV.i. 27-30)

Perhaps the most curious aspect of Calyphas' murder is that, from the moment he is dragged out of his tent by an enraged Tamburlaine, to the moment of his death at his father's hands, Calyphas remains silent. Tamburlaine rants on for some time in his familiar fashion; but why doesn't Calyphas say anything in his defense? It is argued that this intriguing silence represents Marlowe's final, half-hearted attempt to rescue Tamburlaine's reputation from the ramifications of his insatiable bloodlust. If Calyphas was to interrupt his father's ranting with one of his cutting observations on the futility of wars and violence, then Tamburlaine, or at least our opinion of him, would utterly

---

[92] Steane and Kocher both argue that, to an Elizabethan audience, Calyphas would have been an object of ridicule rather than sympathy. See Steane, Study, pp.69-70; Kocher, Thought, p.276.

collapse.[93] So while, as always, Marlowe attempts to undercut any possible backlash against his protagonist, the remarkable feebleness of his effort to do so in this scene clearly points to a shift in emphasis from the rapt admiration of Part One.

> The fact that Marlowe invented the character of Tamburlaine's cowardly son and gave him lines that, no matter how much one tries to shed modern predispositions, seem to resonate with ironic jabs at the way of wars further suggests that in 2 Tamburlaine Marlowe begins to call into question the value of overreaching vision....[94]

We see this theme of the futility of violence and action arise time and time again in the acts of stage violence in Part Two.[95] When Tamburlaine's queen, Zenocrate, dies (II.iv.) his reaction is, typically, to wave his sword about in the air and fly into a violent rage:

> What, is she dead? Techelles, draw thy sword,
> And wound the earth, that it may cleave in twain,
> And we descend into th'infernal vaults,
> To hale the Fatal Sisters by the hair,
> And throw them in the triple moat of hell,
> For taking hence my fair Zenocrate.
> (II.iv. 96-101)

But Tamburlaine no longer possesses the demi-godlike,

---

[93] Leech, Poet, p.63.

[94] Christopher Fanta, Marlowe's "Agonists": An Approach to the Ambiguity of His Plays (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), p.21.

[95] Powell, "Spectacle," 209.

Herculean stature necessary to match his words with a descent into Hades.[96] He has become impotent and, most disastrous of all for the "terror of the world," an object of pity.

The same point is made in the Theridamas/Olympia subplot which may be seen as a reworking of the Tamburlaine/Zenocrate relationship in Part One.[97] Theridamas is clearly a reflection of Tamburlaine; but in Part Two the warrior is no longer capable of winning his lady with violent actions and resounding speeches. Rather, in an intriguing piece of stage violence, he becomes the unwitting instrument of her suicide, whereupon he echoes, in his long speech over her corpse, Tamburlaine's similarly impotent speech over the body of Zenocrate. The power of violent action to sweep even the powers of Fortune and Death before it has been shown to be an illusion.

We can see in the Tamburlaine plays a process of evolution both in the forms of dramatic violence, and in the themes conveyed and reinforced by Marlowe's use of this violence. Part Two contains much more demonstratively bloody

---

[96] Given the ironic echoes of classical mythology in this passage, it is interesting to note Battenhouse's theory that Marlowe may have used Seneca's Hercules as a model for Tamburlaine. See Battenhouse, Renaissance, p.202.

[97] Such analogous characters and relationships were common in Elizabethan drama. Marlowe was to use them later, with striking effect, in Doctor Faustus. Shakespeare also made frequent use of them, most notably in The Tempest. See Alan Dessen, Elizabethan Drama and the Viewer's Eye (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1984), pp.23, 66-7; Fanta, Ambiguity, p.20.

violence than does Part One; but paradoxically the depicted power of this violence to control events is but a fraction of that shown in the earlier play. Moreover, in Part Two Marlowe uses dramatic violence to illustrate themes, such as the futility of glory and the mutability of earthly things, much more prominently than in Part One. While Amyras' epitaph upon his father's death contains no hint of condemnation, suggesting that Marlowe's ultimate conception of his protagonist remained largely favourable, it is undeniable that Tamburlaine has lost much of the captivating magnetism that he possessed in Part One. The reduction of the overreacher in both stature and sympathy, from Part One to Part Two, is indicative of Marlowe's growing disenchantment with this figure which becomes increasingly evident in the later plays.

Chapter III

The Jew of Malta and Doctor Faustus

> ...I walk abroad a nights
> And kill sick people groaning under walls:
> Sometimes I go about and poison wells....
> And every moon made some or other mad.
> (The Jew of Malta II.iii. 175-7, 196)

> Now, Faustus, let thine eyes with horror stare
> Into that vast perpetual torture-house.
> There are the Furies tossing damned souls
> On burning forks; their bodies boil in lead:
> There are live quarters broiling on the coals,
> That ne'er can die....
> (Doctor Faustus V.ii. 120-25)

The Jew of Malta and Doctor Faustus, both written sometime between 1588 and 1592,[98] display, as do the Tamburlaine plays, Marlowe's awareness of the power of dramatic violence and of the possibilities of "multiplicity of statement." Yet Marlowe remained deeply rooted in the conventions of the earlier native English drama. Much of the dramatic violence in The Jew and Faustus, particularly that violence which possesses comic overtones, has its origins in

---

[98] There are numerous arguments regarding the dating of The Jew and Faustus. One of the more curious of these is Bennett's proposal that The Jew is the earlier play because "the impetuous violence of the plot seems to argue for its comparative earliness in the Marlowe canon" (See H.S. Bennett, Introd., "The Jew of Malta" and "The Massacre at Paris" by Christopher Marlowe [London, 1931; rpt. New York: Gordian Press, 1966], p.5). However, as the dating controversy is beyond the pale of this work, I use the most accepted chronological sequence.

the traditions of the earlier native English drama.

In The Jew Barabas, who is initially portrayed as a sympathetic Renaissance overreacher victimized by Christian prejudice, gradually takes on the trappings of a Vice from the earlier Morality plays. His violent crimes, far from detracting from his appeal, actually contribute to it, for Marlowe stresses the comic unreality of this violence and carefully prevents any of the victims from capturing audience sympathy, thus allowing the audience to laugh at the most horrific acts. We may see in Faustus an almost identical structure where the protagonist is debased from overreacher to comic Vice. Here Marlowe makes use of the medieval traditions of "eldritch" literature and the "comedy of evil" to present a darker theme. Faustus' conversion to evil results in his overreaching ambitions being physically realized as violent buffoonery. The idea of the overreacher as sympathetic victim, which is touched upon in The Jew, is more deeply explored in Faustus. Here the overreacher becomes the victim of an oppressive, divinely-ordained order which debases those who aspire beyond their "natural" station.

The world of The Jew is not so dominated by the overreacher as was the world of the Tamburlaine plays. At this point in his career, Marlowe's interest shifted from defining the Renaissance overreacher to reworking earlier dramatic traditions, such as that of the Vice figure from the Morality plays, within the context of Renaissance humanism and

Machiavellian power-politics. In The Jew the emphasis is clearly on these earlier traditions, for the overreacher aspect of Marlowe's protagonist is apparent only in Barabas' opening soliloquy where the Jew's stereotypical greed is refashioned as an aspiring grasp for an unattainable infinity:

> **Barabas.** And thus methinks should men of judgement frame
> Their means of traffic from the vulgar trade,
> And, as their wealth increaseth, so inclose
> Infinite riches in a little room.
> (I.i. 34-7)

Our initial attitude towards Barabas is, as with Tamburlaine, generally sympathetic. Marlowe fosters this attitude, not by depicting his overreacher as a conquering hero, but rather by portraying him as a victim, a significant change in his conception of this figure. This is evident in the exchange between Ferneze and Barabas after the Governor of Malta has confiscated all of the Jew's wealth:

> **Barabas.** Is theft the ground of your religion?
>
> **Ferneze.** No, Jew; we take particularly thine,
> To save the ruin of a multitude:
> And better one want for a common good,
> Than many perish for a private man....
> (I.ii. 96-100)

A large portion of Marlowe's Elizabethan audience probably realized that Ferneze's defense recalls precisely the argument used by the high priest Caiaphas to justify the crucifixion

of Christ[99]:

> ...it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.
> (John 11:50, King James Version)

However, in Act Two Barabas the sympathetic overreacher takes on the characteristics of the traditional Jewish bugbear of popular myth, and finally becomes a Vice reminiscent of the earlier Morality plays.[100] It is the Vice, and the morality of

---

[99] See Frederick S. Boas, Christopher Marlowe: A Biographical and Critical Study (1940; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p.137.

[100] There is some argument regarding the extent of Elizabethan anti-Semitism as a popular attitude and its influence upon Marlowe's creation of Barabas. Cole believes that Barabas is the embodiment of popular prejudices towards Jews at the time. Harbage echoes this, contending that Barabas would not have been perceived as a sympathetic character. He points out, with regard to suggestions that Marlowe sympathetically portrays Barabas as being set upon by the pitiless Christian governor Ferneze in Act One, that it was a common feature of many Elizabethan plays to reproach Christians with the merits and finer qualities of certain non-Christians. An example of this practice, he suggests, may be seen in the depiction of the noble Jewish usurer, Gerontus, in Wilson's Three Ladies of London. However, Harbage then seemingly undermines his own argument by arguing that Ferneze's patently unjust "policy" would have had the approval of the Elizabethan audience.
We are therefore brought to the question of whether Elizabethan anti-Semitism was so strongly held by the audiences of the day as to override their sense of justice. Omitting any discussion of whatever Marlowe's personal thoughts on the matter may have been, we are left with a possibly unresolvable problem. As Sanders observes:

> The truth of the matter is that the Elizabethan audience--that peremptory hangman so frequently called in to effect the execution of this or that critical judgement--is so nebulous an

the Vice tradition, which dominates the rest of the play and its presentation of dramatic violence.

In 1808 Charles Lamb said of Barabas:

> Marlowe's Jew.... is a mere monster, brought in with a large painted nose, to please the rabble. He kills in sport, poisons whole nunneries, invents infernal machines.[101]

Here Lamb unwittingly captured precisely those characteristics of the Vice tradition which are most prominent in The Jew. The popular idea of a mass-murderer or poisoner with a "large painted nose" may be evidence of Elizabethan anti-Semitism; but it is also evidence of the profound influence the Morality play had upon Marlowe's crafting of the character of Barabas. In these early plays a common physical characteristic of the devil was his large, bent nose. In Like will to Like (1568) the figure of Vice ridicules the devil as a "bottel nosed godfather," and in All for Money (1560) the devil is refered

---

entity as to be useless in an operation calling for precise definition.

See Sanders, Dramatist, p.40; Cole, Suffering, p.141; Alfred Harbage, "Innocent Barabas," TDR, 8, No.4 (1964), 49, 52.

[101] Charles Lamb, "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets," in The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb ed. E.V. Lucas (London, 1904; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1968) Vol.IV., p.26.

to as a "bottell nosed knaue."[102] The physical relation of Marlowe's Barabas to these early devil figures is made clear by Ithamore, the Jew's servant and co-conspirator:

> **Ithamore.** O, brave, master! I worship your nose for this.
>
> (II.iii. 174)
>
> ...
>
> O mistress! I have the bravest, gravest, secret, subtle, bottle-nosed knave to my master, that ever gentleman had!
>
> (III.iii. 9-11)

This mocking of the devil by the Vice figure who also assists him is another aspect of the Vice tradition employed by Marlowe.[103]

Lamb's observation that Barabas is brought on merely "to please the rabble" is indicative of the widespread popularity enjoyed by the Vice figure. The Vice came eventually to dominate the Morality stage, absorbing the characteristics of other villains such as the devils, and fascinating audiences

---

[102] Craik, Interlude, p.51. There is certainly a suggestion here of anti-Semitism in the creation of dramatic villains long before Marlowe's Barabas or Shakespeare's Shylock.

[103] Craik, Interlude, p.51. In The Merchant of Venice (II.ii. 23-8) Gobbo also refers to Shylock as "a kind of devil" and "the very devil incarnation" in an echo both of Ithamore's lines and of the earlier traditions from which they both descend.

with his inventive intriques and diabolical magnetism.[104] In contrast, the less intriguing figure of Mankind was divided into numerous smaller characters. One description of the resulting situation may be applied equally well to the relationship of Barabas with the secondary characters of Marlowe's play: "They come and go on a stage dominated by him, their roles reduced to no more than support for his."[105]

However, it is Lamb's statement that Barabas "kills in sport" which goes to the heart of the play. Barabas' violence is notably deficient of any desire to humiliate or inflict mental cruelty.[106] This reveals his character's connection with the Vice figure of the earlier drama who indulges in violence, not for the attainment of any ultimate goal, but solely to

---

[104] Bernard Spivack, Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1958), pp.151, 307. The popularity of the Vice may have contributed to the popularity of The Jew which "ran for a record number of performances." See Steane, Study, p.16.

[105] Spivack, Allegory, p.307.

[106] This absence of any intent, on Barabas' part, to demean or humiliate his victims places him in sharp contrast with the crueller, yet more "heroic," figure of Tamburlaine in Marlowe's earlier plays. The double-standard illustrated by this comparison no doubt had its origins in the popular prejudices of the Elizabethan era. Yet, the fact that Marlowe deprives his Barabas' violence of any hint of humilating cruelty suggests that the playwright was attempting to limit the audience's negative reaction to his roguish protagonist. The attractive depiction of Barabas' villainy, though it clearly has links with the comic violence of the Vice tradition, may also represent, as William Empson suggests, Marlowe's presentation to an Elizabethan audience of a "parody" of their own expectations and prejudices. See William Empson, "Two Proper Crimes," The Nation, 163(1946), 444-5; Harbage, "Barabas," 48, 54.

demonstrate time and time again the inventive genius of his own villainy. With The Jew one cannot escape the feeling that Barabas' acts of violence are independent of any logical narrative structure within which Marlowe attempted to fit them. Though Machiavel introduces the play, the impetus behind Barabas' violence seems to derive more from the Morality tradition's logic of spectacle than from any Machiavellian-inspired lust for power.[107]

It is in Act Two that we become aware of the remarkable change in Barabas' character. When he first meets his partner-in-villainy, Ithamore, he boldly declaims that "we are villains both," whereupon the two mischievously exchange tales of their misdeeds:

> **Barabas.** As for myself, I walk abroad a nights
> And kill sick people groaning under walls:
> Sometimes I go about and poison wells....
> And in the wars 'twixt France and Germany...
> Slew friend and enemy with my stratagems:
> Then, after that, was I an usurer....
> ...
> **Ithamore.** One time I was an hostler in an inn,
> And in the night time secretly would I steal
> To travellers' chambers, and there cut their throats....
>
> (II.iii. 175-7, 188-91, 206-8)

Barabas is no longer the sympathetic figure of the preceding act. He has suddenly assumed the characteristics of the Jewish bogeyman who was popularly believed to poison wells

---

[107] Spivack, Allegory, pp.350-51.

and cause outbreaks of plague.[108] However, Barabas' unique declaration of villainy is so extensive, and is delivered with such "horrific gusto," that it becomes unreal and even rather humourous.[109] But this speech indicates more than just a change in the characterization of Barabas. More significantly, it marks a "dramaturgic change" where Marlowe's overreacher and the theatrical conventions of Renaissance drama, which underlie the characters and actions of the first act, give way to the dramatic conventions of the Morality Play tradition:

> Structurally the first two acts of The Jew of Malta belong to the Elizabethan drama's naturalistic future, but they give way to its homiletic past. They give way, in other words, to a succession of episodes ... wherein against a parade of victims villainous deceit remains on display in a variety of forms.[110]

---

[108] Levine, "Violence," p.250.

[109] Levin notes the fantastical, almost childish, nature of Barabas and Ithamore's villainous boastings: "These, we think, are the nightmares of spoiled children rather than the misdeeds of wicked men." Sanders agrees, perceiving in the exchange a connection with the dramatic violence of Marlowe's other plays:

> This is the brutal schoolboy humour of the 'sick' joke, whose only charm is that of its perversity; and it is clearly related to that drive for random destruction which is so dominant in The Massacre and Tamburlaine.

See Levin, Overreacher, p.82; Sanders, Dramatist, p.52.

[110] Spivack, Allegory, p.371. Steane, however, sees in the last three acts of The Jew some indication of Marlowe's later dramatic development. While the first two acts have longer and better speeches, hearkening back to the long, poetic set speeches of Tamburlaine, the unpoetical, give and take dialogue of the last three acts represents a bridge in Marlowe's canon with the more prosaic writing of Edward II.

Barabas' boasting speech is also of great importance as it wrecks the depiction of him, established in Act One, as being a stereotypical Jewish usurer whose ultimate goal is the accumulation of wealth. The autobiographical declaration reveals that Barabas actually began his career of villainy long before he learned the ways of commerce and finance. He states that he first studied medicine in order to speed men to their graves, and engineering so that he might kill "friend and enemy" with his military works (182-90). It was only after this that Barabas became involved in finance, not from any lust for ducats, but solely to extend his career into new fields of villainy:

> Then, after that, was I an usurer,
> And with extorting, cozening, forfeiting,
> And tricks belonging unto brokery,

Muriel Bradbrook similarly perceives in these last acts a movement away from verse and a growing interest in the possibilities of stage action. This clearly points towards the more demonstrative, naturalistic action of later Elizabethan drama. While Marlowe was working with the tools and conventions of the past, he was also undoubtedly looking towards the future. See Steane, Study, p.196; Bradbrook, Conventions, pp.149-52.

There is considerable debate among Marlovian scholars over whether this sudden change of character and style in Act Two of The Jew is the product of another writer's corruption of Marlowe's text. I do not find these arguments particularly convincing and, as they may be found in most introductions to modern editions of the play, they need not be detailed here. However, it is amusing to note Brooke's observation that, for a modern playwright, nothing short of insanity would explain this sudden shift in mood. See C.F. Tucker Brooke, Introd., The Works of Christopher Marlowe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), p.232.

> I fill'd the gaols with bankrouts in a year,
> And with young orphans planted hospitals;
> And every moon made some or other mad.
> (II.iii. 191-6)

The earlier Barabas is essentially a ducat-grasping financier given to such hilarious ejaculations of miserly ecstasy as: "O my girl, /My gold, my fortune, my felicity" (II.ii. 47-8). But by the time of his boasting speech Barabas has been transformed into a figure of madcap violence to whom usury is but a tool with which to bring about confusion and mass destruction.

Marlowe's balancing of Renaissance tragedy and Vice comedy is evident in Barabas' first crime when he artfully engineers the duel, and simultaneous deaths, of two close friends and virtual innocents, Mathias and Lodowick. The absurd farce of their mutual murder is highlighted by Barabas' play-by-play commentary:

> Enter Barabas above
> **Barabas.** O, bravely fought! and yet they thrust not home.
> Now, Lodowick! now, Mathias! So; [Both fall
> So, now they have show'd themselves to be tall fellows.
> (III.ii. 5-7)

Yet suddenly the mood of the scene changes with the entrance of Lodowick and Mathias' respective parents, Ferneze and Katherine. Their uncomprehending bereavement over the deaths of their children is heart-rending. In but a few lines Marlowe

shifts from a farcical treatment of violence, very much in the tradition of the Morality Vice figure, to a tragic depiction of the effects of such violence upon surviving loved ones, which is so much a part of later Elizabethan tragedy.

Barabas and Ithamore next conspire to poison an entire nunnery with a pot of rice-porridge in order to eliminate Barabas' daughter, Abigail, who has deduced her father's instrumental role in the deaths of Lodowick and Mathias. Modern productions of The Jew have exploited this scene for all of its considerable comic potential. In their reviews of Clifford Williams' 1964 production of The Jew, critics note how even the idea of murdering a whole nunnery with poisoned porridge provokes "side-splitting" laughter on the part of the audience:

> And so completely had the audience forfeited by their laughter all claims to ordinary human sympathy and decency, that when the nuns later crossed the stage 'coughing and chocking' [sic] and 'clinging' to Jacomo the hilarity was redoubled. Lines like 'all the nuns are dead, let's bury them' were greeted with such howls of uncontrollable laughter that the audience risked 'laughing themselves into a coma'.[111]

The death of Abigail is somewhat more troubling, however, as she is our one touchstone of absolute virtue in a corrupt

---

[111] Theatre World, May 1965, pp.19-22; The Times, 2 October 1964; as quoted in James L. Smith, "The Jew of Malta in the Theatre," in Christopher Marlowe ed. Brian Morris, Mermaid Critical Commentaries (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969), p.15.

world. Her innocence would have lent to her death an air of tragic waste were it not for Marlowe's crafting of her death-scene in such a way as to minimize any sense of tragedy. Upon hearing Abigail's death-bed confession about her father's crimes, the friar Barnardine promises her that the silence of the confessional is sacrosanct by canon law:

> **Abigail.** So I have heard; pray, therefore, keep it close.
> Death seizeth on my heart: ah, gentle friar,
> Convert my father that he may be sav'd,
> And witness that I die a Christian! [Dies
>
> **Friar Barnardine.** Ay, and a virgin too; that grieves me most.
> But I must to the Jew, and exclaim on him,
> And make him stand in fear of me.
> (III.vi. 37-43)

The swiftness of the transition from Abigail's devout Christian death, to her confessor's lecherous epitaph and sudden dismissal of the girl's corpse, mocks Abigail's Christianity and undercuts the tragic aspects of the scene with black comedy.[112] One cannot escape the thought that Abigail must be rather simple-minded not to perceive the moral corruption of her confessor and of her society in general. Williams' 1964 production of the play has the friar, who has been supporting Abigail on his knee throughout her pathetic

---

[112] This close connection of thoughts of sex and death is characteristic of The Jew of Malta. See, for example, Ithamore in III. i. 26-30 and III. iii. 20-36.

confession, indifferently drop the girl's corpse upon the stage, with an audible bump, after she succumbs to her father's poison.[113] She is no longer an object of lust and, as he extracted information from her, within the "sacred" rite of confession, with which to blackmail her father, the "gentle friar" cares nothing for the pitiful girl or her fate. What sympathy the audience may feel for Abigail is more than outweighed by the sudden, unexpected, callous humour of the corrupt friar.

Barabas then contrives to dispose of the friars Barnardine and Jacomo who have learnt from Abigail of the extent of the Jew's crimes. He cunningly dissembles a wish to become a Christian and give all his wealth to a religious house, thus playing off the two greedy friars against each other. He lures Barnardine into spending the night at his house only so that he and Ithmore may strangle him secretly (IV.ii.). Then they prop up the dead friar on his staff and place him where Jacomo, who has been similarly lured to Barabas' home with the prospect of converting the Jew, would be sure to encounter him. Barabas has cannily sown dissension between the two "men of God," and Jacomo is so suspicious of his rival that he preemptively strikes the corpse of Barnardine and knocks it to the ground. When Barabas and Ithamore conveniently enter at this point to witness the

---

[113] "RSC prompt copy for Williams' production," as quoted in Smith, "Theatre," p.18.

friar's violent attack, the feigned shock and horror of these two enthusiastic mass murderers is uproariously funny:

> **Barabas.** Who is it? Barnardine! now, out, alas, he is slain.
>
> **Ithamore.** Ay, master, he's slain; look how his brains drop out on's nose.
>
> ...
>
> Fie upon 'em! master; will you turn Christian, when holy friars turn devils and murder one another?
>
> **Barabas.** No; for this example I'll remain a Jew:
> Heaven bless me! what, a friar a murderer?
> When shall you see a Jew commit the like?
> (IV.iii. 16-18, 32-6)

It may be noted that much of the violent humour in The Jew has satirical overtones, criticizing professed Christians and Christian institutions in general. In the morally corrupt--some critics say "morally neutral"--world of The Jew, religion offers no guidance or reassurance.[114] Thus the only true Christian, Abigail, is derided at her death for her faith in the faithless. The two friars, supposed embodiments of religious morality, are depicted as being merely two more corrupt individuals in a society permeated by greed and corruption. It is sometimes argued that this anti-religious sentiment in The Jew is actually anti-Catholic and that Marlowe is in no way commenting upon Protestant England. However, while the Protestant faith is nowhere included in the

---

[114] For a discussion of "moral neutrality" in The Jew see Bevington, "Mankind", p.232.

play's anti-religious satire, it is also never specifically excluded.[115] It must be remembered that after 1581 all public plays were censored by the Master of Revels so that no unorthodox treatment of matters relating to Elizabethan government or religion would have been permitted to be shown undisguised.[116] Were Marlowe to have made an unambiguous public attack upon religion in general--and he is alleged to have done so privately by Kyd and Baines--the consequences would undoubtedly have been quite nasty and, more than likely, ultimately fatal.[117]

One should not lose sight, in studying Marlowe's comic violence from a rather removed, intellectual perspective, of the essential fact that so much of Barabas' attractive fascination is dependent upon comic appeal. While Eliot's perception of the play's "terribly serious" Elizabethan humour

---

[115] For two versions of this argument see Cole, Suffering, p.135; Fanta, Ambiguity, pp.26-7.

[116] Fanta, Ambiguity, p.5.

[117] Bradbrook contends that Marlowe employs comic violence in The Jew in order to disguise "the boldness of his intellectual challenge." See Muriel Bradbrook, "Marlowe's Doctor Faustus and the Eldritch Tradition," in Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig, ed. Richard Hosley (1962; rpt. Kansas City: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1963), p.89. Harbage expresses the similar view that The Jew is, like all of Marlowe's plays, "admirably subversive." Harbage, "Barabas," 48.

Even as matters stood, with only hints of religious and political free-thinking in Marlowe's plays, the Privy Council issued a warrant for his arrest in May, 1593, to answer charges of sedition and blasphemy. For this, and for Kyd's and Baines' accusations in their entirety, see Maclure, ed., Heritage, pp.32-8.

suggests that Marlowe makes use of comic violence for manifold thematic purposes, it also overlooks the simple laughter generated by Marlowe's villainous protagonist.[118] It would be far more profitable, in fact, to approach this aspect of the play from the perspective of modern cinematic black comedy than from that of "terribly serious" literary scholarship. While movies of this genre are frequently loaded with wit, irony, and social satire, one rarely loses sight of their basic comic appeal as so many scholars have done with The Jew.[119] The audience's laughter leads it to identify, to some

---

[118] T.S. Eliot, "Christopher Marlowe," in his Selected Essays: 1917-1932 (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), p.123.

[119] A fine example of this modern black comedy, with numerous echoes of The Jew of Malta, is Kind Hearts and Coronets (Great Britain, Ealing Studios, 1949). Here the protagonist (Dennis Price), heir to a family title and fortune, systematically disposes of his seven relatives (all played by Alec Guinness!) who stand between him and the attainment of wealth. As with Barabas, much of the fascination of Price's character lies in his inventive genius for murder. Indeed, one identifies so much with this modern counterpart to the Vice, possibly because his violence is always rather unreal and undercut with humour, that you cannot help but cheer him on to greater heights (or depths) of imaginative villainy. Also, like Barabas, just when the riches and the title are almost within his grasp, he is abruptly "hoist with his own petard" and becomes the cause of his own downfall.

Compare this precis of Kind Hearts and Coronets with Bradbrook's assessment of Elizabethan villains such as Barabas in The Jew of Malta:

> Here the audience could, in a strictly limited fashion, identify themselves with the hero. His daring, his intelligence, his successful plotting against odds and his bitter wit were qualities which the audience enjoyed and approved. They even enjoyed jeering and deliberate cruelty.... (and) when a bad character was overthrown at the end,

degree, with the play's leading character, a self-proclaimed homicidal maniac, and overrides any sense of moral revulsion or outrage at the Jew's violent crimes. This aspect of Elizabethan dramatic comedy is noted by Rossiter who comments:

> It is this unholy jocularity, the readiness of sarcastic, sardonic, profane and sometimes blasphemous wit, the demonic gusto of it all, which not only wins the audience over to accepting the Devil as hero, but also points us towards the central paradox of the play.[120]

That an audience could accept "the Devil as hero" is an idea with which many scholars find it difficult to come to terms. To support the view that Barabas would have been, for an Elizabethan audience, a distasteful Machiavellian figure, critics sometimes resort to the argument that Elizabethans were particularly horrified by poisoners such as Barabas and the idea of subtle, secretive murder. Poisoning was usually

---

> the audience, who had been thrilled by their successful daring all through, would turn around and get an equal satisfaction out of their unrepentant deaths....

Clearly drama, like history, repeats itself. See Bradbrook, Conventions, p.61; also Knoll, Marlowe, p.99; Steane, Study, p.171.

[120] Arthur Rossiter, "Angel with Horns" and other Shakespeare Lectures ed. Graham Storey (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1961), p.19. Knoll suggests that one reason why the violence in The Jew has comic overtones, and is capable of provoking laughter, is that the acts of violence themselves are dealt with summarily, in so few lines that the realization of the horrific nature of the Jew's crimes never properly registers with the audience. All they remember is the comedy. See Knoll, Marlowe, p.98.

associated, in the Elizabethan mind, with Italians and the Byzantine intrigues of the Italian peninsula. When anyone refered to an "Italian murder" the thoughts of the audience, of those both in the pit and in the gallery, were of poison; an attitude fostered by the popular legends surrounding real-life Machiavellians such as the Borgias. Some critics argue that the Elizabethans, given this popular attitude, could never have identified with the character of Barabas.[121]

In his boasting speech in Act Two Barabas proudly admits that: "Sometimes I go about and poison wells...." Later, when he decides to dispose of his daughter, and of an entire nunnery in the bargain, he expounds to Ithamore on his skill at the fine art of poisoning:

> **Barabas.** ...Ithamore, seest thou this?
> It is a precious powder that I bought
> Of an Italian, in Ancona, once,
> Whose operation is to bind, infect,
> And poison deeply, yet not appear
> In forty hours after it is ta'en.
> ...
> And with her let it work like Borgia's wine,

---

[121] Fredson Bowers, "The Audience and the Poisoners of Elizabethan Tragedy," The Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 36(1937), 503-4. Bowers notes (497): "The Elizabethan's horror and his fear of poisoning were expressed again and again.... Of all forms of murder, that by poisoning was considered the most detestable...."

Whereof his sire, the Pope, was poisoned![122]
(III.iv. 63-8, 94-5)

Later, when Ithamore is seduced into blackmailing his master by Bellamira and Pilia-Borza, Barabas disguises himself as a French minstrel and poisons his unsuspecting blackmailers with the deadly scent of the flowers in his hat:

Bellamira. How sweet, my Ithamore, the flowers smell!

Ithamore. Like thy breath, sweetheart; no violet like 'em.

Pilia-Borza. Foh! methinks they stink like a hollyhock.

Barabas. So now, I am reveng'd upon 'em all:

---

[122] Marlowe may be here invoking the memory of Cesare Borgia, and of his father, Pope Alexander VI, "with the intent to call up in the audience's imagination Machiavelli, popularly supposed to have been Caesar's councillor" (E. Meyer, Machiavelli and the Elizabethan Drama [Weimar, 1897] as quoted in Bennett, ed., "The Jew of Malta", pp.112-13). It will be recalled that Barabas is introduced, at the beginning of the play, by the figure of Machiavel, with typically intriguing Marlovian "moral neutrality":

I crave but this,--grace him as he deserves,
And let him not be entertain'd the worse
Because he favours me.
(Prologue, 33-5)

With this "poison" speech Marlowe introduces into the character of Barabas aspects of the Machiavellian "bugbear" of popular myth as depicted in works such as Gentillet's Contre-Machiavel (1576) (Cole, Suffering, p.137). The character of Barabas is, by this point, something of a hybrid, a figure containing elements of the earlier Vice tradition as well as of the "Machiavel" of contemporary fame. However, it is the Vice aspect of his character which continues to dominate the play.

The scent thereof was death; I poison'd it.[123] [Aside.
(IV.vi. 39-43)

Marlowe undercuts this distasteful aspect of his protagonist's character, not only with comedy, but also through the skilful use of stagecraft. Much of Barabas' vicious character is depicted onstage only in the private asides which Barabas shares with the audience. We see this convention of Elizabethan villainy in the episode of the poisoned flowers, and earlier in the exchange between Barabas and Pilia-Borza who has delivered the blackmail note from Ithamore:

> **Barabas.** I must make this villain away [Aside.] Please you
> dine with me, sir;--and you shall be most heartily poisoned. [Aside.
> ...
> O, that I should part with so much gold! [Aside.
> Here, take 'em, fellow, with as good a will--
> As I would see thee hang'd [Aside.]; O, love stops my breath!
>
> (IV.v. 30-32, 53-6)

---

[123] Although such an outlandish method of poisoning might appear to be bizarre, and perhaps even comical, to a modern audience, for Elizabethans such a poisoning would have seemed quite true-to-life. Bowers, "Poisoners," 493-4.

Strange forms of poisoning were very much the norm for Elizabethan drama. In Marlowe's The Massacre at Paris, the old Queen of Navarre dies from the fatal smell of poisoned gloves (Sc. iii); while in Edward II Lightborn boasts that: "I learned in Naples how to poison flowers"(V.iv. 31). In Alabaster's Roxana poisoned flowers also take their toll; and later, in Hamlet, old Hamlet is said to have been murdered, as he slept, by poison poured into his ear.

An audience would undoubtedly not only appreciate the amusing contrast between the bitter, violent language of Barabas' poisonous thoughts and his public fawning before his blackmailer, but also be enlisted on Barabas' side, by means of these asides, as silent accomplices. The device of a villain sharing his diabolical thoughts and plans with an audience creates an element of complicity in the audience's reaction towards the character and his misdeeds which results in their identifying, to a degree, with the villain.[124]

Although audiences no doubt identified with the character of Barabas, they could still, as Bradbrook suggests, very much enjoy his downfall.[125] The Jew, who has betrayed Christian Malta to the Turks, decides to turn around and betray the

---

[124] The idea of the audience as "accomplices" in a villain's crimes may be found in Greenblatt, Self-Fashioning, p.216.

Barabas' feigned death and "resurrection," after his being denounced by Ithamore and Bellamira, is offered by Greenblatt as proof of the audience's identification with his character:

> The Jew has for the audience something of the attractiveness of the wily, misused slave in Roman comedy, always on the brink of disaster, always revealed to have a trick or two up his sleeve. The mythic core of this character's endless resourcefulness is what Nashe calls "stage-like resurrection".... At this moment, as elsewhere in the play, the audience waits for Barabas' recovery, wills his continued existence, and hence identifies with him (p.216).

This resourceful "resurrection" also points to Barabas' links with the inventive, immortal figure of the Vice in the Morality tradition.

[125] Bradbrook, Conventions, p.61.

Turks to the Christians. The groundwork for this treachery is laid out in a speech (V.ii. 27-46) in which Barabas explains his actions in the name of good "policy." Ostensibly Machiavellian, the speech leaves one with the impression that it is still the mad logic of the Vice, not the logic of power, that drives Barabas. This feeling is justified later when Barabas outlines his plot. He initially invokes the precedent of the Machiavellian practice of princes, but then, in a question directed to the audience, he reveals the true impetus behind his double-cross:

> Why, is not this
> A kingly kind of trade, to purchase towns
> By treachery, and sell 'em by deceit?
> Now tell me, worldlings, underneath the sun
> If greater falsehood ever has bin done?
> (V.v. 46-50)

The sense here is that a "kingly kind of trade" takes second place, in Barabas' mind, to the accomplishment of one of the greatest feats of villainy in history. The Jew is proud, not so much of his princely power, as of his diabolical ingenuity.

However, Barabas' treacherous plot backfires, and the Jew, tricked by Ferneze, falls into the boiling cauldron with which he intended to cook the Turkish prince Calymath. As Henslowe records a "cauderm for the Jewe" as one of the properties of the Admiral's Men in 1598, this scene was

undoubtedly part of the original production of the play.[126] The staging of the scene was probably quite simple, beginning with the character of Barabas standing in the gallery of the "tiring house" at the back of the stage. A trap door, or perhaps a curtain disguising the actor's descent by stairs, facilitated Barabas' "fall" from the gallery, whereupon a curtain is drawn aside revealing Barabas thrashing about in a cauldron.[127]

The appeal of the poetic justice of the Jew being "hoist with his own petard" is undeniable. Marlowe's choice of this particularly nasty means of execution may have been intended to highlight the audience's sense of poetic justice, for many may have recalled that, in England between 1531 and 1547, boiling to death in lead or seething water was the legal punishment for poisoners.[128]

---

[126] Bennett, ed., Introd. p.163.

[127] Smith, "Theatre," p.22; Bennett, ed., Introd. p.164.

[128] A.V. Judges, ed., Underworld, p.lx. This punishment came into being after the Bishop of Rochester's household was believed poisoned in 1531. The Crown declared poisoning to be high treason and Rochester's cook was publicly boiled alive. See Hibbert, Evil, pp.24-5.

The device of the boiling cauldron may also have had its origins in emblematic traditions. In Whitney's emblem book the device of the boiling cauldron is accompanied by an admonition against pride from the gospel of Luke (18:14): "...for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled...." Whitney's lines bear a striking resemblance to Marlowe's depiction of Barabas' last moments when none would help him from the cauldron:

> The boylinge brothe, aboue the brinke doth
> swell...

One cannot help but appreciate the humour in the depiction of Barabas' last moments as he spits out curses left and right, unrepentant and villainous to the end:

> **Barabas.** ...had I but escap'd this stratagem,
> I would have brought confusion on you all,
> Damn'd Christians, dogs, and Turkish infidels!
> But now begins the extremity of heat
> To pinch me with intolerable pangs:
> Die, life! Fly, soul! tongue, curse thy fill, and die!
> [Dies.[129]
> (V.v. 84-9)

For all of its violence, poetic justice, and humour, the death of Barabas remains curiously moving. Barabas the overreaching victim, the Vice, the Machiavellian, confuses and fascinates the audience, and ultimately leads them to identify with him. His stage violence, and his violent dialogue, play a major role in this attraction. His crimes excite our admiration for his ingenuity and point out his ties to the

---

> So reaching heads that thinke them neuer well,
> Doe headlong fall, for pride hathe ofte that hire:
> And where before their frendes they did dispise,
> Nowe beinge falne, none helpe them for to rise.

See Geoffrey Whitney, A Choice of Emblemes and other Devises (Leyden, 1586), p.216; as quoted in Levin, Overreacher, p.98.

[129] That Barabas should die marks a departure from the traditions of the Morality in which the figure of Vice always lives on. Cole believes that Marlowe is making the point, with Barabas' death, that the Vice remains alive at the end of The Jew in the sense that the Christians, such as Ferneze, have adopted Barabas' "policy." See Cole, Suffering, p.143.

Vice tradition of the earlier English drama. At the same time, they suggest a movement away from extravagant, bombastic verse of Tamburlaine, which exists as a substitute for action, and towards the more naturalistic, violent action of post-Marlovian Elizabethan drama. All of these aspects of the The Jew find a similar expression in the dramatic violence of Marlowe's next play, Doctor Faustus.

It is something of a critical commonplace in Marlovian studies to say that Doctor Faustus is a drama in transition from the ideas of the earlier Morality Plays to the humanistic attitudes of the later English Renaissance.[130] Faustus is seen,

---

[130] Doctor Faustus presents scholars with the problems of a corrupt text. This is particularly relevant to any study of dramatic violence in the play as the passages which contain most of the play's violent action, the middle comic scenes, are the very passages whose legitimacy as Marlowe's work is most often called into question. The argument is made that as the middle scenes of the play possess none of the high, poetic quality of either Faustus' initial ambitious declarations, nor of his agonizing end, then these scenes must represent the subsequent additions of later writers. In support of this one notes Henslowe's entry in his Diary, for 22 November 1602, when he paid £4 to Samuel Rowley and William Birde "for ther adicyones in doctor Fostes." See Frederick Boas, ed., Introd. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe (London, 1932; rpt. New York: Gordian Press, 1966), p.28.

Other critics see in these middle scenes something of Marlowe's style as evidenced in his other plays. Sanders notes the striking similarity between the comedy in the middle scenes of Faustus, and the black comedy of The Jew of Malta. Bradbrook likewise perceives in the burlesque comedy of Faustus echoes of the comic elements in Tamburlaine and The Jew. See Sanders, Dramatist, p.207; Bradbrook, Conventions, p.143.

The critical consensus is that, although the middle scenes clearly show signs of textual corruption, the text as we have it today is largely Marlowe's or, at least, follows Marlowe's original plan. As Greg argues:

more than any other Marlovian protagonist, as a hybrid Renaissance man: a character trapped between the black and white ethical system of the Morality plays and the praiseworthy ambitions of the Elizabethan age.[131] Faustus is initially portrayed as a sympathetic overreacher whose blasphemous ambitions and extravagant poetic language, which he uses to give voice to his aspirations, are reminiscent of Tamburlaine:

> **Faustus.** O, what a world of profit and delight,
> Of power, of honour, and omnipotence,
> Is promised to the studious artizan!
> All things that move between the quiet poles
> Shall be at my command: emperors and kings
> Are but obey'd in their several provinces,
> Nor can they raise the wind, or rend the clouds;
> But his dominion that exceeds in this,
> Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man;
> A sound magician is a demi-god:
> Here, tire my brains to get a deity!
> (I.i. 54-64)

The first occurrence of dramatic violence in Faustus makes it

---

> I do not believe that as originally written it differed to any material extent from what we are able to reconstruct from a comparison of the two versions in which it has come down to us.

See W.W. Greg, as quoted in Steane, Study, p.123. For supporting views see also Leech, Poet, p.16; Irving Ribner, "Marlowe's 'Tragicke Glasse'," in Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig, ed. Richard Hosley (1962; rpt. Kansas City: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1963), p.111.

[131] See Knoll, Marlowe, p.69; Levin, Overreacher, p.131; William Tydeman, "Doctor Faustus": Text and Performance (Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1984), pp.22-3.

evident that Marlowe is consciously invoking the style and power of his earlier play in order to bring into sharp relief his changed conception of the overreacher.

When Faustus decides to commit his soul to Lucifer in exchange for knowledge and power, the devil Mephistophilis urges him to draw up a contract, written in his own blood, as a guarantee of his good faith:

> **Faustus** [stabbing his arm]. Lo, Mephistophilis, for love of thee,
> I cut mine arm, and with my proper blood
> Assure my soul to be great Lucifer's,
> Chief lord and regent of perpetual night!
> (II.i. 53-6)

This is a clear echo of a similar act of self-mutilation by Tamburlaine in Tamburlaine: Part Two (III.ii.). But while Tamburlaine's blood streams freely from his wound, symbolizing his powerful, supremely confident, life-force, Faustus' lifeblood congeals suggesting a far less determined, hesitating spirit:

> **Faustus.** But, Mephistophilis,
> My blood congeals, and I can write no more.
>
> **Meph.** I'll fetch thee fire to dissolve it straight.
> [Exit.
>
> **Faustus.** What might the staying of my blood portend?
> Is it unwilling I should write this bill?
> Why streams it not, that I may write afresh?
> Faustus gives to thee his soul: oh, there it stay'd!
> (II.i. 61-7)

The differences between Faustus' self-wounding, and that of Tamburlaine in Marlowe's earlier play, are of great significance in interpreting the evolution of Marlowe's dramatic thought and development. Tamburlaine was a successful overreacher who was absolutely single-minded in his pursuit of the "sweet fruition of an earthly crown." But even in the Tamburlaine plays there is a noticeable decline in the protagonist's stature from Part One to Part Two. Doctor Faustus marks the reduction of the overreaching superman to the human level. Indicative of this are Faustus' short soliloquies, such as the one above, which throughout the play give evidence of an all-too-human and divided mind. Although Faustus has decided to sell his soul, part of him still recoils from the infernal contract and must be forced. The device of the Good and Bad angels advising Faustus is a traditional symbolic representation of this internal conflict. However, Marlowe goes far beyond this tradition, and it is in the agonizing moments when Faustus is alone with his thoughts that psychological depth becomes apparent, for the first time, in Marlowe's work. Faustus' self-doubting soliloquies may be seen as precursors of Shakespeare's much more extensive, but very similar, use of soliloquies in Macbeth and Hamlet. This marks a turning point, not only in Marlowe's personal dramatic development, but in the evolution of Elizabethan drama.

Marlowe's drama was, however, still very much imbued with

the traditions of the earlier English theatre. As Bradbrook observes, in Faustus Marlowe makes use of the "eldritch tradition," which is characterized by strange, violent horrors that are always depicted in such a way as to seem harmlessly comic rather than terrifying.[132] This tradition is evident in the hilarious scene of Faustus and Mephistophilis at the Papal court.

> In Marlowe's day, eldritch mirth is most frequently found combined with antipapal stories.... These play boisterously with notions of hell-fire, combining obscene tales with parody of holy water, sacred relics, and other rejected objects of veneration from the old faith.[133]

The antics begin with another echo from the Tamburlaine plays when the Pope enters with his train and the humbled Bruno, who was created as a rival Pope by the German Emperor. The Pope commands that Bruno be cast down before him as a footstool so that he may mount his Papal throne from his rival's back (III.i. 89-98). This humiliation recalls the similar degradation of Bajazeth whom Tamburlaine used as a footstool to ascend his own throne (Part One IV.ii.).[134]

---

[132] See Bradbrook, "Eldritch," pp.83-90.

[133] Bradbrook, "Eldritch," p.86.

[134] It is interesting to note the contrast in dialogue in these similar scenes from the two plays. In Part One the visual image is accompanied by the extravagant, bombastic poetry which is so characteristic of the play:

Tamburlaine. Bring out my footstool.
They take him out of the cage

Later Faustus and Mephistophilis, in the guise of two Cardinals, spirit away Bruno and return, invisible, to further plague the Papal court at a banquet. They inject an element of mischievous deviltry into the formal solemnity of the feast, beginning with their snatching of food and wine from the hands of the outraged Pope and his guests. Faustus then proceeds to physically assault the Pope whose horrified reaction is hilarious:

> **Bajazeth.** Ye holy priests of heavenly Mahomet,
> That sacrificing slice and cut your flesh,
> Staining his altars with your purple blood:
> Make heaven to frown and every fixed star
> To suck up poison from the moorish fens,
> And pour it in this glorious tyrant's throat....
> Fiends look on me, and thou dread god of hell,
> With ebon sceptre strike this hateful earth,
> And make it swallow both of us at once!
> Tamburlaine gets up upon him to his chair
> (IV.ii. 1-7, 27-9)

Compare this to the simpler, more prosaic, dialogue of the middle, comic scenes of Faustus:

> **Pope.** Cast down our footstool.
> ...
> **Bruno.** Proud Lucifer, that state belongs to me:
> But thus I fall to Peter, not to thee.
>
> **Pope.** To me and Peter shalt thou grovelling lie,
> And crouch before the Papal dignity;
> Sound trumpets, then, for thus Saint Peter's heir,
> From Bruno's back, ascends Saint Peter's chair.
> [A flourish while he ascends.
> (III.i. 89-98)

Clearly, as we have seen above, the overreaching poetic verse of the Tamburlaine plays is echoed in the early scenes of Faustus. Perhaps Marlowe is emphasizing, in the middle scenes of Faustus, the debasement of his overreacher by depriving these scenes of that "mighty line" which is the verbal manifestation of the overreacher's aspirations and power.

Faustus. How now?
Must every bit be spiced with a cross?
Nay then, take that. [Strikes the Pope.

Pope. O I am slain, help me, my lords;
O come and help to bear my body hence:--
Damn'd be his soul for ever for this deed!
[Exeunt the Pope and his train.
(III.ii. 88-93)

The scene concludes with a farcical parody of the rite of excommunication during which Faustus and Mephistophilis violently attack a group of chanting friars who were summoned by the Pope to damn his tormenters:

Sing this.
Cursed be he that stole his Holiness' meat from the table!
Maledicat Dominus!
Cursed be he that struck his Holiness a blow on the face!
Maledicat Dominus!
Cursed be he that took Friar Sandelo a blow on the pate!
Maledicat Dominus!
Cursed be he that disturbeth our holy dirge!
Maledicat Dominus!
Cursed be he that took away his Holiness' wine!
Maledicat Dominus!
Et omnes Sancti! Amen!
Mephistophilis and Faustus beat the Friars, fling fireworks among them; and exeunt.
(III.ii. 100-110)

The stage violence of the scene at the Papal court has obvious satirical, anti-Catholic, overtones which would have been greatly appreciated in Protestant England of the late Elizabethan era. However, the sense one gets from imagining

the violent, visual action that would have accompanied this parody of monastic chanting is that Marlowe was more interested in the sheer spectacle of the scene than in pandering to any religious prejudices. Reviews of modern productions of the play point out how effective is this image of Faustus and Mephistophilis laying waste to the pomp and grandeur of the Papal banquet:

> ...the pageant of the interrupted papal meeting is staged with magnificence. The contrast between the fusty sobriety of Faustus' study and the riot of colour when he gets loose as a magician is extremely effective.[135]

The violence of this tumultuous scene is more the violence of adolescent pranksters than of bloody villains. The two "invisible," diabolical figures leap about the stage, ridiculing and assaulting the leaders of the hated Roman Church; but no one is seriously hurt by their antics. Comic devils such as they (for Faustus shares the traditional characteristics of the devils in this scene) were a common feature of fifteenth and sixteenth century drama and audiences

---

[135] Eric Keown, Rev. of Michael Bentall's production of Doctor Faustus at the Assembly Hall, Edinburgh, Punch, 24(3 August 1961), 328. Other reviews of the play agree, suggesting that "if the trivial conjuring tricks are played in surroundings of much splendour they will gain enormously in importance....the final wrecking of all this grandeur by Faustus and Mephistophilis seems indeed a devilish outrage." Rev. of Doctor Faustus at the Assembly Hall, Edinburgh, The Times; as quoted in John Russell Brown, "Marlowe and the Actors," TDR, 8, No.4 (1964), 166.

very much enjoyed their exercise of diabolical power.[136]

However, many scholars perceive a deeper thematic purpose underlying the evident comic appeal of the scene at the Papal court. There is a subtle, tragic irony pervading the middle scenes of Faustus. During the Middle Ages it was thought that all reality is ultimately good as it was brought into being by God. Since evil, as embodied in diabolical figures such as Lucifer or Mephistophilis, was defined as the rejection or inversion of good, then evil was seen to be unreal and powerless. It was the pride and confidence of the devils, and of those allied with them such as Faustus, in their illusory power that made them into objects of ridicule in the eyes of the medieval audience. By the 16th century this "comedy of

---

[136] Leech, Poet, p.87.

evil" had been ingrained in the traditions of English drama.[137] Viewed in this light, the comic episodes of Faustus are clearly integral to the ironic tragedy of the drama.

The scene at the Papal court, for example, may be seen as ironic because it is Faustus, ultimately damned for his pride, who mocks the excessive pride and pomp of the Roman Church.[138] But the scene acquires a deeper significance if we view Faustus as being as much a figure of mockery as the Pope. Marlowe is, at this point, beginning to adapt the tradition of the "comedy of evil" to suit his own tragic purpose. Faustus clearly does not perceive the irony in his mocking and attacking the pride of the papacy. This blindness marks the initial stage of his degeneration and is a recurring theme

---

[137] Charlotte R. Kesler, The Importance of the Comic Tradition of English Drama in the Interpretation of Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus", DAI, 15(1955), 1387-8; Cole, Suffering, p.15. Both Ornstein and Cole believe that this "comedy of evil" derived not only from the earlier dramatic and artistic traditions, but also from the practical desire of Elizabethan playwrights to appeal to "the least sophisticated of minds." See Robert Ornstein, "The Comic Synthesis in Doctor Faustus," ELH, 22(1955), 165, 168; Cole, Suffering, p.23.

The comic aspects of this tradition should not, I believe, be so easily dismissed. Even those members of the audience who perceived the underlying theme of the "comedy of evil" would still enjoy the superficial, violent comedy of the middle scenes of Faustus. The Elizabethans patronized the theatre, not to be preached at or to have medieval philosophy forced down their throats, but to be entertained. If the rather bland "pill" of medieval theories upon evil and corruption were sugared with a sprinkling of ever-popular violent comedy, then it would doubtless go down much better with all sections of the audience.

[138] Zucker, Image, p.162.

throughout the drama. Shortly thereafter Faustus begins to lose sight of the great, overreaching ambitions he expressed at the outset of the play and fritters away his time performing magician's tricks to amuse aristocrats and playing jokes on the common folk.

One of these tricks occurs when several of Faustus' enemies attempt to revenge themselves on him and chop off his head. The stagecraft of the scene doubtless fascinated Marlowe's Elizabethan audience:

> **Martino.** Strike with a willing hand. [Benvolio strikes off Faustus' false head.] His head is off.
>
> ...
>
> **Benvolio.** We'll put out his eyes, and they shall serve for buttons to his lips, to keep his tongue from catching cold.
>
> **Martino.** An excellent policy: and now, sirs, having divided him, what shall the body do? [Faustus rises.
>
> **Benvolio.** Zounds, the devil's alive again.
>
> **Frederick.** Give him his head, for god's sake.[139]
>
> (IV.iii. 44-5, 63-8)

Here we see Marlowe characteristically playing up the comic aspects of a violent scene with the horrified reactions of the would-be murderers to the sight of the decapitated Faustus walking about before them. Equally characteristic of

---

[139] The beheading of Faustus has been traced back to the 14th century as part of a popular Christmas feast tradition with its origins in the beheading of the Green Knight from Arthurian romance, which would have been enacted for the feast. See Bradbrook, "Eldritch," p.85.

Marlowe is the fact that this piece of comic violence should possess deeper thematic significance. Faustus, who originally vowed to learn "strange philosophy" and "the secrets of all foreign kings," has been reduced to playing tricks on bumpkins. The corrupting influence of diabolical impotence has taken its toll on his nature.

Faustus later plays a similar trick upon the Horse-courser. But in the middle of the scene Marlowe has Faustus remind the audience of his eventual fate. He contrasts the tragic Faustus, who is still capable of perceiving his doom, with Faustus the degenerate trickster, who is blind to what is really important and who cares only for base practical jokes:

> **Faustus.** Away, you villain! what, dost think I am a horse-doctor? [Exit Horse-courser.
> What art thou, Faustus, but a man condemn'd to die?
> Thy fatal time doth draw to final end;
> Despair doth drive distrust unto my thoughts:
> Confound these passions with a quiet sleep:
> ...
> **Horse-courser.** No, will you not wake?
> I'll make you wake ere I go. [Pull him by the leg, and pull it away.] Alas, I am undone! what shall I do?
> ...
> [Horse-courser runs away.
> **Faustus.** What, is he gone? farewell he! Faustus has his leg again, and the horse-courser, I take it, a bottle

> of hay for his labour: well, this trick shall cost him forty dollars more.
>
> (IV.va. 27-32, 63-6, 76-9)[140]

This scene lacks the humour of the earlier decapitation scene. Marlowe has disturbed his audience by reminding them of Faustus' ultimate fate, and so deprives the succeeding violent action of most of its comic potential. In doing so Marlowe highlights the baseness of Faustus' trickery and the extent of his fall. In attempting to become something of a demi-god he sells his soul, only to become a common trickster. Though no longer blinded to his fate, Faustus tries to escape the thought of his damnation during a few lustful minutes in the arms of a succubus disguised as Helen of Troy. Faustus' corruption, his degeneration into evil, is thus absolute. He is therefore unable to call upon Christ's mercy which, it is made clear by figures such as the Old Man, is always available to him "If sin by custom grow not into nature" (V.i. 44).

Marlowe endows Faustus' final act with a tragic pathos notably lacking in the play's middle scenes. The audience cannot help but recall the play's opening scenes where Marlowe's poetry gives voice to Faustus' overreaching vison. The change in Faustus is shocking. Gone is the pride, the monumental hubris, that initially marked Faustus as an

---

[140] For a discussion of the staging of this scene see T.W. Craik, "The Reconstruction of Stage Action from Early Dramatic Texts," in The Elizabethan Theatre V, ed. G.R. Hibbard (Waterloo, Ont.: Archon, 1975), p.89.

overreacher with ambitions comparable to those of Tamburlaine. Whereas Tamburlaine attained power almost on a level with his dreams and died a conqueror, Faustus achieves nothing and, in his final moments, is almost embarrassingly pathetic with his begging for salvation:

> **Faustus.** O, I'll leap up to my God!--Who pulls me down?-
> See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!
> One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah, my Christ!--
> Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!
> Yet will I call on him: O, spare me, Lucifer!--
> (V.ii. 149-53)

To hear the pleas of wretched beggars is always pitiful, but when we realize that the beggar was once a man of great gifts and aspiring vision, who is damned solely because of his ambition, our pity is transformed into a profound sense of sympathy. I contend that Elizabethan audiences, regardless of the religious orthodoxy of the times, would not be unsympathetic to Faustus' plight. In the late 16th century, though medieval attitudes were still widely held, there was a new spirit in the air. As Machiavelli challenged the secular rulers of Europe, so Martin Luther had challenged its spiritual lords. Although church and state attempted to buttress the orthodox, hierarchical view of the cosmos upon which their power was based, the popularity of overreaching

myths, such as that of Tamburlaine,[141] suggests that, while Faustus' pact with Mephistophilis would have been seen by Elizabethans as sinful, his initial overreaching ambition would have been praiseworthy.

Therefore, as is usually the case with Marlowe's protagonists, it is difficult to be certain as to how we are meant to regard Faustus and his fate. I believe that, scholarly protestations of Marlowe's orthodoxy notwithstanding, the play itself invites some degree of sympathy towards his tragic hero. The Prologue is typically ambiguous, refering to "The form of Faustus' fortunes, good or bad" (I. Prologue. 8). The Epilogue contains more than a hint of a sympathetic attitude, on Marlowe's part, towards Faustus' tragedy:

> **Chorus.** Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
> And burned is Apollo's laurel-bough,
> That sometime grew within this learned man.
> (V. Epilogue. 1-3)

However, the sense of these lines is undercut in several succeeding lines:

> Faustus is gone: regard his hellish fall,
> Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise,
> Only to wonder at unlawful things,
> Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits

---

[141] See note 61.

To practise more than heavenly power permits.[142]
(V. Epilogue. 4-8)

Given such ambiguity, perhaps a single, certain interpretation of the play is unattainable. The staging of Faustus' death is equally confusing, for the audience is never shown Faustus being tortured by the devils. At the end of V.ii. Faustus is dragged offstage:

Faustus. Adders and serpents, let me breathe a while!
Ugly hell, gape not! come not, Lucifer!
I'll burn my books!--Ah, Mephistophilis!
[Exeunt with him.
(V.ii. 92-4)

The next we see of Faustus is when the scholars enter and find his dismembered body (V.iii. 6-7). While dismemberment would be difficult to depict onstage, it would not be impossible when we recall that in the play's middle scenes Faustus lost both his head and his leg.

Possibly we are meant to view the tortures of hell as being unimaginable, and for that reason "hell" may have been only a painted backdrop while its violent horrors were depicted in the language of the play:

---

[142] Boas argues that the first three lines of the Epilogue are definitely Marlowe's, while the lines 4-8 are so uncharacteristic of Marlowe's work that they must be the playhouse additions to the piece. If true, this would make Marlowe's attitude towards Faustus and, by implication, towards all his rebellious protagonists, much less ambiguous. See Boas, ed., Doctor Faustus, p.175.

[Hell is discovered.

Bad Angel. Now, Faustus, let thine eyes with horror stare
Into that vast perpetual torture-house.
There are the Furies tossing damned souls
On burning forks; their bodies boil in lead:
There are live quarters broiling on the coals,
That ne'er can die...
But yet all these are nothing; thou shalt see
Ten thousand tortures that more horrid be.
(V.ii. 120-5, 130-31)

We cannot be certain, however, that this was the case. As with other scenes in the Marlovian canon where the stage violence is uncharacteristically muted, we can only speculate as to the reasons why.[143] As Leech observes:

> Marlowe never asserts, fully, a moral tone: he lets us see the violence, the indifference, the treatment of human bodies as objects, and invites us to make our judgements as we please.[144]

Violence in The Jew and Faustus takes many forms, but, in general, it tends to reflect the hybrid nature of both plays. The madcap Vice, and the corruption of the "comedy of evil," are both aspects of the earlier English drama which Marlowe adapted to Renaissance tragedy. In both plays the fascinating, overpowering overreacher from the Tamburlaine plays has been transformed into a sympathetic victim. In The

---

[143] See notes 69 and 77.

[144] Leech, Poet, p.212.

Jew this reversal is overshadowed by the prominence of the Vice whose bloody acts of violence are, within the moral context of the Vice tradition, actually comic and contribute to his appeal rather than detract from it. In Faustus, however, dramatic violence, while ostensibly a part of the earlier "comedy of evil" and "eldritch" traditions, actually conveys Marlowe's changed attitude towards his Renaissance overreacher. Faustus is the victim of an oppressive deity and his violent buffoonery emphasizes the degeneration of his aspiring vision. Though Faustus is dismembered and damned for his prideful overreaching, there is nonetheless more than a hint of sympathy in Marlowe's depiction of him. Dramatic violence is the key to understanding the changes in characterization of the overreacher in The Jew and Faustus, and has a similar role in the study of Marlowe's final plays: The Massacre at Paris and Edward II.

Chapter IV

The Massacre at Paris and Edward II

Old Queen of Navarre. O, no, sweet Margaret! the fatal poison
Works within my head; my brain-pan breaks;
My heart doth faint; I die! [Dies.
Narvarre. My mother poison'd here before my face!
O gracious God, what times are these!
(The Massacre at Paris iii. 19-23)

Lightborn. What means your highness to mistrust me thus?
King Edward. What means thou to dissemble with me thus?
Lightborn. These hands were never stained with innocent blood,
Nor shall they now be tainted with a king's.
King Edward. Forgive my thought for having such a thought.
(Edward II V.v. 78-82)

It is impossible to date precisely either The Massacre at Paris or Edward II. It can only be ascertained that both were written sometime between 1590 and 1592, making these probably the final works in the Marlovian canon.[145] Both plays show Marlowe making use of dramatic violence to shift audience sympathy entirely from overreacher to victim.

The Massacre at Paris presents, for the first time, the overreacher as a villain and his victims as sympathetic figures, though Marlowe never exploits this sympathy to its full dramatic potential as he later does in Edward II. This

---

[145] See Bennett, ed., Introd. "The Jew" and "The Massacre", p.170; Irving Ribner, ed., Introd. Edward II by Christopher Marlowe (New York: Odyssey Press, 1970), p.vii.

change in characterization began in Tamburlaine: Part Two with Tamburlaine's murder of his son, Calyphas. However, while the earlier play ambiguously balances admiration for Tamburlaine with sympathy for his son, making it possible for scholars to debate where Marlowe actually intended audience sympathy to lie, in The Massacre it is undeniable that the overreacher has lost the sympathy that he once possessed. The character of Guise expresses his ambitions in terms similar to those used by earlier Marlovian overreachers. However, the overreaching protagonist is now portrayed as a rabidly Catholic Machiavellian who, given his violent persecution of innocent French Protestants, must have been anathema to the largely Protestant Elizabethan audience.

Edward II depicts all of the changes in characterization undergone by the overreacher in the earlier plays. In the beginning of the play Marlowe portrays Edward much as he did the effete Mycetes of Tamburlaine: Part One and Henry III from The Massacre: as a weak king dominated by his favourites. The role of the overreacher is assumed by Mortimer Junior who seems to personify nobility and strength in his early scenes but, as the play unfolds, is revealed as a scheming, traitorous villain more like Guise than Tamburlaine or Faustus. He expresses his overreaching ambitions in exactly the same terms used by Tamburlaine but, unlike Tamburlaine, falls dramatically and unambiguously before the power of Fortune, having lost the audience's sympathy in the process.

Conversely, Edward acquires the audience's sympathy by play's end as a result of the violent sufferings he undergoes at the hands of Mortimer's minions. Marlowe begins this ultimate rejection of the amoral overreacher in The Massacre at Paris.

The Massacre consists of little more than a skeletal structure of violent episodes upon which is hung a skin of religious bigotry and xenophobia. Marlowe makes no pretense of psychological depth in his characterizations and spends little time analysing individual motives or dwelling upon personal tragedies.[146] The plot of The Massacre is essentially a rapid succession of murders. Marlowe never prepares his audience for the slaughters and allows them little time to get to know and sympathize with the victims. His characters simply walk onstage, are murdered, and are carried offstage. The self-contained nature of each of these violent episodes is striking. It recalls one of the popular series of woodcuts which depict the main events of St. Bartholomew's Night as a group of separate incidents, with no attempt made to integrate

---

[146] Levine categorizes The Massacre at Paris as a "journalistic drama." Plays of this genre typically have plots consisting of little more than a series of sensational, historical events loosely strung together with a political or religious theme. Their characters tend to be "stock" figures, either entirely good or evil, whose guilt or innocence is dependent upon the popular sentiments of the audience before which the drama was intended to be performed. Levine draws a clear distinction between "journalistic dramas" such as The Massacre and A Larum for London (1599), and fictional popular dramas such as The Spanish Tragedy (1586) or The Jew of Malta. See Levine, "Violence," pp. 82, 272-8.

them within a narrative structure.[147] To accurately describe the play one need only recount the fast-moving sequence of murders: the Old Queen of Navarre is killed by the scent of poisoned gloves;[148] the Admiral is first wounded by musket-fire, and later stabbed to death;[149] Loreine, Seroune, and Ramus are then disposed of, with two unfortunate schoolmasters following close upon their heels; six devout Protestants appear onstage and are dispatched within only seven lines. Then King Charles dies of a broken heart. Mugeroun is shot; the Duke of Guise, the Machiavellian instigator of the massacre, is assassinated; and his brother, the Cardinal, is strangled. Finally, the new King of France, Guise's former accomplice, is mortally wounded by a fanatical friar, who is then killed by the dying King's hand. In all, eighteen people meet grisly fates upon the stage, while offstage, we are told, a hundred Protestants are shot while swimming the Seine in an

---

[147] Pictoral representations of the massacre are often panoramic in scope, allowing viewers to pick out particular violent incidents from a sweeping tapestry of blood and horror. See St. Batholomew's Night as depicted by Dubois and others in Philippe Erlanger, St. Bartholomew's Night, trans. Patrick O'Brian (1960; rpt. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), pp.162-3, 226-7.

[148] Such an outlandish poisoning would have been viewed as completely true-to-life at the time given popular Elizabethan ideas about Continental politics and poisoners. (Bowers, "Poisoners," p.493.) See also pp.83-4 above.

[149] The stage direction for the action reads: As they are going out, the Soldier dischargeth his musket at the Lord Admiral. This may have been staged with a real musket, gunpowder, and "shot." (See note 79)

attempt to flee their Catholic persecutors.[150]

---

[150] This succession of violent deaths becomes rather tiresome after a while, leaving one inevitably feeling the incongruity of these scenes with the fine craftmanship, and high drama, of similarly violent scenes from some of Marlowe's other plays. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that, as with parts of Faustus and The Jew, Marlowe's authorship of much of The Massacre is sometimes called into question. It is generally accepted, however, that while the extant text is undeniably corrupt, these scenes of extreme violence are probably very close to Marlowe's original work. See Bennett, ed. Introd., pp.174-5; Knoll, Marlowe, p.104; Sanders, Dramatist, p.22.

Certain violent rhetorical passages in The Massacre appear to fix the play within the Marlovian canon:

> These bloody hands shall tear his triple crown,
> And fire accursed Rome about his ears;
> I'll fire his crazed buildings, and enforce
> The papal towers to kiss the lowly earth.
> (The Massacre at Paris xxi. 62-5)

> Proud Rome...
> I'll fire thy crazed buildings and enforce
> The papal towers to kiss the lowly ground.
> (Edward II I.iv. 97, 100-101)

> And Faustus vows...
> To burn his Scriptures, slay his ministers,
> And make my spirits pull his churches down.
> (Doctor Faustus II.ii. 99, 101-2)

> I'll be reveng'd on this accursed town...
> I'll help to slay their children and their wives,
> To fire the churches, pull their houses down....
> (The Jew of Malta V.i. 62, 64-5)

Bennett suggests that the similarity between the passages from The Massacre and Edward II may be due to an actor's faulty memory "confusing diatribes against Rome which occur in the two plays," thus implying that the extant text of The Massacre is actually the transcript of a performance. However, both passages seem to echo lines from Faustus and The Jew as well. This economical repetition of lines is characteristic of Marlowe's work. Witness how the most famous lines of Faustus are anticipated in the earlier chamber-drama Dido Queen of Carthage:

> Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,
> And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?--

One curious aspect of these violent scenes is that their brevity and self-contained nature somewhat inhibits the development of sympathy for Guise's victims. In part, this is a continuation of the trend from Marlowe's earlier plays in which the overreaching protagonist dominated the stage. His victims were always secondary characters for whom Marlowe was very careful to prevent any sense of sympathy on the part of the audience. In The Massacre, Guise's first soliloquy points out his relation to Tamburlaine and Faustus:

> That like I best, that flies beyond my reach.
> Set me to scale the high Pyramides,
> And thereon set the diadem of France;

> Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.--
> (Doctor Faustus V.i. 107-9)

> For in his looks I see eternity,
> And he'll make me immortal with a kiss.
> (Dido IV.iv. 122-3)

The critical debate over the "Collier Leaf," a single MS leaf of dialogue from The Massacre which is widely regarded to be Marlowe's holograph, also links the dramatic violence of the play with that of Marlowe's other dramas. The leaf relates the murder of Mugeroun, who had cuckolded Guise, and is typically Marlovian in its grimly comic treatment of violence. The controversy over the authenticity of this fragment has significant implications for the study of comic violence in The Jew and Faustus for, if we accept that the "Collier Leaf" is in Marlowe's hand, "it substantially weakens the case for looking for collaborators in the comic scenes of other plays" (Leech, Poet, p.16).

Its implications for the study of violence and the overreacher are rather more limited, however, for while the "Leaf" does allow Guise more lines than does the comparable scene in the extant text, an extrapolation of this with regard to the entire play would only further flesh out a villainous, unsympathetic Guise. See H.S. Bennett, ed., "Appendix A: The 'Collier Leaf'," in "The Jew" and "The Massacre", pp.253-5.

> I'll either rend it with my nails to naught,
> Or mount the top with my aspiring wings,
> Although my downfall be the deepest hell.
> (ii. 42-7)

However, later in the same soliloquy Guise's difference from earlier overreachers is made apparent. He reveals himself as a treacherous Catholic Machiavellian who, as part of a larger Counter-Reformation conspiracy, is committed to the destruction of all Protestants:

> My policy hath fram'd religion.
> Religion! O Diabole!
> ...
> Five hundred fat Franciscan friars and priests:
> All this, and more, if more may be compris'd,
> To bring the will of our desires to end.
> (ii. 65-6, 85-7)

From the very beginning of the play, therefore, Marlowe's largely Protestant audience would have regarded Guise as a villain and would be inclined to identify with his victims.[151]

Though Marlowe's overreacher is portrayed as a villain

---

[151] Julia Briggs argues that, though Elizabethan audiences would undoubtedly have been hostile to Guise, Marlowe attempts to insert an element of moral uncertainty into his drama at Guise's death by depicting him as being out-villained by Henry III. Her contention is interesting but unconvincing. However, as Briggs notes at the beginning of her article, the existence of the "Collier Leaf" allows wide range for speculation as to what the original text may have contained. Certainly Marlowe's other plays display a marked predilection for moral complexity and ambiguity. See Julia Briggs, "Marlowe's Massacre at Paris: A Reconsideration", RES, 34(1983), 265-6.

in The Massacre, he continues to dominate the action of the play much as he did in the earlier dramas.[152] This may be simply a result of Marlowe's instinctive tendency to present his overreacher as the central character in the play, for his sympathies have obviously shifted towards the overreacher's victims. Although the brevity of scenes where Guise persecutes Protestants does not aid in fostering audience sympathy, there is often, as in the murder-scene of a group of Protestants, some hint of sympathy for Guise's victims:

> Enter five or six Protestants, with books, and kneel together. Then enter Guise and others.
>
> **Guise.** Down with the Huguenots! murder them!
>
> **First Pro.** O Monsieur de Guise, hear me but speak!
>
> **Guise.** No, villain...
> Tuez, tuez,tuez! let none escape.
> [They kill the Protestants.
> So, drag them away. [Exeunt with the bodies.
> (ix. 1-3, 7-8)

Guise's slaughter of six innocent Protestant "lambs" in the middle of their prayer service is truly villainous. The scene is truncated, with additional material having probably been lost in the transmission of the text. However, even in the play's original state such scenes of violence may have been brief, suggesting that though Marlowe's sympathies may

---

[152] Indeed, so dominant is character of Guise in The Massacre at Paris that, in Henslowe's books, the play is simply noted as The Guise. See Levin, Overreacher, p.106.

have shifted, he continued to allow his overreacher to dominate the play while the victims, though now sympathetic, remained secondary characters.

In one murder-scene, however, Marlowe does give one of Guise's victims the opportunity to attract audience sympathy. Ramus the logician is permitted to give a farewell speech, an apology in the Greek sense of the word, in which he bravely defends his Protestant theology in the face of his would-be murderers. Such a heroic stand in the face of danger could not help but provoke the admiration of even those parts of the Elizabethan audience who were not already familiar with Ramus' works and reputation, or with the individual tragedies of the massacre itself.

With Ramus' murder we are also confronted with the problem of the unusual presentation of comic violence in The Massacre. The witticisms which sometimes accompany Guise's atrocities are not particularly funny. Granted, the appreciation of humour is very subjective, and what would have been hilarious to an Elizabethan audience might well fall flat before a modern audience. Yet, while many scenes of comic violence in Marlowe's earlier plays betray a sharp wit which both modern critics and audiences appreciate, the bitter, "death's-head" comedy of The Massacre has rarely found an appreciative audience.[153] Guise's murder of Ramus is preceded

---

[153] Knoll, Marlowe, p.105.

by a long, presumably humourous, sophistical parody of his victim's art:

> **Ramus.** O, good my lord,
> Wherein hath Ramus been so offensious?
>
> **Guise.** Marry, sir, in having a smack in all,
> And yet didst never sound anything to the depth.
> Was is not thou that scoff'dst the Organon,
> And said it was a heap of vanities?
> He that will be a flat dichotomist,
> And seen nothing but epitomies,
> Is in your judgement thought a learned man;
> And he, forsooth, must go and preach in Germany,
> Excepting against doctors' axioms,
> And ipse dixi with this quiddity,
> Argumentum testimonii est inartificiale.
> To contradict which, I say, Ramus shall die:
> How answer you that? your nego argumentum
> Cannot serve, sirrah.--Kill him.
> (vi. 23-37)[154]

The passage lacks the brevity, the sharpness of wit, of similar, but far more effective, comic scenes in The Jew of Malta and other plays. The complexities of Guise's parody of Ramus' scholasticism are, for the modern reader, only decipherable with the aid of explanatory notes which accompany the text in modern editions of the play. The argument could be made that a portion of the Elizabethan audience may have been able to follow the intricacies of Guise's speech, and certainly their sympathies would have been with the innocent

---

[154] Marlowe is recorded as being a student of logic at Cambridge in 1581, where Peter Ramus' anti-Aristotelian work had aroused great controversy. See Boas, ed., Doctor Faustus, p.58.

Ramus. But this does nothing to explain the lameness of Marlowe's usually amusing black humour.

None of the other grim jokes which accompany the murders in The Massacre are quite so complicated as Guise's parody of Ramus' logical dialectic. Yet while the Ramus passage fails to be funny because the sharp cutting-edge of Marlowe's wit was lost beneath philosophical verbiage, the play's other grisly jests do not amuse precisely because they are too cutting and bitter. We see this when Guise dispatches the Huguenot preacher, Loreine, with a mockery of Protestant liturgical ritual:

> **Loreine.** I am a preacher of the word of God;
> And thou a traitor to thy soul and him.
>
> **Guise.** 'Dearly beloved brother,'--thus 'tis written.
> [Stabs Loreine, who dies.
> **Anjou.** Stay, my lord, let me begin the psalm.
> (v. 67-70)[155]

It is doubtful whether any Protestant Elizabethan would have

---

[155] The Church of England's morning and evening prayers began with the preacher saying "Dearly beloved brethern" just before the general confession. The confession and absolution were followed by a singing of the psalm. Kocher believes that this scene displays Marlowe's veiled mockery of Anglican ritual. See Kocher, Thought, p.293.

It is hard to come to any conclusion regarding Kocher's argument because Marlowe would have to so heavily veil his satire in order to be safe from the political/religious authorities, as in this case where he puts it in the mouth of an atheistic villain, that a modern reader cannot know for certain whether the dramatist is really mocking the established orthodoxy.

found this parody particularly funny.[156] The joke is too dark, too sinister, to prompt our laughter. It may be that Marlowe intended the effect to be one of shock and horror, instead of laughter, in order to foster his audience's perception of the overreaching Guise as a monster who is so perverted that such atrocities are, to him, fit subjects for levity. The above passage is also noteworthy as it marks the Duke of Anjou as an accomplice in Guise's vicious atrocities. This is interesting because, by the end of the play, Anjou has become King Henry III and is assassinated by one of Guise's party, becoming, through his dying warning to his "sister" Elizabeth, something of a Protestant martyr. This monarch's redemption and final attainment of audience sympathy foreshadows the similar treatment of Edward in Edward II. Briggs suggests that the death of the overreaching Guise in The Massacre likewise foreshadows the downfall of the failed overreacher, Mortimer, in Edward II.[157]

---

[156] For an interesting analysis of the role of mockery in The Massacre see Briggs, "Reconsideration," 274-6.

[157] Both overreachers' ambitions, expressed through flights of rhetorical fancy, reach their highest points immediately before their downfalls. Guise's soliloquy, which occurs some 15 lines before his death, both invokes the famous chariot image of Tamburlaine and anticipates the later, remarkably similar, speech of Mortimer:

> **Guise.** So;
> Now sues the king for favour to the Guise,
> And all his minions stoop when I command....
> As ancient Romans o'er their captive lords,
> So will I triumph o'er this wanton king;
> And he shall follow my proud chariot's wheels.
> (The Massacre at Paris xviii. 46-8, 51-3)

One intriguing aspect of "comic" violence of The Massacre is that most of the acts of violence are accompanied by jokes, or are made into perverse "practical" jokes, which are appropriately crafted to suit each victim, pointing to the horrific appropriateness of Edward's murder which Marlowe later depicted as a monstrous parody of the king's homosexuality. Ramus the logician is murdered after Guise parodies his work. Loreine the preacher is killed to the accompaniment of a mockery of his Protestant rituals. Guise says to two schoolmasters, "I'll whip you to death with my poniard's point," before dispatching them (vi. 80). When a cutpurse cuts the gold buttons off Mugeroun's cloak, he responds by cutting off the cutpurse's ear (xi. 32-3). There is a sense of humour evident in each of these acts. But it is a humour of a dark and particularly nasty variety. Marlowe has left the madcap antics of The Jew and Faustus far behind.

Ultimately The Massacre was almost completely dependent for its success upon its appeal to anti-Catholic and anti-

---

> **Mortimer Junior.** The prince I rule, the queen do I command,
> And with a lowly conge to the ground,
> The proudest lords salute me as I pass....
> (Edward II V.iv. 48-50)

Thus, while Guise is in many ways similar to the overreachers of Marlowe's earlier plays, his "tumble headlong" upon reaching the "point" of Fortune's wheel clearly points towards Marlowe's later portrayal of the overreaching Mortimer in Edward II. See Briggs, "Reconsideration," 265.

Spanish prejudices in an extremely paranoid and violent era. Guise, and by association the Pope and Philip of Spain, are portrayed as using religion only as a mask for their Machiavellian ambitions. "My policy hath fram'd religion," Guise declares (ii. 65).[158] In the heated atmosphere of the late Elizabethan period even a bad play, such as The Massacre probably was even in its original, pristine state, would be ensured of some success so long as it depicted, in a sensational manner, the conspiracies of Catholics who, it was believed, were plotting to entangle England in their web of evil. The Massacre drew a large crowd at its first performance, and was to remain one of the most popular of the "old" plays produced by Henslowe's company throughout the 1590's.[159]

In the depiction of dramatic violence, Edward II is nothing like The Massacre. While the latter is distinguished by its tiresomely excessive violence, Edward II is remarkable for the fact that it displays very little dramatic violence. Even a passing acquaintance with Marlowe's work would

---

[158] This Machiavellianism links Guise with some of Marlowe's other ostensibly Machiavellian protagonists such as Barabas. It also contributes to the frequent identification of Marlowe with his protagonists. Several years later Thomas Beard, in his The Theatre of Gods Iudgements, was to claim that Marlowe thought "all religion but a deuice of pollicie." See Thomas Beard, The Theatre of Gods Iudgements (1597), ch.xxv, as quoted in Maclure, ed., Heritage, pp.41-2.

[159] Sanders, Dramatist, pp.32-3; Harbage, "Audience Approval," in Audience, p.178.

demonstrate that, from Tamburlaine: Parts One and Two to The Jew, violence pervades both the action and the dialogue of his plays. However, aside from Edward's death-scene, there are actually very few examples of violence in this play.

Even the battle-scenes are more abbreviated than is usual in Marlowe's dramas. The battle of Edward with his Barons, for example, takes place offstage to the sound of "alarums":

> **King Edward.** Saint George for England, and King Edward's right.
>
> [Alarums. Exeunt the two parties severally.]
>
> Enter [King] Edward [and his followers,] with the Barons [and Kent,] captives.
>
> **King Edward.** Now, lusty lords, now, not by chance of war,
> But justice of the quarrel and the cause,
> Vailed is your pride.
>
> (III.iii. 35-6)

The later battle of Edward with his Queen and Mortimer is not staged at all. Rather, Marlowe sets the stage for the battle in Act IV, Scene iv, and then abruptly drops the audience into the aftermath of the conflict in Scene v, with the battle supposedly having taken place in the interval. Given the influence of Elizabethan stage practice, and modern editors, upon stage directions in texts of Edward II, one may argue that this anomaly is so minor as to be insignificant. However, similar suppressions of violent action are also apparent at other points in the play.

One of the more curious of these instances of suppressed

violence occurs with the execution of Gaveston. The overweening ambition of this favourite is ostensibly the cause of the falling out between Edward and his barons which dominates the action of first three acts of the play. Yet, when this central figure is captured by the barons, the last we see of him is a stage direction: "Exeunt Warwick and his Men with Gaveston" (III.i. 17). We are informed of his death in the next scene, and even then the saguinary details are unusually brief:

> **Arundel.** The Earl of Warwick seized him on his way;
> For being delivered unto Pembroke's men,
> Their lord rode home thinking his prisoner safe;
> But ere he came, Warwick in ambush lay,
> And bare him to his death, and in a trench
> Strake off his head, and marched unto the camp.
> (III.ii. 115-120)

That a major figure in a drama should vanish so quickly, and with so little comment made on his end, is startling. But it is especially surprising considering that the playwright is Marlowe. If there is one constant in the Marlovian canon, it is that Marlowe never misses an opportunity to exploit the theatrical power of stage violence. If one considers the dramatic potential of the onstage decapitation of Gaveston as an illustration of the escalating conflict between Edward and his barons, as well as a foreshadowing of the King's own murder at the order of one ambitious baron, it is difficult to understand why Marlowe did not care to exploit these

possibilities. In his other plays he is certainly not averse to using gratuitous violence (in Faustus even an onstage beheading [IV. iii]) to excite the interest of his audience as well as to convey important themes. But with the murder of Gaveston Marlowe significantly chooses not to make use of stage violence at a potentially pivotal moment in the drama.[160]

One possible explanation for the absence of dramatic violence throughout most of Edward II is that Marlowe may have intended to conserve his audience's emotional energies for one mind-numbing catharsis at the play's climax: the sodomitic impaling of Edward II. This gut-wrenching atrocity becomes much more moving in a setting in which it stands virtually alone than it would in a dramatic landscape crowded with poisoned nuns and slaughtered innocents.

It is often argued that the emotional impact of this singularly monstrous crime is so powerful that it transforms

---

[160] An intriguing contrast to Marlowe's depiction of Gaveston's beheading occurs later in the play with Mortimer's decapitation of Kent (V.iv.). As with Gaveston's murder, Marlowe decently obscures the gory event by having it take place offstage. However, Marlowe employs Kent's trial as a backdrop to present the boy-king Edward III's growing awareness of the danger of Mortimer's ambition, and so prepares us for Mortimer's own downfall, and decapitation, in the final scene. While the dramatist does not make use of the dramatic significance of Gaveston's murder to the same extent as he does Kent's, both display a similar dearth of the theatrical violence so characteristic of most of Marlowe's work.

Edward II from historical chronicle into personal tragedy.[161] Charles Lamb rightly termed Edward's death-scene a masterpiece that "moves pity and terror beyond any scene, ancient or modern, with which I am acquainted."[162] Yet when Bertolt Brecht produced Edward II for the modern stage, he softened the murder by having Lightborn stab Edward rather than impaling him. This revision may be a tacit admission on Brecht's part that the murder of Edward, as Marlowe depicts it, is so powerful that it fundamentally alters the nature of the drama:

> If Brecht wanted to make Edward II into a play embodying a statement about the dialectic of history--as seems likely--then he may have sensed that at the end of Edward II, as Marlowe wrote it, we come out saying not 'how true' but 'how horrible'.[163]

Whatever pity we may feel for Edward is due more to the

---

[161] For arguments supporting this position see: Levin, Overreacher, p.110; Wilson, Shakespeare, p.102; Cole, Suffering, p.185; Sanders, Dramatist, pp.121-5; Eugene M. Waith, "Edward II: The Shadow of Action," TDR, 8, No.4 (1964), 62; Leech, "Power," 187.

For perspectives on Edward II as historical chronicle see: W.L. Godshalk, The Marlovian World Picture (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), p.76; Irving Ribner, ed., "Edward II As Historical Tragedy," in "Edward II": Text and Major Criticism (New York: Odyssey Press, 1970), p.94.

For a review of both positions and an attempt to effect a compromise see also J.R. Mulryne and Stephen Fender, "Marlowe and the 'Comic Distance'," in Christopher Marlowe, ed. Brian Morris (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969), pp.57-62.

[162] Lamb, "Specimens," p.24.

[163] Mulryne, "Distance," p.61.

awful violence of his death than to any of his actions. Throughout the play the audience is presented with a picture of a monarch whose dependence upon scheming favourites is both politically dangerous and morally distasteful. His pathetically weak need to be loved renders him more human than kingly. Within fifty lines of learning of Gaveston's death, Edward manages to overcome his grief and adopt Spencer as his favourite, investing him with the very titles he gave to Gaveston at the beginning of the play. The speed of the shift in Edward's affections is significant:

> **King Edward.** Treacherous Warwick! Traitorous Mortimer!
> If I be England's king, in lakes of gore
> Your headless trunks, your bodies will I trail...
> You villains that have slain my Gaveston!
> And in this place of honor and of trus',
> Spencer, sweet Spencer, I adopt thee here,
> And merely of our love we do create thee
> Earl of Gloucester and Lord Chamberlain....
> (III.ii. 134-6, 142-6)

The extent of Edward's slavish devotion to certain ambitious courtiers doubtless unnerved the politically sensitive Elizabethans. The scene where Edward allows Gaveston to sit beside him on the throne (I.iv. 8-14) would have disturbed Marlowe's audience almost as much as it did Edward's barons. It is certainly not difficult to imagine the extent of an Elizabethan audience's shock a few lines later when Edward expresses the same royal irresponsibility as Shakespeare's Lear:

King Edward. If this content you not,
Make several kingdoms of this monarchy
And share it equally amongst you all,
So I may have some nook or corner left
To frolic with my dearest Gaveston.
(I.iv. 69-73)

It is interesting to note the striking resemblance of Edward to the weak monarchs of Marlowe's earlier plays who are victims, directly or indirectly, of the overreachers. His earliest incarnation was as Mycetes in Tamburlaine: Part One, and his hedonistic principles, which contemporary gossip suggests were not too far removed from Marlowe's own, were first articulated by Tamburlaine's son, Calyphas, who dies at his father's hand in Part Two. Perhaps Edward's most obvious predecessor was the outrageous, homosexual Henry III of France in The Massacre. Like Edward, Henry is easily manipulated by his favourites, as he himself declares upon succeeding to the throne:

What says our minions? think they Henry's heart
Will not both harbour love and majesty?
Put off that fear, they are already join'd:
No person, place, or time, or circumstance,
Shall slack my love's affections from his bent:
As now you are, so shall you still persist,
Removeless from the favours of your king.
(xi. 16-22)

Henry dies at the hand of one of the deceased Guise's fanatical followers, and in his final moments Marlowe allows

this former accomplice of the Machiavellian Guise to redeem himself in the eyes of the audience. Though wounded, Henry bravely strikes back, and slays his assassin, whereupon he summons the English ambassador in order to send a warning to his "sister England" of the traitorous conspiracies of the Catholic powers. More than anything else, it is this redemption of a weak king, through his dignity and nobility in the face of death, which marks Henry as an early model for Edward.

Just as Henry was a victim, albeit indirectly, of the overreaching Guise in The Massacre, so is Edward the victim of Mortimer Junior in Edward II. In his moment of triumph Mortimer boasts, in the same terms once used by Tamburlaine, of his ability to make "Fortune's wheel turn as he please" (V.ii. 53). But this ambition is shown to be mere arrogance and reveals the noble, Hotspur-like defender of ancient baronial privilege of the play's early scenes to be nothing more than a deceitful, calculating Machiavellian. Mortimer later reiterates his claim to power over Fortune with a line from Ovid's Metamorphoses: "Major sum quam cui possit fortuna nocere" [I am too great for Fortune to harm] (V.iv. 69). A knowledgeable Elizabethan playgoer would recall that, in Ovid, these words are spoken by Niobe just before the death of her children. This allusion suggests that Mortimer's pride is based more upon arrogance than virtu, and that he too will

soon be crushed beneath Fortune's wheel.[164] In the speech Mortimer makes upon falling from power we may see how greatly Marlowe's depiction of the overreacher has changed from the earlier, all-powerful Tamburlaine:

> **Mortimer Junior.** Base fortune, now I see that in thy wheel
> There is a point, to which when men aspire,
> They tumble headlong down. That point I touched,
> And, seeing there was no place to mount up higher,
> Why should I grieve at my declining fall?
> Farewell, fair queen; weep not for Mortimer,
> That scorns the world, and, as a traveler,
> Goes to discover countries yet unknown.
> (V.vi. 59-66)

Although some may see in Mortimer's last lines an overreaching desire to discover realms beyond those of mortal men, the terms Marlowe has him use clearly distinguish him from the earlier overreachers. It is the "will to power" which, more than any other characteristic, defines the overreacher. Whenever Tamburlaine contemplated ascending to higher realms he would always picture himself as a conqueror challenging the gods and never as a humble "traveler." Clearly Marlowe's vision of the overreacher has undergone a radical shift from the Tamburlaine plays to Edward II.

Conversely, Marlowe's depiction of the overreacher's victims has become more and more sympathetic to the point where, in Edward II, it is the victim, and not the

---

[164] Kiefer, Fortune, p.138.

overreacher, who dominates the action of the play. As with Henry III, it is Edward's behaviour in the face of imminent death that redeems him in the eyes of the audience and captures their sympathy. Unlike Henry III, however, Edward acts not so much as an enraged monarch as a man desperately attempting to preserve some dignity in the midst of continuous humiliation. This stoic "passive suffering" renders him more a figure of tragedy than of history.

A comparison of Marlowe's depiction of the final moments of the imprisoned Edward's life with Shakespeare's presentation in the last scene of the similarly jailed Richard II reveals the importance of violent humiliation, and the reaction to this humiliation, in the fostering of audience sympathy.[165] In Richard II we find the king enjoying the luxury of solitude, which allows him to indulge in soliloquies:

> **Richard.** Thoughts tending to ambition, they do plot
> Unlikely wonders--how these vain weak nails
> May tear a passage through the flinty ribs
> Of this hard world, my ragged prison walls,
> And for they cannot, die in their own pride....

---

[165] For a discussion of the relationship between Richard II and Edward II see A.P. Rossiter, Woodstock: A Moral History (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), pp.47-65.

Rossiter offers the influence of Shakespeare as a reason why Marlowe "so abruptly turned his hand to a study of petulant weakness" in Edward II (p.64). As we have seen, this shift in Marlowe's interest actually came in the form of a gradual movement over the course of five plays, and was certainly not as abrupt as Rossiter believes.

[The music plays
Music do I hear.
Ha, ha; keep time! How sour sweet music is
When time is broke, and no proportion kept.
(V.v. 18-22, 41-3)[166]

Here Richard is so bored by his incarceration that he is able to idly indulge in fantasies of escape and critical reflections on "sour sweet" music as a metaphor for his life. In contrast, in Marlowe's Edward II, the king is never seen without his tormentors. The very idea of peace and quiet in which to daydream has, like thoughts of escape, been long since driven from the king's mind:

King Edward. And there in mire and puddle have I stood
This ten days' space; and, lest that I should sleep,
One plays continually upon a drum.
They give me bread and water, being a king;
So that, for want of sleep and sustenance,
My mind's distempered, and my body's numbed,
And whether I have limbs or no I know not.
O, would my blood dropped out from every vein,
As doth this water from my tattered robes.
(V.v. 58-66)

The differences in the depiction of these scenes is striking. Richard remains comparatively unscathed by his imprisonment. One is not surprised to find him ultimately depicted as a strong, heroic figure struggling valiantly

---

[166] William Shakespeare, King Richard The Second ed. Stanley Wells (1969; rpt. Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1981).

against all odds when his would-be murderers reveal themselves:

> [The murderers, Exton and servants, rush in
> **Richard.** How now! What means death in this rude assault?
> Villain, thy own hand yields thy death's instrument.
> [He snatches a weapon from a servant and kills him
> Go thou, and fill another room in hell.
> [He kills another servant. Here Exton strikes him down
> (V.v. 105-7)

In comparison, Edward's reaction when he realizes his murder is imminent is pitifully weak and ignoble:

> **King Edward.** Something still buzzeth in mine ears
> And tells me if I sleep I never wake.
> This fear is that which makes me tremble thus;
> And therefore tell me, wherefore art thou come?
>
> **Lightborn.** To rid thee of thy life. Matrevis, come!
> [Enter Matrevis and Gurney.]
> **King Edward.** I am too weak and feeble to resist.
> Assist me, sweet God, and receive my soul!
> ...
> [King Edward is murdered.]
> (V.v. 102-112)

Both Marlowe and Shakespeare use prison episodes to redeem their respective, irresponsible monarchs. However, Marlowe's portrayal of Edward's last days is, in every instance, far more brutal and heartrending than is Shakespeare's depiction of the imprisoned Richard II. While Richard is strong and heroic at play's end, every inch the figure of a superior royal, Edward's incredible agonies, and

his struggle to maintain some vestige of simple, human dignity, instills in the audience, I believe, a far more intensely sympathetic reaction.

It may be argued that whatever power the death-scene of Edward possesses is the fortuitous result of Marlowe's close following of the historical accounts of Edward's sufferings. While it is accurate to say that Marlowe made great use of these histories, one must always bear in mind that, like most dramatists of his age, he was given to bending the facts of history to suit his own dramatic ends. How Marlowe adapts historical chronicle to personal tragedy in the final, violent scenes of Edward II tells us much about his objectives and demonstrates that his achievement was in no way serendipitous.

Marlowe's two main sources for Edward II were Holinshed's Chronicles (1587) and Stow's Annals (1592).[167] It is interesting to observe how carefully Marlowe crafted the final scenes, choosing certain passages from one account, and combining them with incidents from the other, to create a horrific monument to human cruelty. While Marlowe displays a

---

[167] Leech, "Power," p.199. Raphael Holinshed, Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland (London, 1587,1807; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1976) Vol.II; John Stow(e), The Annales of England, faithfully collected out of the most autenticall Authors, Records, and other Monuments of Antiquite, from the first inhabitation untill this present yeere 1592. Imprinted at London by Ralfe Newbery.

In the passages concerning the imprisonment and death of Edward II, the Annales is virtually identical to Stow's Chronicles of 1580.

certain predilection for violent humiliation in all of his dramas, from the debasement of Bajazeth in Tamburlaine: Part One, to the vicious persecution of Protestants in The Massacre, these cruelties are, like those of Edward II, a part of recorded history. The presence of such atrocities in a single play may be written off as accidental, but in the Marlovian canon they are a significantly recurring feature. Thus we may deduce, from Marlowe's choice of violent incidents from the chronicle accounts, something of his objectives in the play.

The scene of Edward being forcibly washed and shaved in foul puddle water (V.iii. 25-36), for example, is taken from Stow and is symbolically significant in that it is a mocking inversion of the holy anointing of a king.[168] It denotes Edward's fall from splendid monarch to suffering man. However, there is one humiliation which is recorded by Stow but mentioned neither by Holinshed or by Marlowe. This is Gurney's devising a crown of hay with which he crowns the hapless Edward to the accompanying taunts and jeers of the king's other jailors. Marlowe had to have known of this incident as it immediately preceeds the episode of the shaving in puddle water which is also recorded only in Stow. I believe Marlowe refrained from adapting this act of humiliation into his

---

[168] See Alan Dessen, Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), pp.124-5.

play's final scenes because he realized that it would have linked Edward, in the minds of virtually the entire audience, with the Biblical precedent of the mocking of Christ with the crown of thorns. Stow probably had this allusion in mind when he made this humiliation a part of his chronicle. However, as Wilson observes, Marlowe "does not deeply feel the sacredness of royalty,"[169] and, unlike Stow, has no desire to create a martyr. Though Marlowe makes use of Edward's royal origins to intensify the audience's reaction to his fall and humiliation, he carefully avoids portraying Edward in a heroically royal fashion. Any suggestion of kingly, or semi-divine attributes, would inhibit the audience's personal idertification with Edward. The king's sufferings would then become the transient physical agonies of a martyr who is rendered ultimately invulnerable, and inhuman, through the power of divine grace.[170] Perhaps Marlowe also sought to downplay the semi-divine aura of royalty in order to emphasize the role of power-politics in the play. One may see a hint of this in Edward's famous reflection at the beginning of Act V: "But what are kings when regiment is gone,/ But perfect shadows in a sunshine day" (V.i. 26-7). As Kiefer observes: "Significantly, the issue of the divine right of kings, so

---

[169] Wilson, Shakespeare, p.102.

[170] The depiction of Edward II as a royal martyr is not limited to Stow. He is similarly portrayed in a roof boss at Bristol cathedral. See Hattaway, Theatre, p.159.

important to Shakespeare's Richard II, never finds expression in Marlowe's tragedy."[171]

Another curious aspect of Marlowe's adaption of the historical chronicles to the play is his creation of the character, Lightborn, as Edward's assassin. The name "Lightborn" is derived from that of a devil in the earlier Chester cycle of plays and is an anglicization of "Lucifer", the "bearer of light and fire" of Roman mythology as well as a traditional Christian appellation for Satan.[172] His character is also very much in the Marlovian vein of inventive Italianate murderers:

> **Lightborn.** I learned in Naples how to poison flowers,
> To strangle with a lawn thrust through the throat,
> To pierce the windpipe with a needle's point,
> Or whilst one is asleep, to take a quill
> And blow a little powder in his ears,
> Or open his mouth and pour quicksilver down.
> (V.iv. 31-36)

Like the murderous Barabas of The Jew, Lightborn also displays a sense of humour which is quite funny in a violent, twisted way. An example of this may be found in the repartee between Edward and Lightborn just a few lines before Edward's death at Lightborn's hands:

---

[171] Kiefer, Fortune, pp.139-40. See also Hattaway, Theatre, p.143.

[172] Levin, Overreacher, p.124.

King Edward. These looks of thine can harbor nought but death.
I see my tragedy written in thy brows.
...
Lightborn. What means your highness to mistrust me thus?

King Edward. What means thou to dissemble with me thus?

Lightborn. These hands were never stained with innocent blood,
Nor shall they now be tainted with a king's.

King Edward. Forgive my thought for having such a thought.

(V.v. 72-3, 78-82)

Marlowe's audience, most of whom probably already knew the story of Edward's murder, would undoubtedly have appreciated the humour in Lightborn's assertion that "his hands were never stained with innocent blood" and that they would not now be stained with Edward's. Lightborn was a sophisticated murderer after the Italian fashion. The Italians, most Elizabethans believed, favoured secretive murders by poisons or other means which, like the killing of Edward, often left no wounds on the corpse nor spurted any blood which could mark the assassin.[173]

The demonic overtones in Marlowe's characterization of Lightborn are apparent from his first entrance in response to Mortimer's Faust-like invocation: "Lightborn, come forth!" (V.iv. 21). This aspect of Lightborn's character is integral to any interpretation of Edward's death-scene, for the king

---

[173] Bowers, "Poisoners," 504.

is murdered by a red-hot spit driven up through his anus in a monstrous parody of his sin of sodomy. This perversely appropriate execution ties in with both the Elizabethan belief that the punishment of criminals should be suited to their crimes,[174] and the fact that the traditional iconographic punishment in hell for sodomites was to be "spitted from anus to mouth."[175] What could be more appropriate than to have the divine punishment of sodomites in hell meted out upon a sodomite in this world by the figure of the devil incarnate?[176]

---

[174] See W. Moelwyn Merchant, ed., Edward II (London: Mermaid, 1967), p.21, as quoted in Mulryne, "Distance," pp.57-8.

The relation of Edward's murder to Elizabethan ideas of punishment and execution may also partly explain the emphasis placed upon the degradation of the king for, as we have seen in Chapter One, the humiliation and degradation of criminals was perceived as being an integral part of any punishment. See Hibbert, Evil, p.27.

[175] Diehl, "Iconography," 42-3.

[176] Toby Robertson's Prospect production of Edward II in 1965 offers some intriguing ideas on the staging of Edward's murder:

> Lightborn prevails upon him [Edward] to lie down, probably with his head towards the audience, so that the table, placed on top of the body can shield the audience from Lightborn's fatal act. Robertson made the execution an act of love--the same actor could possibly play Gaveston and Lightborn--and had Lightborn fall across Edward's body as he too died, stabbed by Gurney (Hattaway, Theatre, p.159).

Elizabethan companies often had actors doubling up on parts in their productions. The idea that Marlowe may have taken advantage of this to depict Edward's favourite being the cause not only of the king's downfall, but of his death as well, is so perfect in its thematic circularity that, one suspects, it was probably not the case.

This vicious "poetic justice" betrays something of the characteristically nasty Marlovian sense of humour at work even in his adaption of historical chronicles.

Still, it is important to note that Marlowe never condemns the "heinous vices" of Edward which are implied, and criticized, in Holinshed. Indeed, he seems to praise them when he has Mortimer Senior deliver an impressive historical/mythological defense of homosexual love:

> **Mortimer Senior.** And, seeing his mind so dotes on Gaveston,
> Let him without controlment have his will.
> The mightiest kings have had their minions.
> Great Alexander loved Hephaestion;
> The conquering Hercules for Hylas wept,
> And for Patrocles stern Achilles drooped.
> And not kings only, but the wisest men:
> The Roman Tully loved Octavius,
> Grave Socrates, wild Alcibiades.
> Then let his grace, whose youth is flexible
> And promiseth as much as we can wish,
> Freely enjoy that vain, light-headed earl,
> For riper years will wean him from such toys.
> (I.iv. 388-400)

Mortimer Junior's reply that "his wanton humor grieves not me" (I.iv. 401), and that it is Gaveston's mocking of the barons and tradition which actually bothers him, is significant as it suggests that, in the world of Edward II at least, homosexuality is not regarded as a sin.[177] Yet this

---

[177] In the Elizabethan era homosexuality was legally punishable by confiscation of property and death. A few were prosecuted, but none executed, under this law until 1608. The infamous Baines libel, it should be noted, implies that Marlowe had some personal interest in homosexuality for he

raises the question of why Marlowe emphasizes the iconographic appropriateness of Edward's death. Marlowe may be attempting to force his audience to question their preconceived notions of appropriate punishment and deviant behaviour by inflicting such horrific suffering on a character with whom, though reprehensible by the standards of traditional morality, they have come to identify.[178] This fostering of sympathy for an irresponsible king, who is a homosexual as well, in the minds of a generally homophobic, politically sensitive audience, may be one of Marlowe's greatest achievements in Edward II.

One final note on Marlowe's use of the historical chronicles in his depiction of Edward's murder concerns the controversy over whether Marlowe actually intended to replicate the historic impaling of Edward in all its gruesome horror.[179] The often-noted ambiguity in Marlowe's portrayal of

---

is quoted as saying "That all they that loue not Tobacco & Boies were fooles". See Richard Baines, (1593), as quoted in Critical Heritage, p.37. See also Claude J. Summers, Christopher Marlowe and the Politics of Power (Salzburg: Salzburg Univ. 1974), pp.157-8; Hattaway, Theatre, p.145.

[178] Greenblatt, Self-Fashioning, p.203; William Empson, "Two Proper Crimes," Rev. of Christopher Marlowe: A Study of his Thought, Learning, and Character, by Paul Kocher, The Nation, 163(1946), 444-5.

[179] This question is a matter of some debate among Elizabethan scholars. Some feel that Marlowe would never have attempted to depict Edward's impaling, and that he would have decently obscured the issue by having Edward smothered or simply stabbed. See Levin, Overreacher, p.124; Wilson, Shakespeare, p.101.

For arguments that Marlowe intended his murder to replicate the historical atrocity see: Leech, "Power," 195; Dessen, Interpreters, p.129; Cole, Suffering, 182;

the murder may be the result of a strange ambiguity in the historical accounts. In Edward II Lightborn initially requests a red-hot spit (V.v. 30), which is never refered to again, leaving open the possibility, in the absence of any specific stage direction, that Marlowe may have intended to have Edward smothered with the table called for some eighty lines later:

> **King Edward.** And therefore tell me, wherefore art thou come?
>
> **Lightborn.** To rid thee of thy life. Matrevis, come!
> [Enter Matrevis and Gurney.]
> **King Edward.** I am too weak and feeble to resist.
> Assist me, sweet God, and receive my soul!
>
> **Lightborn.** Run for the table.
>
> **King Edward.** O spare me, or dispatch me in a trice.
> [Matrevis brings in a table.]
> **Lightborn.** So, lay the table down, and stamp on it,
> But not too hard, lest that you bruise his body.
> [King Edward is murdered.]
> (V.v. 105-112)

There is an element of confusion in Stow's account which may have contributed to the suggestion of ambiguity in Marlowe's depiction of the murder:

> ...one night being the 22, of Septemb, they came rushing in upon him sodainly, as he lay in his bed, with great and heauy featherbeds, being in weight as much as 15 strong men could beare, wherwith they oppressed and strangled him by smothering. Into whom they also thrust a plummers sodring iron, being made red hot up into his

---

Sanders, Dramatist, p.124; Mulryne, "Distance," p.61; Craik, "Stage Action," p.84.

> bowels.... [Edward] crying out with a loud voyce, so that many aswel within the castle as without heard it....[180]

Where Holinshed is unambiguous about how Edward was killed, noting that "heauie featherbeds or a table" were used only to hold Edward down,[181] Stow implies that Edward was first smothered, then impaled for good measure, whereupon the king screamed so loud that he could be heard outside the castle in spite of the fact that his mouth was smothered by the heavy featherbeds. This evident confusion may be responsible, to some degree, for Marlowe's rather unclear depiction of the murder. At any rate, the stage murder was probably depicted as it occurred in history, for an Elizabethan audience, familiar with the story of Edward's death, would undoubtedly not have appreciated being cheated of such a dramatic stage effect.

There are strong similarities between The Massacre and Edward II despite the obvious difference in dramatic quality. Both are adaptions of historical accounts, and both comprise the final movement in a gradual change in Marlowe's attitudes towards his overreachers and their victims. Dramatic violence is instrumental in presenting this shift in sympathy and interest. While in Tamburlaine: Parts One and Two, Faustus, and The Jew the protagonists who inflict violence upon others

---

[180] Stow, Annales, p.345.

[181] Holinshed, Chronicles, p.587.

are generally sympathetic, in The Massacre the overreacher, while still the aggressor, is crafted as an unsympathetic Catholic villain. In Edward II, the protagonist and the overreacher are no longer the same individual, and Marlowe actually goes so far as to make his protagonist a victim of the overreacher. The protagonist/victim, Edward, begins as an unsympathetic figure with the audience's sympathies clearly lying with Mortimer, the latest incarnation of the heroic overreacher. But then, in a surprising reversal, Marlowe exposes his overreacher as a base, power-grubbing Machiavellian, and causes the audience's sympathies to shift to Edward through the relentless employment of humiliation heaped upon degradation. Edward is the last in a long line of the overreachers' royal victims, but is also the ultimate figure in an evolutionary progression which saw Marlowe's interests shift more and more, with each succeeding play, away from the overreacher and to the victims of violence.

Conclusion

Marlowe's use of dramatic violence in his plays is clearly of enormous importance in any appreciation of his work. Indeed, many aspects of Marlowe's plays, such as his characterization of the "overreacher" figure, his sense of comedy, and his refashioning of the earlier Vice, "comedy of evil," and "eldritch" traditions, can only be fully understood in light of his use of dramatic violence. Although Marlowe often employs violence as an appeal to the sanguinary tastes of his audience, his awareness of their expectations does not prevent him from questioning their preconceived attitudes towards the world around them. The sympathetic, overreaching protagonists of Tamburlaine and Doctor Faustus violently challenge the political and religious orthodoxy of the Elizabethan era. These plays became popular successes in large part because they embodied the ambitions of the growing "middle classes" of the period. But later, in Edward II, Marlowe turns around and defines both the amorality which is personified in the overreacher's "will to power," and the limits of his overreaching power. Moreover, he uses dramatic violence to defy the conventional morality of his time by fostering audience sympathy for the weak, homosexual Edward (who, unlike his royal counterparts in other deposition plays such as Richard II, remains a pathetic figure to the end) largely by exploiting the horrifically violent agonies which

Edward undergoes in the play's final scenes.

The traditional scholarly reluctance to study Marlowe's use of dramatic violence has resulted in a failure to appreciate these important facets of the playwright's work. Only very recently has scholarship both acknowledged this oversight and made a partial attempt to rectify it, with this thesis representing only a part of the current reappraisal of this overlooked aspect of Marlowe's work.[182]

---

[182] See David Thurn's study of the thematic significance of violent visual and poetic images in Tamburlaine: Parts One and Two, and Matthew Proser's analysis of the psychology of aggression in the same plays. David Thurn, "Sights of Power in Tamburlaine," ELR, 19, No.1 (1989), 3-21; Matthew Proser, "Tamburlaine and the Art of Destruction", HSL, 20(1988), 37-51.

Works Cited

Albert, Edward. A History of English Literature. 4th ed. Revised by J.A. Stone. 1923; rpt. London: George Harrap, 1971.

Bakeless, John. The Tragicall History of Christopher Marlowe. Harvard, 1942; rpt. Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1964.

Barber, C.L. "The form of Faustus' fortunes good or bad." Tulane Drama Review, 8, No.4 (1964), 92-119. Subsequent references to this "Marlowe Issue" will be abbreviated as: TDR.

Barry, Patricia S. The King in Tudor Drama. Salzburg Studies in English Literature: Elizabethan Studies, 58. Salzburg: Salzburg University, 1977.

Battenhouse, Roy W. Marlowe's "Tamburlaine": A Study in Renaissance Moral Philosophy. 1941; rpt. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1964.

Beier, A.L. "Vagrants and the Social Order in Elizabethan England." Past and Present, No.64 (1974), pp.3-29.

Bevington, David M. Action is Eloquence: Shakespeare's Language of Gesture. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.

_____. From "Mankind" to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.

_____, ed. Medieval Drama. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975.

_____. Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968.

Birringer, Johannes H. "Marlowe's Violent Stage: 'Mirrors' of Honor in Tamburlaine." ELH, 51 (1984), 219-39.

Boas, Frederick S. Christopher Marlowe: A Biographical and Critical Study. 1940; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960.

_____. An Introduction to Tudor Drama. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933.

Bowers, Fredson T. "The Audience and the Poisoners of Elizabethan Tragedy." The Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 36, No.4 (1937), 491-504.

_____. The Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy. Princeton, 1940; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959.

Bradbrook, Muriel C. "Marlowe's Doctor Faustus and the Eldritch Tradition." In Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig. Ed. Richard Hosley. 1962; rpt. Kansas City: University of Missouri Press, 1963, pp.83-90.

_____. Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy. 2nd. ed. Cambridge, 1935; rpt. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Brewer, Derek. English Gothic Literature. Hong Kong: Schocken, 1983.

Briggs, Julia. "Marlowe's Massacre at Paris: A Reconsideration." RES, 34 (1983), 257-78.

_____. This Stage-Play World: English Literature and its Background 1580-1625. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Brown, John Russell. "Marlowe and the Actors." TDR, 155-73.

Campbell, Lily B. Shakespeare's "Histories": Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy. 1947; rpt. San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1965.

Carnicelli, D.D., ed. Lord Morley's "Tryumphes of Fraunces Petrarcke". Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.

Chambers, E.K. The Elizabethan Stage: Vol.IV. 1923; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945.

Charney, Maurice. "The Persuasiveness of Violence in Elizabethan Plays." Renaissance Drama, NS2 (1969), 59-70.

Clemen, Wolfgang. English Tragedy Before Shakespeare: The Development of Dramatic Speech. Trans. T.S. Dorsch. 1961; rpt. London: Methuen, 1980.

Cole, Douglas. "Christopher Marlowe, 1564-1964, A Survey." The Shakespeare Newsletter, 14, No.1 (1964), 44.

_____. Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe. 1962; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965.

Cook, Ann Jennalie. The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London, 1576-1642. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.

Craik, T.W. "The Reconstruction of Stage Action From Early Dramatic Texts." In The Elizabethan Theatre V. Ed. G.R. Hibbard. Proc. of the Fifth International Conference on Elizabethan Theatre. July 1973. Waterloo, Ontario: Archon, 1975, pp.76-91.

_____. The Tudor Interlude: Stage, Costume, and Acting. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1958.

Cunliffe, John W. The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy. 1893; rpt. Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1965.

Cunningham, J.S., and Roger Warren. "Tamburlaine The Great Rediscovered." Shakespeare Survey, 31 (1978), 155-62.

Daiches, David. "Language and Action in Marlowe's Tamburlaine." In his More Literary Essays. London: Oliver and Boyd, 1968, pp.42-69.

Dessen, Alan C. Elizabethan Drama and the Viewer's Eye. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1977.

_____. Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Diehl, Huston. "The Iconography of Violence in English Renaissance Tragedy." Renaissance Drama, NS2 (1980), 27-44.

Eliot, T.S. "Christopher Marlowe." In his Selected Essays: 1917-1932. London: Faber and Faber, 1932, pp.118-25.

_____. "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation." In his Essays on Elizabethan Drama. 1932; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1956, pp.3-55.

Empson, William. "Two Proper Crimes." Rev. of Christopher Marlowe: A Study of his Thought, Learning, and Character, by Paul Kocher. The Nation, 163 (1946), 444-5.

Erlanger, Philippe. St. Bartholomew's Night. Trans. Patrick O'Brian. 1960; rpt. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962.

Fanta, Christopher G. Marlowe's "Agonists": An Approach to the Ambiguity of His Plays. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970.

Fraser, John. Violence in the Arts. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974.

Godshalk, W.L. The Marlovian World Picture. The Hague: Mouton, 1974.

Grant, Michael, ed. Latin Literature: An Anthology. 1958; rpt. Bungay, Suffolk: Penguin, 1981.

Gray, J. Glenn. "Understanding Violence Philosophically." In his On Understanding Violence Philosophically and Other Essays. New York: Harper and Row, 1970, pp.1-33.

Greenblatt, Stephen. "Marlowe and the Will to Absolute Play." In his Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Harbage, Alfred. "Innocent Barabas." TDR, 47-58.

_____. Shakespeare's Audience. 1941; rpt. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964.

Hattaway, Michael. Elizabethan Popular Theatre: Plays in Performance. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982.

Hibbert, Christopher. The Roots of Evil: A Social History of Crime and Punishment. Boston: Little, Brown, 1963.

Holinshed, Raphael. Vols.2 and 3 of Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland. 6 vols. London, 1587, 1808; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1976.

Hurstfield, Joel and Alan G.R. Smith, eds. Elizabethan People: State and Society. London: Edward Arnold, 1972.

Judges, A.V., ed. Introd. The Elizabethan Underworld. 1930; rpt. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965.

Kesler, Charlotte R. The Importance of the Comic Tradition of English Drama in the Interpretation of Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus". DAI, 15 (1955), 1387-8 (University of Missouri).

Kiefer, Frederick. Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy. San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1983.

Kimbrough, Robert, ed. "Christopher Marlowe." In The Predecessors of Shakespeare: A Survey and Bibliography of Recent Studies in English Renaissance Drama. Ed. Terence P. Logan and Denzell S. Smith. Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1973, pp.3-55.

Kirschbaum, Leo. "Shakespeare's Stage Blood and its Critical Significance." PMLA, 64 (1949), 517-29.

Knoll, Robert E. Christopher Marlowe. New York: Twayne, 1969.

Kocher, Paul H. Christopher Marlowe: A Study of his Thought, Learning, and Character. 1946; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962.

Lamb, Charles. "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets," in Vol.4 of The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb. 5 vols. Ed. E.V. Lucas. London, 1904; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1968.

Leech, Clifford. Christopher Marlowe: Poet for the Stage. Ed. Anne Lancashire. New York: AMS Press, 1986.

_____, ed. Introd. Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964.

_____. "Marlowe's Edward II: Power and Suffering." Critical Quarterly, 1, No.3 (1959), 181-96.

_____ and T.W. Craik, gen. eds. The Revels History of Drama in English: Vol.III 1576-1613. 8 vols. London: Methuen, 1975.

Leslie, Nancy. "Tamburlaine in the Theater: Tartar, Grand Guignol, or Janus?" Renaissance Drama, NS4 (1971), 105-120.

Levin, Harry. Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher. 1961; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1967.

Levine, Gerald M. "Violence and Sensationalism in Elizabethan England." Diss. New York 1968.

Lucas, F.L. Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy. 1922; rpt. New York: Haskell House, 1972.

Maclure, Millar, ed. Marlowe: The Critical Heritage 1588-1896. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.

Marlowe, Christopher. "Dido Queen of Carthage" and "The Massacre at Paris". Ed. H.J. Oliver. London: Methuen, 1968.

_____. "Edward II": Text and Major Criticism. Ed. Irving Ribner. New York: Odyssey Press, 1970.

_____. "The Jew of Malta" and "The Massacre at Paris". Ed. H.S. Bennett. London, 1931; rpt. New York: Gordian, 1966.

_____. Tamburlaine. Ed. J.W. Harper. London: Ernest Benn, 1971.

_____. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus. Ed. Frederick S. Boas. London, 1932; rpt. New York: Gordian Press, 1966.

May, Rollo. Power and Innocence: A Search for the Sources of Violence. New York: Norton, 1972.

Merchant, W. Moelwyn. "Marlowe the Orthodox." In Christopher Marlowe. Ed. Brian Morris. Mermaid Critical Commentaries. Proc. of the First York Symposium. 19-21 Apr. 1968. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969, pp.179-92. Subsequent references to this collection will be cited as: Marlowe. Mermaid.

Mulryne, J.R., and Stephen Fender. "Marlowe and the 'Comic Distance'." Marlowe. Mermaid. pp.49-64.

Nagler, A.M. A Source Book in Theatrical History. New York: Dover, 1959.

O'Neill, Judith, ed. Critics on Marlowe: Readings in Literary Criticism. Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1970.

Ornstein, Robert. "The Comic Synthesis in Doctor Faustus." ELH, 22 (1955), 165-72.

Poirier, Michel. "Edward II." In "Edward II": Text and Major Criticism. Ed. Irving Ribner. New York: Odyssey Press, 1970, pp.77-92.

Proser, Matthew N. "Tamburlaine and the Art of Destruction." HSL, 20 (1988), 37-51.

Potter, Robert. The English Morality Play. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975.

Powell, Jocelyn. "Marlowe's Spectacle." TDR, 195-210.

Ribner, Irving, ed. "Edward II As Historical Tragedy." In "Edward II": Text and Major Criticism. New York: Odyssey Press, 1970, pp.93-102.

_____. "Marlowe and the Critics." TDR, 211-24.

_____. "Marlowe's 'Tragicke Glasse'." In Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig. Ed. Richard Hosley. 1962; rpt. Kansas City: University of Missouri Press, 1963, pp.91-114.

Robertson, Toby. "Directing Edward II." Interviewed by John Russell Brown. TDR, 174-83.

Rose, Martial, ed. The Wakefield Mystery Plays. London: Evans, 1961.

Rosow, Eugene. Born to Lose: The Gangster Film in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Rossiter, Arthur. "Angel with Horns" and other Shakespeare Lectures. Ed. Graham Storey. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1961.

_____. Woodstock: A Moral History. London: Chatto and Windus, 1946.

Sanders, Wilbur. The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.

Seneca, Lucius Annaeus. Four Tragedies and Octavia. Trans. E.F. Watling. Bungay, Suffolk: Penguin, 1966.

Shakespeare, William. Hamlet. Ed. Harold Jenkins. New York: Methuen, 1982.

_____. King Richard The Second. Ed. Stanley Wells. 1969; rpt. Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1981.

Smith, James L. "The Jew of Malta in the Theatre." Marlowe. Mermaid. pp.3-23.

Spivack, Bernard. Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil. New York: Columbia University Press, 1958.

Steane, J.B. Marlowe: A Critical Study. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964.

Stone, Lawrence. The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641. 1965; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.

Stow(e), John. The Annales of England, faithfully collected out of the most autenticall Authors, Records, and other Monuments of Antiquite, from the first inhabitation untill this present yeere 1592. Imprinted at London by Ralfe Newbery.

Summers, Claude J. Christopher Marlowe and the Politics of Power. Salzburg Studies in English Literature: Elizabethan Studies, 22. Salzburg: Salzburg University, 1974.

Symonds, John Addington. Shakespeare's Predecessors in the English Drama. London, 1884; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1968.

Thorp, Willard. "The Ethical Problem in Marlowe's Tamburlaine." The Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 29 (1930), 385-89.

Thurn, David H. "Sights of Power in Tamburlaine." ELR, 19, No.1 (1989), 3-21.

Tillyard, E.M.W. The Elizabethan World Picture. 1943; rpt. London: Chatto and Windus, 1967.

Tydeman, William. "Doctor Faustus": Text and Performance. Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1984.

Waith, Eugene M. "Edward II: The Shadow of Action." TDR, 59-76.

Wells, Henry W. "Senecan Influence on Elizabethan Tragedy: A Re-Estimation." SAB, 19 (1944), 71-84.

Wilson, F.P. Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare. 1951; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.

Wilson, John Dover, ed. Life in Shakespeare's England: A Book of Elizabethan Prose. Cambridge, 1911; rpt. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969.

Woolf, Rosemary. The English Mystery Plays. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972.

Zucker, David Hard. Stage and Image in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe. Salzburg Studies in English Literature: Elizabethan Studies, 7. Salzburg: Salzburg University, 1972.