

CRAVING FOR WEALTH:***THE JEW OF MALTA***

Christopher Marlowe's fourth play, *The Jew of Malta* is thought to have been performed as early as 1590, although the first recorded performance was in the February of 1592. This play was very popular in Renaissance England, encompassing, as it did attack on both Roman Catholic and Jews, two favorite objects of distrust.

The Jew of Malta is undoubtedly the most problematic of Marlowe's plays where the portrayal of a Jew in terms that are hard to see as anything other than anti-Semitic brings us up against the important issue of ethnic identity and racial prejudice. Briefly, its

story of a villainous Jew named Barabas who, having had his wealth confiscated by the Christians who rule the island of Malta, takes his revenge on the Governor and his knights.

In the course of his plotting, he brings about the death of a number of innocent and not so innocent parties including his daughter's two rival suitors, a friar and the inhabitants of a nunnery, when he is identified as the perpetrator of these crimes he is arrested but he fakes his own death with Cyprus under threat from Turkish forces, Barabas betrays Malta to Calymath, the Turkish emperor's son. Shortly afterwards, he decides to switch sides again, but Ferneze, the Governor of Malta, springs the trap on Barabas himself, who dies cursing.

History of Jews in England: The history of Jews in Europe and in England in particular is a complex one. The myths tales and propaganda purporting to be the truth about Jews in the early modern period were numerous, and some of them are quite astonishing. A number of them are directly relevant to *The Jew of Malta*. For instance, Barabas's Jewish identity would immediately

mark him out as a villain for an audience of Marlowe's contemporaries.

During medieval times, Jews had been traditionally associated with the devil, they were thought to be a cursed race, the curse originating from the idea that they were responsible for the death of Christ. One of the Christian Knights in *The Jew of Malta* justifies stripping Barabas of his wealth with the phrase:

'Tis not our fault, but thy inherent sin¹.

In 1096, the first crusade had set out from Western Europe to reclaim the Christian holy places in the Middle East from their Arab conquerors. On their way through France and Germany, the crusaders slaughtered the Jew in the middle-European cities. There were large-scale massacres in Worms, Collogne, Prague and others places. At Regensburg, the Jewish population was forcibly baptized in the River Danube, when Jerusalem was reclaimed by crusaders, a further massacre of Jews and Moslems followed.²

In 1189 the start of the third crusade, led by Richard Plantagenet brought about another cycle of persecution of the Jews. As the king prepared to leave out his knights' word spread that he had ordered the slaughter of Jews to mark the departure and hundreds of them were burned in their houses. At York, the Hebrew congregation took refuge in the castle and was besieged. From the castle the crowd proceeded to York Minster, where records of money owed to local Jews were found and burned. In a grim irony, Richard the Lion heart ransomed from captivity in the Holy Land owed his freedom in large part to the money of wealthy Jews in England. There were common myths in circulation about Jews crucifying and murdering children; and such a reference actually crops up in Marlowe's play *The Jew of Malta*.

The two friars, Bernardine and Jacomo, are discussing the deaths of the nuns, and are standing over Abigail's body. Abigail has just informed Bernardine with her dying breath that her father brought about the deaths of Lodowick and Don Matthias.

JACOMO *Oh, brother, all the nuns are dead! Let's bury them.*

BERNARDINE *First help to bury this; then go with me, And
help me to exclaim against the Jew.*

JACOMO *Why, what has he done?*

BERNARDINE *A thing that makes me trembles to unfold.*

JACOMO *What, has he crucified a Child?*

BERNARDINE *No, but a worse thing.*³

Such tales can be dated back to the first half of the twelfth century according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* of 1137, when a child's body was discovered in a wood in Norwich, Theobald of Cambridge, a monk who had converted from Judaism, disseminated the notion that Jews used Christian blood as a ingredient in their Passover bread. Although no-one was ever convicted of the Child's murder, the idea that Jew's indulged in the ritual slaughter of Christian children soon took hold.

Perhaps the most tenacious of all the anti-Semitic libels was that of child-crucifixion. One hundred and fifty cases of this charge are on record, Hugh of Lincoln being the most famous English example. Belief in the medicinal value of blood, particularly young blood, was the sources of this strange conviction that Jew were in

the habit of stealing Christian children, crucifying them and using the blood in their Passover ritual. Frequently the decoy was the daughter of the Jew, for folk-lore permitted him to have extravagantly beautiful daughters, as long as it was understood that the beauty was the fatal façade for a murderous heart. Abigail plays this role in her father's plots, though she does it unwittingly.

By the time Marlowe was born, Jews had in fact been officially banned from England for over 300 years. Jews in England had been forced to wear a yellow badge in the shape of stone tablets – representing the Ten Commandments – to indicate their ethnic identity.

A dynamic element in the formation of the myth was, of course, the influence of the Gospels, which neglected the Semitic origin of Christ and his disciples and referred to his opponents, somewhat inaccurately, as “The Jews”. In Christian Europe the world acquired its primary colouring from this constantly reiterated usage; and the medieval stage reinforced the lesson of Jewish villainy in contemporary terms, dressing the villains of the passion story in Jewish cloaks and harmed hats, often completing

the identification with the appendage of the Jew badge instituted in 1215 – and the use of current Jewish names.

This, together with the exigencies of dogmatic theology, which made it necessary to label the medieval Jew the enemy of Christendom, resulted in an almost universal opprobrium being attached to the Hebrew race.

In 1287, Edward I imprisoned the leaders of the English Jewish community who were ransomed for the sum of £12,000. During the reigns of Edward I and Henry III the Jewish people were literally bought and sold - as they were having no rights of citizenship and survival under the protection of the monarch. They were tantamounting to the king's possessions. They did not enjoy rights of inheritance, all their property being confiscated by the state on their death. They were also heavily taxed and tortured if they refused to pay.

In 1290, Edward I expelled the entire Jewish population from the nation perhaps as many as 15,000 until when Cromwell allowed a Jewish settlement. In other parts of Europe, some Jewish

communities survived although their numbers remained almost invariably marginalized.

The Jews that were known in the country between that data and the resettlement in 1656 amount to only a few hundred, and most of these were either real or pretended converts seeking assimilation into the English community. The Jews known to have been present in sixteenth and seventeenth century London were prosperous merchants some of them trusted advisors of the government, and in no significant way related to the Shylocks and Barabas's of the stage. In 1347, when the plague hit Europe, the Jews once again found themselves targeted as the cause. The plague was a weapon, a Satan and the Jews were Satan's agents. The rumour circulated that Jews were poisoning the water supply and thousands of Jews were killed in the wake of the report, many were burned at the stake, others in their homes.

Although the Jewish population had been deported from England in the 13th Century, a few remained. Often, they survived by professing to be Christians while covertly continuing to practice their own religion.

Marlowe sees the absurdity of the Christian monomania which regards all divergence from a not very self-evident truth as willful error, and he starts from a very different position of Ferneze and Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*. The religious persuasions of the two (protagonists character) in so far as they are not mere 'policy', are data, given. The idea of Barabas changing this religion is as ridiculous to Ferneze as it is to Barabas.

In a similar way, Marlowe sees through the Christian notion of the Jews as an accursed race to the rapacity for which this is no more than a convenient smokescreen, and he has caught both the self-righteous tone, and the logical perversity.

The Jew of Malta was revived in February 1594, which probably coincided with the time of Lopez's trial, when it proved immensely popular due, not doubt, to the scandal of the Lopez affairs. It was revived again in 1594. Queen Elizabeth's Jewish physician, Dr. Lopez, was one of the most notorious victims of popular frenzy on this subject.⁴

Around the early sixteenth century, too European Christians began to find a use for the Jews in their midst although it was certainly not the case that all Jews were wealthy, and they were valued for the fact that their religion allowed them to take money on usury, that is to say, loan money and charge interest. The Christian church had decreed that credit and loans were against God's law. Edicts such as the Second Lateran Council of 1139 had established that any Christian discovered taking money on usury should be denied the sacraments. There was no such ban for those practicing Judaism. With the emergence of embryonic capitalism in the sixteenth century, there was a heavy demand for the facility of credit for banking and for ventures in industrial and other enterprises and consequently were in increasing demand as credit brokers in European cities.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, European nations gradually were readmitting Jewish populations, partly, no doubt because they had now identified a specific use for them. In truth, it was not just Jews who lent money on interest – the demands of capitalist economies were inevitably more pressing than the structure of church dogma. In the introductory note of *Elizabethan*

Plays it is mentioned so, eminent sixteenth-century Jews resided in Constantinople and powerful politically and commercially have been suggested as possible inspirations by Professors Kellner and Brooke.⁵ Marlowe may have learned about them through his diplomatic connection from London Jews. By 1624, the English parliament had formerly restricted the divine interdict on the practice of usury.

Theme: *The Jew of Malta* is filled with blood and murder also favorite topics of the Elizabethan audience who embraced the bloody revenge tragedies of the period. Marlowe's own reputation for violence and an unconventional lifestyle probably added to the play's attraction. Marlowe was interested in depicting the differences between what men professed and what their actions revealed. Thus, the dangers of Catholicism, the corruption force of the Jews, and the characters' own greed proved to be important themes when the play was produced.

For instance, in Malta, Barabas is surrounded by his enemies and as this passage suggests, his riches ensure the only kind of protection and power that he, as a Jew may obtain. Ferneze's unjust

seizure of his property thus constitutes the total destruction of Barabas's hard earned, gradually built singular protection against a field of enemies, an anti-Semitic world.

One of the points of this theme in *The Jew of Malta* is the difference between what is real and what only appears real. For instance, Ferneze suggests that in taking all of Barabas's wealth, he is not a fault but only fulfilling the inherited curse of the Jews. But Ferneze uses religion when it is convenient. He ignores the Christian admonition of kindness toward all men, and he lacks any compassion for the Jews.

Technique: *The Jew of Malta* is constructed and properly made to fit the triple method of construction. The Overplot, framed by the siege, is the inter-relationship between the Christians and Jews; and the Spaniards and Turks. It is connected with the main plot through the speculations of Barabas who is caught up in the under plot through his misplaced confidence in Ithamore. The bonds of self-interest connect the central intrigue, which involves usury, with power politics upon the upper level and with blackmail upon the lower. Blackmail is the tax that Barabas pays on his ill-gotten

hoards; but his rear-guard actions against the blackmailers are more successful than his efforts to beat the politicians at their own game. Various theories have been proposed to account for it, but indeed the second half of the play is largely a reconstruction. The thread of the plot is throughout probably Marlowe's but in the first two acts the central character is humanized.

In the rest of the play, the bare plot has possibly interpolations and alterations but certainly stripped of the humanizing touches with which Shakespeare manages to keep Shylock invested even after the game goes against him.

The Jew of Malta originally contained longer set speeches than the other plays of Marlowe to be found in the extant version. There can be no doubt that it has a very great deal more in the way of short dialogue than *Tamburlaine* and that it represents an entirely different method of dramatic composition.

On other hand, this play has a plot which is full of incidents and which includes a variety of swiftly developing and skillfully interwoven subsidiary episodes. This is no longer a plot like that of

Tamburlaine; entirely dependent on the protagonist, nor does it is likes that of *Doctor Faustus*, mirror symbolically the temptations and spiritual conflicts of the principal character. Barabas's long soliloquies, a new note which is much closer to the idioms of everyday speech are well modulated poetic dictions, constantly varying their tempo and capable of being adapted with a dramatic vividness to the changing subject-matter. For instance, I give a reference to support this statement, one of Barabas's long soliloquies at the beginning of Act II, scene I:

*Thus like the sad presaging raven, that tolls
The sick man's passport in her hollow beak,
And in the shadow of the silent night
Doth shake contagion from her sable wings,
Vexed and tormented runs poor Barabas
With fatal curses towards these Christians.
The uncertain pleasures of swift-footed time
Have ta'en their flight and left me in despair,
And of my former riches rests no more
But bare remembrance-like a soldier's scar,
That has no further comfort for his main.*

*O Thou, that with a fiery pillar led'st
 The sons of Israel through the dismal shades,
 Light Abraham's offspring, and direct the hand
 Of Abigail this night! Or let the day
 Turn to eternal darkness after this.
 Nor quiet enter my distempered thoughts,
 Till I have answer of my Abigail.⁶*

It creates a lyrical atmosphere which forms a curious contrast with the cool and calculating terms in which Barabas elsewhere lays bare his policy. It is one of the techniques of Barabas's longer speeches and soliloquies which also serve the purpose of establishing his character. His character and personality are revealed to at least the same extent, however in the dialogue, in the plots he devises and in his actions and reactions generally. This method of characterization plays but a small part in *Tamburlaine* and *Doctor Faustus*. It is more firmly developed here, and gives an impression of greater richness, especially in the earlier acts. In the second half of the play, which is evidently only a crude, unpolished draft, Marlowe again neglects this means of portraying character.

Craving for Wealth: Where Tamburlaine and Faustus sought to control, the one by conquest and the other by knowledge. In *The Jew of Malta* Barabas is satisfied with plundering. Supporting this fact Judith O'Neill remarks:

*What more many Heaven do for earthly man
Then thus to pour out plenty in their laps,
Ripping the bowls of the earth for them,
Making the sea their servant, and the winds
To drive their substance with successful blasts?*⁷

The Jew turns his back upon the coloured splendours of his Mediterranean world, content with the reflection of fire and sea and sky in the precious stones which comprise his wealth. If any of an artists' delight in form and hue remains in Barabas's praise of his treasure, it has been contaminated by the worldly sense of values which is inimical to art. And he holds a king's ransom in his hand when the play opens. Barabas is soon forced to admit that he has no hope of a crown; no principality waits this Machiavellian.

Barabas's numerous soliloquies are continually used to throw light on this duplicity of him. Those two soliloquies at the very beginning of the play have the function of revealing to the people the peculiar nature of the man which would account for such behaviour. The first spoken by Barabas in his counting-house as he tells over his riches is intended with its highly coloured enumeration of precious stones and distant lands to give up as a picture of the wealthy Jewish merchant wallowing among his treasures and awaiting the return of his argosies.

The second brings into close relationship the blessing represented by this wealth and the lot of the Jew in a Christian world. The following a quotation justifies this fact:

Rather had I, a Jew, be hated thus

*Than pitied in a Christian poverty;*⁸

Furthermore, I would say Marlowe was a genius. Fascinated with the wild craving for wealth and power Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* has embodied insatiable lust for infinite riches and their potential power. For instance, Barabas is shown as a merchant

prince with dignity and grandeur. In this context Journal of the Yokohama National University has mentioned like the following:

*Give me the merchants of the India mines,
That trade in metal of the purest mould;
The wealthy Moor, that in the eastern rocks
Without control can pick his riches up,
And in his house heap pearls like pebble stones,
Receive them free, and sell them by the weight
Bags of fiery opals, sapphires, amethysts,
Jacinth's, hard topaz, grass-green emeralds,
Beauteous rubies, sparkling diamonds.*⁹

In Act I Scene II, Great Salim-Calymath, son of His highness, Emperor of Turkey came to demand to Ferneze, the Governor of Malta for ten years' tribute that remains unpaid. Consequent upon this strong order of Calymath, Ferneze reminded to merchant and moneyed Barabas instantly to levy the ten years' tribute past. And also he made the OFFICER read the articles of the decrees of the Turkey:

OFFICER *First, the tribute money of the Turks
shall all be levied amongst the Jews,
and each of them to pay one half of his estate.*

BARABAS *How, half his estate?*

[Aside] I hope you mean not mine

.....

OFFICER *(reads) Secondly, he that denies to pay
Shall straight become a Christian.*

BARABAS *How, a Christian? [Aside] Hum, what's here to do?*

OFFICER *(reads) Lastly, he that denies this shall
absolutely lose all he has.¹⁰*

Having heard the rules, most of the Jews will have to accept giving the half but Barabas actually, wants nothing to pay it as tribute besides being not convertible into Christian.

The rationalization goes further. Since it is unacceptable to Harry an opponent who differs from you in all good conscience, the

Jew must be a deliberate heretic. And it is the almost universal assumption of medieval and Renaissance Christendom that the Jews do, in fact, recognize the truth of Christianity, but from a willful and cross-gained stubbornness refuse to admit the fact

Marlowe sees in *The Jew of Malta* the Christian monomania which regards all divergence from a not very self-evident truth as willful error, and he starts from a very different position:

FERNEZE. *Why, Barabas, wilt thou be christened?*

BARABAS. *No, governor, I will be no convertite.*¹¹

The idea of Barabas changing his religion is as ridiculous to Ferneze as it is to Barabas.

His main aim and object was to collect more money, more pelf and an international mercantilism that meant his plan for becoming a hoarder of the world. Denying such proposal of Turkey he stands against the state. Had he accepted either of the two alternatives: payment of tribute or conversion into Christian there

would have been no tragedy in his life. He is made to do so by his craving for unlimited wealth.

But another example of craving of wealth is the reason why Abigail, the daughter of Barabas converted into Christian nun. Ultimately she was also dead as a nun. Let us see the Jewish merchant in question. Barabas is introduced as a man owning more wealth than all others of Malta. He begins the play in his counting-house, perhaps already playing on the stereotypical view of Jews being misers. He wants to become the wealthiest in Malta at all cost, so his action nothing but to collect money by any means for becoming the richest man in Malta, when Turkish ships arrive to demand tribute. However Barabas's wealth is seized by the Maltese governor and he is left penniless. With the aid of his daughter Abigail, he recovers some of his former assets and a Turkish slave, Ithamore, who appeared to hate Christians as much as Barabas.

Barabas then, in revenge for the robbery especially upon the Ferneze, the governor of Malta, use his daughter's beauty to embitter the governor's son, Lodowick and his friend, Don Methias against each other, leading to a duel in which they both die.

Barabas fervently conceives plan to destroy the emerging romance between Abigail and Don Methias and in so doing, he takes revenge on the Governor through his son Lodowick. Fixed on achieving his aim, Barabas locks Abigail in the house so that she can't interfere with his plot. His plots and evil deeds become inhuman and outrageous. When Abigail knows of Methia's death and deciphers her father's plan, she concludes:

There is no love on earth,

*Pity in Jews, nor piety in Turks.*¹²

She consigns herself to a nunnery. Only to be poisoned along with all the nuns by Barabas and Ithamore for becoming a Christian. Along with his villainous nature he might have characterized with unnatural, unlawful, and immoral virtues due to his unlimited craving for wealth. It is shown by his act of killing all nuns even including his own daughter by poisoning for becoming a Christian. In Act I, Scene I, though Barabas said:

As Agamemnon did his Iphigen;

*And all I have is hers.*¹³

It is contradicted because it is an ironic in one sense. The legendary king Agamemnon was forced to sacrifice his daughter for Greek cause in the war against Troy. But, before the end of the play *The Jew of Malta* Barabas killed Abigail for the sake of his own gain. His atrocious behaviour is a sign of his craving character. Of course, Barabas shows evidence of humanity, particularly when he protests against the blatant unfairness of the Governor's edict that the Turkish tribute will be paid entirely by Malta's Jewish population. It is because of Barabas's protests that he is stripped of all he has and consequently becomes a sort of monster. As exemplification the following quotation will be significant:

Excess of wealth is cause of covetousness,

*And covetousness, O, 'tis a monstrous sin.*¹⁴

In the final act of this play, Barabas encounters the Turkish army, and seizes the opportunity to take revenge on all the population of Malta. He eagerly helps the Turks enter the fortified city. The Turks

prevail and appoint Barabas Governor of Malta. In this moment Barabas expresses his feeling:

*But Malta hates me, and, in hating me,
My life's in danger; and what boots it thee,
Poor Barabas, to be the Governor.*¹⁵

For the first time Barabas crafts a plot which does not center around revenge. In order to win back friendship with Malta, Barabas offers to destroy the Turks, in exchange for money from the Governor. From his experience, Barabas has learned that a fortune, built alone and kept alone, does not ensure wealth or security. Ferneze agrees to his plan, and with great zeal, Barabas now physically crafts the trap for his victims. He provides a lavish feast for the Turkish army at a nearby monastery and during the meal, hidden cannons massacre the soldiers.

At his home, Barabas has created a concealed device by which the floor opens and will drop Calymath into a dangerous pit. However, before the dining Turk plummets down, Ferneze betrays

Barabas, trapping him in his own device. Ferneze and Calymath refuse to help him, and Barabas dies in the pit.

This is the main reason for the death of a craving mind like that of Barabas who is a party with the enemy of his own Country and who possesses the nature of treacherous villain. Barabas is such a fellow who craves to gain fulfillment of his desire only to get destruction ultimately.

This play portrays characters of three religious groups: Christians, Jews and Turks who are Muslims in constant enmity with one another. It shows self-contented morality and suggests that in the end, all religious groups are equally likely to engage in violent and selfish acts, regardless of their professed moral teachings. However, Barabas was more craving for wealth. In the forthcoming chapter Marlowe's historical play *Edward II* will be discussed.

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