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The Irony of Identity: Self and Imagination  
in the Drama of Christopher Marlowe

by

R. Ian McAdam

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

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## Abstract

While much of Renaissance literature is concerned with self-fashioning, certain Renaissance writers retain, even as they stress the need for the establishment of individual identity, a belief that the energies of the self remain subordinate to a greater power. One such writer was Marlowe, who was haunted by an intimation that could be called in the broadest sense mystical: the self which must be fashioned so heroically is in a sense illusory. Therefore the playwright, though extremely unorthodox in his religious thought, was deeply influenced by Augustinian theology, particularly as it questions the validity of humanism and a self-sufficient human identity. This religious outlook, however, is radically compromised in the plays by an energetic insistence that, without first establishing a viable human self, an individual can never hope to transcend it.

The thesis recognizes Marlowe's psychological instability or uncertainty, which in part makes up the "meaning" of his texts. His unresolved psychological conflicts arise both from his peculiar religious temperament and from a difficulty in accepting and dealing with homosexual impulses. The plays are discussed in the order of Dido Queen of Carthage, Tamburlaine Parts One and Two, Doctor Faustus, The Jew of Malta, The Massacre at Paris, and Edward II, in the belief that this at least approximates the actual chronology. With respect to sexual conflicts, the last two plays reveal a greater acceptance of homosexual desire, which in earlier plays is resisted or evaded in various ways. With respect to religious conflicts, Doctor Faustus is a crucial play, in which Marlowe attempts to free himself from the religious dependency which is expressed, somewhat reluctantly, in Tamburlaine. In the later plays the characters must struggle more independently to fashion an identity, yet these works remain haunted by the Augustinian suggestion that humankind's ultimate permanent identity can only be a spiritual one.

Since human identity is seen in essence as an imaginative construct, the plays develop a parallel between self-fashioning and artistic creation. A misuse of imagination and a difficulty in balancing assertive and passive impulses lead Marlowe's protagonists to a failure of self-fashioning. The tragic sense of this failure is intensified by the suggestion that for some individuals, because of their variance from social norms, self-fashioning becomes more difficult than for others. There is, however, also a larger, more disturbing implication that human beings, in relation to their creator, must play at a game they cannot win.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In Donne's "Good Friday, 1613: Riding Westward," the speaker's conflict is paradigmatic of a central paradox in Renaissance literature. Though his "soul's form bends towards the east" where he should see Christ crucified, he, the erring human, is carried by "pleasure or business" towards the west. He admits he is almost glad to "not see/ That spectacle [the cross] of too much weight for me," since "Who sees God's face, that is self life, must die." The speaker realizes he is not yet ready for the final surrender to God, but consoles himself by hoping that his act of disobedience, turning his back on Christ, will begin a process of transformation ("Burn off my rusts, and my deformity") which will eventually restore the divine image within him. West paradoxically becomes east, but the circle may be completed only because the speaker insists first on asserting his own identity. Self-assertion becomes the first step towards self-surrender.

In the case of Donne's speaker the journey westward is further justified by the fact that he keeps the images of Christ's sacrifice "present yet unto my memory." But the poet does more than remember the passion; the poem itself is an act of imagination which gives meaning to the journey of

self-assertion and gives hope for the future possibility of self-surrender. The conflict between self-assertion and self-surrender which Donne's poem seems to resolve so neatly recurs as a major source of tension in other Renaissance works, though of course the conflict is not always easily resolved, and the imaginative response is often concerned with more than simply the "transformation of sin" in the sense of personal purgation. In a devotional lyric the parameters are necessarily limited--God, the human self, and the battle of wills between them--but much of the epic and dramatic literature of the period examines more fully the act of self-assertion, and sees it as a heroic and sometimes tragic endeavour. In this literature self-assertion becomes more than simply an act of rebellion against the Godhead. It becomes a process and a project which, thanks largely to Stephen Greenblatt, has come to be known as "self-fashioning." Among other examples Greenblatt quotes Calidore's statement from The Faerie Queene VI.ix.31: "in each mans self.../ It is, to fashion his owne lyfes estate," and the critic argues that in the sixteenth century "fashion seems to come into wide currency as a way of designating the forming of a self."<sup>1</sup> Much of the literature of the period is indeed concerned with this struggle to achieve and maintain personal identity. Yet certain Renaissance

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<sup>1</sup>Renaissance Self-Fashioning (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 2.

writers--Spenser and Milton are prime examples--retain, even while they stress the need for the establishment of individual identity, a belief that the energies of the self remain subordinate to a greater power. Even at their most "humanistic" they experience an intimation that could be called in the broadest sense mystical: the self which must be fashioned so heroically is in a sense illusory--it creates itself only in the end to surrender itself. These writers thus seem haunted by Augustine's admonition, also quoted by Greenblatt: "Hands off yourself. Try to build up yourself, and you build a ruin."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the heroic effort is recognized as necessary, inescapable, for much of this literature intimates an idea succinctly voiced by a modern psychiatrist and writer: "An identity must be established before it can be transcended."<sup>3</sup>

This struggle to establish an identity--yet with the belief that it must be, or could be, eventually transcended --is central to the drama of Christopher Marlowe. I therefore suggest that Marlowe, though extremely unorthodox in his religious thought, was deeply influenced by Augustinian theology, particularly as it questions the validity of humanism and a self-sufficient human identity.

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<sup>2</sup>Sermon 169, quoted in Peter Brown, Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine (London: Faber & Faber, 1972) 30; Greenblatt 2.

<sup>3</sup>Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled (New York: Touchstone, 1978) 97.

Patrick Grant in The Transformation of Sin argues that Renaissance literature in general can be understood in terms of an encounter between Medieval guilt culture, with its emphasis on the Augustinian sense of inherited sin and the need for divine grace, and an emerging emphasis on enlightenment and individual achievement: "...the conflict between a deeply rooted mythology of fallenness and inherited guilt, against which human behaviour must be judged, and an ethical endeavour toward an autonomy of reason admired but still feared produces in the Renaissance both profound and disturbing theology and literature."<sup>4</sup> While Greenblatt as well acknowledges that Augustine's view was "influential" down through the centuries, I feel that he and the other new historicists underestimate the impact of Augustinian thought on Renaissance literature. Greenblatt, Catherine Belsey, and Jonathan Dollimore are certainly all at pains to attack the idea that there exists an essential, universal human nature, yet their primary aim is to reveal that human identity is no more than a "cultural artefact." Thus Greenblatt in his studies "perceived that fashioning oneself and being fashioned by cultural institutions-- family, religion, state--were inseparably intertwined"(256). For Greenblatt the end result of this realization of the "fictiveness" of the human self seems to be to halt suddenly on the precipice of a metaphysical void and suck in his

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<sup>4</sup>(Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1974) 38.

breath: "...to let go of one's stubborn hold upon selfhood, even selfhood conceived as a fiction, is to die"(257).

Belsey, in The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama, is much more obviously political in her attacks on the repressive ideology of "liberal humanism": subjectivity is "not natural, inevitable or eternal; on the contrary, it is produced and reproduced in and by a specific social order and in the interests of specific power relations."<sup>5</sup> In Belsey's view even the most earnest and sophisticated inquiries into the nature of the inner self--psychoanalysis for example--primarily serve "to keep us off the streets"(54). All concern for the "truth of the self" is for Belsey either a red herring or a front for some repressive political agenda or other, and she can confidently assert in her study of Milton that "meaning is for us now no longer a metaphysical mystery, like Milton's Incarnation, but a site of struggle, a place to lay claim to the possibilities we want to realize."<sup>6</sup> We may very well wonder, first, who has authorized Belsey to make exclusions from the list of possibilities "we" want to realize, and, second, how we can so blithely ignore what writers like Milton "wanted to realize," since the whole purpose of new historicism is presumably to increase our awareness of

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<sup>5</sup>(London: Methuen, 1985) 223.

<sup>6</sup>John Milton: Language, Gender, Power (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) 104.

historical contexts. Although Dollimore is more sensitive to humankind's desire, even down to the present day, to cling to essentialist belief,<sup>7</sup> his dismissal of religion is no less complete than Belsey's. He does, however, encounter some difficulty in his argument that the "decentring of man" in the early seventeenth century--occurring after the decline of what he calls "Christian essentialism" and before the emergence of the essential humanism of the Enlightenment--resulted in an "emphasis on the extent to which subjectivity was to be socially identified"(155). The difficulty arises since he must refute any suggestion that the instability or "discontinuity" of the self in the literature of the period may be related to the very religious philosophies whose impact or importance he wishes to downplay. He does admit at one point that "In general terms essentialism might at least be qualified by... Augustinian [theology]... because of its emphasis on man's helpless depravity"(163) (and, I may add, on man's ultimate spiritual dependency). Moreover, he suggests a little later that Calvinism, because of its similar emphasis on depravity, created "a destabilizing tendency all its own," which presumably also had a major influence on a literature in which "man is decentred to reveal the social forces that both make and destroy him"(168).

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<sup>7</sup>See especially the final chapter of Radical Tragedy (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984).

Yet how far is man "decentred," and does this literature retain any vision of an "essence" behind the image of humankind as a composite of social forces? Such vision varies greatly from writer to writer. Middleton, for example, comes close to the type of Renaissance writer Dollimore envisages: one who "transposes" theological contexts for socially subversive reasons. Marlowe, on the other hand, though also remarkably subversive, seems much more personally engaged in the theological issues he explores and more deeply concerned with man's "essential" nature. Marlowe, in fact, seems obsessed with religious ideas to a greater degree than any other major dramatist of the period. Though Paul Kocher may exaggerate when he argues that "criticism of Christianity... appears in all the biographical documents as the most absorbing interest of [Marlowe's] life,"<sup>8</sup> he nevertheless underlines a very important element in Marlowe's life and work. What particularly needs emphasizing is that the intensity of the attack strongly suggests a peculiar "religious" temperament within Marlowe himself. We can speculate that growing up in Canterbury, the "mother-city of the Church of England, the seat of the Primate and centre of national ecclesiastical

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<sup>8</sup>Christopher Marlowe: A Study of his Thought, Learning and Character (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962) 4.

affairs of state"<sup>9</sup> may have had an impact on a sensitive and intellectually acute youth, and we know for certain that the Archbishop Parker scholarship under which Marlowe studied for six years at Cambridge expected its recipients to enter the ministry. The fact that Marlowe did not might simply indicate that he discovered his first love for poetry and playwrighting, were it not for the other evidence in hand which suggests a continuing interest in religious ideas--an interest of a most radical kind. The Baines note,<sup>10</sup> for example, is an intriguing account of Marlowe's unusual thought and behaviour--an account which, in light of the plays, definitely remains within the realm of credibility.<sup>11</sup> Kocher has examined the Baines note in detail<sup>12</sup> and demonstrates convincingly, as J.B. Steane has recognized, "an essential unity of design", showing how the accusations in the note can be grouped so as to summarize a broad and

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<sup>9</sup>A.D. Wraight, In Search of Christopher Marlowe (London: Macdonald & Co., 1965) 5.

<sup>10</sup>"A Note Containing the opinion of on[e] Christopher Marly Concerning his Damnable Judgment of Religion, and scorn of gods word," by the government informer Richard Baines, was "delivered to the Privy Council on the day before Marlowe's murder"(Wraight 302).

<sup>11</sup>I say this mainly in response to the objections of Malcolm Kelsall, who argues testily that "it is pointless to speculate how much the document tells us about Marlowe's mind or intellectual milieu"[Christopher Marlowe (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981) 7].

<sup>12</sup>Christopher Marlowe: A Study of his Thought, Learning and Character, 33-68.

coherent attack on religion."<sup>13</sup> Yet another piece of historical evidence deserves, I believe, more attention than it has hitherto received. We know that the "atheistic" material found among Kyd's papers in May 1593 consisted of a copy of part "of an anonymous treatise quoted in full for purposes of confutation by John Proctor in 1549 in a book called The Fal of the Late Arrian."<sup>14</sup> The "late Arrian" was probably John Assheton, who had attempted to deny the divinity of Jesus Christ and had afterwards recanted. Boas comments that "It is surprising evidence of the range of Marlowe's reading that he had once in his possession these portions of a heretical treatise more than thirty years old by an obscure parish priest"(112). This fact suggests, however, not so much an extraordinary range of reading as a peculiar obsession with, or at least an unusual interest in, Arian doctrine.

It is worth inquiring, therefore, into the psychological reasons for this particular interest, and to do so requires a closer examination of the Arian treatise. William Dinsmore Briggs informs us that "the sheets of the original MS. are bound up in reverse order, and that when properly arranged their contents is [sic] practically

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<sup>13</sup>Marlowe: A Critical Study (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1964) 23.

<sup>14</sup>Frederick S. Boas, Christopher Marlowe: A Biographical and Critical Study (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) 112.

continuous, so that the document is not made up of a series of fragments, but is, though incomplete, perfectly coherent. It will be seen, also, that we possess something more than the first half of the document."<sup>15</sup> Briggs then reprints the entire Arian treatise paragraph by paragraph, presumably supplying the second half from Proctor's book. That the Marlowe copy originally contained the entire Arian treatise is likely, judging from Kyd's claim that "amongst those waste and idle papers... w<sup>ch</sup> unasked I did deliver vp, were founde some fragments of a disputation toching that opinion, affirmd by Marlowe to be his, and shuffled w<sup>th</sup> some of myne vnknown to me by some occasion of o<sup>r</sup> wrytinge in one chamber twoe yeares synce."<sup>16</sup> The doctrine expounded in the treatise is, as Briggs points out, heretical but in no sense atheistical. I reproduce selected passages:

What the scriptures do witnes of God, it is cleere and manyfest ynoughe: for fyrst Paule to the Romans declareth that he is euerlastynge, and to Tymothie inuisible and immortall, to the Thessaloniens lyuing and true.... We therefore cal God (whiche onelye is worthy this name and appellacion) euerlastynge, inuisible, incommutable, incomprehensible, immortall, &c.

And if Iesus Christ, euen he whiche was borne of Marye, was God, so shal he be a visible God, comprehensible, and mortall, which is not counted God with me....

For if we be not able to comprehend nor the angels,

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<sup>15</sup>"On a Document Concerning Christopher Marlowe," Studies in Philology 20 (1923): 153.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted in Wraight, In Search of Christopher Marlowe, 311.

nor our own soules which are thynges creat, to wrongfully then and absurdly we make the Creatour of them comprehensible, especially contrary to so manifeste testimonye of the scriptures, &c.

For howe may it be thought true religion whiche vnitethe in one subjecte contraryes, as visibilitie, and inuisibilitie, mortalitie and immortalitie, &c.  
(156)

The divinity of Christ is thus denied, not through an atheistical denial of the Godhead, but through what seems a profound respect for it. What is perhaps the most interesting passage of the treatise occurs near the end:

But not to trouble your lordship any lenger with my rude & barberous talke, shortly thus I thinke of Iesus Chryst. Verely that he was the most electe vessel, the orgen or instrument of the deuine mercy, a Prophet and more then a Prophete, the son of God, but according to the spreete of Sanctificacion, the fyrst begotten but emongest many brothers.  
(157)

A doctrine that insists strongly on human limitation paradoxically suggests humankind's potential spiritual glorification; by denying divinity to Jesus Christ, it seems to promise quasi-divinity to all humankind.

Marlowe's possession of such a document not only proves his fascination with unorthodox theological ideas (if the Baines note leaves us in any doubt of this fact), but also encourages us at least to wonder about his link to the kind of "atheistical" thought associated with Raleigh's School of Night. Evidence for the existence of the School has been sifted through by various scholars mainly in the first half of the twentieth century; the idea has recently received much less attention, probably due to a general realization

that, given the amount of evidence, the School of Night's existence can never be absolutely proven or disproven. M.C. Bradbrook<sup>17</sup> and Eleanor Grace Clark<sup>18</sup> come out in favour of such a School; Kocher<sup>19</sup> attempts to cast serious doubts on its existence. More recently A.D. Wraight again treats the idea of the School seriously, and devotes a good deal of space to what he sees as a lasting influence on the thinkers of this group exerted by Giordano Bruno.<sup>20</sup> Even John Bakeless, who finds the evidence for the School of Night "rather slender," remarks: "it seems probable that the Italian philosopher's visit helped produce a general atmosphere of religious speculation which both Marlowe and Raleigh found congenial."<sup>21</sup> The possibility of Bruno's influence on Marlowe has been most thoroughly explored by James Robinson Howe in Marlowe, Tamburlaine, and Magic.<sup>22</sup> Although Howe's central hypothesis--that the warrior Tamburlaine is a completely admirable "metaphoric figure" representing the Renaissance magus or ideal man--remains

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<sup>17</sup>The School of Night: A Study in the Literary Relationships of Sir Walter Raleigh (1936; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1965).

<sup>18</sup>Raleigh and Marlowe (1941; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1965).

<sup>19</sup>Christopher Marlowe, 7-18.

<sup>20</sup>In Search of Christopher Marlowe, 164.

<sup>21</sup>The Tragical History of Christopher Marlowe (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1942) 1: 127, 129.

<sup>22</sup>(Athens: Ohio UP, 1976).

doubtful, and though his discussion of Tamburlaine is full of questionable assumptions, he does, I think, persuasively argue that the "neo-Platonic-Hermetic line of thought" put forward by Bruno and other Renaissance philosophers had a profound effect on Marlowe. Howe quotes the modern scholar Eugenio Garin's description of the Renaissance magus figure:

Among all human activities, magical work actually comes to assume a central position, so much so that in itself it expresses almost in the manner of an example that divine power of man which Campanella exalts in his justly famous verses. The man at the center of the cosmos is the man who, having grasped the secret rhythm of things, becomes a sublime poet but, like a God, does not limit himself to writing words of ink on perishable paper; on the contrary, he writes real things in the grand and living book of the universe.<sup>23</sup>

This description would seem to be inspired by Ficino's assertion, also quoted by Howe (11), that "not only does the human intelligence claim for itself as a divine right the ability to form and fashion matter through the medium of art, but also to transform the nature of existence by its own power."<sup>24</sup> The promise of almost unlimited personal power no doubt "inspired" Marlowe on some level, but my immediate qualification indicates my belief that, from the very beginning of his artistic career, Marlowe was not only impressed by the courage, glory and beauty of mankind's

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<sup>23</sup>Medioevo e Rinascimento (Bari: G. Laterza & F., 1954) 151; Howe's translation (11).

<sup>24</sup>Howe's translation of Théologie Platonicienne, Vol. 1, trans. Raymond Marcel (Paris, 1964) 229.

highest aspirations, but he was also aware of how many of these aspirations must remain limited to the realm of the imagination; indeed, the relative power, or powerlessness, of the human imagination is a major theme of his writing. This dual viewpoint of course makes him a profoundly ironic writer, but he should not be characterized as a complacent and detached moralist calmly exposing the follies of the human race. It is true, I think, that his work exposes human limitation, and the folly of striving for unrestricted personal power; thus a "moral" critical approach to the plays often provides valuable insights. But it is also true that Marlowe identifies closely with his protagonists, that he "is deeply implicated in his heroes," as Greenblatt<sup>25</sup> and other critics taking a "romantic" approach have argued. I contend that this close identification arises from the fact that Marlowe still "believed in" the necessity of self-assertion, even while he could never fully escape a "belief" or suspicion of its ultimate futility. I thus feel that, by themselves, neither a moral nor a romantic critical approach to Marlowe's plays satisfactorily elucidates their meaning.

I do feel, however, that such a divided mind on Marlowe's part sometimes results in irony and ambiguity which seems self-induced, a product of the author's own unresolved psychological conflicts. Marlowe, as I will

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<sup>25</sup>"Marlowe and Renaissance Self-Fashioning," Two Renaissance Mythmakers, ed. Alvin Kernan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977) 63.

argue from evidence in the plays, possessed a brilliant and inquiring mind but an uncertain sense of identity, and created characters whose identities are also extremely unstable. This uncertainty or instability is at least partly a function of the theological bent of his thinking. Returning to the question of a Hermetic influence on Marlowe, I quote a passage from Bruno's De Immenso et Innumerabilis:

Hence it is clear that every spirit and soul has a certain continuity with the spirit of the universe, so that it has its being and existence not only there where it perceives and lives, but it is also by its essence and substance diffused throughout immensity as was realised by many Platonists and Pythagoreans.<sup>26</sup>

Wraight sees a connection--rightly, I believe--between Bruno's thought and the Arian heresy. Indeed, Wraight adds that "even Raleigh is in essence a deist"(173), and John Aubrey's account of Raleigh's speech before his execution is interesting in its implications:

I remember the first Lord Scudamour sayd 't was basely said of Sir Walter Ralegh to talk of the anagram of Dog [and that] in his speech on the scaffold I heard my cousin Whitney say (and I think 't was printed) that he spake not one word of Christ, but of the great and incomprehensible God with much zeal and adoration, so that he concluded that he was a-Christ not a-theist.<sup>27</sup>

Given Marlowe's probable sympathy with this kind of religious thought--in light of the Arian treatise in his

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<sup>26</sup>Lib. I, cap. 7, quoted in Wraight 172.

<sup>27</sup>Quoted by Eleanor Clark, Ralegh and Marlowe, 386.

possession--we may speculate on the effect it had on his life and work. It is likely that Marlowe shared with Raleigh an assertive, even aggressive, desire to eradicate the need for an Intercessor. Marlowe as an aspiring young poet and playwright would naturally be attracted to the philosophies of Bruno and Ficino since they would serve as an inspiration and a justification of his own creative abilities. As Dollimore remarks, "Humanists like Ficino and Pico, under the influence of neoplatonism, advocate man's spiritual self-sufficiency and even come close to suggesting an independent spiritual identity: 'With his super celestial mind he transcends heaven... man who provides generally for all things both living and lifeless is a kind of God' (Ficino, Platonic Theology p. 234)."<sup>28</sup> Yet it is important to pause here in order to note the qualification "come close to suggesting," since an "independent spiritual identity" is in a sense a contradiction in terms; what the "humanism" of Ficino does, in effect, is to somehow incorporate the divine "other" into the self. This refusal to recognize the normal and natural limitations of humanhood and earthly existence might very well produce psychological tension for two reasons: either a difficulty in dealing with the burden of responsibility imposed by such God-like powers, or an exaggerated concern for, or dependency upon, or indeed doubt about, this supposed internal divine presence. Either way

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<sup>28</sup>Radical Tragedy, 162-63.

(and I'm not sure these possibilities are mutually exclusive) it is possible to see how such a philosophy could prove psychologically disruptive.

It is also possible, however, to attribute some of Marlowe's apparent psychological instability simply to his immaturity and extremely rapid artistic development, and we must not forget that a man who is arguably the second most significant playwright in the language completed his life's work before the age of twenty-nine. In this light Ellis-Fermor's comparison of Marlowe with Raleigh is worth careful consideration:

There is in both men the combination of penetrating intellect with profound religious instinct. Both appear to have reached similar conclusions, apparently startling to their contemporaries (perhaps even to posterity), but actually the result of clear reasoning in the service of a fearless desire to have nothing but the truth. ...if we allow for the distinction between considered philosophic argument and the epigrammatic and aphoristic manner of a brilliant conversationalist, it is clear that the contents of the Baines libel has much in common with The Sceptic.

...Both [men] appear as destructive thinkers engaged in clearing the ground...

In both cases, the presence of urgent and intense religious feeling is implied in this preoccupation with the original essence of man's being. Marlowe was cut off before any trace of constructive thought, or any answers to his questions, had made their way into his work. With a mind whose grasp of metaphysical thought was as powerful and as comprehensive as his, the period of destruction and negation would necessarily be a long one; the process was thorough and went deep. But in the case of Raleigh... there is much material--the majority, in fact, of his written work--to indicate the later development of

positive and constructive thought.<sup>29</sup>

I consider this account extremely perceptive, especially in its claim that the period of "negation" would be long. However, it is doubtful whether Marlowe's ideas were always "the result of clear reasoning" or whether he was always motivated by "fearless" desires. It is not, I think, simply idle biographical speculation to see in the excessive self-assertions of Tamburlaine and Faustus a reflection of the insecurity of their creator, and there is certainly some element of truth in Kocher's remark that, however desperate Marlowe's desire to be free, "he was bound to Christianity by the surest of chains--hatred mingled with reluctant longing, and fascination much akin to fear."<sup>30</sup>

There is another facet of Marlowe's personal life which creates as well this curious tension between fear and reluctant longing: his homosexuality. In his essay "Marlowe and Renaissance Self-Fashioning" Greenblatt remarks that, while the "family is at the center of most Elizabethan and Jacobean drama as it is the center of the period's economic and social structure," in Marlowe "it is something to be neglected, despised, or violated." The effect is to "dissolve the structure of sacramental and blood relations that normally determine identity in this period and to

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<sup>29</sup>Christopher Marlowe (London: Methuen, 1927) 163-64.

<sup>30</sup>Christopher Marlowe: A Study of his Thought, Learning and Character, 119.

render the heroes virtually autochthonous, their names and identities given by no one but themselves."<sup>31</sup> This aspect of Marlowe's work may in fact result from a subconscious intimation that he would have to achieve his own self-fashioning without the supporting "structure" described by Greenblatt. I use the term "subconscious" since I believe that Marlowe only gradually recognized or admitted homosexual desires as he matured.<sup>32</sup> In early plays such as Dido and (especially) Tamburlaine, we find a great resistance to sexual surrender since, as in Spenser, it is seen as interfering with heroic endeavour and encouraging effeminacy. Thus Tamburlaine checks the temptation to succumb to Zenocrate's beauty with terms that resemble Atin's castigation of Cymochles in the Bower of Bliss: "Up, up, thou womanish weake knight,/ That here in Ladies lap entombed art,/ Unmindful of thy praise and prowest might" (The Faerie Queene, II.v.36). Yet there is sufficient evidence throughout Marlowe to indicate that "Ladies lap" was not, for him, where the greatest temptation lay. The Spenserian resistance to romantic surrender is thus intensified by Marlowe's own aversion to heterosexual involvement as well as a reluctance to admit longings which

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<sup>31</sup>Two Renaissance Mythmakers, ed. Alvin Kernan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1971) 56.

<sup>32</sup>For this reason I prefer to allow my discussion of sexual issues in Marlowe also to unfold gradually, saving the most detailed treatment of the subject for my final chapter on Edward II.

contradicted the sexual morals of his society. It is significant that when, in Edward II, romantic love is finally artistically embraced, it has become the heroic project and not an alternative to it.

Having claimed that both religious and sexual conflicts in Marlowe's psychology must be taken into account in an exploration of his work, and having suggested as well that there is some kind of development from "early" to "later" works, I must now say something about the chronology of the plays. Very few Marlowe critics are foolhardy enough to claim absolute certainty about the order in which Marlowe composed his works, and I do not intend to offer incontrovertible proof in this dissertation for a definite chronology. I do intend, however, to discuss the plays in the order of Dido Queen of Carthage, Tamburlaine Parts One and Two, Doctor Faustus, The Jew of Malta, The Massacre at Paris, and Edward II, in the belief that this quite possibly represents the order of composition. This chronology was suggested by Ellis-Fermor, and in her essay "Edward II: Marlowe's Culminating Treatment of Love," Leonora Leet Brodwin compares it with other suggested chronologies, offering several compelling reasons for accepting Ellis-Fermor's.<sup>33</sup> Kocher as well accepts this chronology. The biggest bone of contention is of course whether Doctor Faustus comes in the middle or at the end of the canon. On

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<sup>33</sup>ELH 31 (1964): 139-55.

this question I would side with J.B. Steane in favour of an early date, for the general reasons given in the conclusion to his study.<sup>34</sup> Steane builds upon the argument offered by M.M. Mahood in Poetry and Humanism, where she claims that in Marlowe's tragedies "'the whole story of Renaissance humanism is told', its worship of life and pride in humanity suffering gradual diminution and impoverishment."<sup>35</sup> If we ignore for a moment the minor plays, there is indeed a "gradual diminution" observable as we move from Tamburlaine through Faustus and The Jew to Edward II. However, I would insist this decrease in the heroes' virtù represents something more complicated than a steadily increasing criticism of "Renaissance humanism." Tamburlaine, itself a surprisingly complicated play, does I believe illustrate quite definitely what Steane has called Marlowe's "remarkable contrasts of mind: one cultivating a sharp, critical humour which is oddly destructive of the rapt high-seriousness and idealism of the other"(346). Thus the play which seems an enthusiastic exploration of Hermetic "idealism" serves in the end as a critique of such philosophy, a critique which ultimately affirms humankind's subordination to a greater power. In Faustus Marlowe attempts to rid himself completely of the religious

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<sup>34</sup>Marlowe: A Critical Study, 337-62.

<sup>35</sup>Steane 347, quoting Mahood (London: Jonathan Cape, 1950) 54.

dependency which is expressed (somewhat reluctantly) in Tamburlaine, by exorcising his personal fears; the result is a devastating vision not of the tyranny, nor of the absence of God (for Marlowe cannot yet free himself from a poet's admiration of the glory and power of creation), but of His supreme indifference. Meanwhile Marlowe's philosophical interest changes, from the Hermeticism which informs Tamburlaine (though rather ironically), to the Machiavellianism of the later plays. The self must now struggle more independently to fashion an identity--usually in the face of a hostile society, since the awareness of homosexual tendencies has become more conscious. Yet in spite of this struggle to come to terms with the physical and social aspects of human existence, the later plays remain haunted by the Augustinian suggestion that humankind's ultimate, permanent identity can only be a spiritual one.

Thus it could be said that Marlowe's central artistic vision is a realization of the individual's responsibility for his own self-fashioning, but always with a concomitant awareness that such a self is ultimately illusory. Moreover, Marlowe seems conscious of a parallel between self-fashioning and artistic creation, since both in a sense involve the creation of fictions. It is the purpose of this dissertation to examine how the artistic imagination functions in this struggle towards creating and sustaining a

viable human identity, as well as to explore the reasons why the tension arising from the conflict between self-assertion and self-surrender always leads to tragic results in Marlowe's plays; that is, to a failure of self-fashioning. For Marlowe in his plays appears to be working towards a conception of self-fashioning as a delicately balanced dialectic of self-assertion and self-surrender, but this balance is upset both by an overly aggressive, even pathological self-assertion, as well as by a tendency towards premature self-surrender.

## Chapter 2: Dido Queen of Carthage

Marlowe's Aeneas, like Virgil's, is a man faced with a heroic project which has already caused him much suffering in the past and which promises more in the future; understandably he is tempted to abandon his struggle prematurely, taking refuge instead in the arms of Dido and behind the walls of Carthage, before the gods convince him he must resume his voyage. It is possible to view this archetypal narrative pattern in a more specifically psychological or Freudian sense, and Constance Brown Kuriyama, in a chapter of Hammer or Anvil entitled "Emasculating Mothers," sees the central conflict represented in the play as an attempt "to fulfill a predestined adult role [while] remaining hopelessly stagnated in a state of passive dependency by yielding to the wishes of... maternal characters."<sup>1</sup> While I believe that Kuriyama overemphasizes both Aeneas' Oedipal conflict and the "emasculating" quality of the "maternal" characters, her discussion is up to a point quite illuminating since she sees the problem with which the play grapples as "essentially one of defining or confirming

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<sup>1</sup>Hammer or Anvil: Psychological Patterns in Christopher Marlowe's Plays (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1980) 61.

identity"(53).

The heroic project facing Aeneas is on a metaphoric level his own self-fashioning, the establishment of his own identity. It therefore may not be wrong to see the play, at least as far as Aeneas is concerned, as "adolescent in its basic concerns"(Kuriyama 53). After the fall of Troy, his birthplace, Aeneas must set out on his own and establish a new sense of identity:

Dido. What stranger art thou that dost eye me thus?  
Aen. Sometime I was a Trojan, mighty Queen;  
 But Troy is not; what shall I say I am?  
 (II.i.74-76)<sup>2</sup>

Aeneas' question, "what shall I say I am?," rather than "who am I?," in itself would seem to indicate an "anti-essentialist" bias in Marlowe's concept of identity, and his reply to Dido suggests that selfhood is determined by a cultural "other" with which the individual identifies. Identity in the world is, the play suggests, to a certain extent a cultural artefact, a construct, an object to be formed from the "materials" of one's social circumstances and environment. Because of his temporary uncertainty of identity, Aeneas is placed in some danger, for in Dido he is faced with a woman who, in response to her own needs, would impose an identity upon him, that of her dead husband:

Ilio. Renowned Dido, 'tis our General:  
 Warlike Aeneas.

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<sup>2</sup>All quotations of the play are from the Revels edition, Dido Queen of Carthage and The Massacre at Paris, ed. H.J. Oliver (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968).

Dido. Warlike Aeneas, and in these base robes?  
Go fetch the garment which Sichaeus ware.  
(II.i.77-80)

She thus poses an immediate threat to Aeneas' independence and integrity. This threat is the first indication in Marlowe that women are not welcome as romantic "others," that is, as positive mirrors of masculine identity.

Dido's comparative forcefulness and Aeneas' weakness in their first exchange already suggests the inversion of conventional male and female active and passive roles which critics have noted in their relationship.<sup>3</sup> While Virgil's Aeneas exhibits humility in his first encounter with Dido--

Fit thanks for this are not within our power,  
Not to be had from Trojans anywhere  
Dispersed in the great world--  
(I.818-20)<sup>4</sup>

there is certainly nothing in the epic to suggest Aeneas' repeated refusal to sit beside Dido during their first meeting in Marlowe's play.<sup>5</sup> When Aeneas, having finally seated himself, accepts Dido's pledge "In all humility" (II.i.99), she chides him: "Remember who thou art: speak like thyself;/ Humility belongs to common grooms." Kuriyama

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<sup>3</sup>See Kuriyama, Hammer or Anvil, 54.

<sup>4</sup>All quotations of the Aeneid are from the translation by Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage Books, 1983).

<sup>5</sup>While the desire to avoid involvement with women is very often quite conveniently masked in the Virgilian plot by Aeneas' claims that he must fulfil the will of the gods and resume his heroic responsibilities, moments such as this seem inexplicable without recourse to speculation about Marlowe's uncertain sexual identity.

finds the tone of this speech "distinctly maternal,"<sup>6</sup> though it sounds more like the tone of a woman who does not approve of the submissiveness of her husband or lover. Dido is not threatening Aeneas with emasculation; she is rather encouraging him to take on a more assertive role (though, ironically, one wholly determined by her own expectations and desires).

While this scene places Aeneas in a surprisingly passive role, it in some ways reflects even more poorly on Dido, revealing her shallowness ("Warlike Aeneas, and in these base robes?") and her lack of empathy for a man buffeted by fortune. Lest we judge Aeneas' weakness too harshly and forget what he has recently suffered, Marlowe has him quickly launch into his tale of the fall of Troy. Though critics have disagreed over the impression Aeneas' narrative creates or was meant to create,<sup>7</sup> John Bakeless correctly suggests that it places Marlowe's Aeneas, in comparison to Virgil's, in an admirable light:

Marlowe's Aeneas tells how he rushed alone against the Greeks; Vergil's is accompanied by a band of warriors. Marlowe's Aeneas fights his way boldly out of the city; Vergil's, like a prudent commander, moves cautiously in the shadows. Marlowe's Aeneas claims to have carried Anchises on his back, Iulus in his arms, while leading Creusa by the hand; Vergil's Aeneas carries only Anchises. As a final

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<sup>6</sup>Hammer or Anvil, 55.

<sup>7</sup>Some argue that the Troy narrative deflates Aeneas by revealing his tendency to desert women. See, for example, William Leigh Godshalk, "Marlowe's Dido, Queen of Carthage," ELH 38 (1971): 5.

touch, Marlowe makes Aeneas leap into the sea in a vain effort to save Polyxena who is not even mentioned in Vergil's account.<sup>8</sup>

Mary Elizabeth Smith quotes Bakeless's comparisons approvingly, but then goes on to conclude: "From Aeneas's own mouth we hear described feats of exaggerated boldness and strength, and so with his own words Marlowe cleverly mocks him."<sup>9</sup> It is difficult to believe, however, that in a speech which J.R. Mulryne and Stephen Fender rightly claim "must be classed among Marlowe's most powerful, and most savage, dramatic writing,"<sup>10</sup> the playwright is simply mocking his speaker's credibility. The fact that Marlowe has omitted Virgil's description of Aeneas' intent to murder Helen--surely his most questionable, least heroic moment during the fall of Troy--suggests that Marlowe was at pains, during the Troy narrative at least, to improve, not tarnish, Aeneas' heroic image. Oliver does argue in a note that in the Aeneid "Aeneas has his son by the hand, and Creusa is following him; this is why she can disappear without his noticing it until too late. By omitting not only this fact but also the details of Aeneas' frenzied search for her

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<sup>8</sup>The Tragical History of Christopher Marlowe (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1941) 2: 62.

<sup>9</sup>"Love Kindling Fire": A Study of Christopher Marlowe's The Tragedy of Dido Queen of Carthage (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1977) 9.

<sup>10</sup>"Marlowe and the 'Comic Distance'," Christopher Marlowe: Mermaid Critical Commentaries, ed. Brian Morris (London: Ernest Benn, 1968) 52.

through burning Troy, Marlowe certainly treats him with less sympathy"(33). To this one might object (echoing Bakeless) that by having Aeneas actually take his "beloved wife"(II.i.267) by the hand Marlowe places him in a more positive light than does Virgil. Marlowe does not include the frenzied search and the appearance of Creusa's ghost-- one of the most moving moments in Virgil's epic and indeed in all literature--perhaps because, as Oliver in his introduction suggests, the playwright "thought the whole story of Creusa was better played down in a tragedy about Dido"(xlii). In terms of Marlowe's sexual development, there may be a certain subconscious significance in Aeneas' lament that "manhood would not serve"(II.i.272) and in his failure to save three women (Creusa, Cassandra, Polyxena) in a row. Yet Virgil's Aeneas also stands "unmanned"(II.731) after witnessing the murder of Priam; thus the doubts about "manhood" at this point in Marlowe's play may reveal a conscious interest in gender expectations rather than subconscious homosexual tendencies.

In spite of the doubts about Aeneas' valour expressed by some critics, the fact remains that the tale of Troy is a poetic tour de force. The power of Aeneas' narration moves Dido to the extent that she interjects emotionally several times: "O Hector, who weeps not to hear thy name!" (II.i.209); "Ah, how could poor Aeneas scape their hands?"(220); "O end, Aeneas, I can hear no more!"(243).

Yet her final remark at the end of the scene deserves closer examination:

O had that ticing strumpet ne'er been born!  
Trojan, thy ruthful tale hath made me sad.  
Come, let us think upon some pleasing sport,  
To rid me from these melancholy thoughts.

It is a curiously dismissive, inadequate response; she has been discomfited, and now seeks more pleasant distractions. In this respect she differs greatly from Virgil's Dido, who, in subsequent days we are told,

wanted to repeat  
The banquet as before, to hear once more  
In her wild need the throes of Ilium,  
And once more hung on the narrator's words.  
(IV.107-10)

Marlowe's Dido does not make that kind of emotional investment, nor does she display so deep an imaginative response. J.B. Steane notices this quality in Dido even before Aeneas has narrated his experiences: "When Dido commands him to describe the fall of Troy she does it with little imagination or sympathy, having only the curiosity of one who has heard several versions and now has the opportunity to hear an authentic account."<sup>11</sup>

While Dido lacks depth, Aeneas if anything is too sensitive and reflective for the role of an epic hero. Outside Carthage's walls he "stands... amaz'd"(II.i.2) at the sight of a statue of Priam. Aeneas' response initially suggests a complete evasion of heroic responsibility, for

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<sup>11</sup>Marlowe: A Critical Study (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1964) 45.



On those hard-hearted Grecians which rejoice  
 That nothing now is left of Priamus!  
 O, Priamus is left and this is he!  
 Come, come aboard, pursue the hateful Greeks!

Ach. What means Aeneas?

Aen. Achates, though mine eyes say this is stone,  
 Yet thinks my mind that this is Priamus.

(15-25)

Yet the heroic impulse is finally subsumed in an act of self-sacrifice that becomes really a desire for self-annihilation, denying all past and future suffering:

And when my grieved heart sighs and says no,  
 Then would it leap out to give Priam life.  
 O, were I not at all, so thou mightst be!  
 Achates, see, King Priam wags his hand;  
 He is alive; Troy is not overcome!

Ach. Thy mind, Aeneas, that would have it so  
 Deludes thy eyesight: Priamus is dead.

(26-32)

Mulryne and Fender claim that the treatment of Aeneas in this scene "involves a certain deflation of the hero" while at the same time "Our regard for him remains undiminished; the feelings his delusion expresses are entirely praiseworthy."<sup>12</sup> Because of the deflation, "there enters into our relationship with [Aeneas] a distance that is also an uncertainty." The "uncertainty" referred to by Mulryne and Fender can be related to the critical dispute concerning whether Dido should be regarded as a burlesque of Virgil or as a serious tragedy (see "Marlowe and the 'Comic Distance'," 51-52). Mulryne and Fender, though they regard Dido as a failure, believe that Marlowe was attempting something quite sophisticated:

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<sup>12</sup>"Marlowe and the 'Comic Distance'," 50.

Marlowe's subject in Dido was the not entirely un-Virgilian one of men who choose, but do not choose, their destiny. Aeneas is at once the noble leader of a people and the victim both of a destiny chosen for him and of the wayward impulses of his own fancies and of others. The gods reflect his ambivalent situation by being themselves powerful and petty, dedicated to noble causes and to trivial pursuits. The situation is an absurd one in that contrary estimates of every action are possible and patently self-cancelling. (52)

While this is an accurate description of Aeneas' dilemma, I am not certain that Marlowe consciously set out to establish this vision of "absurdity" throughout the play; the last sentence quoted above makes me particularly uneasy, for it seems to attribute to Marlowe a kind of modern nihilism. As my discussion of the play's opening scene will indicate, I do feel the portrayal of the gods is intended to increase our detachment and encourage our judgement of the play's action. However, as with other of Marlowe's works, I do not believe that all the oddities of tone and behaviour can be ascribed to a careful and conscious attempt to manipulate audience response.

Uncertainty of response in the statue scene arises, Mulryne and Fender argue, from the coexistence of the "deflation of the hero" with an invitation to closer identification, for in "a very 'modern' way, Marlowe invites us to share Aeneas' psychology" (50). Aeneas' weakness does indeed call our attention to the psychological meaning of the play, the hero's struggle for identity. Aeneas strongly identifies with Priam, King of Troy, and has difficulty in

now living without that source of identification: "Ah, Troy is sack'd, and Priamus is dead,/ And why should poor Aeneas be alive?" There is a quality of heroic loyalty, rather than simply weakness or foolishness, in this identification, and if we are tempted to see Aeneas as completely ridiculous in this scene we should remember that Virgil's Aeneas as well is deeply moved by the images of Troy he finds engraved on Carthage's walls:

"What spot on earth,"  
 He said, "what region of the earth, Achates,  
 Is not full of the story of our sorrow?  
 Look, here is Priam..."  
 He broke off  
 To feast his eyes and mind on a mere image,  
 Sighing often, cheeks grown wet with tears.  
 (I.624-34)

Moreover, Marlowe has precluded our passing judgement on Aeneas as a dreamer by having his hero, on first appearance, exhibit common sense and sound leadership, as Smith points out:

He is a man of action in a world of concrete realities.... [E]xhorting his companions to "Pluck up your hearts, since fate still rests our friends"(I.i.149), he turns his attention to the practical necessities of lighting a fire and of discovering the identity of the strange land to which the wind has driven their ships.<sup>13</sup>

It therefore seems likely that Marlowe did not intend the scene involving Priam's statue primarily to undercut or ridicule Aeneas, but that the playwright has here begun to explore a theme dear to his heart and central to his work:

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<sup>13</sup>"Love Kindling Fire", 7.

humankind's imaginative enhancement of experience. The ambivalence evident in this scene recurs in Marlowe's later treatment of this subject, for the imagination can both help the individual come to terms with the suffering inherent in earthly experience as well as delude him into believing he can escape or evade heroic endeavour.

In Aeneas' case, despite his temporary lapses, there seems to be a definite attempt to use the imagination constructively; the same cannot be said, however, for all the characters in the play. There is a short exchange in Act III which nicely contrasts Dido's imaginative response to experience with Aeneas'. As the hunting party traverses the wood in III.iii Achates remarks to Aeneas:

As I remember, here you shot the deer  
That sav'd your famish'd soldiers' lives from death,  
When first you set your foot upon the shore,  
And here we met fair Venus, virgin-like,  
Bearing her bow and quiver at her back.

Aeneas replies:

O, how these irksome labours now delight  
And overjoy my thoughts with their escape!  
Who would not undergo all kind of toil  
To be well stor'd with such a winter's tale?  
(51-59)

Aeneas finds imaginative consolation in a narrative which mirrors the sufferings he has experienced. Art for Aeneas, whether a narrative or a statue, gives meaning to experience, allowing him to reflect on his heroic project and come to terms with the sacrifices he must make. While Priam's statue brought him close to despair, it also

focussed his heroic energies--"Come, come aboard, pursue the hateful Greeks"(II.i.22)--and now the prospect of accumulating "winter's tales"--records of "irksome labours" undergone and overcome--provides him with a sense of accomplishment and presumably prepares him for future struggles. Dido's reaction to this, however, is simply, "Aeneas, leave these dumps and let's away." Oliver believes that "dumps" here must mean "reminiscences", "moods of reverie", since the "context makes it unlikely that the other sense of 'doleful dumps', is intended"(53). Yet it is possible that both meanings are intended; all this talk about irksome labour and undergoing "all kind of toil" has made Dido decidedly uncomfortable, and she cannot sympathize with anyone who would find anything positive in such experiences. To her, Aeneas' remarks are certainly doleful, and she wishes to hear nothing more of the kind.

Not that Dido lacks imagination. Like Aeneas she indulges in fantasies which seem to temporarily loosen her hold on reality. Unlike Aeneas, who tries to use his imagination to help him come to terms with his responsibilities and the demands of experience, Dido uses hers more to escape contemplating these demands, to indulge instead in fantasies of complete personal control. As noted above, she attempts to impose the identity of Sichaeus upon Aeneas the moment she first meets him. Just before the consummation of their love in the cave, she again reverts to

this fantasy of her first husband:

Sichaeus, not Aeneas, be thou call'd;  
 The King of Carthage, not Anchises' son.  
 Hold, take these jewels at thy lover's hand,  
 These golden bracelets, and this wedding-ring,  
 Wherewith my husband woo'd me yet a maid.  
 (III.iv.58-62)

But now it is Dido doing the wooing; the fantasy increases her sense of control over the situation. When Aeneas is brought back by Anna after his first attempt to depart, and has made his questionable excuses, Dido deludes herself into believing that his heart belongs solely to her, and wilfully continues to fabricate the illusion of immortal love between them, even in the face of his plainly expressed doubts:

Dido. O, how a crown becomes Aeneas' head!  
 Stay here, Aeneas, and command as King.  
Aen. How vain am I to wear this diadem  
 And bear this golden sceptre in my hand!  
 A burgonet of steel and not a crown,  
 A sword and not a sceptre fits Aeneas.  
Dido. O keep them still, and let me gaze my fill.  
 Now looks Aeneas like immortal Jove:  
 . . . . .  
 Ten thousand Cupids hover in the air  
 And fan it in Aeneas' lovely face!  
 . . . . .  
 Heaven, envious of our joys, is waxen pale,  
 And when we whisper, then the stars fall down,  
 To be partakers of our honey talk.  
 (IV.iv.38-54)

The fantasy is immediately reinforced, however, since Aeneas, swayed by the power of Dido's poetry, capitulates: "O Dido, patroness of all our lives,/ When I leave thee, death be my punishment!" (55-56). To Dido's credit she is



Instead of oars, let him use his hands,  
 And swim to Italy. I'll keep these sure.  
 (161-64)

She thus struggles to maintain a more realistic assessment of the situation.

By the end of the play, after Aeneas' second (and final) departure, Dido appears, pathetically and movingly, to succumb completely to fantasies:

Dido. O Anna, fetch Arion's harp,  
 That I may tice a dolphin to the shore  
 And ride upon his back unto my love!  
 Look, sister, look, lovely Aeneas' ships!  
 . . . . .  
 Now is he come on shore safe, without hurt.  
 . . . . .  
 See where he comes; welcome, welcome, my love!  
Anna. Ah sister, leave these idle fantasies;  
 Sweet sister cease; remember who you are!  
 (V.i.248-63)

In response to Anna's admonition, Dido temporarily recovers herself. But almost immediately she decides that the only way she can assert her identity and maintain her self-worth is, paradoxically, to kill herself:

Dido I am, unless I be deceiv'd,  
 And must I rave thus for a runagate?  
 Must I make ships for him to sail away?  
 Nothing can bear me to him but a ship,  
 And he hath all my fleet. What shall I do,  
 But die in fury of this oversight?  
 I, I must be the murderer of myself.  
 (264-70)

Before she dies she prays to the gods that Carthage may be revenged upon the race which Aeneas will found. Dido thus finishes her life with the ultimate act of control which is also, of course, the ultimate act of surrender.

It is, in fact, the intensity of this conflict which

she experiences between the need to control and the desire to relinquish control, between self-assertion and self-surrender, which makes Dido, far more than Aeneas, the prototype of the later Marlovian heroes such as Faustus and Edward. While Aeneas is faced with the choice between heroic duty and romantic love, in both cases his actions are so largely determined by external agents (the gods, Dido) that an internal conflict between assertion and surrender is not fully realized. Most of the dramatic tension of the play arises from Dido's conflicts: her attempts to assert herself as queen and ruler of Carthage and her desire to surrender to her passion for a man who, ironically, turns out to need commanding more than he commands. This conflict develops gradually. When first stung by Cupid's dart she is afraid of giving herself away:

Love, love give Dido leave  
To be more modest than her thoughts admit,  
Lest I be made a wonder to the world.  
(III.i.93-95)

When Aeneas has examined the pictures of Dido's rejected suitors and exclaims, "O happy shall he be whom Dido loves!" (III.i.167), Dido vacillates between pride and coy submissiveness:

Then never say that thou art miserable,  
Because it may be thou shalt be my love.  
Yet boast not of it, for I love thee not--  
And yet I hate thee not. [Aside] O, if I speak,  
I shall betray myself!  
(168-72)

She later proves that as a queen she can be quite forceful,



any great degree her duties as a sovereign, for she is far more concerned with her personal needs than with her responsibilities as a queen. She tells Aeneas, "So thou wouldst prove as true as Paris did,/ Would, as fair Troy was, Carthage might be sack'd,/ And I be call'd a second Helena!"(V.i.146-48). She says to Anna, after Aeneas' second departure, "Now bring him back and thou shalt be a queen,/ And I will live a private life with him"(V.i.197-98). Her attitude here, as Leech points out,<sup>15</sup> looks forward to Edward II's:

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.70-73)

However, Dido, like Edward, could never really give up the power and privilege which go hand in hand with great responsibility. She insists on having her own way, and in her egotism she cannot even entertain the existence of any will greater than her own, or one which would contradict hers:

Aen. O Queen of Carthage, wert thou ugly-black  
Aeneas could not choose but hold thee dear;  
Yet must he not gainsay the Gods' behest.

Dido. The Gods? What Gods be those that seek my  
death?

(V.i.125-28)

She cannot conceive of any universal order that would require her to sacrifice her own demands for a greater good.

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<sup>15</sup>Christopher Marlowe: Poet for the Stage, ed. Anne Lancashire (New York: AMS Press, 1986) 39.

The basic illusion under which Dido operates, then, is the paradoxical dream of control without sacrifice, or power without responsibility. This fantasy of absolute control finds expression in the play's opening scene, where Jupiter promises Ganymede he will allow him to "Control proud fate, and cut the thread of time"(I.i.29); ironically, such power would be granted by Jupiter and exercised by the boy in a state of perpetual sensual indulgence. As Smith points out, Marlowe is

describing, with a zestful amusement which assumes a drastic irony in the context of the whole play, one kind of love. Jupiter's major fault in Dido is not that he should love a boy, but that his amours should promote in him lethargy, apathy, irresponsibility and inattention to duty.... Love draws him, as it does the mortals he would control, away from the practical problems and duties of the real world to a life in an illusory world of his own construction.<sup>16</sup>

We question the validity of Jupiter's promises in the light of Ganymede's retort, "I am much better for your worthless love"(3) and the boy's claim that Juno gave him a rap on the head that "made the blood run down about mine ears"(8). The sudden, realistic evocation of human suffering and injury in these lines clashes strongly with Jupiter's images of God-like control, such as his driving back the horses of the night (26) to prolong their love-making. And Jupiter is finally called back from romantic indulgence to a sense of duty by, ironically, the Goddess of Love, who chides him in

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<sup>16</sup>"Love Kindling Fire", 50-51.

very un-Virgilian tones: "Ay, this is it! You can sit toying there/ And playing with that female wanton boy"(50-51). Yet Jupiter's reply (82-108) concerning the fulfilment of Aeneas' destiny and the founding of Rome is delivered with all the dignity and grandeur we could expect from the ruler of the gods; the speech is a convincing refutation of Venus' provoking remark that Aeneas might as well die "Since that religion hath no recompense"(81). Despite Venus' incredulity after this speech--"How may I credit these thy flattering terms"--Marlowe, unlike Virgil, actually increases Jupiter's concern and involvement by having the god directly order Aeolus to stop the storm, whereas in the Aeneid Neptune performs this function even before the Venus-Jupiter confrontation.

Such words and action on Jupiter's part should make us hesitate to agree with those critics who suggest Marlowe's main purpose is to depreciate the gods. Don Cameron Allen, for example, believes that Dido clearly reveals Marlowe's "characteristic attitude towards those who think that there is a divinity that shapes our ends. In his poetic philosophy men are surely better than their gods and have only one mortal weakness: they lend their ears and their hearts to the advice and direction of the silly hulks they have themselves created."<sup>17</sup> The later action of the play

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<sup>17</sup>"Marlowe's Dido and the Tradition," Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig, ed. Richard Hosley (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1962) 68.

does not, however, prove that humankind is better than the gods; if anything, Dido is worse than Jupiter, since while the god eventually resumes his responsibility, she permanently abandons hers. Though there is undoubtedly a disarming mixture of jocular and dignified tones in the opening scene, the artistic intent is to make the audience detached enough to sit in judgement not so much on the gods as on the human attitudes explored in the play. Marlowe took advantage of the anthropomorphic tradition in the myths of the Roman deities to present us in the prologue with an ironic mirror of humankind's dreams of unlimited, God-like powers and desires. If even Jupiter must eventually smarten up and attend to his duties--"Come, Ganymede, we must about this gear"--in order to ensure the fulfilment of destiny, how much less likely is it that a mere mortal like Dido can wilfully realize her own illusions in opposition to reality and fate. It is not so much the gods as humankind's conceptions of the gods (the projection through myth of the fantasy of absolute control) which Marlowe ridicules.

In all fairness to Dido, she is not the only character in the play who retreats from life into a self-deluding fantasy world. The scene between the Nurse and Cupid/Ascanius (IV.v) provides us with another ironic mirror of Dido's dilemma: Cupid's beauty has reawakened sexual desire in the old woman, and like Dido she vacillates

between the realistic and the fantastic in attempting to control her response:

Blush, blush for shame, why shouldst thou think  
of love?

A grave and not a lover fits thy age.  
A grave? Why? I may live a hundred years:  
Fourscore is but a girl's age; love is sweet.  
My veins are wither'd, and my sinews dry;  
Why do I think of love, now I should die?

(29-34)

In the end she comes down on the side of delusion, her last words referring, presumably, to a wholly imaginary lover: "Well, if he come a-wooing, he shall speed:/ O how unwise was I to say him nay!"(36-37).

This scene does not reflect only upon Dido's behaviour; in the subsequent action we find Aeneas himself indulging in a purely escapist fantasy. Having earlier been commanded by Hermes "in a dream"(IV.iii.3) to resume his voyage to Italy (a dream which may be construed as another example of positive imagination encouraging heroic action), Aeneas succumbs to Dido's spell and begins to take part in the construction of a new city:

Carthage shall vaunt her petty walls no more,  
For I will grace them with a fairer frame  
And clad her in a crystal livery  
Wherein the day may evermore delight;  
From golden India Ganges will I fetch  
Whose wealthy streams may wait upon her towers  
And triple-wise entrench her round about;  
The sun from Egypt shall rich odours bring  
Wherewith his burning beams, like labouring bees  
That load their thighs with Hybla's honey's spoils,  
Shall here unburden their exhaled sweets  
And plant [furnish] our pleasant suburbs with her  
fumes.

(V.i.4-15)

The intense lyricism, the surreal intensity, of the passage makes clear that Aeneas' mind is not bent on the practical aspects of urban planning or nation-building; he has entered a dream-world. The paradisaical quality in his vision of Carthage finds expression elsewhere in the play: Venus lays the sleeping Ascanius in a grove "with sweet-smelling violets,/ Blushing roses, purple hyacinth"(II.i.318-19), where he spends most of the play in "cooling shades/ Free from the murmur of these running streams"(334-35); and the Nurse promises Cupid/Ascanius a country-house with "an orchard that hath store of plums,/ Brown almonds, services [pear-trees], ripe figs, and dates,/ Dewberries, apples, yellow oranges" and a "garden where are bee-hives full of honey,/ Musk-roses, and a thousand sort of flowers,/ ... in the midst [of which] doth run a silver stream"(IV.v.4-9). The play is thus punctuated with references to idyllic scenes which contrast sharply with the images of war, suffering, and destruction. This pastoral strand woven through the epic tapestry contributes to a sense of longing, a desire for release and escape, in the emotional texture of the play.

Aeneas' apparent "weakness" is therefore perhaps not so surprising or incongruous with respect to the overall tone of the play. Carthage holds much the same attraction for him as the Bower of Bliss for Verdant. He in fact receives the kind of advice from Achates which one might expect Guyon

to give Verdant:

Banish that ticing dame from forth your mouth,  
 And follow your foreseeing stars in all;  
 This is no life for men-at-arms to live,  
 Where dalliance doth consume a soldier's strength,  
 And wanton motions of alluring eyes  
 Effeminate our minds inur'd to war.

(IV.iii.31-36)

Aeneas, however, seems to have great difficulty following this advice--"I fain would go, yet beauty calls me back"(46)--and when Dido convinces him to stay he exclaims in her arms: "This is the harbour that Aeneas seeks,/ Let's see what tempests can annoy me now"(IV.iv.59-60). Therefore what he feared during his first attempt at departure has come true:

Her silver arms will coll [hug, encircle] me  
round about  
 And tears of pearl cry, 'Stay, Aeneas, stay!'  
 Each word she says will then contain a crown,  
 And every speech be ended with a kiss.

(IV.iii.51-54)

Everywhere in Dido we find the idea of being surrounded, protected, enclosed, contained. This idea is expressed in various images of enclosure throughout the play. References to walls, for example, occur frequently. As William Godshalk suggests, "the image is taken from the Aeneid,"<sup>18</sup> where it also recurs frequently. When Virgil's Aeneas first sees Carthage under construction, he remarks, "How fortunate these are/ Whose city walls are rising here and now!"(I.595-96); it is the desire to be through with the

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<sup>18</sup>"Marlowe's Dido, Queen of Carthage," ELH 38 (1971): 16.

heroic struggle, to have achieved the final resting-place now. In Marlowe, Ganymede says he was brought to Jove "wall'd-in with eagle's wings"(I.i.20) to spend a life of ease in the god's "bright arms"(22). Troy, of course, falls because Priam "Enforc'd a wide breach in that rampir'd wall"(II.i.174). Before the lovers' consummation in the cave, Aeneas promises, "Never to leave these new-upreared walls/ Whiles Dido lives and rules in Juno's town" (III.iv.48-49), but Hermes persuades him to go to Italy to build finally, as Jupiter prophesies to Venus, "those fair walls I promis'd him of yore"(I.i.85). Godshalk argues that "'wall' becomes a significant image, conveying its traditional suggestions of safety, integrity, and unity,"<sup>19</sup> yet he misses the ironic implication of some of these images. As we have seen, Ganymede "wall'd-in with eagle's wings" is not as safe as he would like to be. And Aeneas' projected "crystal" walls around Carthage, because of their inherent fragility, suggest a sense of false security or integrity.

The cave is another enclosure in the play with negative implications. Godshalk, adopting an approach of which Kuriyama would approve, suggests "one might see Aeneas' entry into the cave with Dido as a symbol, not so much of

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<sup>19</sup>"Marlowe's Dido, Queen of Carthage," 16.

sexual union, as of reabsorption into the maternal womb"<sup>20</sup> since the queen insists so strongly on imposing a new identity (Sichaeus) on Aeneas. Marjorie Garber, in her essay "Closure and Enclosure in Marlowe,"<sup>21</sup> sees the cave as an emblem of Dido's attempt to encircle and enclose, but the lovers' exchange before they enter suggests "the irony of [Dido's] situation, the binder bound":

Dido. Tell me, dear love, how found you out this  
cave?  
Aen. By chance, sweet Queen, as Mars and Venus met.  
Dido. Why, that was in a net, where we are loose;  
And yet I am not free--O would I were!  
(III.iv.3-6)

As Garber explains, "In her innocence, Dido thinks her lack of freedom comes from the need to tell her love; in fact, the net of passion holds her, and cannot hold Aeneas"(7).

The "binder," however, continues her attempts to enclose, and her fantasies of absolute control often involve images of enclosure:

O that I had a charm to keep the winds  
Within the closure of a golden ball,  
Or that the Tyrrhene sea were in mine arms,  
That he might suffer shipwrack on my breast  
As oft as he attempts to hoist up sail!  
(IV.iv.99-103)

In her desperation she even goes so far as to imagine Aeneas both sailing for Italy and simultaneously remaining a prisoner in her room in the palace:

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<sup>20</sup>"Marlowe's Dido, Queen of Carthage," 8.

<sup>21</sup>Two Renaissance Mythmakers, ed. Alvin Kernan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

I'll hang ye [the sails] in the chamber where  
I lie.

Drive, if you can, my house to Italy:  
I'll set the casement open that the winds  
May enter in and once again conspire  
Against the life of me, poor Carthage Queen;  
But, though he go, he stays in Carthage still,  
And let rich Carthage fleet upon the seas,  
So I may have Aeneas in my arms.

(IV.iv.128-35)

The irony of her fantasy underlines the hopelessness and the potential destructiveness of her unlimited wilfulness. The binder is, in the end, bound indeed, for Dido at last chooses what Garber terms "the ultimate enclosure of the funeral pyre."<sup>22</sup> Dido is thus finally contained in an emblem which literalizes her fiery passion, a state she has described earlier in response to Aeneas' question about whom she loves:

The man that I do eye where'er I am,  
Whose amorous face, like Paeon, sparkles fire,  
When as he butts his beams on Flora's bed.  
Prometheus hath put on Cupid's shape,  
And I must perish in his burning arms-  
Aeneas, O Aeneas, quench these flames.

(III.iv.17-22)

Dido's tragedy is that such flames of passion have been raised by a man incapable of quenching them, a man who does not in fact "burn" nearly as much as she imagines. Dido is deluded when she implies that Aeneas will be able to "balance [her] content"(III.iv.35). Whether "content" suggests the "pleasure she might have in the relationship"

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<sup>22</sup>"Closure and Enclosure in Marlowe," 8.

or "what is contained in [her]; what [she] can offer,"<sup>23</sup> Dido certainly finds no balance in Aeneas. His will simply cannot, could not ever, equal hers.

Although I have laboured thus far to exonerate the hero from some of the more serious charges laid against him, it must be admitted that Aeneas' characterization constitutes the most problematic element of the play. Particularly during the scene (IV.iv) after his first attempt at departure, Aeneas' vacillation borders on the ludicrous, and the play comes perilously close, though unintentionally I think, to burlesque. Part of Marlowe's difficulty may be related to what A.J.A. Waldock identifies as Milton's problem in Paradise Lost: the author has expanded his source at various points and raised awkward questions about human motivation and emotional response which the original author avoided. The careful reader of Book IV of the Aeneid will notice how surprisingly reticent Virgil is concerning Aeneas' thoughts and feelings towards Dido during their affair. The consummation, swiftly narrated by the epic voice, takes place in the cave with no speeches--no promises or protestations of love--and Virgil does not prolong the desertion by having Aeneas fail in his first attempt at departure. Thus, while Aeneas' essential ambivalence remains--Dido calls him "two-faced man" (417) and he can only counter, rather weakly, "I sail for Italy not of my own free

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<sup>23</sup>Oliver, 56.

will"(499)--Virgil deliberately restricts that part of his narrative which reflects badly, from the point of view of the romantic reader, on his hero. Marlowe, on the other hand, under the demands of dramatic dialogue and action, expands this part of the narrative, making the situation which Mulryne and Fender call "an absurd one" that much more so.

Yet Marlowe's failure results only partly from his expansion of the source material. The playwright, I suspect, identifies more closely with Dido than with Aeneas,<sup>24</sup> probably because he has an easier time imagining a male love-object than a female one. It is therefore Dido's romantic passion that truly inspires him, even while her love-object seems unimpressive at times. Moreover, Marlowe, with Dido, does not feel particularly attracted to the kind of man who would willingly undergo all sorts of toil to be well-stored with a winter's tale. Morally, the playwright recognizes the need to accept life's necessary

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<sup>24</sup>I would, however, stress that Marlowe also identifies (though not as strongly) with Aeneas, partly for the reasons mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (Aeneas is the "adolescent" still struggling to fashion his own identity).

Marlowe's double identification with both Dido and Aeneas also brings to mind Kocher's conclusion to his discussion of Tamburlaine: "...Tamburlaine is wrestling with God, from whom he cannot escape. He must conquer God, or else succeed in feeling that he stands in a special relation of favor to Him. And so perhaps it was with Marlowe"(103). Aeneas, as the subject of anxious solicitation from the gods, is the one who stands in a special relation to the divine power. Dido, with her disbelief that there can exist a greater will in the world than her own, is the one who wishes to challenge the gods' dominion.

trials and tribulations, but emotionally, artistically, he would rather play at a different kind of game. Thus Jupiter, in his speech of prophecy, refers to "bright Ascanius" as "beauty's better work/ Who with the Sun divides one radiant shape"(I.i.96-97). Ascanius, the god foretells:

Shall build his throne amidst those starry towers  
That earth-born Atlas groaning underprops;  
No bounds but heaven shall bound his empery,  
Whose azur'd gates, enchased with his name,  
Shall make the morning haste her grey uprising  
To feed her eyes with his engraven fame.  
(98-103)

Ascanius' enclosure becomes the whole created universe conceived of as a work of art; it is a setting for the jewel of his glory or fame ("enchased," l. 101, can mean to place a jewel in a setting, as well as to enclose, engrave). Marlowe's preference for Ascanius as "beauty's better work" (a phrase not in Virgil) may indicate the playwright's own homoerotic tendencies, which will become more apparent in his later works. More importantly, the image is in a sense Marlowe's personal indulgence in the kind of fantasy the play exposes, for there is no recognition of the struggle or suffering Ascanius will undergo before becoming this great and mighty emperor. (As far as Dido goes, we know that Ascanius spends the major part of the action in an unconscious stupor in Venus' grove.) The image of Ascanius' final triumph, then, is very much another dream of obtaining power without paying the price. While Marlowe

recognizes this dream as a fantasy or impossibility, it nevertheless maintains a strong hold over his imagination and the imagination of his later characters.

There is another reason why Marlowe's characterization of Aeneas is not successful. In the Aeneid narrative the hero eventually resumes the heroic struggle, goes off in the voyage of self-assertion, paradoxically in compliance with the commands of the gods, but Marlowe's mind is far more engaged by characters who assert themselves in defiance of destiny or traditional modes of conduct, for then the heroic project is entirely their own. The playwright's next hero, almost it seems in compensation for Aeneas, is much more consistent (and unorthodox) in his campaign of self-assertion, and much more brutally successful in his resistance to beauty's powerful glance.

### Chapter 3: Tamburlaine the Great

The two parts of Tamburlaine constitute an extremely controversial play, what Catherine Belsey calls "a notoriously plural text."<sup>1</sup> Mulryne and Fender remark that "Critical dispute about the play, too familiar to summarize, centres round whether we 'blame' or 'sympathize with' the hero."<sup>2</sup> This statement does not quite cover the entire controversy, for there is also the question of whether Marlowe intended such a divided response and, if so, to what purpose. Mulryne and Fender in fact offer an answer to this question, since they argue that Marlowe deliberately "develops and sustains an ambivalent attitude to Tamburlaine" in order to "produce in the audience a state of mind that is at once contradictory and yet profoundly true of thinking and feeling about the play's central topic, the fulfilment of will"(53-54). Other critics, though their numbers seem to have decreased in recent years, do not believe that Marlowe in Tamburlaine is in control of the ambiguities of his text. C.L. Barber claims that the play

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<sup>1</sup>The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama (London: Methuen, 1985) 29.

<sup>2</sup>"Marlowe and the 'Comic Distance'," Christopher Marlowe: Mermaid Critical Commentaries, ed. Brian Morris (London: Ernest Benn, 1968) 54.

"is deeply naive, a drama written partly in defiance and partly in ignorance of the limits of art. One way to describe Tamburlaine is to say that it is based on an unacknowledged pact, the author's identification with his protagonist, for the enjoyment of unacknowledged magic."<sup>3</sup> More recently Constance Kuriyama has argued that it is "fatal to approach this play with the conviction that the author is a totally conscious creator";<sup>4</sup> for her, Tamburlaine renders experience in terms "that all seem ultimately related to a basic preoccupation with sexual identity," and she hypothesizes that "the authorial mental state" is "one of intense conflict of a marked homosexual character" (19).

A good case for Marlowe as a highly conscious craftsman in Tamburlaine can be made by first examining closely the prologue to Part One:

From jiggling veins of rhyming mother-wits  
 And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,  
 We'll lead you to the stately tent of War,  
 Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine  
 Threat'ning the world with high astounding terms  
 And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.  
 View but his picture in this tragic glass  
 And then applaud his fortunes as you please.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>"The Death of Zenocrate: 'Conceiving and Subduing Both'," Literature and Psychology 16 (1966): 16.

<sup>4</sup>Hammer or Anvil: Psychological Patterns in Christopher Marlowe's Plays (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1980) 8.

<sup>5</sup>All quotations of the play are from Tamburlaine the Great, ed. J.S. Cunningham, Revels Plays (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1981).

As Robert Kimbrough points out, this last line

should not be taken as a typical Elizabethan plea for applause. Because it comes at the beginning of the play and because of the way in which the play develops, it is meant to suggest that within pageantry and through amazing rhetoric, the play will present a study of a grand figure in action, judgment of whom is left to the viewers.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that judgment is left, almost as a challenge, to the audience suggests that Marlowe was well aware that there is more than one way to view Tamburlaine, and that those viewers not wholly dominated by one particular response would react ambivalently to the hero. The question is, to what moral or artistic end has Marlowe sought to create such a response? Furthermore, do Marlowe's intentions concerning our response to the hero represent the entire "meaning" of the play, or are we still inclined, with Kuriyama, to look for "unconscious meaning"?

Recently the new historicist critics have offered one strategy for coping with the question of divided response. Belsey believes that the play does not answer questions such as whether we are to regard Tamburlaine as "a popular hero or an imperial tyrant" but "poses them with a certain sharpness to an Elizabethan society preparing to embark on a series of colonialist adventures."<sup>7</sup> This view may well have been influenced by Stephen Greenblatt, who begins his

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<sup>6</sup>"1 Tamburlaine: A Speaking Picture in a Tragic Glass," Renaissance Drama 7 (1964): 22.

<sup>7</sup>The Subject of Tragedy, 29.

chapter "Marlowe and the Will to Absolute Play" with an account of the gratuitous destruction of an African village by English explorers. Greenblatt concludes:

If we want to understand the historical matrix of Marlowe's achievement, the analogue to Tamburlaine's restlessness, aesthetic sensitivity, appetite, and violence, we might look not at the playwright's literary sources... but at the acquisitive energies of English merchants, entrepreneurs, and adventurers.<sup>8</sup>

A.D. Wraight calls attention to an even more convincing historical analogue to Tamburlaine's exploits by pointing out the parallel between Tamburlaine's siege of Damascus and Raleigh's actions at the siege of Fort Del Ore in Ireland. Quoting from Eleanor Grace Clark,<sup>9</sup> Wraight summarizes the incident thus:

Hooker, in his continuation of Holinshed, describes the slaughter of 400 Spaniards and Italians who were assisting the Irish rebels, and who held out although repeatedly called to surrender until they

'began to fear, somewhat prophetically, that what they had built for a garrison would prove their monument, and they should be buried alive in the ruins of it. Therefore, finding no succours arrive, they beat a parley, and hung out the white flag, crying out, Misericordia, misericordia. But the deputy would not listen to any treaty with the confederates of traitors and rebels.'

Raleigh, with Macworth, was placed by Lord Grey, then Lord Deputy of Ireland, in charge of the brutal massacre that followed, in which not even the women

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<sup>8</sup>Renaissance Self-Fashioning (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 194.

<sup>9</sup>Raleigh and Marlowe (New York: Fordham UP, 1941) 229-30.

were spared.<sup>10</sup>

While these historical analogues are extremely interesting and may very well have influenced, even inspired, Marlowe in his creation of Tamburlaine, we must seriously question whether the playwright's primary moral purpose was, as Belsey suggests, to promote contemplation among the more thoughtful Elizabethans about the social and ethical implications of colonialism. If Marlowe's challenge to the audience were of that nature, surely the text would offer more evidence of an authorial concern with political and social policy with respect to colonial expansion. The hero may conquer, murder, and pillage, but there is nothing in the play to suggest that such action constitutes a critique of Elizabethan or European colonial policy. Tamburlaine is not directly concerned with the challenges of colonization; nor do the hero's conquests seem even remotely related to this topic, since the outsider Tamburlaine represents no particular national or collective viewpoint. He does not "stand for" anything except his own aspirations.

Tamburlaine, in fact, does not seem to be about social or political reality at all. The responsibility of rule, the relationship between king and commons, foreign policy-- these are questions hardly even raised by the play, let alone seriously explored. As Richard A. Martin argues, the

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<sup>10</sup>In Search of Christopher Marlowe (London: Macdonald & Co., 1965) 135.

world of Tamburlaine lies closer to romance than realistic fiction. In romance "the imagination masters reality, and earthly glory becomes the medium of a limitless fulfillment of desire."<sup>11</sup> In Tamburlaine the "language transforms the material world into art... and generates in the spectator a willing enthusiasm for the quest for an earthly crown"(251). Though this "notoriously plural text" may be interpreted in a variety of (often very interesting) ways, I believe that the true "inspiration" of the work lies in the Hermetic and neo-Platonic thought discussed in my Introduction.

Tamburlaine seems Marlowe's test-case for the idea of man as a sublime poet who "does not limit himself to writing words of ink on perishable paper" but "writes real things in the grand and living book of the universe." The most fascinating effect of the Tamburlaine plays is that they set our minds to work on the question of what exactly constitutes "real things" in the play--and, ultimately, in real life as well.

One of the critical commonplaces about Tamburlaine--that the play draws a parallel between rhetorical skill and personal power, between the word and the sword--has been reexamined in recent years by critics such as Martin, Judith

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<sup>11</sup>"Marlowe's Tamburlaine and the Language of Romance," PMLA 93 (1978): 248.

Weil,<sup>12</sup> and Johannes Birringer.<sup>13</sup> These critics all see the play as an exploration of the power of the imagination, although they offer different theories concerning the extent to which the play exposes, or intends to expose, the failure or even the foolishness of human imagining. Since it is Tamburlaine's imagination which dominates in the play, we are in a sense thrown back to the question of whether we sympathize with or blame the hero. With respect to this question, it is my belief (and here I am in general agreement with Weil) that the play introduces a steady stream of ironies (some of which may register with the audience retroactively) which gradually override our sympathies with and encourage our detachment from the hero.<sup>14</sup> Whereas Martin argues that the power of imagination to "master" reality is not called into question until Part Two, it is actually questioned (though fairly subtly at first) early in Part One, and both parts of Tamburlaine together must be regarded as a tragedy of "the consequences

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<sup>12</sup>Christopher Marlowe: Merlin's Prophet (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977).

<sup>13</sup>Marlowe's Dr Faustus and Tamburlaine: Theological and Theatrical Perspectives (Frankfurt: Verlag Peter Lang, 1984).

<sup>14</sup>I am aware of the dangers inherent in any discussion of "audience" response, since the critic assumes a consensus of response among a group of individuals (either, in this case, Elizabethan or modern) who could very well differ greatly in their tastes and appreciations. Nevertheless, a critic must argue from the evidence s/he chooses to present what s/he feels would constitute a probable response for a majority of people.

of human imagining."<sup>15</sup>

Returning to the prologue once more, we find in fact that the potential for irony is introduced with the play's opening words. For one thing, the prologue promises that

From jiggling veins of rhyming mother-wits  
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,  
We'll lead you to the stately tent of War....

Yet, as Birringer points out,<sup>16</sup> the play which has "announced itself in the heroic mode" immediately presents us with the clownage it has promised to eschew. The figure of the effete and rhetorically inept Mycetes easily becomes the butt (literally) of Cosroe's jokes:

Mycetes. Well, here I swear by this my royal seat--  
Cosroe. You may do well to kiss it then.  
(1 I.i.97-98)

He even speaks in rhymes which, if not exactly the "jiggling veins" of a poulter's measure derided by the prologue, nevertheless serve to render his rhetoric fatuous:

Return with speed, time passeth swift away,  
Our life is frail, and we may die today.  
(67-68)

But the play's opening lines introduce a greater irony, inherent in the equation of rhetoric and personal might:

...you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine  
Threat'ning the world with high astounding terms  
And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.

Notice that these lines do not introduce a second verb to

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<sup>15</sup>Cunningham's phrase in his introduction (38) to describe Judith Weil's approach in Merlin's Prophet.

<sup>16</sup>Marlowe's Dr Faustus and Tamburlaine, 57.

correspond to the second participial phrase; we shall "hear" Tamburlaine threatening the world with high astounding terms, but we shall not "see" him scourging kingdoms. We shall only hear, or hear about, him doing that as well. In other words, the prologue subtly suggests that Tamburlaine will be all talk and no action, which in fact is very much what happens throughout both parts. It is unfortunate that so few of us have ever seen Tamburlaine (or any of Marlowe's plays except Doctor Faustus) performed, since the power of Marlowe's rhetoric often influences us to view the characters in ways which the physical presentation of the drama on stage might very well alter. Readers of Tamburlaine will no doubt remember the hero as the invincible conqueror, but do we ever see him conquer anyone on stage? Surprisingly, no. In fact, Marlowe is very careful to deny us the kind of combat scenes that Shakespeare provides between Hal and Hotspur, Macduff and Macbeth, or Edmund and Edgar. Tamburlaine's first potential battle, towards which the play has built up a great deal of suspense, is postponed in a manner that, in spite of the hero's subsequent rhetorical triumph, seems inescapably bathetic:

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.  
Usumcasane. Come, let us meet them at the mountain  
top,



Zenocrate and Zabina "tirad[ing] like fishwives,"<sup>17</sup> Bajazeth briefly flies across the stage pursued by Tamburlaine. Such action, like the king-drawn chariot in Part Two, would inevitably border on the comic or ludicrous; it is unlikely that a director could manage the scene in such a way as to avoid inducing laughter from the audience.

There is also, in Part One, a structure of parallel scenes which begins to make the whole idea of "rhetorical prowess" ridiculous. Bajazeth, like Tamburlaine, speaks in a mighty line (see 1 III.i.1-40) but his rhetorical excesses are rapidly exposed by the sycophantic affirmations he receives from his followers:

Argier. They say he is a king of Persia--  
 But if he dare attempt to stir your siege  
 'Twere requisite he should be ten times more,  
 For all flesh quakes at your magnificence.  
Bajazeth. True, Argier, and tremble at my looks.  
Morocco. The spring is hindered by your smothering  
 host,  
 For neither rain can fall upon the earth  
 Nor sun reflex his virtuous beams thereon,  
 The ground is mantled with such multitudes.  
Bajazeth. All this is true as holy Mahomet,  
 And all the trees are blasted with our  
 breaths.  
 (1 III.i.45-55)

The heroic defiance of the Soldan is even more seriously undercut in his exchange with the messenger at the beginning of IV.i; after he attempts to rouse the Egyptians and the messenger speaks fearfully of the "frowning looks of Tamburlaine"(13), the Soldan replies:

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<sup>17</sup>Harry Levin, Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher (1952; rpt. London: Faber & Faber, 1961) 65.

Villain, I tell thee, were that Tamburlaine  
 As monstrous as Gorgon, prince of hell,  
 The Soldan would not start a foot from him.  
 But speak, what power hath he?

The strong suggestion of doubt in the final query immediately, and rather comically, deflates the Soldan's courageous stance. On one level these examples certainly reflect well on Tamburlaine by demonstrating his verbal superiority. However, at the same time they have the unsettling effect of demonstrating that vaunts and boasts are, after all, only just that, so much hot air, and gradually encourage us to question our admiration for Tamburlaine's rhetorical power.

What then is our final response to Tamburlaine's military prowess? We cannot say it becomes laughable, because thousands of people die, if not at Tamburlaine's hands, then at the hands of his soldiers. Yet such horror is strangely tempered by a sense of unreality in the play. When Tamburlaine cuts his arm as an example to his sons, he exclaims:

View me, thy father, that hath conquered kings  
 And with his host marched round about the earth  
 Quite void of scars and clear from any wound,  
 That by the wars lost not a dram of blood,  
 And see him lance his flesh to teach you all.  
 (2 III.ii.110-14)

Amazing, we think to ourselves, Tamburlaine has come through all his battles without a scratch. How is this possible, we wonder? And if it were possible, what could this man possibly know about the "fear of wounds," of the sufferings

of war? What could he possibly know about the processes of experience which go on in the real world? What could he possibly teach his sons, who are (unlike their father) human? They do, in fact, seem to occupy a world more real than their father's, which in Part Two gradually begins to displace the Tamburlaine world. To borrow from Frye's theory of modes, the play seems at times a curious mixture of romance and low mimetic. (The incongruity is particularly evident in Part Two when Olympia achieves her heart's desire--the release of her "troubled soul" from the "prison" of her body [IV.ii.33 ff.] by making Theridamas believe in something as patently unreal as a magical ointment.) But is Tamburlaine's world truly romantic? That is, is it imagination mastering reality, or only imagination masquerading as reality, acting as a substitute for it? It is (and I think we become more aware of this fact as the play progresses), a denial of reality in which Tamburlaine perversely attempts to become the all-controlling Word Itself, Christ incarnate:

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.

(2 III.ii.126-28)

In one sense, this parody of the resurrected Christ and the atonement ironically serves to emphasize, through the hero's distorted vision, the unreality of suffering: Tamburlaine's sons must not fear wounds nor, by extension, must they scruple to inflict them on others. But this scene may also

be viewed as the one small sacrifice that Tamburlaine ever makes, the one time he suffers for others. (Should the director have the actor wince when he cuts his arm? After all, Tamburlaine, as he himself states, has never felt a wound.) Curiously, this one moment of passivity is expressed not only in religious terms but also, secondarily (perhaps subconsciously on Marlowe's part) in sexual terms, for the fingers in the wound involve a Freudian image which suggestively places Tamburlaine in the female sexual role, endowing him with the effeminacy which above all things he seems to fear.

It is at this point that I would like to consider the problem of unconscious meaning in Tamburlaine. To what extent does the text offer evidence of unresolved religious and sexual conflicts in the psyche of its author? Was Marlowe fully aware of these conflicts, perhaps only dimly aware, or completely oblivious to them on a conscious level? Was he intentionally exploring them, working through them in his art, or were the conflicts controlling him as he wrote? An essential introduction for readers interested in these questions may be found in Norman Rabkin's short essay "Marlowe's Mind and the Heart of Darkness," where the author compares Judith Weil's emphasis in Merlin's Prophet on "Marlowe's intentionality, his control of himself as well as his audience" with Kuriyama's insistence that Marlowe is

"the creature of his own psychology."<sup>18</sup> Many readers may feel more sympathy with Weil's approach (although it sometimes seems over-ingenious) since it acknowledges more readily what Rabkin calls Marlowe's "intellectual brilliance"(18). Weil's study also has the advantage that a great deal of evidence for careful and conscious artistic control can be garnered from the texts as they have come down to us (even in their mangled state), whereas Kuriyama must rely on the presence of Freudian sexual motifs (often convincing but sometimes questionable) and a biographical sketch which speculates wildly, from extremely limited historical data, on the character of Marlowe's parents, particularly his mother.<sup>19</sup> (It sometimes strikes me that Kuriyama is far more obsessed with the emasculating mother figure than she ever proves Marlowe was.) Moreover, when one reads Kuriyama's concluding remarks--"the psychological

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<sup>18</sup>"A Poet and a filthy Play-maker": New Essays on Christopher Marlowe, ed. Kenneth Friedenreich, Roma Gill and Constance B. Kuriyama (New York: AMS Press, 1988) 14-15.

<sup>19</sup>It is interesting to observe that Kuriyama and William Urry come up with diametrically opposed portraits of Marlowe's mother Katherine. Kuriyama argues that the wills of Katherine's niece Dorothy and of her husband John--"in their brevity and in their dominant theme of complete surrender to Katherine"--suggest "the coercive power of her personality." She thus "dominated the Marlowe household" (Hammer or Anvil, 219). Urry, on the other hand, observing that Katherine may not have had her final wish "of being buried by her husband in the churchyard of St. George's," refers sentimentally to "John Marlowe's patient and long-suffering wife and widow, of whom so little is heard in the records which contain so much about her family" [Christopher Marlowe and Canterbury, ed. Andrew Butcher (London: Faber & Faber, 1988) 41].

and intellectual cul-de-sac that Marlowe flailed about in was probably inescapable, and his human insight might never have broadened or deepened significantly"<sup>20</sup>--one suspects that, at the time of Hammer or Anvil, she had neither read Marlowe very sympathetically nor yet appreciated the extent of his achievement. However, by dealing with homosexuality and the concern with sexual identity, Kuriyama began to cover very necessary ground in our understanding of the playwright's work.

For those readers who have simply and calmly intuited from a reading of Marlowe the fact of the author's homosexuality, it is surprising to examine how contentious the issue has been among critics. Homophobia has left certain critics highly indignant at the suggestion that Marlowe would ever portray homosexuality without clear moral condemnation. A case in point is William Godshalk's discussion of Dido Queen of Carthage:

The action begins rather shockingly with the discovery of "Jupiter dandling Ganimed vpon his knee".... The viewer can hardly sympathize with what he sees and hears. As Don Cameron Allen remarks, the "affair of Jupiter with Ganymede is an example of amor illegitimus et praeternaturalis" ... and we must stress the meaning of "unnatural" in praeternaturalis. Marlowe's initial presentation invites, or even demands, this emphasis, and it is from this tainted framework that we are introduced to the love story of Dido and Aeneas.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Hammer or Anvil, 232.

<sup>21</sup>"Marlowe's Dido, Queen of Carthage," ELH 38 (1971): 2-3.

A little later in his argument Godshalk remarks, "Homosexual love is, by common judgment, completely without worth"(3). Steane, in his introduction to the Penguin Complete Plays, attacks A.L. Rowse's assertion that "Marlowe was a well-known homosexual": "...for that there is no evidence at all.... Baines says that Marlowe said that 'all they that love not tobacco and boys were fools' and homosexuality plays a part in three of his works, in two of them very incidentally: these things are hardly evidence."<sup>22</sup> Perhaps there is no concrete historical evidence; the suggestion from the works, however, is very strong. The whole induction to Dido Queen of Carthage, as Levin points out, is "elaborated con amore out of a half a line from the Aeneid."<sup>23</sup> As Claude J. Summers argues, Marlowe's presentation in Edward II "of homosexual love in casual, occasionally elevated, frequently moving, and always human terms is unique in sixteenth-century English drama."<sup>24</sup> The Neptune episode in Hero and Leander is intensely, hauntingly erotic. But perhaps the best literary "evidence" of all is the contrasting descriptions of Hero and Leander at the beginning of the poem, the former so detached and artificial, the latter so warm and physically appreciative.

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<sup>22</sup>(Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969) 15.

<sup>23</sup>Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher, 34.

<sup>24</sup>"Sex, Politics, and Self-Realization in Edward II," "A Poet and a filthy Play-maker": New Essays on Christopher Marlowe, 222.

Yet I do not wish to argue that such examples prove necessarily that Marlowe accepted or celebrated his own sexual nature. According to Baines, Marlowe said not only "That all they that love not tobacco & Boyes were fooles," but also "That St John the Evangelist was bedfellow to Christ and leaned alwaies in his bosome, that he vsed him as the sinners of Sodoma."<sup>25</sup> Though it could be argued that Marlowe in the latter case was simply relying on the shock value which any reference to homosexuality would carry in his society, elsewhere the Baines note indicates such contempt for Christ on Marlowe's part that it seems unlikely the playwright would attribute to this figure a characteristic he had come to regard as a positive aspect of his own personality. It is indeed a curious contradiction. Perhaps Marlowe, even after several years of adult life, could only partially accept his sexual tendencies, never quite overcoming concomitant feelings of guilt, anger and fear. Considering his historical context,<sup>26</sup> such feelings

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<sup>25</sup>Quoted in J.B. Steane, Marlowe: A Critical Study (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1964) 364.

<sup>26</sup>Alan Bray, in Homosexuality in Renaissance England (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982) 61, remarks:

"Attitudes to homosexuality had hardly changed since the thirteenth century; it was in the Renaissance, as it was then, a horror, a thing to be unreservedly execrated.

It is difficult to appreciate the weight of that condemnation if one has not read through--as the researcher must--the constant repetition of expressions of revulsion and horror, of apologies for the very mention of the subject that it was felt necessary to express whenever was mentioned the 'detest-

would not be at all surprising.

The evidence in Tamburlaine indicates that the twenty-three year old author had not yet consciously recognized his homosexuality. I should make it clear here that I am not attempting an in-depth psychoanalytic reading of Marlowe. Those interested in such a reading from a classically Freudian point of view, with an emphasis on unresolved Oedipal conflicts, may consult Kuriyama's Hammer or Anvil, though they should keep in mind Summers' warning that the book's "naive and inaccurate concept of homosexuality (based on a discredited 1962 study of psychiatric patients) is fundamentally homophobic."<sup>27</sup> A more recent psychological reading, Peter S. Donaldson's "Conflict and Coherence: Narcissism and Tragic Structure in Marlowe,"<sup>28</sup> does more justice, I believe, to the central meaning of Tamburlaine. Donaldson relies on the psychoanalytic work of Heinz Kohut, an aspect of which involves the "shift from a model of the mind based on conflict to one in which the coherence of the self is regarded as prior to any conflicts in which the self engages" (36). Kohut's exploration of the pre-Oedipal stages of human development suggests that "castration anxiety,

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able and abominable sin, amongst Christians not to be named'."

<sup>27</sup>"Sex, Politics, and Self-Realization in Edward II," 237.

<sup>28</sup>Narcissism and the Text: Studies in Literature and the Psychology of Self, ed. Lynne Layton and Barbara Ann Schapiro (New York: New York UP, 1986).

penis envy or other aspects of the Oedipal complex may be merely a mask for deeper fears concerning the cohesion or reality of the self"(37). Applying this theory to Renaissance tragedy, Donaldson argues:

Interpersonal, even Oedipal conflict provides a frame for the inner drama in plays like Hamlet, King Lear, Edward II, and Dr. Faustus, but the point here is that such conflict is merely a frame, a structure which, like the outwardly Oedipal symptoms of Kohut's narcissistic patients, first masks and then reveals far deeper and more primitive terrors. (37)

In his discussion of Tamburlaine, which takes up the greater part of the essay, Donaldson suggests that while Tamburlaine's military conflicts "have the character of Oedipal victories," the hero's progress eventually leads to a revelation of "the precariousness of his self-cohesion and his radical dependence on the mirroring of others"(39); that is, he requires the presence of others as "selfobjects" which provide him with his sense of identity. Therefore "the effect of the play's interest in Tamburlaine's impressive appearance and its quasi-magical potency is to point, finally, to his underlying need for assurance of his own worth and coherence, a need that leads him either to avoid conflict or to be unable to be nourished by it in a way that would assuage his hunger for endless repetition of approving, mirroring reactions from other characters"(40). While I regard Donaldson's essay as one of the most illuminating of the psychological studies of Marlowe, I believe certain modifications in his argument are necessary.

At one point he remarks:

There is little sense of achievement in the military sphere, because Tamburlaine's opponents are knocked down too easily, almost automatically, and there is little sense of intimacy in the gaining of a wife, for, like Tamburlaine's male companions, Zenocrate is to Tamburlaine little more than an extension of himself, or "portion of his glory." (38)

There is no question that Tamburlaine reduces those around him to "selfobjects," extensions of himself, including (and perhaps especially) his wife, but surely the status of Tamburlaine's friends, particularly Theridamas, is different. Tamburlaine's relationship with these men is, contrary to Donaldson's suggestion, curiously intimate.

The difference between Tamburlaine's rapport with his followers and with his wife is evident in the scene in which the hero and Zenocrate first appear (Part One, I.ii). Although Tamburlaine's heroic identity seems already dependent on the "mirroring chorus" (Donaldson 39) of the adoring Techelles and Usumcasane, the protagonist treats them clearly as equals and not subordinates:

Tamburlaine. Nobly resolved, sweet friends  
and followers.

These lords, perhaps do scorn our estimates,  
And think we prattle with distempered spirits;  
But since they measure our deserts so mean  
That in conceit bear empires on our spears,  
Affecting thoughts coequal with the clouds,  
They shall be kept our forcèd followers  
Till with their eyes they view us emperors.

(60-67)

Tamburlaine sees his friends as partners in his imaginative project ("That in conceit bear empires on our spears") and

is willing to share centre-stage with them ("Till with their eyes they view us emperors"). In contrast, Zenocrate is simply an ornament to him; she must "grace his bed"(37) (but notice that he disrobes for her only to reveal "complete armour" and cutlass--not very inviting sexually). And while she is extremely valuable to him--"Thy person is more worth to Tamburlaine/ Than the possession of the Persian crown" (90-91)--she is still very much a "possession," booty that he has seized.

The greatest contrast in this scene, however, is between the wooing of Zenocrate and the much more intense and personal wooing of Theridamas. As C.L. Barber points out, Tamburlaine addresses Zenocrate with love poetry that is "literally frigid":<sup>29</sup>

With milk-white harts upon an ivory sled  
Thou shalt be drawn amidst the frozen pools  
And scale the icy mountains' lofty tops.  
(98-100)

The sexual threat of Zenocrate is thus put on hold, on ice. When, in his imagination, Tamburlaine conceives of Zenocrate's beauty melting the ice, he delays the dreaded consummation, the surrendering of himself, by the offering of "martial prizes, with five hundred men," who sound like sexual surrogates, or a multi-male bolster to Tamburlaine's threatened masculinity. This love speech is concluded by the adolescent, embarrassed aside between Techelles and

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<sup>29</sup>"The Death of Zenocrate: 'Conceiving and Subduing Both'," 19.

Tamburlaine: "What now? in love?/ Techelles, women must be flattered"(106-07). How different is the "love speech" to Theridamas, in which Tamburlaine has no trouble imagining himself united with his new friend:

Both we will walk upon the lofty cliffs,  
 And Christian merchants that with Russian stems  
 Plough up huge furrows in the Caspian Sea  
 Shall vail to us as lords of all the lake.  
 Both we will reign as consuls of the earth,  
 And mighty kings shall be our senators.  
 Jove sometimes maskèd in a shepherd's weed,  
 And by those steps that he hath scaled the heavens  
 May we become immortal like the gods.  
 Join with me now in this my mean estate  
 (I call it mean, because, being yet obscure,  
 The nations far removed admire me not),  
 And when my name and honour shall be spread  
 As far as Boreas claps his brazen wings  
 Or fair Boötes sends his cheerful light,  
 Then shalt thou be competitor [partner] with me  
 And sit with Tamburlaine in all his majesty.  
 (192-208)

The speech ends with a description that sounds very much like a royal marriage, and the concluding rhyming couplet and Alexandrine give it a sense of rhetorical consummation reminiscent of the more elevated moments of The Faerie Queene. Theridamas replies in terms not far removed from sexual surrender--"Won with thy words and conquered with thy looks,/ I yield myself"--and continues in terms that sound like a marriage vow: "To be partaker of thy good or ill/ As long as life maintains Theridamas"(227-30). Tamburlaine then replies in a speech which reinforces the idea of a "marriage" with Theridamas:

Theridamas my friend, take here my hand,  
 Which is as much as if I swore by heaver.  
 And called the gods to witness of my vow:

Thus shall my heart be still combined with thine  
 Until our bodies turn to elements  
 And both our souls aspire celestial thrones.  
 (231-36)

What is truly remarkable, besides the fervour of the emotion, is the aspiration towards a celestial throne, in direct contradiction to the coveted "earthly crown" at the conclusion of the more famous "Nature that framed us" speech (II.vii.18-29). What do we make of this? Must we say that the above speech is out of character, since it reveals an atypical aspiration of the hero? Tamburlaine certainly speaks elsewhere of becoming "immortal like the gods" but usually he does so in the sense of achieving the condition through heroic self-assertion. His speech to Theridamas is the only time, in Part One at least, that he speaks both of giving himself to another and of the dissolution of his body.

I suggest that Tamburlaine can only conceive of surrendering himself in the context of masculine intimacy, since the neo-Platonic frame for this surrender allows Marlowe to evade the possibility of sexual involvement. At this point I believe it is necessary to accept unconscious motivation on the part of the playwright. Tamburlaine and Theridamas are, in the scene examined above, expressing homosexual longings which Marlowe felt but had not yet fully accepted, and which were therefore expressed in quasi-religious terms which nevertheless do not quite mask the sexual nature of the desires ("sit with me," "take my hand,"

"my heart combined with thine/ Until our bodies turn to elements"[my emphasis]). The most positive sexual feelings expressed (though indirectly) in Tamburlaine are homosexual. The degree of affection Tamburlaine shows for his friends is unlike anything he shows for his wife until she is on her deathbed (when, significantly, she is no longer a sexual threat). We recognize Tamburlaine's speech to Theridamas as one of the rhetorical high points of the play, and I therefore do not want to imply that the neo-Platonic sentiments become merely a neurotic façade for an inability to deal with physical realities. Marlowe's emotional identification with his hero is, I believe, particularly strong here, since the speech is in effect a call for affection and companionship (and thus a much grander precursor of Barabas' pitiful "What, all alone?" outside the walls of Malta). It is possible to link the assertiveness here--"I hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains"--to Marlowe's intimation of how heroic he himself would have to be to express openly his own sexual desires. Significantly, the heroic energy is directed against the limiting power of Fate and Fortune, not destructively and cruelly against other human beings.

It is, in fact, whenever Tamburlaine is forced into a heterosexual role, where heterosexual performance is required or expected, that the unconscious fears and stresses on the author take on rather ugly manifestations in



all attempts to prove his masculinity, it is interesting how often the hero transfers the phallic aggression onto his soldiers, rather than claiming it personally:

Now in the place where fair Semiramis,  
 Courted by kings and peers of Asia,  
 Hath trod the measures, do my soldiers march;  
 And in the streets, where brave Assyrian dames  
 Have rid in pomp like rich Saturnia,  
 With furious words and frowning visages  
 My horsemen brandish their unruly blades.  
 (2 V.i.73-79)

I would hesitate, however, to make sexual maladjustments on the part of the author the central "meaning" of Tamburlaine, or the sole driving force behind Marlowe's creation. In doing so, I believe Kuriyama drastically limits her understanding of the play and underestimates Marlowe's achievement. We can see in more general terms that Tamburlaine's resistance to sexual surrender reveals the fragility of his own self-image, so that the irony of his repeated, and increasingly brutal, acts of self-assertion becomes progressively more evident. Donaldson, for instance, points out how Tamburlaine's sexual reluctance and his physical cruelty are ironically linked at the end of Part One. With the corpses of Bajazeth, Zabina, and the King of Arabia lying on stage, Tamburlaine calls attention to these "sights of power" as

objects fit for Tamburlaine  
 Wherein as in a mirror may be seen  
 His honour, that consists in shedding blood.  
 (V.i.475-78)

The Sultan seems perfectly agreeable (nullifying, Donaldson

suggests, Tamburlaine's Oedipal victory) and replies:

Mighty hath God and Mahomet made thy hand,  
 Renowned Tamburlaine, to whom all kings  
 Of force must yield their crowns and emperies;  
 And I am pleased with this my overthrow  
 If, as beseems a person of thy state,  
 Thou hast with honour used Zenocrate.

(480-85)

The repetition of the word "honour," Donaldson argues, "makes it plain that Tamburlaine's chastity, his sparing of Zenocrate's hymeneal blood, is related to his savagery, not an alternative to it--both are attempts to increase his own honor, conceived in self-reflexive terms"(45). Tamburlaine never really gives himself to Zenocrate; she

is not the prize of a conflict in which fully formed selves have engaged with the risk of injury, nor is it clear that her husband to be has any firm conviction that she possesses a self of her own: she is, like her father and the corpses which are still littering the stage even as he places the crown on her head, just another mirror of a self that must desperately find its reflection everywhere rather than face its own emptiness. (46)

Perhaps the most famous revelation of Tamburlaine's failure to "engage with the risk of injury" is his apostrophe to beauty. It is often suggested that this speech seems out of character for Tamburlaine, that it sounds more like "the poet himself" speaking, but that is in essence who Tamburlaine is: a poet in a self-created world who experiences difficulty confronting the demands of reality. This speech contains several ironies, the most obvious of which springs up through the simple pronoun "my" in "What is beauty, saith my sufferings, then?" Tamburlaine

has just consigned the Virgins to an excruciating death at the point of his horsemen's spears, and proceeded to contemplate, rather placidly, the agony Zenocrate will feel at viewing the slaughter of her countrymen, and then he speaks of his suffering. The beauty of Zenocrate's sorrow, he seems to reason, tempts him to desist in the destruction of Damascus and "lays a siege unto [his] soul." He wonders:

What is beauty, saith my sufferings, then?  
 If all the pens that ever poets held  
 Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts  
 And every sweetness that inspired their hearts,  
 Their minds and muses on admirèd themes;  
 If all the heavenly quintessence they still  
 From their immortal flowers of poesy,  
 Wherein as in a mirror we perceive  
 The highest reaches of a human wit--  
 If these had made one poem's period  
 And all combined in beauty's worthiness,  
 Yet should there hover in their restless heads  
 One thought, one grace, one wonder at the least  
 Which into words no virtue can digest.

(V.i.160-73)

This passage, the finest moment in the work of a writer who produced some extremely fine poetry, presents us with two major ironies. First, it achieves what it states is impossible; it contains what it claims is uncontainable, a description of the ineffable, indescribable power of beauty. Kimberley Benston suggests this in his essay "Beauty's Just Applause: Dramatic Form and the Tamburlaine Sublime": "The remarkable order and control of this verse almost belies its own subject and is, therefore, exactly suited to the expression of an asceticism leading to

inexpressibility."<sup>30</sup> The second irony, which must be considered in light of the overall movement of Tamburlaine's soliloquy, is that the speech does not contain the very thing we would expect: consciousness of the loved one who supposedly inspired these sentiments. It is clear Zenocrate falls out of sight, out of mind, long before Tamburlaine reaches the end of his musings, so what begins as a kind of love poem motivated by concern for her, ends, ironically, with her total exclusion; even, in fact, with an affirmation that he will continue to resist her--or at least resist what she represents to him ("thoughts effeminate and faint"), since by that point she no longer seems to exist. While "the humanizing effect of Beauty presupposes a recognition of what Kant calls a 'ground external to ourselves,' a sense of the Other...", the final passage of Tamburlaine's soliloquy, as Benston argues (rather poetically), is "nothing less than a grand act of sublime revision and restitution. What it revises--by recasting the soliloquy's essential terms of Beauty and virtue--is the relation between Eros and imagination; what it restitutes is the primacy of agonistic eloquence"(222). Tamburlaine claims the power of "conceiving and subduing, both," yet the beauty he "conceives" he does not create but only mirrors, and if he were a true lover he would not "subdue" it but surrender

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<sup>30</sup>Modern Critical Views: Christopher Marlowe, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986) 221.

to it. Through poetry he manages to appropriate beauty and encase it in an exquisite apostrophe, yet he succeeds only by simultaneously annihilating the human (and by inference the divine) source of that beauty. He fails completely to appreciate beauty's true worthiness: that it inspires love. It is true that something that Tamburlaine calls love--"Of fame, of valour, and of victory"(181)--is still present in his thoughts, but he fails to recognize the true love of an "other" which encourages the lover to surrender himself, to "engage with the risk of injury." For him Eros can only be sublimated into heroic action--of a self-serving kind. Thus he does not use imagination to come to terms with romantic love as a process of experience, but effectively to exclude it.

Tamburlaine's exclusion or sublimation of Eros with the power of "agonistic eloquence" finds an interesting contrast in the behaviour of his son Calyphas. Calyphas, unlike his father, is rhetorically weak, and speaks with such halting rhythms and clumsily repetitive verbal constructions that he seems barely capable of blank verse:

The bullets fly at random where they list,  
 And should I go and kill a thousand men  
 I were as soon rewarded with a shot,  
 And sooner far than he that never fights.  
 And should I go and do nor harm nor good  
 I might have harm, which all the good I have,  
 Joined with my father's crown, would never cure.  
 I'll to cards: Perdicas!

(2 IV.i.52-59)

While Calyphas is certainly no poet, he seems in the context

refreshingly human, and though self-indulgent and cowardly he at least expresses a healthy sexual appetite, one major step towards a natural, sane acceptance of Eros:

Calyphas. They say I am a coward, Perdicas, and I fear as little their tarantaras, their swords, or their cannons, as I do a naked lady in a net of gold, and for fear I should be afraid, would put it off and come to bed with me.

Peridicas. Such a fear, my lord, would never make ye retire.

Calyphas. I would my father would let me be put in the front of such a battle once, to try my valour!

(67-73)

It is, surely, just such a battle that Tamburlaine wants to avoid, and one wonders if Tamburlaine murders his son simply because Calyphas' military cowardice forms an unwelcome "mirror" of his father's glory ("Image of sloth and picture of a slave"[91]) or if, as well, Calyphas reminds Tamburlaine on some level of his own heterosexual inadequacy. Tamburlaine orders the "effeminate brat" buried by concubines so that "not a common soldier shall defile/ His manly fingers with so faint a boy"(162-64), a comment carrying homosexual overtones (the phallic "manly fingers") which oddly seem to rebound more on Tamburlaine and his soldiers than on Calyphas. Immediately Tamburlaine commands: "Then bring those Turkish harlots to my tent,/ And I'll dispose them as it likes me best"(165-66). How, we may ask (considering his usual sexual reluctance) will he deal with these concubines, who, in the context of his own rhetoric, amount to necrophile sexual partners of his own

dead son?

Rhetoric, which Tamburlaine has used so successfully to both express his heroic self-assertiveness and to stave off the demands of reality and natural process, in the end acts as a kind of trap, exposing his own inadequacies in ever more disagreeable ways. The suggestion of necrophilia recurs, more obviously and significantly, at the end of the play, where the dying Tamburlaine addresses Zenocrate's embalmed corpse with the words:

Now eyes, enjoy your latest benefit,  
 And when my soul hath virtue of your sight,  
 Pierce through the coffin and the sheet of gold  
 And glut your longings with a heaven of joy.  
(2 V.iii.224-27)

Donaldson comments:

Part I ended with a mirror in which Tamburlaine's honor was reflected, and the content of that image was the lifeless bodies of his victims; here the image is of merger, not mirroring, and we are meant to know that the heaven of joy Tamburlaine proposes to himself amounts to fusion with a corpse. (52)

Not only, then, is Tamburlaine's "honour" ironically mirrored by dead bodies, but his final vision of heaven is yet another dead body. What greater, more painful irony could there be than this failure of imagination? Can the mind of this man in the end reach no further than a coffin? While this "merging" with Zenocrate's corpse is the closest Tamburlaine comes to expressing sexual desire for his wife, the penetration is to be accomplished by the soul's eyes, therefore saving him one last time from imagining real physical intimacy. If we remember that the most significant

image of enclosure in each of Marlowe's plays--Dido's funeral pyre, Barabas' cauldron, Faustus' Hell, Edward's dungeon--occurs at or near the end, then it is difficult to overemphasize the importance of Zenocrate's coffin in terms of the overall meaning of the play. Though Tamburlaine refers to his vision as a heaven of joy, the piercing of the coffin and the glutting of his longings with the contents therein makes this enclosure as much of a personal hell as the four enclosures mentioned above. In spite of Tamburlaine's vision of Paradise as Zenocrate lay dying, his imagination at the last seems tragically unable to transcend the physical world.

Tamburlaine's desire to escape into this enclosure seems intensely ironic for other reasons as well. His rhetoric has always been notable for the frequency of cosmic imagery--"And with our sun-bright armour as we march/ We'll chase the stars from heaven and dim their eyes"(1 II.iii.22-23)--leaving the impression that all the world was not enough room for him to move around in, as he himself claims: "For earth and all this airy region/ Cannot contain the state of Tamburlaine"(2 IV.i.119-20). (In this respect he differs so much from the more pusillanimous Aeneas, who, seeking enclosure, complains, "But hapless I... have not any coverture but heaven"[*Dido*, I.i.227-30].) And Tamburlaine, with his penchant for sacking cities, has always seemed intent on breaking down, annihilating enclosures, rather

than escaping into them. Finally, he has used the practice of enclosing others as a demonstration of his power: capturing Zenocrate, putting Bajazeth in a cage, and harnessing the kings to his chariot.

The last example, perhaps the most notorious piece of stage spectacle in Elizabethan drama, has received much critical attention. Marjorie Garber remarks: "The visually spectacular entrance of the chariot in 4.3 makes metaphor into reality, reducing the subject kings to less than human states, while literalizing Tamburlaine's self-chosen role as the scourge of God."<sup>31</sup> I have suggested earlier the comic or ludicrous element in this spectacle, and Mulryne and Fender agree that Tamburlaine's tendency to literalize metaphor weakens our sympathetic identification with the hero by imposing a "comic distance" which encourages our detachment:

...Tamburlaine's word--in both senses of 'word' [his literal words and his promises]--becomes a kind of cage too, and the price he pays for making good his hyperbole is the kind of ridiculousness that comes of trying to turn metaphor into fact. Equally powerful as our wonder at his ability to make good his threats is our sense of the ridiculousness of hyperbole enacted.<sup>32</sup>

Tamburlaine's desire to be reunited with Zenocrate's corpse may be seen as an extreme example of this tendency to

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<sup>31</sup>"Closure and Enclosure in Marlowe," Two Renaissance Mythmakers, ed. Alvin Kernan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977) 8.

<sup>32</sup>"Marlowe and the 'Comic Distance'," 54.

"literalize"--to reduce all experience to a material state that can be handled and controlled--yet at that point such behaviour no longer appears ridiculous or comic but becomes horrifying. Such, the play suggests, is the ultimate result of the refusal to recognize the ontological gap between language and being. The great irony--and this pattern recurs in the later plays--is that while the hero attempts to escape into an imaginative realm, the material world actually seems to become more intrusive, more powerful. Tamburlaine tries to avoid dealing with the physicality of experience, but the "body" in the end takes its revenge in the form of Zenocrate's corpse and the hero's obsession with it.

The perversity of Tamburlaine's imagination may be contrasted with the more constructive imagination of Aeneas. While Aeneas turns artefacts into real people (Priam's statue), Tamburlaine turns real people into artefacts, either as sideshows (Bajazeth), elements in an emblem (the harnessed kings), or, most extreme of all, a literal piece of art (Zenocrate's embalmed and gold-covered corpse). While Aeneas' imagination encourages his acceptance of the heroic project destiny has chosen for him, Tamburlaine's encourages him to believe that his project is self-chosen and always under his complete control,<sup>33</sup> so that he in

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<sup>33</sup>There is one moment in Tamburlaine, however, where the hero's imaginative response vaguely resembles Aeneas'. In Part One, I.ii, Tamburlaine concludes Theridamas'

effect becomes his own script-writer and stage-manager.

Yet not only his rhetoric but the action of the play ultimately betrays Tamburlaine's fantasy of absolute control. The episode of the king-drawn chariot demonstrates that the stage itself can act as an ironic enclosure, according to the brilliant theatrical analysis carried out by Birringer. I wish to reproduce a long passage from his discussion since the description illuminates very interestingly how the play in performance can make certain ironies apparent that the printed text itself may not communicate so clearly. The section I quote concerns the effect of the final moments of the chariot scene:

At the beginning of his long speech, we find an implicit stage-direction in the text; answering Techelles' proposal to start with the attack on Babylon, Tamburlaine shouts; "We will, Techelles - forward then, ye jades!"(IV.iii.97). The chariot cannot be swung round and moved off since Tamburlaine here begins his long triumphant speech (36 lines) for which he will need at least two or three minutes. The staging, therefore, becomes problematic because the chariot ought to keep moving according to the

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acceptance into his inner circle of friends with the remark:

These are my friends, in whom I more rejoice  
 Than doth the king of Persia in his crown;  
 And by the love of Pylades and Orestes,  
 Whose statues we adore in Scythia,  
 Thyself and them shall never part from me  
 Before I crown you kings in Asia.

(240-45)

Here Tamburlaine allows himself to be influenced and inspired by the work of other artists (the sculptors who created the statues and the poets who have retold the myth) to give of himself, to experience an outpouring of affection towards his friends. He thus for once allows himself to be affected, rather than being the one who always affects and effects. It is another example of Tamburlaine directing his most natural, human feelings towards his close male friends.

text-direction. Most likely, the performance will provide us with a most significant "speaking picture" at this point: the chariot will move in a circle, and it will probably have to stop several times in order to allow Tamburlaine to speak head on to the audience. We can also expect a number of physical gestures - Tamburlaine's handling of the reins and the whip - that will increase the disjunction between the poetry's imaginative appeal and the physically oversubstantiated chariot.

Peter Hall's Olivier production superbly rendered the ambivalent effect of the spectacle, and the visual impact of the chariot's circling movement was enforced by the stage design. The enormous golden circular lighting grid, which was suspended over the whole stage of the Olivier Theatre, poured down light onto another matching circle painted on the floor and, with full intensity, highlit Tamburlaine at one of the crucial moments of his speech: "I'll ride in golden armour like the sun." This dazzling effect was matched, however, by the more ominous, symbolic significance of the stage circle which had turned blood-red at each horrific moment of conquest in the play, suggesting Tamburlaine's violent destruction and re-mapping of the known world.

In spite of Tamburlaine's heroic fantasy of rising to the lofty heavens, the staging suggests that his very physical chariot keeps moving round and round, along the blood-stained ground of "this disdainful earth" (V.iii.122) which is not yet completely conquered, not yet completely consumed and ransacked (cf. IV.i.192-206). The circling movement of Tamburlaine's earth-bound chariot conveys a sense of the maddening futility that is the reverse side of the triumph and glory of his exulting pride. This sense of futility grows stronger in proportion to the increasingly hyperbolic efforts Tamburlaine must make in order to defy the limitations that have become visible and transform them into imagined success.<sup>34</sup>

The "maddening futility" of Tamburlaine's heroic project becomes more evident in Part Two. Weil is certainly correct to suggest that the "tension between [Tamburlaine's]

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<sup>34</sup>Marlowe's Dr Faustus and Tamburlaine, 147-48.

conceits and the intransigent matter of experience grows stronger"<sup>35</sup> after the death of Zenocrate. For one thing, the most obvious failure of rhetorical power occurs immediately after her death, when Tamburlaine rails and Theridamas must gently admonish him:

Ah, good my lord, be patient, she is dead,  
 And all this raging cannot make her live.  
 If words might serve, our voice hath rent the air;  
 If tears, our eyes have watered all the earth;  
 If grief, our murdered hearts have strained forth  
blood.  
 Nothing prevails, for she is dead, my lord.  
(2 II.iv.119-24)

Moreover, at his next appearance, Tamburlaine briefly falls into what for him is a surprisingly realistic mode, lecturing his sons on the "rudiments of war"(III.ii.53-92) before resuming his quasi-divine stance in the doubting-Thomas parody. For a moment we are convinced that here is a man who does actually have to make use of the practical strategies of war; his series of triumphs, for once, do not appear as simply an epic poem he is writing about himself, as is almost literally suggested in Part One: "Those wallèd garrisons will I subdue/ And write myself great lord of Africa"(III.iii.244-45). Still, Part Two only magnifies chinks in Tamburlaine's imaginative armour that have been present from the start. There is, for example, a very interesting moment early in Part One, just after Tamburlaine's wooing of Theridamas. The Persian lord,

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<sup>35</sup>Merlin's Prophet, 137.

having listened in awe to Tamburlaine's dazzling rhetoric, exclaims, "Not Hermes, prolocutor to the gods,/ Could use persuasions more pathetic," to which the hero replies, "Nor are Apollo's oracles more true/ Than thou shalt find my vaunts substantial"(I.ii.209-12). Yet the utterances of Apollo's oracle were notoriously ambiguous, and the allusion invites us, even at this very early stage of the play, to question the substantiality of Tamburlaine's heroic project.

This undermining of Tamburlaine's theatrical presence is admittedly much subtler than ones that occur later, such as his futile raging at Zenocrate's death, and the reader may thus suspect that Marlowe's method in Tamburlaine resembles the technique that Stanley Fish claims for Milton in Paradise Lost: to lure the spectator into a sympathetic identification with the hero, only to gradually expose the foolishness of this identification. But why exactly are we tempted to identify with Tamburlaine? Mulryne and Fender come closest to an explanation of Marlowe's artistic purpose with their claim, quoted at the outset, that the playwright sought to "produce in the audience a state of mind that is at once contradictory and yet profoundly true of thinking and feeling about the play's central topic, the fulfilment of will." However, deliberately creating an ambivalent response does not itself constitute a true "surprised-by-sin" approach, and Mulryne and Fender do not believe that we are ever to resolve our ambivalence in outright

condemnation of the hero:

In Tamburlaine, the appeal is rarely to orthodox moral ideas, and we certainly do not find a comprehensive moral framework behind the action as a whole. Our judgement of Tamburlaine, though it may on occasion appeal to basic humanitarian instincts, normally acts through a sense of proportion, a recognition of extravagance and triviality which is morally neutral. The only lesson that the death of Tamburlaine teaches is the existential one of man's common mortality:

Shall sickness prove me now to be a man,  
That have been term'd the terror of the world?  
It's from just such a basic proposition--the ultimate meaninglessness of endeavour--that the absurdist position springs.<sup>36</sup>

It is in fact Mulryne and Fender's argument that Marlowe's work "provides models of an absurd universe"(50), and they quote a statement from Camus to illustrate the kind of worldview they feel Marlowe was endeavouring to communicate:

There is in the human situation (and this is a commonplace of all literatures) a basic absurdity as well as an implacable nobility. The two coincide, as is natural.<sup>37</sup>

Though Mulryne and Fender argue that this "coincidence in Tamburlaine is maintained throughout," the thrust of my discussion thus far will indicate my strong disagreement with the suggestion that Tamburlaine's "nobility" remains "implacable" throughout both parts. If Tamburlaine is about the fulfilment of will, its vision is not an absurdist recognition of the "ultimate meaninglessness of endeavour"

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<sup>36</sup>"Marlowe and the 'Comic Distance'," 56.

<sup>37</sup>"Hope and the Absurd in the World of Franz Kafka," Kafka: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Ronald Gray (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962) 149.

and not as morally neutral as Mulryne and Fender imply.

Not that I wish to argue that Tamburlaine is a morally straightforward text. The general consensus of more recent critics is that there is something "absurd" in Battenhouse's claim that the play is "one of the most grandly moral spectacles in the whole realm of English drama,"<sup>38</sup> since it so blatantly ignores the more radical elements in the play. As Greenblatt points out, "Tamburlaine repeatedly teases its audience with the form of the cautionary tale, only to violate the convention."<sup>39</sup> With the Baines note in mind, it is tempting to argue that Marlowe was motivated to a large extent simply by the desire to shock his contemporaries. Yet part of what Marlowe challenges in Tamburlaine is the conventional morality of his day which postulated a neat moral universe in which divine power operated to punish tyrants and overreachers and protect the innocent. Kuriyama suggests that the "four major concepts of godhead... in Tamburlaine [gods as rivals, gods as protectors, gods as examples to be emulated, gods as avengers and punishers of the wicked], all of them more or less in conflict," are evidence of "irrationality," unconscious motivation on Marlowe's part.<sup>40</sup> But it is also possible that Marlowe

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<sup>38</sup>Marlowe's Tamburlaine: A Study in Renaissance Moral Philosophy (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1941) 258.

<sup>39</sup>Renaissance Self-Fashioning, 202.

<sup>40</sup>Hammer or Anvil, 9.

consciously satirizes, as he did in Dido, humankind's conception of the roles of God or the gods in earthly experience. The gods are seen in whatever role is needed to justify an individual's action, or placate his terror, or provide hope for his salvation or the destruction of his enemy; as such needs change according to circumstance, so does the image of God entertained by the individual. I for one do not find it particularly disturbing that Tamburlaine can at one point conceive of himself as under Jove's special protection (1 I.ii.177-80) while later he denigrates that same deity by claiming that "Jove, viewing me in arms, looks pale and wan,/ Fearing my power should pull him from his throne"(1 V.i.453-54). Such examples reflect Tamburlaine's remarkable egotism and suggest that he never seriously and deeply subordinates himself psychologically to his concepts of the deity. (He certainly has no fear of the gods, unlike Aeneas or Faustus; this strikes me as being one of the healthier aspects of his psychology.) The play suggests that often in human experience God is an act of imagination; if the divine being seems at times inconsistent or variable, such disparity arises, to paraphrase Weil, from the tension between the divine conceit and the intransigent matter of experience. Yet just as in Dido, where lurking behind the seemingly parodic version of the Olympian gods there is a Destiny or Fate which is never called into question, so behind the human concepts of godhead in

Tamburlaine there lurks a God, an Absolute Will (call it what you will) whose existence the play eventually confirms.

Admittedly, the actuality of this divine presence has become a contentious issue in Marlowe criticism. It will be helpful to begin with Steane's statement that "God is the great unseen actor" of the play, since "on both occasions when supernatural power is challenged [Tamburlaine daring Mahomet out of his heaven and Orcanes invoking Christ's aid against the Christians who have broken faith] the challenge is met."<sup>41</sup> I believe Steane is essentially correct; although even these challenges are not free from complicating ambiguities of their own, the effect of these two episodes in performance would certainly go far in convincing the audience of a divine force in operation behind the human action on stage. While it is objected that Christ's supposed assistance to Orcanes is completely undercut by Gazellus' rather cynical comment after the fact, "'Tis but the fortune of the wars, my lord,/ Whose power is often proved a miracle"(2 II.iii.31-32), nevertheless a "slender" power ("Too little to defend our guiltless lives"[II.ii.60]) has been suddenly surprised and has emerged victorious. The odds were certainly against this outcome, and therefore the audience will find it easier to accept the "miracle" than Gazellus' cynicism. It is, in fact, very difficult for us not to identify with, or approve

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<sup>41</sup>Marlowe: A Critical Study, 114-15.

of, the grateful Orcanes when he replies to Gazellus, "Yet in my thoughts shall Christ be honoured,/ Not doing Mahomet an injury"(II.iii.33-34); his open-mindedness is rare in the play and undeniably attractive.

Tamburlaine's challenge to Mahomet raises perhaps a more difficult problem of interpretation. Ian Gaskell points out that if "the audience sees Tamburlaine's seizure as divine retribution then not only must they now imaginatively accept the power of the god [Mahomet] whose holy writ has been enthusiastically burned...; they must also logically deny the power of the God Tamburlaine asserts in his stead."<sup>42</sup> The first half of the objection is perhaps best answered by recognizing that Marlowe's deity is not the partisan Christian one; as Steane argues, the "universal spirit" that Marlowe imagines "has power and dignity which extend beyond local allegiances, nomenclatures, rites and myths, and his essential attribute is energy."<sup>43</sup> Yet if this is so, why, as suggested by the second half of Gaskell's objection, is Tamburlaine punished for recognizing such a deity?

There is a God full of revenging wrath,  
From whom the thunder and the lightning breaks,  
Whose scourge I am, and him will I obey.  
So Casane, fling them in the fire.  
[They burn the books.]  
Now, Mahomet, if thou have any power,

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<sup>42</sup>"2 Tamburlaine, Marlowe's 'War Against the Gods'," English Studies in Canada 11 (1985): 186.

<sup>43</sup>Marlowe: A Critical Study, 115.

Come down thyself and work a miracle.

Well, soldiers, Mahomet remains in hell;  
 He cannot hear the voice of Tamburlaine.  
 Seek out another godhead to adore,  
 The God that sits in heaven, if any god,  
 For he is God alone, and none but he.

(V.ii.182-201)

After all, Tamburlaine's concept of godhead is not dissimilar, as Steane points out, to the one expressed by Orcanes in his prayer to Christ:

...he that sits on high and never sleeps  
 Nor in one place is circumscribable,  
 But everywhere fills every continent  
 With strange infusion of his sacred vigour.

(II.ii.49-52)

At one point in his argument (114-15) Steane suggests that Tamburlaine is punished because of the doubt expressed in the phrase "if any god"(V.ii.200), but surely the effect of the play in performance would see the retribution as a result of Tamburlaine's challenge rather than his doubt. The main difference between Orcanes and Tamburlaine is, I suggest, that Orcanes recognizes the special manifestation of God in the Son, while Tamburlaine does not.

In my Introduction I argued that Marlowe's interest in Arian doctrine suggests a desire to eradicate the need for an Intercessor. According to Baines, Marlowe believed that "the first beginning of Religioun was to keep men in awe," and I suspect that Marlowe very much wanted to imagine a God who would not impose limitations, a divine spirit immanent throughout creation and not restricted to one incarnation or manifestation. For this reason he would have found Bruno's

philosophy "congenial," as Bakeless suggests. Yet at the same time the playwright could not dispel his own doubts about the limitations of individual aspiration, and may secretly have feared the burden of responsibility which such beliefs imposed upon him. Such doubt or fear manifests itself artistically as the retribution resulting from Tamburlaine's challenge to Mahomet. The primacy of the Son<sup>44</sup> is reaffirmed, as is the subordinate nature of the

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<sup>44</sup>To this it may be objected that in Islam, which lacks the doctrine of the Trinity, Mahomet is not God's Son but only his inspired prophet. It is difficult to ascertain what exactly Marlowe's, and other Elizabethans', conception of Islam would have been. Samuel C. Chew in The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance (1937; New York: Octagon, 1965) discusses the welter of misconceptions about Islam which were propagated during the period. Chew does quote one writer who failed to realize the "unitarian" aspect of the Moslem religion (396).

At any rate, with respect to Tamburlaine specifically, I think a close analogy between Mahomet and Christ can be established. Mahomet's supreme miracle was the revelation of the Koran, the divine word. Thus in a sense for Mahomet, as for Christ, the ontological gap between language and being is bridged through direct contact with the godhead. Tamburlaine fails, in the end, to achieve this kind of "rhetorical" mastery, for his physical being is endangered by his violation of the scripture of a truly inspired prophet. Moreover, as Kocher remarks (88), Tamburlaine's challenge to Mahomet, "Come down thyself and work a miracle," is very likely an allusion to the challenge to Christ on the cross (Matthew 27:40).

Another point raised by Chew is too interesting to pass over without comment. The scholar informs us:

Towards the close of the sixteenth century rumours were afloat about a certain scandalous treatise entitled De Tribus Impostoribus Mundi. The 'three impostors' who had deceived the world were, it was said, Moses, Jesus Christ, and Mahomet. The blasphemous charge against the Saviour and the association of Him with the Arabian impostor roused general indignation. (405)

Marlowe dismissed Moses, the divinely-inspired author of the Pentateuch, as "but a Jugler"; Christ, the word made flesh,

human individual. Tamburlaine is not Christ, the all-controlling Word, after all.

What I am thus suggesting is that while Tamburlaine the character never seriously and deeply subordinates himself psychologically to his concepts of the deity, Marlowe himself cannot quite escape the fear of retribution, even while his iconoclastic impulses are expressed vicariously through his hero. Yet perhaps there is after all an "existential" element in Marlowe's religious philosophy as expressed in Tamburlaine, for it is interesting to realize that the illness which strikes Tamburlaine is not, in actual fact, what destroys him. The disease, as the Physician makes clear, is serious but need not be fatal. In a diagnosis which shatters completely the already severely tarnished image of Tamburlaine as pure poetic force, the doctor remarks:

I viewed your urine, and the hypostasis,  
Thick and obscure, doth make your danger great;  
Your veins are full of accidental heat  
Whereby the moisture of your blood is dried:  
The humidum and calor, which some hold  
Is not a parcel of the elements  
But of a substance more divine and pure,  
Is almost clean extinguishèd and spent,  
Which, being the cause of life, imports your death.  
Besides, my lord, this day is critical,  
Dangerous to those whose crisis is as yours:

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"deserued better to dy than Barrabas"; and Mahomet, the revealer of the Koran, was notorious in the Elizabethan age as himself a "Jugler," a perpetrator of cheap tricks (see Chew, 406 ff.). Yet still Marlowe allows Mahomet (in lieu of Christ-Moses-God?) to have his revenge, as if the playwright could not help ultimately respecting or fearing the authority figures he wished to destroy.

Your artiers, which amongst the veins convey  
 The lively spirits which the heart engenders,  
 Are parched and void of spirit, that the soul,  
 Wanting those organons by which it moves,  
 Cannot endure, by argument of art.  
Yet if your majesty may escape this day,  
No doubt but you shall soon recover all.

(V.iii.82-99, my emphasis)

The physician is telling Tamburlaine to rest. Tamburlaine is flesh and blood, of a substance more divine and pure, bound by other laws than his own will; he is a creature. Though the hero appears to accept the doctor's advice, immediately an alarm is heard, and he must go to face Callapine's army, an effort which exhausts him and destroys his chance for recovery. He is thus in effect killed by the demands of his own endlessly repeating heroic project rather than by the illness per se. God, it seems, has only warned him, has demonstrated to him that he is subject to natural processes which he cannot control or transcend.

While Tamburlaine's prowess (at least poetically) has been formidable, he has never learned that life is a dialectic of assertion and surrender, that there are times to disengage. As if his heroic project is too much to bear, he has at moments contemplated release, such as in the love speech to Theridamas discussed earlier, and at the conclusion of the chariot scene: "So will I ride.../ Until my soul, dissevered from this flesh,/ Shall mount the milk-white way and meet him [Jove] there"(2 IV.iii.130-32). Yet such surrender for him seems mainly a function of the afterlife; while alive he can never stop defending a self so

precarious that it must constantly re-establish its identity by destroying or controlling others. Like Macbeth, Tamburlaine, once he has begun, cannot stop; he has "murdered sleep" for, having defined himself solely through assertiveness, he can never risk temporary surrender.

It is therefore Tamburlaine's lack of integrity which in the end establishes the play's strongest moral comment. His obsession with honour appears in the end to be essentially lovelessness and a fear of disintegration. Perfect fear has, in fact, cast out love and masqueraded under the guise of honour and heroism. "Let not thy love exceed thine honour, son," Tamburlaine warns Amyras (V.iii.199), yet the real tragedy of the play is that unlike Amyras Tamburlaine has never learned to love, has never learned that self-surrender sometimes takes more courage, constitutes a greater act of heroism, than self-assertion. Moreover, Tamburlaine's failure to nurture his sons with love results paradoxically in their being less assertive than is necessary, for Amyras' startling gesture of self-sacrifice as he ascends the "royal chariot of estate" does not augur well for the future of the empire:

Heavens witness me, with what a broken heart  
And damnèd spirit I ascend this seat--  
And send my soul, before my father die,  
His anguish and his burning agony!

(V.iii.206-09)

Tamburlaine has given so little to his sons that they now feel incapable of functioning without him. The tragedy is

not only that Tamburlaine dies but that he leaves those closest to him unable to live. Having been so concerned with the exercise of his own will, he has never taught others to exercise theirs.

Tamburlaine's imaginative response to experience has taught him only assertion, not acceptance. Though he seems to accept the "necessity" of his own death at the end, he does so only by monomaniacally projecting his suffering onto one last mirror of his greatness, his vision of his sons and companions grieving after his death:

Farewell my boys, my dearest friends farewell,  
My body feels, my soul doth weep to see  
Your sweet desires deprived my company.  
(V.iii.245-47)

Tamburlaine can thus be seen as a dramatic dialectic of fantasy and reality, with reality triumphing at the end. The tragic glass tempts the audience at first to accept and even applaud the effort of will behind the act of self-fashioning, since every human individual must heroically struggle to establish and maintain an identity--"heroically" because the task is so difficult and seemingly neverending. Historically, Tamburlaine also probably had a subversive attraction for the Elizabethan middle and lower classes due to his rise from simple shepherd to world conqueror, which would further encourage the identification.<sup>45</sup> At the same

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<sup>45</sup>While I find Simon Shepherd's study Marlowe and the Politics of Elizabethan Theatre (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986) for the most part unreadable--the fault may be my own lack of mental dexterity, I freely admit--this critic does

time the ironies of the play cause us to reflect upon the dramatic action and to finally realize that heroic self-fashioning is only an act of imagination (and perfect heroes ultimately illusory), that human consciousness is not God, and that as we fashion ourselves we must take into account the presence of other selves and the exigencies of a universe which demands acceptance and surrender as often as it demands assertion and struggle. Tamburlaine is a particularly bleak play because so little good comes out of the acts of self-assertion, and because the hero dies with the total absence of anagnorisis: he recognizes neither the enormous suffering he has caused nor that Amyras is completely unequipped to take over the reins of his father's heroic project. If Marlowe created Tamburlaine in compensation for the weak Aeneas, he has come full circle,

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make an interesting suggestion concerning the audience's identification with Tamburlaine. Shepherd argues that "With the uncertainty about succession and Elizabeth's policy of pacifying where possible, the ideology of Protestant aggression produced the need for heroes"(150). These, if I follow the argument correctly, would be "new men" somehow closer to or more in touch with the people than the absolute monarch. Yet the

...final irony of Tamburlaine's reflection of the Elizabethan need for heroes... is that the new cruelty is eventually not an opposition to but a completion of the old order. Tamburlaine receives the Soldan's permission to marry Zenocrate, the new man weds the established family and makes a financial deal with its father. The man who overthrows Turks himself has a 'Turkish' cruelty, and both the heroism and the cruelty can be accommodated to the old order of the Soldan. (152)

It is thus rather like the end of Animal Farm, where one can no longer tell the difference between the pigs and the men.

for Tamburlaine's sons display the same tenuous self-image and nervous dependency as the earlier hero. Though Marlowe may not share Augustine's faith in a God of succour and relief, he does seem to intimate the saint's belief in the fragility of the human personality, since Tamburlaine can only maintain his identity, his sense of personal power, by the wholesale destruction of almost everyone and everything around him. In Doctor Faustus the heroic struggle for self-definition resumes, but the later hero becomes more crippled by his psychological dependency (which he manages much less adeptly than Tamburlaine), and the dream of "a substance more divine and pure" which haunts the poetry of Tamburlaine becomes a nightmare.

#### Chapter 4: Doctor Faustus

If Tamburlaine is a notoriously plural text, then the much shorter Doctor Faustus is even more remarkable for density and complexity of meaning; an archetypal dramatic fable, the play is one of the richest and most significant works in English literature. Considering its obvious concern with magic, it might be expected that Doctor Faustus even more than Tamburlaine would reveal Marlowe's interest in Hermetic thought. However, as James Robinson Howe briefly points out, Faustus' magic is black, not Hermetic natural magic.<sup>1</sup> The significance of this distinction is more fully explored by William Blackburn in his informative essay "'Heavenly Words': Marlowe's Faustus as a Renaissance Magician."<sup>2</sup> Blackburn begins by considering Pico's Oration on the Dignity of Man, in which God explains to Adam: "We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though the maker and moulder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer" (quoted in Blackburn, 3). Pico believed that man could be

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<sup>1</sup>Marlowe, Tamburlaine and Magic (Athens: Ohio UP, 1976) 145.

<sup>2</sup>English Studies in Canada 4 (1978): 1-14.

maker and moulder of himself partly through magic, but warned that there are two kinds: goetia (witchcraft) and magia. The former, the philosopher explains, "depends entirely on the work and authority of demons, a thing to be abhorred... and a monstrous thing. The other, when it is rightly pursued, is nothing else than the utter perfection of natural philosophy"(3). Unfortunately for Faustus, he "utterly and abysmally confuse[s] the two traditions of magic which Pico so carefully distinguishes"(5). Blackburn examines Faustus' incantation and finds it "utter nonsense": "In it Faustus calls upon both the Trinity and the gods of Acheron; in it the name of Jehovah is both abjured and invoked as a source of power. Faustus, while presuming to command the fallen angels... has also 'prayed and sacrificed to them'... as a witch or sorcerer would do"(5).

The "utter nonsense" of Faustus' incantation is in fact quite meaningful on a psychological level. Doctor Faustus, like Tamburlaine, is obviously a play about human aspiration to unlimited power, but it introduces more acutely the problem of self-subordination. Like Tamburlaine's, Faustus' identity is extremely unstable, yet he exercises less control over the "other" or "others" against which he has defined himself; thus, while the desire to assert himself is still very strong, he is less successful in doing so, and experiences a more intense--a more hellish--personal

conflict. I believe in fact that Faustus' damnation, his descent into hell, is best seen as a theatrical metaphor expressing his inability to resolve the conflict between self-assertion and self-surrender. I thus choose to read the play not as an objective critique of Reformation theological systems and beliefs such as predestination,<sup>3</sup> but as a more personal effort by Marlowe to attempt to free himself, or at least explore (rather anxiously) his own desire for religious surrender and self-subordination. As a result, almost by psychological accident, the play begins to uncover Marlowe's repressed sexual desires.

Defining the "other" which functions in Faustus' world is a difficult task because the point is that Faustus himself (as his incantation suggests) cannot decide who or what it is. The confusion becomes most striking at the end of the play. The hero in his final soliloquy exclaims:

Ah, my Christ!--  
 Rend not my heart for naming of my Christ;  
 Yet will I call on him. O, spare me, Lucifer!  
 (xix.147-49)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>For an example of such a reading, see Birringer, Marlowe's Dr Faustus and Tamburlaine: Theological and Theatrical Perspectives (Frankfurt: Verlag Peter Lang, 1984), who argues that "Faustus' inability to proceed towards repentance, to see God as a God of mercy, clearly indicates the typical blindness and insecurity of a reprobate" (164).

<sup>4</sup>All quotations of the play will be from the Revels edition, ed. John D. Jump. I will refer as well when necessary to W.W. Greg's Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus": Parallel Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950).

The continuity of thought or intent in line 149 is more strongly implied by the punctuation of the earlier texts:

Yet wil I call on him, oh spare me Lucifer!  
 (A 1466)  
 Yet will I call on him: O spare me Lucifer.  
 (B 2051)

The hero is already "tumbl[ing] in confusion" as the Bad Angel predicted (xix.132), and has in fact been doing so since the beginning of the play. From what does he wish Lucifer to spare him? The most conservative reply to this question is considered by Max Bluestone: "Following Boas as sanctioned by Greg, most critics assume that the dark powers here fulfill their threat to torture Faustus for calling on Christ or forgetting his vow (vi.85-95; xviii.71-78)."<sup>5</sup> Yet according to the dramaturgy of the play, the dark powers until Scene xix always appear in person; but Faustus during the final soliloquy stands alone, or, according to Greg's reading of the B-text, the devils stand on the upper stage or balcony observing Faustus. Thus it is unlikely that the devils exercise, either here or at the slightly earlier moment when Faustus claims that Mephostophilis and Lucifer hold his hands, a direct physical effect on the hero. Their hold is psychological rather than physical. What Faustus wants to be spared from in his final soliloquy is, I suggest, having to surrender to Christ, since that would

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<sup>5</sup>"Libido Speculandi: Doctrine and Dramaturgy in Contemporary Interpretations of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus," Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama, ed. Norman Rabkin (New York: Columbia UP, 1969) 77.

mean a loss of self, of his own identity, a loss he cannot face. Of course by extension Faustus would also be spared having to surrender to Lucifer, for the same reason. It is the fear of disintegration (death, pain, dismemberment, loss of coherence-integrity-identity) which torments Faustus at the last but which has also tormented him to a lesser degree all along. Yet at the same time he cannot help praying to Christ-Lucifer since he needs them as a source of identity and power. He is reduced to a state where he wishes first that his body may disintegrate to allow his soul (his real self) to fly--intact--into heaven; next to become a soulless beast that cannot consciously experience the pain of disintegration since at death the animal soul simply "dissolves"(174-78); finally he does indeed wish for what he has feared all along, complete dissolution (though a perfectly painless variety): "O soul, be chang'd into little water drops,/ And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found"(185-86). Despite this final emphasis on the terror of physical pain, much of the anguish in the final soliloquy arises from Faustus' simultaneous aversion to, and desire for, self-subordination. Lucifer and Christ for Faustus represent the same thing, the "other" from which he has acquired power (the one through his creation, the other through a special pact) and to whom he must eventually surrender himself. They become conflated in his final nightmare vision because he can live neither with nor without them. They both, in

this sense, tear him to pieces.

The true dialectic of Doctor Faustus is not between good and evil, but rather between natural and unnatural (which most often figures in the play as the supernatural). Faustus suffers because he refuses to accept his human condition, the condition of a creature, his natural place in the hierarchy of created beings. In one sense, then, the play is vigorously "orthodox"--moral in the most commonplace fashion. When we are told by the Chorus that

swollen with cunning of a self-conceit,  
His waxen wings did mount above his reach,  
And, melting, heavens conspir'd his overthrow  
(Prologue, 20-22),

the lines may not finally argue for a malevolent divine force plotting to overthrow Faustus<sup>6</sup> so much as they indicate the normal operation of the universe, "conspiring" or "breathing together" in a harmony which, like a healthy body, corrects or checks disorderly elements in the system as naturally as "waxen" (unnatural) wings melt in the heat of the sun. Yet at the same time the play as a whole leads us to question whether Faustus' "chiefest bliss"(27) is really, as editors of the play usually suggest, his hope of divine salvation, since his obsession with his

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<sup>6</sup>Though this reading is possible, and is the one suggested by Bluestone (35-36). However, Jump suggests we compare 1 Tamburlaine IV.ii.8-11: "God.../ Will sooner burn the glorious frame of heaven/ Than it should so conspire my overthrow." The heaven or heavens as Marlowe conceives them may therefore be less personal than would be required for the meaning of "malevolent conspirator(s)."

eschatological destiny seems as psychologically damaging as his foray into necromancy; they begin to look like two sides of the same coin. As Edward A. Snow in his essay "Doctor Faustus and the Ends of Desire" concludes, "heroic overreaching" and "Christian self-abnegation" are merely the inverted images of each other.<sup>7</sup> They are both unnatural and therefore ultimately destructive. In the context of Faustus' dilemma, Snow reasons,

...summum bonum medicinae sanitas [from Faustus' review of medical art in his opening soliloquy] begins to acquire gnomic resonance. Within the pre-Christian, pre-dualistic ontology that informs Aristotle's ethical vision, sanitas can be understood not merely as physical health but, more comprehensively, as regularity, soundness of being, discretion, good sense, etc.--as if (to translate the vision back into the terms of post-Christian experience) what we term psychic or spiritual "sanity" were in the final analysis a matter of "our bodies health" (and madness the fear of or for it, or disgust with it, or a fever in it), the state of being grounded and stabilized in the continuity of physical existence. The values implied would seem to be in equal opposition to both Christian and Faustian man--who, from this point of view, seem but two manifestations of a single phenomenon. (90)

There is thus a suggestion in the play that Faustus is not altogether wrong to bid "Divinity, adieu" (literally, to leave it "to God," in God's hands). He has turned to it presumably to increase a sense of personal power, to extend himself into the supernatural realm (the same reason he turns finally to necromancy)--and here of course he errs.

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<sup>7</sup>Two Renaissance Mythmakers, ed. Alvin Kernan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977) 105.

However, divinity itself is inadequate or inappropriate for him, since it is a denial of his human selfhood, his necessary life as a man. It is true, as has often been pointed out, that Faustus omits from his Biblical quotations the subsequent passages which offer the hope of divine salvation. For example, the entire quotation of Romans 6:23 reads, "For the wages of sinne is death: but the gifte of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."<sup>8</sup> Yet Faustus omits the second part not because he wilfully deceives himself (or because Mephostophilis leads his eye [xix.95] as the B-text may imply) but because they are for a man of his energy and ambition essentially meaningless. "Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man"(i.23) implies not only his dissatisfaction with the human condition but also highlights that condition. He is still (for a time) Faustus, a man, and must go on with his manly life until such time as his mystical rebirth becomes a viable alternative. How then, to fill that gap between now and the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ? What does he live through in the meantime except his identity of Faustus, a man? While it may be ultimately true that "When all is done, divinity is best"(i.37), quite clearly (for Faustus) all is not yet done.

Mistakenly, Faustus is willing to overreach all natural endeavours, and forgo living a manly life. Until

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<sup>8</sup>All Biblical quotations are from the Geneva Bible.

his fall into necromancy, Faustus' progress, the Chorus implies, has been remarkable but nonetheless natural, like the development of a healthy new strain of fruit-tree or flower. Born of "parents base of stock"(11), he in "riper years"(13) goes to Wittenberg, where he "graces" (adorns) the "fruitful plot of scholarism"(16). But then the disease sets in, and he metamorphoses from a thing that gives and nourishes, into one that seizes and devours: "swollen with cunning of a self-conceit... And glutted now with learning's golden gifts,/ He surfeits upon cursed necromancy"(20,24-25). This process is repeated for us in the opening soliloquy, as we observe Faustus review and dismiss the various professions he claims to have mastered. They are indeed "professions," practiced only "in show" (and the pun occurs again later in The Jew of Malta), because, while he has the wit and talent to have acquired rudimentary knowledge of them (as with law) or even to have practiced them very skilfully (as with medicine), he has not dedicated or given himself to any of them. He has, in spite of his stated intention, sounded none of their depths. If he had seriously chosen a career, it would have provided him with a legitimate heroic project and source of identity (Faustus the lawyer, Faustus the physician) through which he could continue to serve the common good (saving even more cities from the plague, for example). But in his egotism, he finds each alternative "Too servile"(36). Marlowe seems to imply

that here, at least, Augustine was right, for in a passage quoted by Douglas Cole the saint writes, "The will sins if it turns away from the unchangeable good which is common to all, and turns towards a private good, whether outside or below it.... Thus a man who becomes proud, curious, and self-indulgent, is caught up in another life, which compared to the higher life is death."<sup>9</sup>

Contrary to Augustine, however, Doctor Faustus suggests that the "higher life"--or perhaps it is more appropriately termed the "saner life"--is simply one that recognizes the basic soundness, the sinlessness, of physical existence and has the wisdom to leave immortal longings alone. Faustus foolishly pursues his desire for a "world of profit and delight,/ Of power, of honour, of omnipotence"(i.52-53), and the almost tautological repetition of "power" and "omnipotence" foreshadows his later exhaustion and emotional bankruptcy, as if not even his rhetoric can keep up with his desire, or as if not even his desire can keep up with his insatiable need to always be desiring. The crescendo from "power" to "omnipotence," however, signifies Faustus' movement from simple self-assertion to a blasphemous attempt to equal God; but again a note of exhaustion is sounded: "Here tire, my brains, to get a deity"(62, my emphasis).

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<sup>9</sup>The Problem of Free Choice, trans. Dom Mark Pontifex (Westminster, Maryland, 1955), II.19.53, 135, quoted in Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1962) 195.

It is tempting to suggest that through "all [his] labours"(68) Faustus' brains do actually succeed in begetting a dichotomized deity in the form of the Good and Bad Angels, whose entrance at this moment signals the beginning of the neurotic vacillation in the doctor's mind which will reach a nightmare pitch in his final soliloquy. The angels may be viewed as the first symptoms of a severe mental crisis. The Good Angel introduces for the first time the frightening image of a wrathful God (71), and the repetition in the admonition to "Read, read the scriptures"(72) suggests an unquiet, restless searching, almost as if such reading is ultimately as unwholesome and unfruitful as reading the book of necromancy. There is certainly a curious and disturbing grammatical effect in the whole of line 72--"Read, read the scriptures; that is blasphemy"--which is even more apparent with the A-text punctuation: "Reade, reade the scriptures, that is blasphemy"(105). It may be that the singular "is" prevents us from linking "blasphemy" with the scriptures, but I think the ambiguity is there; most editors in fact feel compelled to clarify for the reader that "that" refers back to the book of magic (mentioned three lines earlier) in order to dispel a lurking temptation to misread the line. One wonders if the actor playing the Good Angel would feel compelled to walk up to Faustus on stage and point histrionically to the book of magic (which, unless covered

with sparkles and stars, might look a lot like the Bible anyway) in order to clarify the meaning in performance. Read in a subversive way, the line "Read, read the scriptures, that is blasphemy" seems an almost perfect inversion of Faustus' earlier line, "And necromantic books are heavenly"(i.49). The irony of the latter line may thus be not that Faustus confuses black magic with a more positive spiritual power, but that he fails to realize that any kind of spiritual aspiration<sup>10</sup> carries him away from a natural, sane, human mode of existence.

Doctor Faustus is certainly an extremely ironic play, but its ironies run to ever increasing depths which serve to complicate rather than delineate the Christian morality of the play. For example, what Greenblatt terms Faustus' "extraordinary, and in the circumstances ludicrous"<sup>11</sup> remark "I think hell's a fable," receives Mephostophilis' devastatingly ironic reply, "Aye, think so still, till experience change thy mind"(v.128-29). Faustus is deceived, and is quickly on his way to that "fable" in a handcart. Yet Greenblatt adds: "The chilling line may carry a further suggestion: 'Yes, continue to think that hell's a fable, until experience transforms your mind'"(197). Hell is a

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<sup>10</sup>It may be significant that the word "spirit" in the play always refers to evil spirits or devils, as if the supernatural is inevitably something negative or destructive.

<sup>11</sup>Renaissance Self-Fashioning (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 196.

function of the mind; Mephostophilis can only bring Faustus there by encouraging him in experiences which will radically alter his world-view. Hell, after all, is a fable, a fantasy, a perversion of the mind's normal functioning, a mental illness. It is a sickness of the self, a swelling of the self, to be "swollen with cunning of a self-conceit." Mephostophilis can only describe a spatial hell rather vaguely: "Under the heavens... Within the bowels of these elements [which may mean only somewhere (anywhere) in the created universe<sup>12</sup>]/ Where we are tortur'd and remain for ever [as created beings]"(V.118-121). But as a condition it becomes much more convincing:

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd  
 In one self place, but where we are is hell  
 And where hell is, there must we ever be.  
 (v.122-24)

"One self place" may mean "one and the same place"(Jump 31) but also "the place of the self"; it is unlimited because, for those swollen with a self-conceit, the self becomes the only reality. Mephostophilis' description of hell in fact sounds remarkably like a parody of the famous description of the nature of God as "a circle of which the centre is everywhere and the circumference nowhere";<sup>13</sup> yet perhaps not

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<sup>12</sup>See Greg, Parallel Texts, 330.

<sup>13</sup>According to the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford UP, 1953) 10, the origin of this quotation is unknown. It is "said to have been traced to a lost treatise of Empedocles. Quoted in the Roman de la Rose, and by S. Bonaventura in Itinerarius Mentis in Deum, cap. v. ad fin."

so much a parody as a proof that the Satanic and the divine dilemma are surprisingly similar. The expansion of the self into omnipotence, or at least omnipresence (and in such a context is there any difference?), results in the nightmare of having no "other" to give to or receive from, of being eternally alone, self-enclosed. Is this, we wonder, what prompted God to carry out Creation in the first place?

A similar complication (one could almost say an inversion) of irony occurs slightly earlier when Faustus stabs his arm in order to write the "deed of gift" for Lucifer. "Why streams it not"(v.66) the doctor exclaims when the blood congeals, and while we may be tempted to succumb to the Faustian temptation always to look for supernatural signs and wonders, the most obvious explanation is that his blood has simply coagulated, the way it should naturally. Blood streaming out of the body is as unnatural (the physiological processes resist it) as Christ's blood streaming in the firmament in his final nightmare phantasmagoria. But then a wonder does occur:

Consummatum est: this bill is ended,  
 And Faustus hath bequeath'd his soul to Lucifer.  
 But what is this inscription on mine arm?  
Homo fuge! Whither should I fly?  
 If unto God, he'll throw me down to hell.--  
 My senses are deceiv'd, here's nothing writ.--  
 O yes, I see it plain; even here is writ,  
Homo fuge! Yet shall not Faustus fly.

(v.74-81)

The appearance of the miraculous Homo fuge seems to be

evidence of a beneficent power watching over him, telling him to get the hell out of there (the pun is irresistible). Faustus' inability to believe in God's mercy ("he'll throw me down to hell") ironically nullifies the intent of the miracle. Yet Faustus' question "Whither should I fly?" also alludes, as Weil and Birringer note,<sup>14</sup> to Psalm 139:7-10:

Whether shal I go from thy Spirit? or whether shal I  
flee from thy presence?  
If I ascend into heauen, thou art there: if I lie  
down in hel, thou art there.  
Let me take the wings of the morning, & dwell in  
the vttermost parts of the sea:  
Yet thether shal thine hand lead me, & thy right  
hand holde me.

The allusion thus suggests the mystical presence of God in the self. God could not tell him to fly, because God is already there. And Faustus cannot escape, because no one can flee from himself. Whither shall he fly, indeed, for if to (a realization of) God, that being will require him to surrender himself, which he is not prepared to do.

Birringer calls the appearance of Homo fuge an explicit Mene Tekel (cf. the writing on the wall in Daniel 5:24-30), yet the Biblical writing was a promise of doom rather than a kind of warning. The writing on Faustus' arm seems rather a miraculous response of the body and the mind to preserve their own health and sanity. In that sense Faustus could flee his necromantic practice and return to a more normal activity; his obsession with divine salvation only increases

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<sup>14</sup>Merlin's Prophet, 62; Marlowe's Dr Faustus and Tamburlaine, 179.

his psychological conflict, his hell: "If unto God, he'll throw me down to hell." The psalmist of "Whither shall I go" seemed to realize that the transcendental presence in the self can make it, as a place, either heaven or hell. But God does not really threaten, or guarantee, either one or the other. Mephistophilis concludes his lecture on hell:

And, to be short, when all the world dissolves  
 And every creature shall be purify'd,  
 All places shall be hell that is not heaven.  
 (v.125-27)

All creatures (which, in spite of Greg's objections I take to include human souls) become heaven or hell according to their perfected natures rather than by divine allotment.<sup>15</sup> God, it seems, does nothing at all, except finally to dissolve the world.

Faustus' dilemma, his "damnation," is thus at least partially self-created. It arises from the fact that while he has the will to be omnipotent--"All things that move between the quiet poles/ Shall be at my command"(i.55-56)--his human consciousness must define itself as against, with respect to, an "other" external to it, which is inevitably

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<sup>15</sup>Greg explains this passage: "The world is, I think, the middle-earth; when this dissolves only heaven and hell will remain. Similarly, every creature is not every soul, but every created thing (the original sense of the word), which shall in the end be purifi'd in the sense that it will be no longer mixed, but of one essence, either wholly good or wholly evil"(Parallel Texts, 330). I contend, however, that Mephistophilis uses "places" (l. 127) in the sense of places of the self. Rather than one objective hell, there will be countless subjective ones as a function of the souls which have created them or enclosed themselves therein.

more powerful than he. Faustus must therefore limit or contain a self which wishes to be uncontained, which wants to stretch "as far as doth the mind of man"(i.60). It is his failure to fully, consciously accept this necessary restriction or limitation that damns him in a psychological sense. For the "other" Faustus has of course two choices. God can offer him omnipotence only through Jesus Christ, through the annihilation of his own personality; this, for Faustus the man, is not an acceptable alternative. However, Lucifer, while in a sense demanding the same thing (he obtains Faustus' soul in the end) offers, or Faustus is under the illusion that he offers, more in the meantime: personal power. That Faustus seems to receive rather less, in the way of power, than he bargained for has become a commonplace of criticism. The interesting point is that he must bargain for something which he should be able to establish on his own: personal power in the sense of normal self-assertion, a cohesion of self, a sound identity. One wonders if that is the true meaning of the line "A sound magician is a demi-god"(i.61).<sup>16</sup> A sound, a sane, magician does not attempt to become omnipotent, to control the universe, but is rather satisfied with being half a god; he recognizes and respects the presence of the "other"; he does

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<sup>16</sup>Assuming that the B-text offers the better form of the line here; it is certainly poetically superior to the A-text, which, at this point, reads: "A sound Magician is a mighty god"(A 90).

not try to evade it or deny it or sell his soul to it, and is thus not constantly tormented with the nightmare dread of having to face the final reckoning; he operates out of his own integrity because he accepts his limits. Faustus could, without soliciting supernatural aid, garner some of the honour and wealth he covets by pursuing one of the careers he has dismissed; then the necessary mirrors to provide him with his sense of identity, a coherent sense of self, would be his own satisfaction with a job well done and the respect paid to him by others. He would thus establish himself by the giving of himself to a legitimate human endeavour. However, like Dido he dreams of power without responsibility, control without sacrifice (a dream apparently embodied in the romance world of Tamburlaine until completely deflated by the attendant ironies). Yet for Faustus the shortcut to omnipotence can only be achieved (and then only as an illusion) by postponing, not evading, the ultimate sacrifice.

Like Dido and Tamburlaine, Faustus expresses his fantasies of absolute control through images of enclosure: "I'll have them [the conjured spirits] wall all Germany with brass/ And make swift Rhine circle fair Wittenberg"(i.87-88). As Snow points out, "the formula by which [Faustus] characteristically aspires is not even 'I will' or 'I want' but 'I'll have... I'll have... I'll have,' so anxious is he to feel himself a containing self rather than merely the

voice of a nameless emptiness or an impersonal rush to the void."<sup>17</sup> Necromancy itself is described by the Bad Angel metaphorically as a kind of treasure chest, which will place the entire created universe in Faustus' controlling hands: "Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art/ Wherein all nature's treasury is contain'd"(i.73-74). Yet to achieve any of this, Faustus must ironically enclose himself within the conjurer's circle, to protect him from the power of the devils he is supposedly controlling.

Faustus thus becomes trapped by his own unnatural desires. By wanting too much power, he ends up getting too little, and becomes a slave to those powers he believes will serve him. Let us pause for a moment to question why Faustus wants so much power. Thus far I have suggested it is a question of pride. Faustus finds normal human endeavours too servile, and he is, as I said, a man of extraordinary energy and ambition. But why all this energy? Why this intense fear of self-surrender, of disintegration? Why is he so reluctant to give of himself normally unless he is afraid there is nothing to give? Kohut's description of narcissistic personality disorders, as summarized by Peter Donaldson, may be relevant here: "Where there is severe self pathology the inevitable dissolution of the self cannot be accepted because its full cohesion has never been

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<sup>17</sup>"Doctor Faustus and the Ends of Desire," 70.

achieved."<sup>18</sup> Faustus' aspiring pride and ambition are compensatory for a basic insecurity, an instability of self; he has never achieved, nor does he ever achieve, "full cohesion" of self. We can speculate that this insecurity may have resulted from a lack of nurturing as a child; the "parents base of stock" rather perfunctorily passed him on to the "Kinsmen [who] chiefly brought him up" (Prologue, 11,14). The absence of parental, or at least paternal, affection is more strongly hinted at in the source, The Historie of the Damnable Life, and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus:

John Faustus, borne in the town of Rhode, lying in the Prouince of Weimer in Germ[anie], his father a poore Husbandman, and not [able] wel to bring him vp: but hauing an Uncle at Wittenberg, a rich man, & without issue, took this I. Faustus from his father, & made him his heire, in so much that his father was no more troubled with him, for he remained with his Uncle at Wittenberg, where he was kept at ye Universitie in the same citie to study diuinity. But Faustus being of a naughty minde & otherwise addicted, applied not his studies, but tooke himselfe to other exercises.<sup>19</sup>

Regardless of the actual psychological cause, Faustus demonstrates a remarkable conflict of assertive and passive impulses. The same man who can remark commandingly, "How pliant is this Mephostophilis/ Full of obedience and humility!" (iii.31-32) also relies subserviently on the

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<sup>18</sup>"Conflict and Coherence: Narcissism and Tragic Structure in Marlowe," Narcissism and the Text: Studies in Literature and the Psychology of Self, ed. Layton and Schapiro (New York: New York UP, 1986) 60.

<sup>19</sup>Doctor Faustus, ed. John D. Jump, Appendix II, 123.

devil's protection: "When Mephostophilis shall stand by me,/  
 What power can hurt me? Faustus, thou art safe:/ Cast no  
 more doubts!"(v.25-27). The same man who aspires to be  
 "great emperor of the world"(iii.106) later seems satisfied  
 to be entertainer and servant to the Emperor of Germany and  
 the Duke of Vanholt. He needs not only to control and  
 command, but also to be protected, almost coddled.

This conflict between self-assertion and self-surrender  
 is first apparent in Faustus' exclamation to Valdes and  
 Cornelius: "'Tis magic, magic, that hath ravish'd  
 me"(i.109). Faustus paradoxically sees his instrument of  
 power, the thing he is to control, as taking over or  
 controlling him. The erotic suggestion in "ravish'd" raises  
 the whole question of the sexual nature of the doctor's  
 aspirations, and several critics have remarked on the erotic  
 energy which surfaces at various moments in the play. One  
 such moment is undoubtedly Faustus' speech (already quoted  
 in part above) anticipating the return of Mephostophilis  
 from Lucifer:

Wealth!  
 Why, the signory of Emden shall be mine.  
 When Mephostophilis shall stand by me,  
 What power can hurt me? Faustus, thou art safe:  
 Cast no more doubts! Mephostophilis, come,  
 And bring glad tidings from great Lucifer.  
 Is't not midnight? Come, Mephostophilis,  
Veni, veni, Mephostophilis!

(v.23-30)

The use of the word "stand" in line 25 brings to mind the  
 common Elizabethan pun of "stand" and an erection, and

Faustus does seem to be anxiously awaiting Mephostophilis like an eager lover. There is also, as in the scene where Tamburlaine cuts his arm, a disturbing conflation of sexual and religious overtones, for the words "glad tidings" recall the first chapter of Luke in the Tyndale Bible: "And the angell answered and sayde vnto him [Zacharias]: I am Gabriell that stonde in the presens of God, and am sent to speake vnto the: and to shewe the these glad tydinges [the birth of John and the promise of the Incarnation]"(4-6). The lines thus suggest the perverse image of Faustus ("pregnant" or "swollen with cunning of a self-conceit") receiving an annunciation of Satanic impregnation from the intercessor (or sexual surrogate) Mephostophilis.

This speech, then, implies a strong homoerotic element in Faustus' sexuality. Constance Kuriyama in fact argues that the play "amounts to a reluctant step on Marlowe's part toward confronting his own homosexuality, in its original form of 'feminine' weakness and submission, which Marlowe desperately strove to deny in Tamburlaine."<sup>20</sup> However, another critic who has explored the sexual meaning of the play, Kay Stockholder, believes that while "homosexual elements are strong in the play... the strongest struggle depicted is toward the heterosexual."<sup>21</sup> Certainly any

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<sup>20</sup>Hammer or Anvil, 120.

<sup>21</sup>"'Within the massy entrailles of the earth': Faustus's Relation to Women", "A Poet and a filthy Play-maker": New Essays on Christopher Marlowe, ed. Kenneth Friedenreich,

sexual interpretation of Doctor Faustus must be conducted with caution since the issue is complicated and the text, as Kuriyama points out, relatively "thin".<sup>22</sup> While interpretation of sexual imagery remains tentative, I believe enough evidence can be garnered to show that the play exhibits the same fear of sexual surrender that we have observed in Tamburlaine, and this fear is to a certain extent, as in the earlier play, a fear of heterosexual involvement. However, there is at the same time a growing realization in Marlowe's mind that the homosexual longing recognized earlier only in a "neo-Platonic" sense will begin to demand physical expression as well. This realization seems to involve a certain amount of concomitant repugnance, guilt, and fear on Marlowe's part. I believe that the playwright, at the time of the composition of Doctor Faustus, was still in part resisting his homosexual

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Roma Gill, and Constance B. Kuriyama (New York: AMS Press, Inc. 1988) 218.

<sup>22</sup>Hammer or Anvil, 121. An interesting example of how the play's images can lend themselves to various sexual interpretations is the contrasting significance Stockholder and Kuriyama find in Cornelius' lines:

The spirits tell me they can dry the sea  
And fetch the treasure of all foreign wrecks,  
Ay, all the wealth that our forefathers hid  
Within the massy entrails of the earth.

(i.143-46)

Kuriyama believes that here we have the insecure, male homosexual "desire to learn the sexual secrets that keep potentates--kings, fathers, gods--potent... expressed in an anal form [massy entrails]"(115), whereas Stockholder suggests that the image recalls "lost sexual potency" in a more heterosexual context: "the treasures, hidden within the feminine earthy entrails"(204).

impulses, still regarding them in one sense as unhealthy or undesirable.

Faustus' relationship with the devils, especially Mephostophilis, carries, as has already been suggested, strong homosexual overtones. Levin remarks that "Faustus has in Mephostophilis an alter ego who is both a demon and a Damon. The man has an extraordinary affection for the spirit, the spirit a mysterious attraction to the man."<sup>23</sup> Kuriyama, though eventually consenting that "Levin's observation seems basically sound," initially objects that his "assertion lends itself admirably to scholarly punning, but unfortunately there is little or no direct evidence to support it.... The only demonstrable interest Mephostophilis has in Faustus is a passion for getting and keeping his soul, while Faustus regards Mephostophilis primarily as a servant."<sup>24</sup> While admitting the paucity of textual evidence, we must still recognize in Faustus' lines, "Had I as many souls as there be stars,/ I'd give them all for Mephostophilis"(iii.104-05), an emotional fervour incongruous with an ordinary master-servant relationship; likewise in Mephostophilis' remark, "What will not I do to obtain his soul!"(v.73), a similar fervour indicating more than just a "business" interest (Mephostophilis, Devil of

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<sup>23</sup>Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher, 138.

<sup>24</sup>Hammer or Anvil, 121.

the Month, Highest Number of Souls Obtained). I find it odd that Kuriyama can object to an element of "affection" and "attraction" in the relationship between Faustus and Mephostophilis while at the same time insisting on other, less credible sexual significances, such as the Oedipal characterization of Helen of Troy as the "Marlovian mother" whose seductive power ensures the "inevitability of the son's destruction."<sup>25</sup>

Kuriyama does, however, rightly claim that the "shadowy nether world into which Faustus plunges... is characterized by persistent... innuendos of sexual ambiguity, first suggested by Valdes in his reference to the 'serviceable' spirits' capacity for shape shifting"(122):

As Indian Moors obey their Spanish lords,  
 So shall the spirits of every element  
 Be always serviceable to us three:  
 Like lions shall they guard us when we please,  
 Like Almain rutters with their horsemen's staves  
 Or Lapland giants trotting by our sides;  
 Sometimes like women or unwedded maids  
 Shadowing more beauty in their airy brows  
 Than in the white breasts of the queen of love.  
 (i.120-28)

Like Mephostophilis, these spirits will be serviceable and pliant, but also perform a protective function by standing by with phallic staves, as if the magicians would experience both active and passive sexual roles. Again, as with Mephostophilis, the "protective" function of the spirits seems to suggest a sexually aggressive one, and homosexual

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<sup>25</sup>Hammer or Anvil, 119-20.

involvement is linked to the fantasy of simultaneous control and surrender. The emphasis on the beauty of the spirits' "airy brows" in preference to "the white breasts of the queen of love" would also seem to suggest a certain withdrawal from, or fear of, heterosexual attraction on the part of Faustus' "dearest friends"(i.63) Valdes and Cornelius.

A failure to persist in a heterosexual lifestyle finds expression in the play when Faustus asks Mephostophilis for a wife:

Fau. ...But, leaving this, let me have a wife, the fairest maid in Germany, for I am wanton and lacivious and cannot live without a wife.

Meph. How, a wife! I prithee, Faustus, talk not of a wife.

Fau. Nay, sweet Mephostophilis, fetch me one, for I will have one.

Meph. Well, thou wilt have one. Sit there till I  
come;  
I'll fetch thee a wife in the devil's name.  
[Exit.]  
Enter with a Devil dressed like a woman,  
with fireworks.

Tell me, Faustus, how dost thou like thy wife?

Fau. Here's a hot whore indeed! No, I'll have no wife.

Meph. Marriage is but a ceremonial toy;  
And if thou lov'st me, think no more of it.  
(v.141-52)

In the Damnable Life Mephostophilis' refusal to comply with Faustus' request is clearly due to the fact that marriage is a sacrament:

Hast not thou (quoth Mephostophiles) sworne thy selfe an enemy to God and all creatures? To this I answere thee, thou canst not marry; thou canst not serve two masters, God, and my Prince: for wedlock is a chiefe institution ordained of God, and that hast thou promised to defie, as we doe all, and that hast thou

also done.<sup>26</sup>

While this explanation is sometimes offered by editors of the play, Marlowe pointedly leaves it out, suggesting instead that Mephostophilis somehow takes Faustus' request as a personal affront: "if thou lov'st me, think no more of it." Mephostophilis also seems to play on Faustus' fears of sexual (at this point specifically heterosexual) involvement. Stockholder suggests that the appearance of the "hot whore" is a literalization of Faustus' own sexual fears: "as he approaches his desire for forbidden sensuality he associates it with the familial and domestic in asking for a wife, but an approach to a fulfillment of his embattled desire appears to him in hideous and threatening images from which he again retreats."<sup>27</sup> It is true that Mephostophilis does willingly offer Faustus the "fairest courtesans," but he describes them in images which "are remote and aestheticized" (Stockholder 206) and which culminate with ideal beauty expressed in terms of the male form:

I'll cull thee out the fairest courtesans  
And bring them every morning to thy bed;  
She whom thine eye shall like, thy heart shall have,  
Were she as chaste as was Penelope,  
As wise as Saba, or as beautiful  
As was bright Lucifer before his fall.

(v.153-58)

We might also expect that these "courtesans" would simply be

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<sup>26</sup>Doctor Faustus, ed. John D. Jump, Appendix II, 127.

<sup>27</sup>"Within the massy entrailles of the earth," 206.

more "images," disguised spirits (for the same reasons Greg argues for Helen of Troy being one<sup>28</sup>) and thus, with the general tendency to see the devils as masculine, Mephostophilis' apparent encouragement of heterosexual behaviour is certainly lacking in conviction.

The resistance to heterosexual contact on the part of Faustus and the diabolical world is highlighted in other ways as well. Perhaps the most remarkable instance is the speech by Pride during the procession of the Seven Deadly Sins:

I am Pride. I disdain to have any parents. I am like to Ovid's flea; I can creep into every corner of a wench: sometimes, like a periwig, I sit upon her brow; next, like a necklace, I hang about her neck; then, like a fan of feathers, I kiss her lips; and then, turning myself to a wrought smock, do what I list. But fie, what a smell is here! I'll not speak another word, unless the ground be perfumed and covered with cloth of arras.

(vi.115-22)

One is tempted to read this speech as a reference to Faustus' own psychosexual development. His pride is compensatory for the lack of nurturing he received as a child ("I disdain to have any parents"). Consequently he has never matured enough to learn self-discipline ("I... do what I list") or achieved sufficient "self-cohesion" to be able to accept sexual surrender without fear, for the "image that suggests the fulfillment of a [heterosexual] sex act...

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<sup>28</sup>See W.W. Greg, "The Damnation of Faustus," Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Clifford Leech (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1964) 103-06.

brings with it disgust."<sup>29</sup> There is thus a failure, to borrow Snow's terms, to "ground" or "stabilize" oneself in natural, physical existence, which instead must be denied or disguised ("perfumed and covered with a cloth of arras"). Pride's speech does in fact sound to me suspiciously like a response by Marlowe to an exchange which occurs in Greene's Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay between Prince Edward and his fool Rafe:

Rafe. ...[Bacon] shall make thee [i.e. transform you into] either a silken purse, full of gold, or else a fine wrought smock.

Edw. But how shall I have the maid?

Rafe. Marry, sirrah, if thou beest a silken purse full of gold, then on Sundays she'll hang thee by her side, and you must not say a word. Now, sir, when she comes into a great press of people, for fear of the cutpurse, on a sudden she'll swap thee in to her plackerd [placket, slit at the top of a skirt or petticoat]; then, sirrah, being there, you may plead for yourself...

Edw. But how if I be a wrought smock?

Rafe. Then she'll put thee into her chest and lay thee into lavender, and upon some good day she'll put thee on, and at night when you go to bed, then being turned from a smock to a man, you may make up the match.

(i.101-16)<sup>30</sup>

In this exchange Rafe serves to expose Edward's healthy (if in the context of later developments morally questionable) attraction for Margaret; there is certainly no evidence of revulsion. Interestingly, the flea image in Pride's speech

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<sup>29</sup>Stockholder, "Within the massy entrailles of the earth," 208.

<sup>30</sup>Drama of the English Renaissance, ed. Russell A. Fraser and Norman Rabkin (New York: Macmillan, 1976) 1: 360.

occurs earlier in the A-text of Faustus when the Clown (Robin) remarks: "no, no sir, if you turne me into anything, let it be in the likenesse of a little pretie frisking flea, that I may be here and there and euery where, O Ile tickle the pretie wenches plackets Ile be amongst them ifaith"(424-27). Here again we see a strong sexual drive, with no sense of physical revulsion. Similarly strong heterosexual impulses are expressed later in the A-text when Robin exclaims:

O this is admirable! here I ha stolne one of doctor Faustus coniuring books, and ifaith I meane to search some circles for my own vse: now wil I make al the maidens in our parish dance at my pleasure starke naked before me, and so by that means I shal see more then ere I felt, or saw yet.

(949-53)

It seems that away from the "shadowy, nether world" of Faustus and the devils, life goes on, if not very admirably or heroically, rather sanely and predictably. This predictability, this refusal to give in to the torturing sexual ambiguities of the supernatural world, results in a memorable moment of comic deflation as the matter-of-fact meets the diabolical. After his first encounter with the devils, Robin exclaims: "what, are they gone? a vengeance on them, they have vilde long nailes, there was a hee diuell and a shee diuell, Ile tell you how you shall know them, all hee diuels has hornes, and all shee diuels has clifts and clouen feete"(A 414-17). Robin thus insists on compartmentalizing and delineating the unknown according to

the standards or terms of reference he believes to be normal and natural.

Faustus, on the other hand, does not escape the sexual ambiguity of the supernatural world. After the Old Man's admonition and Mephostophilis' threat to tear him to pieces if he repents, Faustus asks the devil:

One thing, good servant, let me crave of thee  
 To glut the longing of my heart's desire:  
 That I may have unto my paramour  
 That heavenly Helen which I saw of late,  
 Whose sweet embraces may extinguish clear  
 Those thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow,  
 And keep mine oath I made to Lucifer.

(xviii.90-96)

The desire to renew the "vow" and the "oath" in a sense places Helen, as Mephostophilis was earlier, in the role of sexual surrogate between Faustus and Lucifer; intercourse with Helen is Faustus' way of committing himself--body and soul--to Lucifer. Presumably Faustus knows (though apparently he chooses to repress the awareness) that he will be copulating with a "spirit" or devil. The doctor's explanation to the Emperor in the A-text concerning the nature of these conjured apparitions is very clear:

...it is not in my abilitie to present before your eyes, the true substantiall bodies of those two deceased princes which long since are consumed to dust.

...But such spirites as can liuely resemble Alexander and his Paramour, shal appeare before your Grace, in that manner they best liu'd in, in their most flourishing estate, which I doubt not shal sufficient-ly content you Imperiall maiesty.

(1081-90)

Thus when Helen reappears and Faustus exclaims, "Was this

the face that launch'd a thousand ships/ And burnt the  
 topless towers of Ilium"(xviii.99-100), he should realize  
 that the utterance is ironically not so much a rhetorical  
 question praising Helen's beauty but rather a question of  
 fact whose answer is indisputably no. Yet Faustus insists  
 on deceiving himself, and in one last feeble attempt to  
 assert himself in a heterosexual role he imagines:

I will be Paris, and for love of thee  
 Instead of Troy shall Wittenberg be sack'd,  
 And I will combat with weak Menelaus  
 And wear thy colours on my plumed crest,  
 Yea, I will wound Achilles in the heel  
 And then return to Helen for a kiss.  
 (xviii.106-111)

Significantly he can only imagine himself triumphing over  
 weak Menelaus and going straight for Achilles' vulnerable  
 heel; these figures are merely projections of his own  
 insecurity. Yet the sexual ambiguity and confusion reach  
 their height at the climax of the speech:

Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter  
 When he appear'd to hapless Semele,  
 More lovely than the monarch of the sky  
 In wanton Arethusa's azur'd arms,  
 And none but thou shalt be my paramour.  
 (114-18)

It is Helen, not Faustus, who is equated with the masculine  
 gods; Faustus' sexual role therefore parallels that of  
 Semele and Arethusa. In the case of the hapless Semele  
 being burned up in Jupiter's arms, the image is horribly  
 prophetic, if we take Jupiter to represent Faustus' final  
 hellish image of the all-consuming "other". (Notice that  
 the conflation of God and Lucifer seems to be fully achieved

in Faustus' last moment when he screams, "My God, my God! Look not so fierce on me!" just after the devils enter to fetch him off to hell; this makes the Jupiter-God-Lucifer parallel likely, in terms of Faustus' psychology.) The meaning of the Arethusa allusion is more difficult to determine. Whether or not the "monarch of the sky" means Apollo as god of the sun, or Jupiter as god of the sky (which seems to me more likely), there is no myth concerning a liaison between either of these gods and the nymph Arethusa. What is particularly surprising is the adjective "wanton," for the mythical Arethusa is notable for her attempts to flee her lover Alpheus and for her prayers to Artemis to preserve her chastity. Marlowe's Arethusa, in contrast, seems almost sexually aggressive (the god is in her arms, and not vice versa). The final images in Faustus' speech thus suggest simultaneous fear (even terror) of sexual surrender (Faustus-Semele) as well as a desire, a longing for such release (Faustus-Arethusa).

Faustus is indeed ravished by his own magic. The final nightmare soliloquy seems in fact his final rape. Snow compares this last speech to the earlier one of solicitation ("Mephostophilis, come,/ And bring glad tidings from great Lucifer"), and remarks that the "same erotic energy charges both utterances... the later one is the genuine consummation of the earlier one as well as its

ironical inversion."<sup>31</sup> The climax of the speech does seem to communicate a strong orgasmic quality:

My God, my God! Look not so fierce on me!  
 Adders and serpents, let me breathe awhile!  
 Ugly hell, gape not! Come not, Lucifer;  
 I'll burn my books!--Ah, Mephostophilis!  
(xix.187-90)

Wilbur Sanders remarks that "the irreducible love-hate that Faustus bears toward both God and Lucifer becomes that cry of erotic self-surrender and horrified revulsion as he yields to the embrace of his demon lover."<sup>32</sup> At the risk of appearing too salacious, one might also (keeping in mind the oral nature of Faustus' desires<sup>33</sup>) find a suggestion of fellatio (and exhaustion) in the line, "Adders and serpents, let me breathe awhile." One may detect a hint of the same activity earlier with the masculine Helen: both receiving ("Her lips suck forth my soul: see where it flies!") and performing ("Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again").

While some will undoubtedly find such interpretations offensive or gratuitous, the play certainly manifests a strong sense of sexual confusion. Faustus' involvement with the devils suggests his own failure to believe in himself --in a sexual sense, to establish a stable, heterosexual identity. Thus, ironically, Faustus could well profit from

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<sup>31</sup>"Doctor Faustus and the Ends of Desire," 72.

<sup>32</sup>The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1968) 242.

<sup>33</sup>Snow terms it his "oral-narcissistic dilemma," 89.

the advice he offers Mephostophilis:

What, is great Mephostophilis so passionate  
 For being deprived of the joys of heaven?  
 Learn thou of Faustus manly fortitude  
 And scorn those joys thou never shalt possess.  
 (iii.85-88)

The dream of heaven (which often in artistic representation is a very sexually ambiguous place) only interferes with the individual's attempts to assert his "manliness" or human cohesiveness (with its recognition of sexual difference). This dissatisfaction with difference or distinctiveness, the inability to rely on one's own integrity (independently of the "other"), is essentially the source of Mephostophilis' torment:

Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God  
 And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
 Am not tormented with ten thousand hells  
 In being depriv'd of everlasting bliss?  
 O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,  
 Which strike a terror to my fainting soul.  
 (iii.79-84)

God and Lucifer thus figure in homoerotic terms since the desire for these "deities" stems from the individual male's failure to assert his "manliness," to function as a source rather than a receptor of power.

I have suggested that Faustus' involvement with necromancy symbolizes his failure to believe in himself in terms of his sexual identity; I believe as well that it can be seen in more general terms as representing his entire failure of imaginative response to human experience. The false power of the play--magic--may thus be seen as a symbol

of imagination, and Doctor Faustus as much as Tamburlaine becomes a play about the failure of imagination. This failure arises in part from an excessive confidence in words, as if the poetic imagination gives one direct access to power. At this point I would like to return to the essay by William Blackburn quoted at the outset. Blackburn remarks that Pico's concept of magic was "far more ambitious than the natural or astrological magic practised by such humanists as Ficino... which relied on the spiritus mundi for its efficacy"(4). Pico combined Hermetic magic with practical Cabbalism, which involves "tapping the magical power of Hebrew, a language of supreme efficacy in magic because, according to the scriptures, God created the world by speaking"(4). Thus Pico believed that, by studying the Cabbala, a magician could "unlock the secrets of language and acquire divine powers"(4). In the interesting discussion which follows, Blackburn argues that Faustus' "ignorance of magic is a central metaphor in the play because... it is really an ignorance of the proper way to use language"(6). One of the central ironies of the play is that "Faustus has difficulty in distinguishing between things and his verbal description of those things"(6). Thus Faustus can boast:

Are not thy bills hung up as monuments,  
Whereby whole cities have escap'd the plague  
And thousand desperate maladies been cur'd?  
(i.20-22)

Yet what "Faustus says is that his prescriptions ("bills")

have in themselves the power to ward off disease, and so these lines obliquely assert the magician's confidence in his language--a confidence which is essential to his self-deception"(6).

We thus have a situation similar to Tamburlaine, where the word can be taken for the object or the deed, and one can control and create as easily as opening one's mouth to speak. But of course Faustus, as Blackburn remarks, is deceived. The illusion of power gradually evaporates, and the general shrinking or constriction occurs:<sup>34</sup> Faustus goes from the primum mobile, to the court of the Pope, to the court of the German emperor, to the house of the Duke of Vanholt, to his study, and finally to "hell"--which is in essence his own tortured mind. Having no dominion over himself he can have no dominion over anything else. Yet I must part company with Blackburn when he remarks:

"Preferring the vain books of Lucifer to the Bible is one instance of [Faustus'] preference for falsehood; it is also characteristic of his attempt to substitute a world of words for the real world"(8). I cannot believe, as my argument hitherto will indicate, that Marlowe wants to suggest that the Bible represents the "real world," that is, the world of constructive human experience. The play is drawing a parallel, rather than a contrast, between divine and

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<sup>34</sup>This process is most fully explored by G.K. Hunter in "Five-Act Structure in Doctor Faustus," Tulane Drama Review 8.4 (1964): 77-91.

necromantic "scripture" by attacking the belief that words themselves--a magical utterance, a prayer, a pure act of poetic imagination--are so powerful that they can act as a substitute for human suffering and development.

Yet the exploration of imagination is not limited to the power of words only, but is extended to the effect of artistic presentations in general. The episode of the Seven Deadly Sins, in the context of the misuse of the imagination, can be read as an extremely serious moment rather than a gratuitous or fatuous interlude to indulge the tastes of the groundlings. This scene is as close as the play comes to showing us "real" evil--sin as the perversion of natural appetites--yet for Faustus it is only a pageant that ironically delights his soul. Beelzebub has promised that the sins will appear to Faustus "in their own proper shapes and likeness"(vi.106-07); this in a sense is a lie, since the sins appear as artistic, allegorical abstractions which allow Faustus to deny their "reality," their own internal presence within his undisciplined soul. The episode thus functions as a critique of the comedy of evil in the morality plays, since through Faustus' reaction we see that such presentations can deaden rather than increase the individual's sense of personal responsibility. The comedy and festive framework of the pageant blocks the recognition of the real source and the real ugliness of "sin"--the distortion of natural appetites.

Thus magic (imagination) for Faustus not only reveals his failure to believe in himself--to assert himself normally--but also allows him to avoid disciplining himself by excusing him from restraining his desires. In either case he gives imagination too much power, removes it too far from the reference point of reality, as if it were a separate world and not in various ways a mirror of the real one. This is not to say that Doctor Faustus suggests that the imagination can only be used in negative ways. An interesting juxtaposition of creative and self-indulgent uses of imagination in the play involves the two conjurations of Helen. The first occurs on the heels of Wagner's comment about Faustus and the students "at supper with such belly-cheer/ As [the servant] ne'er beheld in all [his] life"(xviii.8-9), which certainly implies over-indulgence. Yet what follows seems remarkably restrained, ordered and calm:

Enter FAUSTUS, MEPHOSTOPHILIS, and two or three Scholars.

I Sch. Master Doctor Faustus, since our conference about fair ladies, which was the beautifullest in all the world, we have determined with ourselves that Helen of Greece was the admirablest lady that ever lived. Therefore, master doctor, if you will do us that favour, as to let us see that peerless dame of Greece, whom all the world admires for majesty, we should think ourselves much beholding to you.

Fau. Gentlemen,  
For that I know your friendship is unfeign'd,  
And Faustus' custom is not to deny  
The just requests of those that wish him well,  
You shall behold that peerless dame of Greece...

· · · · ·  
Music sounds. MEPHOSTOPHILIS brings in HELEN;

she passeth over the stage.

2 Sch. Too simple is my wit to tell her praise  
Whom all the world admires for majesty.

3 Sch. No marvel though the angry Greeks pursu'd  
With ten years' war the rape of such a queen,  
Whose heavenly beauty passeth all compare.

I Sch. Since we have seen the pride of nature's works  
And only paragon of excellence,  
Let us depart, and for this glorious deed  
Happy and blest be Faustus evermore.

(xviii.11-36, my emphasis)

Jump points out that the phrases from the first Scholar's prose speech, "that peerless dame of Greece" and "Whom all the world admires for majesty" are subsequently echoed by Faustus (l. 23) and the second Scholar (l. 29). The editor suggests that "Perhaps this prose speech was inserted after the completion of the verse speeches which follow it"(88). Considering the uncertain nature of the text, this may well be the case; however, it is tempting to see the repetition as deliberate, so that both the artistic "promise" or intention (l. 23) and the audience response (l. 29) directly mirrors or fulfils the initial request for an artistic experience. I am aware that there is a strong critical tendency to view both appearances of Helen as essentially negative moments. Max Bluestone, for example, comments:

Helen "passeth over the stage" in her two appearances, and if Allardyce Nicoll is correct ["Passing over the Stage," Shakespeare Survey, 12 (1959): 47-55], she passes from the theater yard up to the platform and back down to the yard. Hell, in short, begins to encroach upon the theatre itself, for if Helen is a succuba, as Greg suggests, she begins and ends her progress in hell.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>"Libido Speculandi," 70.

Yet this "hell" may be seen as the artist's subconscious and, during the first appearance of Helen (B-text), Mephostophilis as a kind of muse figure (a metaphor of Faustus' control) brings up the perfect image for the delight of Faustus' audience. Even the negative reminder in the third Scholar's remark, "No marvel though the angry Greeks pursu'd/ With ten years' war the rape of such a queen"(30-31) seems contained by the image itself and by their appreciation of its beauty: "...such a queen,/ Whose heavenly beauty passeth all compare"(32). Thus art can distance the audience from life's suffering in a positive way, in a manner which does not involve an evasion of personal responsibility. The Scholars seem in no way harmed by this particular act of necromancy; nor does their enjoyment of it seem sinful. It has been the simplest of artistic acts--the satisfaction of an aesthetic longing--and in this light the first Scholar's final words are not as directly ironic as a moral reading would suggest:

Since we have seen the pride of nature's works  
 And only paragon of excellence,  
 Let us depart, and for this glorious deed  
 Happy and blest be Faustus evermore.

(33-36)

They have, in a sense, seen the pride of nature's work--a perfect mirror of it, at any rate. The deed is thus glorious. And if, quite clearly, Faustus will not be happy forevermore, it is not because he has offended God but because he proves unable to maintain control over his own

imaginative resources.

During the second appearance of Helen, Mephostophilis no longer appears as controlling muse. Faustus becomes completely enthralled--ravished--by his own creation. He confuses imagination with reality; for him, the image is no longer simply a mirror of nature but the real thing with which he becomes actively involved. So completely does he involve himself here that certain orthodox interpreters (Greg, for example) have taken this as the point of no return in terms of the doctor's hopes of salvation. There is certainly a sense that Faustus crosses the line at this point, but it is interesting to note that the crisis is precipitated rather than prevented by the intervention of the Old Man, who enters immediately after the Scholars have praised Faustus' first conjuration of Helen. The Old Man's initial speech represents probably the single most significant difference between the A- and B-texts, and it will be necessary to examine both versions. In the A-text the Old Man states:

Ah Doctor Faustus, that I might preuaile,  
To guide thy steps vnto the way of life,  
By which sweete path thou maist attaine the gole  
That shall conduct thee to celestial rest.  
Breake heart, drop blood, and mingle it with teares,  
Teares falling from repentant heauinesse  
Of thy most vilde and loathsome filthinesse,  
The stench whereof corrupts the inward soule  
With such flagitious crimes of hainous sinnes,  
As no commiseration my expel,  
But mercie Faustus of thy Sauour sweete,  
Whose blood alone must wash away thy guilt.

(1302-13)

Faustus' response to this scathing admonition is (perhaps not surprisingly) to want to "despair and die". For this desire Mephostophilis stands obligingly by with a dagger, almost as if the Old Man and the devil are in fact working together for Faustus' destruction. The terms the Old Man uses--"vilde and loathsome filthinesse", "the stench whereof corrupts"--seem particularly harsh after the hospitality and pleasure Faustus has just offered the Scholars. Moreover, the peculiar grammatical postponement of the final goal of the heavenly path--"To guide thy steps vnto the way of life [ah, there we are], By which sweete path [oh no, we have further to go] thou maist attaine the gole [ah, now we're there], That shall conduct thee [wrong again, we still have to keep going] to celestial rest"--creates an even stronger sense of restless searching than the Good Angel's admonition to "Read, read the scriptures." In contrast, the speech from the B-text seems warm and caring:

O gentle Faustus, leave this damned art,  
 This magic, that will charm thy soul to hell  
 And quite bereave thee of salvation.  
 Though thou hast now offended like a man,  
 Do not perseuer in it like a devil.  
 Yet, yet thou hast an amiable soul,  
 If sin by custom grow not into nature:  
 Then, Faustus, will repentance come too late,  
 Then thou art banish'd from the sight of heaven;  
 No mortal can express the pains of hell.  
 It may be this my exhortation  
 Seems harsh and all unpleasant; let it not,  
 For gentle son, I speak it not in wrath  
 Or envy of thee, but in tender love  
 And pity of thy future misery:  
 And so have hope that this my kind rebuke,  
 Checking thy body, may amend thy soul.  
 (Jump, xviii.38-54)

A close examination of even this speech, however, raises unsettling questions. All will be well, says the Old Man, "If sin by custom grow not into nature:/ Then, Faustus, will repentance come too late"(44-45). First, this is an odd time to make such a warning, after nearly all of the four and twenty years have been used up, and "the fatal time draws to a final end"(xv.22). Second, while this statement makes perfect sense in terms of the dialectic of natural-unnatural and the idea of sin as the perversion of natural appetites which I have suggested, it seems remarkably unorthodox coming from the Old Man, since it virtually eliminates the power of divine intervention and makes the self wholly responsible for its own condition. For these reasons it is dramatically logical that Faustus should also react with despair to this ostensibly more kindly speech. However, the Old Man's next utterance, concerning the angel hovering over Faustus' head with "a vial full of precious grace"(62) seems more consistent with the first A-text speech, since the reference to grace suggests that God has the power to forgive even sin that "has by custom grown into nature," which appears to be Faustus' case. The choice of which of these two initial speeches to include certainly is one of the most difficult a director must face, yet, whichever is chosen, the effect of the scene is to suggest that the Old Man's intervention consolidates Faustus' mental disorder. His acceptance of Helen as a lover reveals that

he is no longer capable of distinguishing illusion from reality, or that he no longer believes reality worth coming to terms with.

Faustus, of course, pays a horrible price for his retreat from reality. With respect to the increasing constriction mentioned earlier, it is interesting to note that Faustus regresses from Icarian flights of imagination to becoming himself a kind of restricted artefact--that is, a character trapped in an old-fashioned morality. This is perhaps the point of the final appearance of the Good and Bad Angels, in which the throne of heaven descends and the hell-mouth is discovered. Those who prefer the A-text (which lacks this scene) may dislike the overt moralizing and the crude stage spectacle here, but I have always felt the poetry good enough to be Marlowe's. This is the kind of nightmare that Faustus has unintentionally "bought into," to be tortured by the eschatological fear-mongering of his culture and his age, its ugliest imaginative constructions. (The behaviour of the Good Angel here is as unattractive as the Bad Angel's, and Marlowe probably would have loved it if, during performance, the throne from heaven squeaked and tottered as it descended. Such "bliss without end" would be as much of a nightmare as hell.)

Yet if Faustus is so completely deluded, how can he be regarded as a great tragic hero? Is it because we, seeking diversion from our own mundane lives, have no qualms about

identifying with a man who no longer believes reality is worth coming to terms with? Marlowe seems to imply in the prologue that again, as in Tamburlaine, some kind of divided response is possible, for the Chorus remarks:

Only this, gentles--we must perform  
The form of Faustus' fortunes, good or bad:  
And now to patient judgements we appeal....  
(7-9)

But how can Faustus' fortunes, or at least the "form" of them, be construed as possibly good? And why exactly are patient judgements appealed to? Is it a plea that Faustus' behaviour, on a psychological level, be understood, forgiven, because of his upbringing?

And now to patient judgements we appeal  
And speak for Faustus in his infancy....  
(9-10)

There does seem to be a particular tone in the opening Chorus of supplication, a cry for a merciful response, for the opening lines make clear that the play will not be an average bill of fare meant to indulge the audience's grosser tastes for riotous or violent action:

Not marching in the fields of Trasimene  
Where Mars did mate the warlike Carthagens,  
Nor sporting in the dalliance of love  
In courts of kings where state is overturn'd,  
Nor in the pomp of proud audacious deeds  
Intends our muse to vaunt his heavenly verse.  
(1-6)

The chorus seems to be soliciting a more thoughtful, more subtle response than audiences are used to giving.

The prologue thus encourages or anticipates a response not so much of condemnation as of melancholic reflection,

and before examining what our final feelings about Faustus should be or were meant to be, I wish to re-examine one critical moment in the play which both Barber and Snow take up in their discussions. I quote from Snow, whose comments subsume Barber's observations and bring us to the point which I mean to discuss:

C.L. Barber, in a beautiful perception of the way in which the play characteristically works ["The Form of Faustus' Fortunes Good or Bad"<sup>36</sup>], has noted the counterpoint between Faustus's fearful response to his devils' threats of dismemberment and the clown's contrastingly "sane" reaction to Wagner's threats to "turne al the lice about thee into familiars, and they shall teare thee in peeces":

Doe you heare sir? you may save that labour, they are too familiar with me already, swowns they are as bolde with my flesh, as if they had payd for my meate and drinke.

([A]388-91)

Barber stresses the felt value of "the clown's independence, and the detente of his common man's wit which brings things down to the physical." Yet he seems to back away from the logical implications of his insight when he goes on to suggest that the ultimate effect of the contrast is to "set off the folly of Faustus' elation in the bargain".... In this interpretation, the common man's sanity of the clown is, by a dramatic irony, made to reinforce the intimidating power of the latent psychotic fears to which it seems so affirmatively immune. But surely what it most strikingly sets off is not the folly of Faustus's elation in his bargain but his terror-stricken response to the threats with which both Christian doctrine and its devils intimidate him once he has entered into it. The clown seems more a benign dialectical alternative than merely an ironic foil. (He plays Barnardine to Faustus's Claudio, or Calyphas to Faustus's Tamburlaine.)<sup>37</sup>

This discussion eventually leads Snow to the observation

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<sup>36</sup>Tulane Drama Review 8.4 (1964): 92-119.

<sup>37</sup>"Doctor Faustus and the Ends of Desire," 90-91.

that Faustus is "burdened with his conceit of self as the Duchess with her child (the last soliloquy his final labour)" and that he has "to engender upon himself, through consciousness, what the Robins and Wagners and Emperors and Horsecourers of the world are prereflectively rooted in [a sound identity]: and thus fated (or chosen) to confront the ontological void in which ordinary experience is so imperturbably suspended"(93).

But I doubt that Robin and company represent only a benign dialectical alternative, and Snow himself seems to have some reservations, for he remarks, "Yet the judgment at Faustus's expense, it needs to be emphasized, remains problematical..."(92). Very problematic indeed, in terms of the traditional arguments (the ones we all employed as undergraduates) that the horseplay of the clowns serves to highlight or mirror Faustus' own moral degeneracy. For example, Scene x, in which Robin and Dick attempt to frighten the Vintner's boy by conjuring a devil but are themselves turned into a dog and an ape, reflects Faustus' own desire to manipulate others through black magic and his accompanying degeneracy. While not all critics feel comfortable with such arguments (Jump is an example [lix-ix]), the point is that, in spite of his failure at self-fashioning, it is Faustus we identify with and who always compares favourably, somehow, with the play's other characters. I once believed that Scene xvii, in which

Faustus charms the peasants dumb one by one, was a good example of how the hero's world gradually runs down and becomes meaningless. But surely it is everyone's world that does so at this point, and while critics who prefer a pure A-text would simply ignore the expanded form of this scene, I think the mysterious overlapping and blending of court and tavern world here is a powerful dramatic technique which exposes the ceaseless search for satiety on the part of all humankind, which becomes in effect a world of blind mouths. While the duchess' appetite for grapes may be more acceptable (because of her pregnancy) than the clowns' rude demand for beer, and while Faustus' explanation of how the grapes are obtained may be a confirmation of all that is good and natural about the temporal cycles of the earth, the act of obtaining the grapes is still a violation (from where they stand geographically) of the normal time of fruition (just as Faustus seeks divinity--omnipotence--too early, so that he is eventually reduced to "self time"(xx.11) which, like "self place" turns the experience of the self into "dreadful horror"). There is also, in Scene xvii, a constant emphasis on recompense, on who will pay for this delight. The Horsecourser and the Carter demand compensation from Faustus, and the Hostess' last words are: "Who pays for the ale? Hear you, master doctor, now you have sent away my guests, I pray who shall pay me for my a--" (114-16). Even normal, natural desires are satisfied only

at a price. Though the Duke promises that he and the Duchess will "recompense" Faustus "With all the love and kindness that [they] may"(119-20), this unhappily will not settle the doctor's account. Just as the Duchess will herself have to "pay" for her longings with travail pains, Faustus will soon be destroyed by his inability to procure love and affection on normal and natural terms. The key difference here is, of course, that the Duchess will have something to show for her labour, while Faustus will not. Yet in spite of her advantage biologically (as well as psychologically), there is nothing particularly heroic about the "unperturbed" characters (although, God knows, pregnant women may beg to differ). While they may be more "natural" and therefore "happier" than Faustus, their lives are not portrayed as involving any risk of self-development. Thus, while Snow's point about the ontological advantage enjoyed by the Robins and Wagners of the world is both extremely valid and interesting, there is something inadequate about it, in the final analysis, as a statement about the tragic nature of the play.

How does Faustus, in spite of his lack of integrity, maintain a heroic stature in the play? Is it simply because he is gifted, so that the play is the tragedy of a genius unable to fit in with his less remarkable, more sane, fellow men and women? It is perhaps the tragedy of the artist, the tragedy (as so many critics suggest) of Marlowe

himself. "Too simple is my wit to tell her praise" says the second Scholar after Helen passes over the stage; he has enjoyed the vision, thank-you-very-much, but it takes a greater mind, a more sensitized one, a more tortured one, to produce it--to actually succeed in telling her praise: "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships...." Or perhaps it is the tragedy of the homosexual (again the tragedy of Marlowe himself) whose strongest desires do not lead naturally to the psychologically reinforcing bond of marriage and the duties of child-rearing (with the concomitant challenges and rewards), but instead to a life where every romantic attraction is necessarily a self-excluding act of social and moral defiance, an existence which culminates in a final nightmare of attraction and repulsion, guilt and despair.

Yet neither of these suggestions explains why there is such a strong sense of Everyman about Faustus, how his character seems to be carefully drawn with enough specificity to communicate a sense of extraordinary aspiration but also, curiously, with enough vagueness to let most of us feel that the spirit of the man is somehow close to our own. We perhaps identify most strongly with Faustus in the prose scene with the Scholars near the end of the play:

Ah, gentlemen, hear me with patience, and tremble not at my speeches. Though my heart pants and quivers to remember that I have been a student here these thirty years, O, would I had never seen

Wittenberg, never read book! and what wonders I have done all Germany can witness, yea, all the world, for which Faustus hath lost both Germany and the world, yea, heaven itself--heaven, the seat of God, the throne of the blessed, the kingdom of joy--and must remain in hell for ever. Hell, ah, hell for ever! Sweet friends, what shall become of Faustus, being in hell for ever?

(xix.42-53)

Did Marlowe in his writing ever come closer to the heart of a man?<sup>38</sup> It is as if all the pretense and artifice were abandoned with the blank verse, and yet the prose communicates even more strongly the true feelings of the heart. There is in this scene, in spite of Faustus' concern for his future state, a strong nostalgic sense, a retrospective longing for lost innocence. Faustus' relation with the scholars seems almost a regressive attempt to establish the pre-sexual intimacy which we observed between Tamburlaine and his men early in that hero's career. It is the desire to escape the demands of adulthood, to get back to when sexual difference (or sameness) made no difference, to recapture the world of childhood friends, to regain Eden before the fall (this perhaps explains the reference to Eden and the serpent, 41-42). It is a desire we may condemn as puerile, but surely one we all understand. Faustus' terror of hell at this point seems to be less a fear of torment than a dread of being alone, of being permanently removed

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<sup>38</sup>Especially, I think, in the way Faustus still clings to a sense of personal pride--"and what wonders I have done all Germany can witness, yea, all the world"--in the midst of his sorrow and despair.

from all sources of true love or affection, separated from his "sweet friends." Yet Faustus demonstrates true love and affection himself in his concern for his friends: "Gentlemen, away, lest you perish with me!... Talk not of me, but save yourselves and depart"(74,76). His concern for them is thus perhaps not regressive at all, but actually transcends the sexual mercinariness of human desire by becoming truly selfless. Faustus seems, for a moment, truly heroic. My admiration for his heroism here would be untempered were it not for my feeling that Faustus in his eagerness almost appears to want to get rid of the Scholars. This may be because, like Juliet, he realizes that his dismal scene he needs must act alone, but also, perhaps, because he cannot bear to have the Scholars, in their innocence, observe the final consummation of his passions. Shame or fear, as much as altruism, seem to motivate him at this moment.

Yet still the play insists, I think, that if Faustus goes no farther than hell he goes farther than others. The Scholars' glib assurances about God's mercy are seriously undercut when the third pipes up bravely, "God will strengthen me. I will stay with Faustus," and the first immediately corrects him: "Tempt not God, sweet friend; but let us into the next room and there pray for him"(77-79). No one is willing to bet on what God is really up to here, and Faustus must be forgiven if the first part of his reply

is tinged with irony: "Ay, pray for me, pray for me; and, what noise soever ye hear, come not unto me, for nothing can rescue me"(80-81). Even if we don't accept that the play portrays God as an actively malevolent force conspiring against the hero, I think Doctor Faustus remains a strong indictment against the deity, mainly by emphasizing his inability to aid his creatures. The story is, as Waldock says of the Genesis story of the Fall, a bad one for God, but perhaps only in the sense that all stories are bad ones for God, because all narratives describe the experience of the human personality crawling through the catastrophic void between creation and reconciliation. The more actively a voice communicates, the more deeply (usually) it is in trouble, or the more difficulty the self experiences in creating a coherent or durable vehicle of existence. What makes Faustus unique as bad press theologically is that it communicates strongly the absurdity of grace, which, as it must come unsolicited, seems to come least to those who need it most. To him that hath shall be given; but conversely, the more you get into trouble, the more you get into trouble. Having reached such an extreme state that you consider praying often means that you've lost enough control of your condition to be hard-pressed to recover. For those who find self-fashioning difficult (either due to upbringing or inherent personal qualities) life becomes difficult; in the end there is no external power who can step in to

resolve internal conflicts.

Snow makes much of Faustus' comment, "til I am past this faire and pleasant greene"(A 1141), but fails to stress its greatest significance in the play--how little Marlowe makes of it--since after Dido the pastoral vision vanishes almost completely from Marlovian drama, except for this fleeting reference by Faustus and a cruel parody of "Come live with me and be my love" in The Jew of Malta. It is as if the dream of Eden, the world of lost innocence, slipped out of Marlowe's consciousness so completely it could never again be seriously considered. And while Snow remarks that both the Christian and Faustian soul seem to be "denied the grace of all that is embodied in a dish of ripe grapes,"<sup>39</sup> I believe he underestimates how the Christian significance in the image of the grapes continued to haunt Marlowe's imagination. Margaret O'Brien has argued<sup>40</sup> that the reference in the concluding 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"--brings to mind (and to this we may add the grapes at Vanholt and the fruit imagery of the Prologue) John 15:1-6:

I am the true vine, and my Father is an husbandman.

Euerie branche that beareth not frute in me, he taketh away: & euerie one that beareth frute, he

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<sup>39</sup>"Doctor Faustus and the Ends of Desire," 102.

<sup>40</sup>"Christian Belief in Doctor Faustus," ELH 37 (1970): 10-11.

purgeth it, that it may bring forthe more frute.  
Now are ye cleane through the worde, which I have  
spoken vnto you.

Abide in me, and I in you: as the bra[n]che can not  
beare frute of it self, except it abide in the vine,  
no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

I am the vine: ye are the branches: he that abideth  
in me, & I in him, the same bringeth forth much  
frute: for without me ca[n] ye do nothing.

If a man abide not in me, he is cast forthe as a  
branche, and withereth: and men gather them, and  
cast them into the fyre, and they burne.

It is as if in the back of Marlowe's mind he realized that what Faustus struggles so hopelessly to achieve--a coherent sense of self, a sound identity--will in the end be undermined by the Creator who set the whole process in motion. It is this suspicion of the illusory nature of the self that makes self-fashioning so difficult for Marlowe's heroes. The soundness of natural life in the end turns out to be the "real" illusion, and, for those unlucky enough to be stripped of this illusion prematurely,<sup>41</sup> experience

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<sup>41</sup>I would like to propose here, as a kind of coda, a further significance to the grape image in the play with respect to Christian iconography. In his analysis of Herbert's "Bunch of Grapes," George Herbert: His Religion and Art (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968), Joseph Summers explains that the cluster of Eshcol signified a foretaste of the Promised Land to the Wandering Children of Israel, the full blessings of God. However, to the Israelites

...the bunch of grapes substantiated the report that it was 'a land that eateth vp the inhabitants thereof, and all the people that we saw in it, are men of great stature. And there we saw the giants... and wee were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so wee were in their sight' (Num. xiii.23-24). From fear they turned to the rebellion which caused God to decree the wandering of forty years. (127)

Thus while the bunch of grapes "is a type of Christ and the Christian's communion" (128), the grapes of Eshcol also signify that "God's blessings [while man is still] under the Law could become... [the] occasion for the renewal of sin

becomes a "dreadful night"(xix.2) in which one is forced to look with unaccustomed eyes into the horrible fire at the heart of creation.

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and the curse"(128). The image of the grapes thus becomes a token of suffering and fear--specifically a fear of being "eaten up," like Christ's body in communion--for those who seek premature religious surrender, who attempt to enter the "Promised Land" before they have lived out their necessary lives in the realm of human experience.

It is interesting to note that the lowest panel of the East Window of Corona in Canterbury cathedral, a window "occupying a position only second in dignity and importance [in the cathedral]," Bernard Rackham, The Ancient Glass of Canterbury (London: Lund Humphries & Co., 1949) 73, is a representation of the Grapes of Eshcol: "Two of the returning [Israelite] spies carry on a staff between them 'a branch with one cluster of grapes'. Inscribed:...[in Latin]('This one refuses to look back at the cluster, the other thirsts to see it; Israel knows not Christ, the Gentile adores him')"(Rackham 75). Marlowe undoubtedly was familiar with this window as a child. In what may very well have been his next play after Faustus, he identifies closely with the "Israelite" Barabas over the Gentiles who oppose him.

## Chapter 5: The Jew of Malta

As M.M. Mahood argues, The Jew of Malta "depicts a world which has cut itself off entirely from the transcendent,"<sup>1</sup> yet the play contains a great density of Biblical allusions. We can account for this discrepancy by accepting G.K. Hunter's assessment that The Jew of Malta is, "apart from Faustus, the greatest ironic structure in Marlowe's work."<sup>2</sup> However, as in Faustus, Biblical parody in The Jew of Malta fails to reinforce orthodox Christian morality: the play does not expose the folly of attempting to establish a "carnal" rather than a "spiritual" identity so much as it explores the tragic failure to establish a very necessary "carnal" identity. Like Tamburlaine and Faustus, The Jew of Malta presents a case of distorted self-assertion. Barabas' symbolic role as Anti-Christ does not pit him against a true Christian or Christ-like counterpart (an ideal which few characters in the play come close to embodying) but rather against those characters (most importantly Ferneze) who successfully operate within the limits of their natural selves. Barabas fails to establish

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<sup>1</sup>Poetry and Humanism (London: Jonathan Cape, 1950) 74.

<sup>2</sup>"The Theology of Marlowe's The Jew of Malta," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 27 (1964): 213.

a stable, human identity for two reasons: in true Marlovian fashion he cannot accept the responsibility which is a concomitant of increased personal power, and, as an outsider (that is, a variant from the social norm), he is not supported in his self-fashioning by society's system of traditional values and beliefs. The Jew of Malta is, in fact, the first of Marlowe's plays to explore in detail the problems of self-fashioning in a social context.

I would like to begin by first dealing with the problems raised by the complex web of Biblical allusions in the text. This subject has been explored by several critics in the past, the most recent of whom is Sara M. Deats in her article "Biblical Parody in Marlowe's The Jew of Malta: A Re-Examination."<sup>3</sup> More than previous commentators, Deats recognizes the problematic nature of many of these allusions, yet insists, sometimes it seems in opposition to the implications of her own examples, on ultimately orthodox interpretations; that is, she argues for Marlowe's use of Biblical parody "as a pointer to... typological norms"(27) so that the play dramatizes "the choice between a spiritual and carnal allegiance"(39). The difficulty arising from this approach becomes particularly evident in Deats' discussion of Ferneze's Biblical paraphrase in his reply to Barabas:

No, Jew, we take particularly thine

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<sup>3</sup>Christianity and Literature 37.2 (1988): 27-48.

To save the ruin of a multitude:  
 And better one want for a common good  
 Than many perish for a private man. (I.ii.97-100)<sup>4</sup>

As Deats points out, "the sentiments voiced by Ferneze had long been proverbial"(see Bawcutt, 82-83, n. 99-100) and so the Governor's position here would appear rational and acceptable; however, the lines also echo Caiaphas' statement in John 11:50: "it is expedient for vs, that one man dye for the people, and that the whole nacion perish not."<sup>5</sup> This surprising reversal, whereby Barabas assumes the role of Christ and the Christian Ferneze that of the Jewish high-priest, adds what Deats terms "ironic density" to the scene (33); the critic concludes that "By evoking both proverb and Scripture, Marlowe creates a puzzling and probably deliberate ambiguity"(34). Puzzling indeed, yet it is difficult to see how the ambiguity here points towards "implied standards"(42) that are Biblical or Godly in nature. Though we may assume that Marlowe means to endow Ferneze with the kind of hypocrisy Christians generally associate with Caiaphas, there remains the question of how conscious Ferneze is of this hypocrisy (a matter I will return to later) as well as whether Marlowe would actually see Caiaphas from the traditional Christian viewpoint. We must remember that the playwright is quoted by Baines as

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<sup>4</sup>All quotations of The Jew of Malta are from the Revels edition, ed. N.W. Bawcutt (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1978).

<sup>5</sup>All Biblical quotations are from the Geneva Bible.

saying that "if the Iewes among whome [Christ] was borne did Crucify him theie best knew him and whence he Came."

Caiaphas and the other Jewish priests are traditionally condemned for seeking what was "expedient" for them, since Christ threatened the existing religious power structure and, specifically, the priests' ability to feather their own nests. Yet if we alter our attitude slightly, we can allow for the possibility that Caiaphas meant, "it is expedient for us--the Jewish people--that the whole nation perish not." With the fear of an uprising and the nation's subsequent destruction at the hands of the Roman forces (what in fact eventually took place historically), the High Priest's concern was perhaps--less selfishly--for the welfare of his people and his state, for which he was willing to sacrifice a single life. Ferneze is in a similar position. While Deats suggests that the Turkish tribute has been neglected for ten years "perhaps for reasons of 'policy'"(32, my emphasis), we do not know that for sure. All we know for certain is that a mighty Turkish fleet stands poised to invade Malta, and Calymath demands quick payment of the tribute. We can understand, then, if Ferneze concludes that, for the preservation of social order (in this case of the society itself), it is certainly better that "one want for a common good/ Than many perish for a private man." The placement of Barabas in a "radical" Christ role of extreme individualism thus suggests an

(admittedly rather perverse) blending of Anti-Christ and Christ together as figures who oppose the common good.

From Hunter's discussion in "The Theology of Marlowe's The Jew of Malta" we learn that "The name Barabbas... means filius patris; but this should be interpreted," the critic hastens to add, "in the light of John viii, 44, where Christ says to the Jews, 'Ye are of your father the Devil', and so Barabbas is to be interpreted as Antichristi typus" (214). However, in subtle but significant ways Barabas as "antitype" parallels rather than inverts the types he reflects. For example, Hunter discusses the several allusions to the Book of Job in the text of the play (218-19), points out that Job was seen as a type of Christ in the Old Testament, and concludes:

Indeed the whole course of Barabas' career can be seen as a parody of Job's; both men begin in great prosperity, and then, for what appears to be no good reason, lose their possessions; both are restored to prosperity before the end of the action; both are accused of justifying themselves in the face of their adversity. But there the parallel ends; the frame of mind in which these events are lived through is precisely opposite. Barabas' self-justification and self-will proceeds from a monstrous egotism, which is the basis of his character.... Job's justification, however one takes the difficult point, must be seen to spring from an anguished awareness that God is unanswerably just. (219)

On the most obvious level no one will deny that Barabas functions as an "Anti-Job," for Job is traditionally the figure of patience while Barabas actively seeks revenge. Yet Hunter's uneasy qualification, "however one takes the difficult point," must make us pause before accepting that

the purpose of the Job allusions is to invite us simply to condemn or dismiss Barabas for his failure to exercise "Christian" patience. I do not here intend to attempt an in-depth analysis of the Book of Job (and I wish to add, somewhat irreverently, that I am not sure it would be worth the effort). However, if I suggest that some readers find the Book of Job one of the most vexing examples of theological obfuscation in existence (it only seems to increase the sense of injustice it purportedly attempts to dispel), then it is conceivable that Marlowe also reacted to it in this way. The Book of Job seems a prime example of that kind of religion whose only purpose is to keep men in awe. "Where wast thou when I layed the fundacions of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding" and so on says God (38:4 ff.), continually hammering home to Job the fact of his own insignificance, finally reducing him to a state of abject submission and self-aborrence; and God does this, ironically, after twice adjuring Job to "gird up his loins" and act like a man (38:3,40:2)! But it is not only our vague sense of injustice at the whole Job fable which dulls the moral edge of Barabas' anti-Job parody. One of Barabas' actions that critics find, understandably, most heinous is his replacement through murder of his daughter Abigail with his "adopted son" Ithamore; Kuriyama remarks that "One of Barabas' most marked egotistical... traits is his tendency to treat people as possessions and objects, rather like

pieces of furniture that he can move about, employ, or discard at will."<sup>6</sup> This replacement of children as objects, however, is exactly what happens in the Book of Job. Job begins with seven sons and three daughters whom God replaces in the end (having allowed Satan to annihilate the originals) with seven more sons and three more daughters. Children are commodities which can be exchanged like Job's oxen and sheep, and neither Job nor God seems to have any scruples about this state of affairs. The fable, like Marlowe's play, thus violates our natural human feelings of familial loyalty and affection. The fact that we are meant to read certain parts of the Bible as allegory does not, I believe, alleviate our revulsion. Waldock's brief discussion of the Pilgrim's Progress is relevant here:

...Bunyan, theoretically, would not have us abandon our customary human values--his allegory, like every allegory, owes its very point to an acceptance of those values--yet he comes very near in [the opening] passage to affronting some of the chief of them. Christian running across the plain, his fingers in his ears to shut out the cries of his wife and children, desperately bent on his own salvation, is not the kind of person for whom in normal circumstances we should have a strong regard.<sup>7</sup>

The Bible's frequent contradiction or denial of what to most of us seem natural human responses (one thinks of Christ's warning in Matthew 11:37 that "he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me") problematizes

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<sup>6</sup>Hammer or Anvil, 160.

<sup>7</sup>Paradise Lost and its Critics (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1962) 54.

Biblical examples in The Jew of Malta and elsewhere in literature as easily acceptable guides for human behaviour. An insistence or an assumption that we are always willing to accept these examples as worthy of imitation leads orthodox critics of Marlowe into questionable assertions. Deats, for example, claims that Jacomo's response, "Why, stricken him that would have struck at me" when asked by Barabas (who has of course framed him) what he has done (IV.i.174-75), recalls to us the Friar's failure to live up to Jesus' command: "But I say vnto you, Resist not euil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheke, turne to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39). "Probably few in Marlowe's audience," Deats piously concludes, "would have overlooked this violation of Christian ethics"(42). Yet it is extremely doubtful that Christ's admonition would spring to anyone's mind as the moral message at this point of the play, or that Marlowe ever intended that it should. Jacomo is destroyed through his own foolishness, not by his failure to live up to the ideals of Christian behaviour. Turning the other cheek would certainly not help anyone survive for long in Maltese society. Rather than confirming such ideals, the Biblical parody in The Jew of Malta makes evident the inadequacy, even the absurdity, of Christian ethics in the dog-eat-dog world that the characters inhabit.

Barabas, of course, is not at all concerned with Christian ethics, and my suggestion that in some subtle and



the final stanza introduces a significance which Hunter does not consider but which is very important to my reading of Marlowe's play. "Thus we prevent the last great day" begins the final stanza, and, though the word "prevent" carries the archaic meaning of "anticipate" (our carnal allegiance thus anticipates the Last Judgement, as C.A. Patrides suggests<sup>8</sup>), there is also a strong tendency -- whether or not Herbert intended this pun--to take the word "prevent" in the more modern sense of "to cut off beforehand, debar, preclude" (OED). We "prevent" the last great day, the annihilation of our human selves, out of a desire for self-preservation, in order to avoid premature self-surrender. Once those "snuffs" of sin and passion (the ingredients of an ultimately illusory but very necessary sense of human identity) are taken away, the light of Christ shines "bright and clear, ev'n unto condemnation," that is, even unto a complete loss of human integrity. It is Marlowe's obsession with this idea (we recall Faustus and the unstable self terrified of its eventual surrender) that accounts, I believe, for the high frequency of Biblical allusions in The Jew of Malta, particularly those concerned with the two covenants, the old versus the new man, the flesh versus the spirit.

Deats draws attention, for example, to the largely

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<sup>8</sup>The English Poems of George Herbert (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1974) 176.

ignored allusions which associate Barabas with Abraham (37-38). In a thematic extension of these allusions in III.iv, the scene of Abigail's disinheritance and Ithamore's adoption, we find a parallel to

the expulsion by Abraham of the bondswoman Hagar and her son Ishmael; like Abigail, Abraham's first-born was deprived of his legacy and banished beyond the gates of his father. One tradition identified Ishmael and Isaac as the ancestors of the Arab and Hebrew races respectively; here, therefore, Barabas follows the pattern of ironic inversion established earlier in the play, reversing Abraham's actions by rejecting his freeborn Hebrew child Abigail in favor of his Turkish bondman Ithamore. Another Christian tradition, claiming for its adherents the promise of Isaac, frequently allegorized the Isaac-Ishmael rivalry as prefiguring the replacement of the old covenant of law, represented by the bondswoman Hagar, by the new covenant of grace, represented by the free wife Sarah. In this schema, Ishmael symbolizes not the Arab people but the heirs of the promise according to the flesh, the Jews, whereas Isaac symbolizes the heirs according to the spirit, the Christians, with the father Abraham an emblem for God the father [cf. Paul's explanation of this "allegory" in Galatians 4:23-28]. (38)

The two traditions together create an interesting ambiguity whereby the Jewish figure in one represents the chosen while in the other it becomes the discarded member. Marlowe probably appreciated this ambiguity, exposing as it does the tendency of every culture or religion to create its own self-justifying myth at the expense of some denigrated "other." In both traditions, the inversions suggested by Deats would appear to hold true, for in the context of the Pauline reading Abigail as converted Christian is rejected in favour of "the infidel devotee of the flesh Ithamore" (39). Barabas' role as Abraham, symbolic of God the father,

may explain his line at I.i.138, "And all I have is hers [Abigail's]," which echoes Luke 15:31: "Sonne, thow art euer with me, and all that I haue, is thine." It is interesting, however, that Barabas' willingness to sacrifice his child parallels rather than inverts the Biblical Abraham, who would have sacrificed Isaac, an incident clearly alluded to in The Jew of Malta when Barabas remarks: "I mean my daughter--but e'er he shall have her,/ I'll sacrifice her on a pile of wood"(II.iii.52-53, a Biblical allusion which itself parallels the reference to Agamemnon and Iphigen at I.i.137). Again we are reminded of the questionable nature of Biblical ethics, for although God eventually "prevents" the sacrifice of Isaac, the test itself can only seem perverse to human sensibilities. Moreover, we cannot forget that the incident "prevents," in Biblical typology, God's willing sacrifice of his own son.

Act III, Scene iv contains another ironic parallel related to the Abraham allusions. The "mess of rice-porridge"(64)--called "pottage" at line 89--recalls, as Bawcutt points out, "the 'mess of potage' for which Esau sold his birthright, Genesis, xxv"(137). Abigail loses Barabas' blessing (31) in this scene and ends up eating the porridge; thus we can see what Deats terms an "outrageous" parallel involving Barabas-Isaac, Abigail-Esau, and Ithamore-Jacob. Since the "allegorizing Christians moralized Esau's selling of his birthright for a 'mess of

pottage'... as a paradigm for the profane man's rejection of a spiritual blessing for carnal gratification," we again get an ironic inversion whereby "Abigail's renunciation of her father's materialistic creed in favor of a spiritual vocation receives as its reward not a blessing" but death, while Ithamore is granted the birthright (Deats 39). The inversion may not seem so complete if one is willing to admit that the treachery displayed by Barabas and Ithamore is not entirely at odds with the rather unscrupulous behaviour, from the standpoint of human ethics, of the Biblical Rebekah and Jacob. The anonymous author of Jacob and Esau is certainly at pains to present their actions in an acceptable light. This point aside, the Biblical allusions in III.iv indicate that Barabas is extremely determined to set aside the spiritual alternative open to humankind. (Such an alternative, if symbolized by the unlucky Abigail, is not presented in a very positive or hopeful light in the play.) The question with respect to the play's tragic hero is, why, if Barabas is so ruthless in his campaign of self-assertion, does he fail to establish a viable "carnal" identity necessary for survival in the Machiavellian world of Malta?

One critic who discusses the character of Barabas in terms of abnormal psychology is of course Kuriyama, and Hammer or Anvil offers several valuable insights. Not surprisingly, Kuriyama believes that "the particular

psychological conflict dramatized in The Jew of Malta, and Barabas's specific role in that conflict... are intimately bound up with Marlowe's"(140). She argues that "Barabas is exactly the kind of hero we might expect Marlowe to turn to once he had abandoned hope of achieving any kind of phallic mastery, and had ceased trying to reconcile his personal goals and ideals with those dictated by his society"(149). Thus psychological conflicts in the play are expressed not so much by physical confrontation, as they had been in Tamburlaine, but rather by "more subtle and 'civilized,' and at the same time, psychogenetically more primitive, modes of defining and regulating power relationships"(141). Kuriyama sees Barabas' hoarding as a regressively anal or pregenital substitute for phallic confrontations. The resulting emasculation of Barabas is expressed in the play through images which suggest "a classic childish confusion of anal and female procreative functions"(154). Whether or not most of us would recognize such confusion as "classic," Barabas' maternal behaviour is clearly expressed on several occasions. Having recovered his bags of gold in Act II, Barabas joyfully identifies himself with the mother lark:

...wake the morning lark,  
That I may hover with her in the air,  
Singing o'er these [his bags], as she does o'er  
her young. (II.i.61-63)

Later in the play Ithamore tells Bellamira and Pilia-Borza that Barabas "hides and buries [his wealth] up as partridges do their eggs"(IV.ii.63-64). Moreover, Hunter has

demonstrated (221-25) that the phrase "infinite riches in a little room" in Barabas' opening soliloquy blasphemously parodies a formula traditionally used to describe the womb of the pregnant Virgin Mary, so that the Jew's counting-house becomes itself a kind of womb with Barabas as a pregnant mother-figure.

With what Kuriyama calls Barabas' quasi-feminine character (156) in mind, I would like to make the claim that, through Marlowe's increasing anxiety over his own thoughts "effeminate and faint," Barabas' role as the Jewish alien in Malta becomes a kind of metaphor in the play for the homosexual in society. Wilbur Sanders in The Dramatist and the Received Idea mentions "the medieval libel of the foetor judaicus (a vile-smelling bodily secretion due to alleged menstruation in Jewish males, which good Christians found intolerable and which could only be obliterated by the waters of baptism)" and suggests that Marlowe "maliciously re-applies it" when Barabas tells Lodowick he must walk around to purge himself after talking with Gentiles (II.iii.44 ff.).<sup>9</sup> John Boswell, in Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality, remarks that "Jews and gay people were often tacitly linked in later medieval law and literature as nonconformists threatening the social

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<sup>9</sup> (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1968) 42.

order."<sup>10</sup> These particular prejudices may have played a role in Marlowe's subconscious linkage of Jews and homosexuals.<sup>11</sup> Though Kuriyama never goes so far as to make this claim herself, she strongly suggests it when she argues that

Marlowe, by partially and tentatively adopting the perspective of an "outsider," a member of an "exploited minority," launches some of his most devastating satirical blasts at the hypocritical Christian society that in his view rejected him and threatened his survival. (150)

It is possible that Marlowe's growing awareness of his own sexual feelings, which he began to become conscious of during the composition of Faustus (assuming this order of composition), frightened him into choosing a protagonist who was not himself directly involved in, or even aspiring to, sexual activity. Nevertheless, the "outsider" figure he chose to portray, and with whom he could strongly identify, indirectly expresses Marlowe's continuing sexual anxieties.

As in Tamburlaine and Doctor Faustus, we again find evidence of what seems a strong aversion to heterosexual activity in The Jew of Malta. Barabas' only reference to

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<sup>10</sup>(Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980), commentary to figure 9; see also pp. 15-16.

<sup>11</sup>As a matter of interest, The Jew of Malta is not the only time in literature that Jewishness has been used as a cover for a homosexual figure. Garry Wills in his article "Oliver Twist: Love in the Lower Depths," The New York Review of Books 26 Oct. 1989 36.16: 60-67, discusses how Dickens used Fagin's Jewishness (taking advantage, like Marlowe, of popular prejudice) as a mask for his character's pederasty. This technique is, however, far more consciously employed by Dickens than by Marlowe.

his own sexual involvement (significantly there is no reference in the play to a loving relationship with Abigail's mother) is decidedly negative:

Bern. Thou hast committed--  
Bar. Fornication?  
 But that was in another country:  
 And besides, the wench is dead. (IV.i.39-42)

As the exchange forms one moment in the verbal sparring match between Barabas and the Friars, it is doubtful that the tale is true. Even if it were, the act is regarded only as "fornication," the significance of which is eradicated by the fact of the woman's death. Death seems to be Barabas' way of dealing with the sexual threat, for he takes steps to murder both his daughter Abigail and his adopted son Ithamore when they enter into heterosexual relationships, presumably because they then begin to move outside of the Jew's control. Indeed, Barabas' replacement of Abigail with Ithamore seems already to have begun when he first begins laying his trap for his daughter's lovers Mathias and Lodowick, for it is in this scene, II.iii, that he purchases the Turkish slave. In one sense both Abigail and Ithamore symbolize a part of Barabas' own nature (he calls Ithamore his "second self"(III.iv.15)) which he must repress or expunge. As they progress to sexual maturity, Barabas can no longer accept them as part of his own being--he can no longer identify with them.

In fact, everyone seeking or engaging in heterosexual activity that comes within Barabas' sphere of influence is

destroyed by him: Mathias and Lodowick are tricked into a mutually fatal duel (though Barabas destroys the latter ostensibly in order to be revenged upon Ferneze, the Jew offers no reason for the destruction of the former), the lecherous Friars are directly or indirectly done away with, and Ithamore and Bellamira (along with her pimp) are poisoned. With the exception of Mathias, all these characters are lured to their deaths by some degree of covetousness or desire for wealth--the flaw which places them in Barabas' power--yet their concomitant "lechery" or sexual desire is significant, for it is Barabas' suppression of his own sexual desires which makes him, on a symbolic level, more powerful or less vulnerable than they. Barabas seems to delight in destroying those engaged in sexual activity, and his sickening comparison of the nuns swollen with the poisoned porridge to their habitual pregnant state (IV.i.6) constitutes a perverse and horrifying equation of natural process and unnatural death. It is interesting to note as well that, with respect to the parents in the play, there are no complete couples: Abigail and Lodowick each have a father and no mother, while Mathias has a mother and no father. While single-parent families occur elsewhere in Renaissance drama (in Shakespeare, for example), I suspect that Marlowe (unlike Shakespeare) could not bear to portray a harmonious, cooperative heterosexual couple; as an artist he simply cannot envisage a fulfilling and permanent sexual

union.

Somewhat less disturbing but equally dismissive of fulfilling sexual relationships is Marlowe's parody of romantic conventions on two occasions in the play. In what might best be termed a "proleptic" parody, the "night scene," during which Barabas recovers his gold, "in its imagery and staging, curiously foreshadows the balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet," as Harry Levin points out.<sup>12</sup> The rhetoric here indeed becomes reminiscent of a love scene--

But stay, what star shines yonder in the east?  
The loadstar of my life, if Abigail (II.i.41-42)--

but Barabas ends up embracing his gold rather than his daughter. (If, as Bawcutt suggests, these lines involve "an irreverent illusion to the Biblical star of Matthew, ii.9"[100], the parody of the search for the Christ-child is ultimately linked to the dehumanizing of Abigail.) An even more interesting parody, since it involves Marlowe's reworking of his own earlier lyric, is Ithamore's version of "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love":

Bella. I have no husband, sweet, I'll marry thee.  
Ith. Content, but we will leave this paltry land,  
And sail from hence to Greece, to lovely  
Greece:  
I'll be thy Jason, thou my golden fleece;  
Where painted carpets o'er the meads are  
hurled,  
And Bacchus' vineyards overspread the world,  
Where woods and forests go in goodly green,

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<sup>12</sup>Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher (London: Faber & Faber, 1961) 92.



defects may be the result of a youthful poet's inexperience at versification and changes in pronunciation since Elizabethan times, I still feel relatively confident in asserting that the romantic-pastoral ideal was never one that Marlowe, even in his earliest days, subscribed to in a deeply personal way; that is, as a legitimate reflection of human sexual pleasures. Where he describes the ideal with poetic intensity in Dido Queen of Carthage, his main purpose is to emphasize his characters' surrender to fantasy.

As we have seen in The Jew of Malta, however, the attack on, or resistance to, sexuality goes deeper than simply a parody of romantic ideals, and in particular the image of the swollen nuns, "pregnant" with death, surely must constitute evidence of the author's disturbed sexual psychology. Yet the image is not just gratuitously horrifying, for it recalls Faustus swollen with a self-conceit, struggling to give birth to himself, as Snow suggests, in his final soliloquy. In The Jew of Malta Barabas is faced with a similar struggle. We first see him in his counting-house, which, as we have already noted, functions metaphorically as a kind of womb. He is not really "born," in terms of his struggle for identity, until his wealth is confiscated and he is evicted from his house. Though he appears an extremely capable and successful merchant at the beginning of the play, he exists in an essentially unchallenged state which may strike us as having

a strong element of the fantastic. The opening soliloquy contains a series of rhetorical tricks whereby we cannot be certain whether all the fabulous wealth the Jew describes actually belongs to him or whether it is the imagined possessions of quasi-mythical Arabians and Moors; while a director must decide exactly what props the actor will be fingering at this moment (the 1633 text indicates that "heaps of gold" lie before him), it is very difficult to tell from the speech itself where reality ends and imagination begins:

Here have I pursed their paltry silverlings.  
 Fie, what a trouble 'tis to count this trash!  
 Well fare the Arabians, who so richly pay  
 The things they traffic for with wedge of gold,  
 Whereof a man may easily in a day  
 Tell that which may maintain him all his life.  
 The needy groom that never fingered groat  
 Would make a miracle of thus much coin:  
 But he whose steel-barred coffers are crammed full,  
 And all his lifetime hath been tired,  
 Wearing his fingers' ends with telling it,  
 Would in his age be loath to labour so,  
 And for a pound to sweat himself to death.  
 Give me the merchants of the Indian 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 pearl like pebble-stones;  
 Receive them free, and sell them by the weight,  
 Bags of fiery opals, sapphires, amethysts,  
 Jacinths, hard topaz, grass-green emeralds,  
 Beauteous rubies, sparkling diamonds,  
 And seldseen costly stones of so great price  
 As one of them indifferently rated,  
 And of a carat of this quantity,  
 May serve in peril of calamity  
 To ransom great kings from captivity.  
 This is the ware wherein consists my wealth:  
 And thus, methinks, should men of judgement frame  
 Their means of traffic from the vulgar trade,  
 And as their wealth increaseth, so enclose  
 Infinite riches in a little room.

(I.i.6-37)

The key phrase in the speech is "without control" in line 22; it is the lack of restraint that Barabas most appreciates in the fantasized Moor (along with the something-for-nothing principle under which he is presumed to operate). The first image of enclosure in the play, the infinite riches in a little room, is thus another Marlovian fantasy of absolute power, untrammelled by the demands of reality. When Calymath arrives demanding the tribute money and Ferneze unscrupulously appropriates Barabas' wealth, reality sets in, in the sense that the Jew must stop dreaming--idly fingering his wealth in an almost masturbatory manner--and take a more active role in determining his own destiny.

I do not mean to suggest that Barabas is unimpressive in the play's opening scenes. When the rumour concerning the Turkish envoy upsets the other Jews, Barabas demonstrates the kind of pride we would expect from a Marlovian hero:

See the simplicity of these base slaves,  
 Who for the villains have no wit themselves  
 Think me to be a senseless lump of clay  
 That will with every water wash to dirt!  
 No, Barabas is born to better chance  
 And framed of finer mould than common men,  
 That measure naught but by the present time.

(I.ii.216-22)

He does not accept that he, like other men, dwells in a house of clay, whose foundation is in the dust (as Eliphaz the Temanite states in Job 4:19). He has not been fashioned

by the God of Genesis, but presumably, through an act of will, has moulded (or intends to mould) himself. Yet such confidence is built entirely upon his reliance on a secret treasure hoard, on the old pattern of regressive, passive behaviour. It is only when he learns that he will be denied access into his house that we view truly admirable self-assertion, for after briefly despairing he begins to talk like a potential tragic hero, insisting on his identity in the face of overwhelming circumstances:

You partial heavens, have I deserved this plague?  
 What, will you thus oppose me, luckless stars,  
 To make me desperate in my poverty?  
 And knowing me impatient in distress,  
 Think me so mad as I will hang myself,  
 That I may vanish o'er the earth in air,  
 And leave no memory that e'er I was?  
 No, I will live: nor loathe I this my life;  
 And since you leave me in the ocean thus  
 To sink or swim, and put me to my shifts,  
 I'll rouse my senses, and awake myself.

(I.ii.259-69)

In terms of Barabas' struggle for identity, this is the high-water mark of the play. Water, to borrow from my own metaphor, is in fact the element he struggles against: he refuses to "wash to dirt," he courageously chooses to swim rather than sink, but in the end he is boiled to death in a cauldron. It is as if water, the spiritual element, symbolic of purification and baptism, becomes a nightmare image since it functions only as a destroyer; in Marlowe's

vision baptism can take place only in a symbolic hell,<sup>14</sup> and even then it is no true baptism since it involves not conversion but annihilation. Barabas emerges from his first enclosure to begin a chain of events which leads inexorably to his encasement in the final enclosure; in the interim he adopts many roles but fails to establish a stable, viable identity. Religion, as Machiavel claims, is but a childish toy, and Barabas, after his initial smug vision of his wealth as a product of "the blessings promised to the Jews" (I.i.104), does not waste much time (with a notable exception to be discussed below) petitioning the heavens for aid. Yet, as Steane remarks, "If religion is childish... there is a corollary which St Paul teaches: 'when I became a

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<sup>14</sup>The cauldron is, as Hunter demonstrates,

"...a traditional image of hell. The standard iconography of Hell in the Middle Ages was derived from the final chapters of Job, where Behemoth and Leviathan (images of the devil) are described in graphic detail. From these, of course, was derived the image of hell-mouth as the mouth of a fearful monster, familiar to many moderns from the revived Mystery Plays. But among the descriptions of Leviathan are features that are not so familiar:

Out of his nostrils commeth out smoke, as out of a boyling pot or cauldron.

He maketh the depth to boyle like a pot (xli,11,22)  
Emile Mâle has remarked the effect of these verses on the iconography of hell:

The thirteenth-century artist put a literal construction on these passages, and carried his scruples so far as to represent a boiling cauldron in the open jaws of the monster."

man I put away childish things'."<sup>15</sup> Barabas fails to become a man, degenerating in a series of cartoon villains, and "childish" religion is vindicated (though somewhat farcically) since the Jew's end emblemizes religion's greatest bugbear. Barabas' "birth," like Faustus', miscarries, and despite the farcical elements in both plays their tragic plots seem to be haunted by Christ's metaphor for spiritual rebirth in John 16:21: "A woman when she trauaileth, hathe sorrowe, because her houre is come: but assone as she is deliuered of the childe, she remembreth no more the anguish, for ioye that a man is borne into the worlde." In Marlowe's vision we never get past the anguish, for his men never succeed in giving birth to themselves as men, and so the sufferings of sainthood remain only a metaphor for personal trauma.

The Jew of Malta is in some ways an even bleaker play than Tamburlaine and Doctor Faustus because "becoming a man" no longer carries with it any sense of the heroic. Catherine Minshull points out a very important influence on Marlowe when she notes that the playwright "would have been familiar with the less savory aspects of government if he had been employed in the secret service."<sup>16</sup> Marlowe's maturing vision of society resulted in a pessimistic (some

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<sup>15</sup>Marlowe: A Critical Study, 174.

<sup>16</sup>"Marlowe's 'Sound Machevill'," Renaissance Drama (N.S.) 13 (1982): 52.

would argue, realistic) view in which, to survive and succeed in worldly affairs, being a man and being a Machiavel amount to the same thing. I have no great quarrel with critics who see The Jew of Malta as essentially "about" Machiavellianism,<sup>17</sup> or with D.J. Palmer's statement that Barabas "does not come to grief because he is a Machiavel, but because he is not Machiavellian enough."<sup>18</sup> The clearest and most persuasive commentary taking this approach is Minshull's essay "Marlowe's 'Sound Machevill'." According to Minshull, the prologue to The Jew of Malta "offers a frank, if inflammatory, exposition of Machiavelli's political code"(40), but "Marlowe was being intentionally ironic in presenting Barabas to the audience as an arch-Machiavellian," a role represented in the play not by the Jew but by "Ferneze, who in true Machiavellian fashion is primarily interested in power politics and military matters"(41). By taking advantage of the popular prejudice against Jews and linking it with a popular misconception of Machiavelli ("the stereotype of the underhanded, scheming anti-Christian villain"[53]), Marlowe succeeded in "writing a secret play between the lines of his official play"(51).

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<sup>17</sup>In "The Jew of Malta and the Critics: A Paradigm for Marlowe Studies," Papers on Language and Literature 13 (1977): 321 ff., Kenneth Friedenreich surveys critics who have adopted this approach.

<sup>18</sup>"Marlowe's Naturalism," Christopher Marlowe: Mermaid Critical Commentaries, ed. Brian Morris (London: Ernest Benn, 1968) 174.

The play can thus be seen as a joke on its sixteenth-century audience, who, "Ignorant of Machiavelli's writings... mistook [Marlowe's] caricature of a Machiavellian villain for the real thing"(53).<sup>19</sup>

The task of modern criticism, as well as modern directors, has largely been to uncover the joke, and twentieth-century audiences (assuming Minshull is correct in her conjectures about sixteenth-century ones) seem to have less trouble detecting Ferneze's hypocrisy, since his final couplet--"So march away, and let due praise be given/ Neither to fate nor fortune, but to heaven"--can now come across as "an outrageous irony"<sup>20</sup> rather than a confirmation of a divinely ordained Elizabethan social order. Certainly the contrast between Barabas and Ferneze is crucial to our understanding of the play. However, I would like to adopt a third approach which I hope will be a kind of dialectical resolution of the presumed sixteenth-century approval of Ferneze's triumph over the villain Barabas, and the modern view of Ferneze as arch-Machiavellian hypocrite. There is no doubt that Marlowe's anti-Christian satire is extremely

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<sup>19</sup>Minshull's most interesting historical point is that the Elizabethan ruling class, more enlightened than the average theatregoer, would probably have approved of Marlowe's play, since "It was to the authorities' advantage that a popular misconception of Machiavelli should flourish to obscure the import of Machiavelli's works as an analysis of [actual] statecraft"(52).

<sup>20</sup>As it did in a RSC revival discussed by James L. Smith in "The Jew of Malta in the Theatre," Christopher Marlowe: Mermaid Critical Commentaries, ed. Brian Morris, 19.



What gives Ferneze a real advantage over Barabas has to do with the distinction between lies and fictions discussed by Coburn Freer in his essay "Lies and Lying in The Jew of Malta." Fictions "require the mutual (if grudging) consent of all members of a community, and they tend generally to reaffirm established social structures"(143); lies, on the other hand, "are by definition the expression of attitudes that stand behind or apart from our mutual consent; they are offered by individuals with individual motives... and in their most extreme form they would destroy the social fabric altogether"(144). Ferneze's and the other knights' hypocritical "profession" during Act I, Scene ii, when Barabas' property is confiscated, receives support from the entire system of beliefs and prejudices embodied in their society; as Freer puts it, "Ferneze and the others... are propped up as much by the fictions of their world as by their own inventive lying"(160). In Malta truth becomes irrelevant, and it is appropriate that Ferneze is cast in this scene not only in the role of Caiaphas, as we saw earlier, but also of Pilate, since he remarks, "No, Barabas, to stain our hands with blood/ Is far from us and our profession"(145-46). Ferneze's remark here is completely contradicted by his subsequent statement that "Honour is bought with blood, and not with gold"(II.ii.56), when the Governor suddenly calls upon another fiction--military honour--to justify his breaking faith with the Turks. What

is truth, indeed; it certainly does not seem to have much to do with a capable, flexible management of government affairs (a fact demonstrated by the actions of the wily Elizabeth I herself).

Ferneze's role-playing is thus facilitated by social fictions, but I think it is debatable how conscious Ferneze is of his own hypocrisy. In a recent new historicist interpretation of the play, Emily C. Bartels argues that, because Ferneze himself is under the pressure of other imperialistic powers (Turkey and Spain), the play subverts the distinction between dominator and dominated and suggests "imperialism as a self-perpetuating chain reaction."<sup>22</sup> In other words, Ferneze compensates for being taken advantage of by taking advantage of someone else. Yet Bartels questions, as I do, Ferneze's personal awareness of his Machiavellian strategies:

...the relation between the subject and the object of domination is problematized by Ferneze's complicity in his own subjugation: he misreads domination as alliance and alternately adopts the dictates of both imperializing powers. The play leaves ambiguous how conscious this misreading is on his part, how much a product of blindness or insight, naïveté or cunning. (8)

The extent of Ferneze's complicity may be a matter for the director and the actor to decide, since the portrayal of his character on stage (tone of voice, gesture, facial

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<sup>22</sup>"Malta, the Jew, and Fictions of Difference: Colonial Discourse in Marlowe's The Jew of Malta," English Literary Renaissance 20.1 (1990): 8.

expressions) would go far in indicating a greater or lesser degree of deviousness. Yet a just portrayal should, I think, stress his dependence on his other knights; together they rely on (indeed sometimes fabricate) the various fictions of Maltese society. Ferneze is also, it must be admitted, highly dependent on circumstance. He is certainly an opportunist, knowing how to make the most of the present moment (as when he switches his alliance from the Turks to the Spaniards) as well as knowing how to bide his time (as when he pretends to accept Barabas' offer of reconciliation).

In what amounts to a crucial statement in the play, Barabas lectures Abigail:

As good dissemble that thou never mean'st  
As first mean truth, and then dissemble it;  
A counterfeit profession is better  
Than unseen hypocrisy. (I.ii.290-93)

Yet if Ferneze's final pretense of friendship with Barabas is undoubtedly a "counterfeit profession," I suggest that a good deal of his flexibility earlier in the play arises from "unseen hypocrisy"; he receives such support from the fictions of his society that he need not be hyper-conscious of the roles he is playing. To cast it in religious terms, he is undisturbed by the illusory nature of the human identity he has adopted in the fallen world, since this world is, in some ways, more supportive of him than of Barabas.

On the other hand, Barabas, as the alien in Maltese

society, must constantly rely on his own "ruthless individualism"(Freer 160). His isolation is actually greater than it need be, for he wilfully refuses to acknowledge any kind of fraternity with the other Jews of Malta. When they learn they have been summoned to the senate house, Barabas says to his fellow Jews:

Hum; all the Jews in Malta must be there?  
 Ay, like enough; why then, let every man  
 Provide him, and be there for fashion sake.  
 If anything shall there concern our state,  
 Assure yourselves I'll look [Aside]--unto myself.  
 (I.i.168-72)<sup>23</sup>

Barabas realizes he must "dissemble" in order to survive, yet the roles he adopts always pit him against others in society (the "theys" and "thems" he constantly opposes), rather than facilitate his acceptance into the larger social order:

We Jews can fawn like spaniels when we please,  
 And when we grin, we bite; yet are our looks  
 As innocent and harmless as a lamb's.  
 I learned in Florence how to kiss my hand,  
 Heave up my shoulders when they call me dog,  
 And duck as low as any bare-foot friar,  
 Hoping to see them starve upon a stall,

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<sup>23</sup>If Jewishness in the play does function as a metaphor for homosexuality, then this strong reluctance to identify with other Jews (homosexuals) could very well express Marlowe's continuing reluctance to accept his sexual identity; Jews (homosexuals) cannot be regarded or identified with as an acceptable or admirable subgroup in society. Marlowe's identification with Barabas certainly involves a strong sense of "negative identity," as Kuriyama argues: "We might recall Erikson's observation that negative identity is associated with the 'ethnic out-group,' the 'exploited minority,' and also with ugliness and evil, four categories into which, in the cultural context of Renaissance England, Barabas clearly falls" (Hammer or Anvil, 150).

Or else be gathered for in our synagogue,  
 That when the offering-basin comes to me,  
 Even for charity I may spit into't.

(II.iii.20-29)

Barabas is even willing to accept and "play with" the most negative fictions that the Christians in his society have fabricated about the Jews. In his famous speech to Ithamore beginning, "As for myself, I walk abroad o'nights/ And kill sick people groaning under walls..."(II.iii.176-201), we should assume, I believe, that the Jew is constructing an imaginative (i.e. completely false) personal history from the various fictions of his society; yet even Barabas' savage glee in relating these atrocities cannot mask the play's tragic recognition of the power that society has to determine negatively the identities of its exploited and persecuted "others." If the Jew is a monster, he is to a large extent a monster that the Christians themselves have created. Unfortunately for Barabas, it is the criminal (anti-social) nature of these identities that makes them subject to persecution and therefore inherently unstable. Self-fashioning for Barabas is an extremely frenetic activity. Unlike the flexible Ferneze, whose "Machiavellian tactics are employed in the service of the state rather than the self"(Deats 43), Barabas can receive no external support for his various projects, outside of his temporary enlistment of Abigail and Ithamore, neither of whom he respects enough as individuals to be able to expect a continuing return of trust. Barabas thus lurches in a much

more dangerous way from role to role than the more calmly shifting Ferneze.

Barabas' reliance on a succession of "counterfeit professions" leaves him a hollow man, partly because he has no positive or supportive social context against which to define himself--at least one he regards as positive or supportive. Yet his inability to establish a stable identity is also a personal failure, and we may regard this failure as truly tragic, since early in the play we see glimmers of hope that Barabas could have become a "real" human being--that is, could have established a viable illusion of one. I earlier considered the heroic assertiveness in the speech beginning, "You partial heavens, have I deserved this plague," and I now want to examine the soliloquy that begins Act II:

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 incertain 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 maim.  
 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.  
 No sleep can fasten on my watchful eyes,  
 Nor quiet enter my distempered thoughts,  
 Till I have answer of my Abigail.

There may be something histrionic, self-dramatizing, about

this speech, but it is a far more positive form of histrionics than the sneering, "counterfeit professions" Barabas adopts later to manipulate others. In this speech he casts himself in a heroic role, but it is the kind of fabrication we can admire, that we feel is necessary in the world. Barabas almost succeeds at creating an illusion of self here, and though creating a successful illusion can eventually lead to self-delusion (as in Tamburlaine's case), it is a necessary step for the maturing individual. Barabas' role is for a moment so successful that he comes close to achieving that desirable state of "unseen hypocrisy": a viable self whose illusory nature is not consciously questioned. What is also significant about this scene is that Barabas takes time out to "disengage" and become self-reflecting:

Now I remember those old women's words,  
 Who in my wealth would tell me winter's tales,  
 And speak of spirits and ghosts that glide by night  
 About the place where treasure hath been hid;  
 And now methinks that I am one of those:  
 For whilst I live, here lives my soul's sole hope,  
 And when I die, here shall my spirit walk.  
 (24-30)

Here Barabas uses fictions, the "winter's tales," to place himself in another context--or view himself from a different perspective--which is quite at odds with the more typical, antagonistically self-justifying roles he elsewhere constructs. What I find particularly interesting in this soliloquy is the prayer to the Jewish God to "Light Abraham's offspring" (an epithet which in this context can

refer either to Abigail or Barabas himself). We do not conclude from these lines that Barabas must be a deeply religious man. As at various moments in Tamburlaine, the God of this soliloquy is an act of imagination; but it seems to me a positive act here, a source of personal inspiration. The concept of God is subordinated to the individual's own heroic effort, and it is one of the rare moments in the play when Barabas identifies positively or constructively with his cultural background. (His earlier complacent recognition of his riches as a manifestation of the blessings promised to the Jews is less significant, since at that moment Barabas is still unchallenged, not yet under the pressure to act heroically.)

Despite these "glimmers of hope" (as I have called them), Barabas shows no further signs of creative self-fashioning; he later can define himself only by a desire to destroy others. In this he resembles Tamburlaine. He acquires his sense of identity and power through his ability to manipulate other people as objects; he never (consciously) considers acquiescing or surrendering to them. The fact that the play to some critics appears to degenerate into farce is due, I believe, more to Barabas' failure of imagination than Marlowe's. Refusing to recognize others as "real" people, the Jew, through the "mirroring process," becomes less "real" himself. The action becomes particularly farcical since Barabas, inhabiting a more

realistic context than Tamburlaine's romance world, exercises far less control than the earlier hero. He must constantly tidy up the loose ends from each preceding stage of machinations. His comment to the Carpenter in V.v is thus profoundly ironic: "Leave nothing loose, all levelled to my mind"(3). All cannot be levelled to the mind, to complete and instantaneous personal control. In one sense Barabas never fully emerges from the fantasy world he initially inhabits, and, as in Faustus, the uncontrolled imagination eventually has its revenge: the hero again is swallowed up by an artefact, a morality emblem.

Yet Barabas, unlike Faustus, has not been obsessed with his eschatological destiny, and his final anguish in the emblematic hell would seem to have little to do with religious retribution, even in a psychological sense--at least with respect to Barabas' psychology. Marlowe in fact seems to be working overtime in The Jew of Malta to free himself from any lingering temptation towards religious dependency. Even though Barabas' concept of God remains subordinated to his own heroic effort, the very presence of his prayer in Act II is remarkable in the context of a play which everywhere else attacks so vigorously the idea that religion could ever help anyone, or that it is anything but monstrous hypocrisy. One senses that Marlowe took a certain perverse pleasure in portraying the fate of the lecherous Friars and nuns, in composing Barabas' speech concerning his

atrocities on Christians, and (perhaps most significantly of all on a symbolic level) in elaborating Ithamore's reply to that speech:

Once at Jerusalem, where the pilgrims kneeled,  
I strowèd powder on the marble stones,  
And therewithal their knees would rankle so,  
That I have laughed a-good to see the cripples  
Go limping home to Christendom on stilts.  
(II.iii.210-14)

Behind this horrible tale lurks the suggestion that those foolish enough to kneel down and submit to religion are deservedly crippled; such devotion simply restricts or damages the individual's personal strength. It is worth noting here that, as several critics have pointed out, the Turks (excluding Ithamore) are the only truthful characters in the play, and (though as far as I know no one has made this claim) it is possible to see in Calymath's remark

I wish, grave governor, 'twere in my power  
To favour you, but 'tis my father's cause,  
Wherein I may not, nay I dare not dally (I.ii.10-12)

an allusion to Christ's dismissal of his parents' remonstrations in the temple with his statement that he must be about his father's business. If Calymath is a kind of Christ-figure (a wonderful irony, since many Elizabethans looked upon the pagan Turks as anti-Christian devils), then it is significant that "Christ," or the figure of truth, must be imprisoned and suppressed at the end of the play by the successful politician Ferneze. Significant as well is the fact that Calymath's men are destroyed in a monastery. It is as if Marlowe's realization in Faustus of the supreme

indifference of God was so devastating that the idea of religion must now be attacked as viciously as possible. This is perhaps why the plot of The Jew of Malta deals so harshly with the unfortunate Abigail. Having realized the extent of her father's treachery, Abigail requests readmittance (now on her own accord) to the nunnery, claiming that

experience, purchasèd with grief,  
Has made me see the difference of things.  
My sinful soul, alas, hath paced too long  
The fatal labyrinth of misbelief,  
Far from the Son that gives eternal life.

(III.iii.64-68)

She retreats back to what was in fact her original home, which the imagery of the play has associated with the womb. It is a decidedly negative step, not only because of the hypocritical nature of the convent, but because it involves a denial of her need to cultivate personal assertiveness. Abigail cannot escape further "experience" and "grief" if she is to continue to grow and develop as a human being. She complains that she now sees "the difference of things," and what does this phrase imply if not the realization (arising mainly from her father's example) that we are not who we pretend to be? It is unfortunate that she has had this illusion so suddenly shattered, for it is a necessary "misbelief" (notice that she does not call it "unbelief") for existence in human society. Her decision to surrender prematurely her personal struggle in favour of "the Son that gives eternal life" has a disastrous effect: she in effect

sells her human birthright for a mess of deadly pottage.

The fact that on stage the pot containing the porridge would resemble the cauldron in which Barabas finally cooks to death links the hero's failure of humanity to Abigail's; yet Barabas is not destroyed simply through premature self-surrender (though his end perhaps does represent a kind of variation on this basic problem). Barabas' first "surrender" is actually a parodic crucifixion and resurrection: having drunk "poppy and cold mandrake juice"(V.i.80) he is taken for dead and thrown over the walls, reviving in time to show the Turks a secret passageway into the town. A grateful Calymath then creates Barabas the new Governor of Malta. Therefore the Jew's machinations, however much difficulty he has had dealing with the loose ends left over from each stage of his intrigues, seem finally to have paid off. Yet why then does Barabas make the fatal mistake of trusting Ferneze? There are, I think, two reasons, both related to Barabas' inability to deal with the burden of his own heroic project. The first reason may be deduced from the doubts he himself enunciates:

Thus hast thou gotten, by thy policy,  
 No simple place, no small authority:  
 I now am governor of Malta. True,  
 But Malta hates me, and in hating me,  
 My life's in danger; and what boots it thee,  
 Poor Barabas, to be the governor,  
 Whenas thy life shall be at their command?  
 No, Barabas, this must be looked into;  
 And since by wrong thou got'st authority,  
 Maintain it bravely by firm policy,

At least unprofitably lose it not:  
 For he that liveth in authority  
 And neither gets him friends, nor fills his bags,  
 Lives like the ass that Aesop speaketh of,  
 That labours with a load of bread and wine,  
 And leaves it off to snap on thistle tops.  
 (V.ii.27-42)

I cannot help feeling that somehow Barabas is not quite honest with himself here. Does he really fear for his personal safety? A moment earlier Calymath has given him "To guard thy person, these our Janizaries"(16), and presumably Barabas is intelligent enough to realize that if Malta hates him that much, then simply relinquishing the governorship would not make him any safer. The hero's reasoning certainly becomes very murky at this point, but I think his concern over assassination is really a great rationalization for the fact that, unlike Ferneze, he cannot accept the responsibility of rule. Having accomplished his revenge, he quickly regresses back to the desire to resume his role of merchant, safe in the womb-like counting-house, letting others take the enormous risks of sailing on the open seas to obtain wealth for him. He cannot face the truth that power is acquired and maintained only by assuming great responsibility and by taking great risks. Like other Marlovian heroes, he is faced with a simultaneous desire to both exercise and relinquish control. Yet he does not struggle very long, for in the end it appears he simply lacks personal courage: the admirable line "Maintain it bravely by firm policy" immediately slides into the ignoble,

mercenary "At least unprofitably lose it not."

The second reason for his desire to confide in Ferneze has to do with his emotional poverty, and to understand that we should first go back to the moment when Barabas transfers his need for a second self from Abigail to Ithamore, making him his "only heir":

O Ithamore, come near;  
Come near, my love, come near, thy master's life,  
My trusty servant, nay, my second self!  
For I have now no hope but even in thee,  
And on that hope my happiness is built.

(III.iv.13-17)

Now admittedly Barabas does not appear to hold Ithamore in any real affection, for when the slave goes offstage to fetch the pot of rice, Barabas snickers, "Thus every villain ambles after wealth,/ Although he ne'er be richer than in hope"(52-53). Yet judging from his overall career, we begin to suspect that Barabas, though he has assumed the role of a master deceiver, actually deceives himself as to his own emotional needs. He is, after all, far more intimate with Ithamore than we would expect from a Machiavellian manipulator of men. The confidence he places in Ithamore eventually gets him in trouble with Bellamira and Pilia-Borza, so, like Abigail, Ithamore and company must be eliminated through another one of the Jew's colourful contrivances.

Surprisingly, Barabas does not ever seem to learn from his mistakes. At the end of his career he again demonstrates this almost neurotic need to confide and trust

someone. He recalls the prisoner Ferneze, to whom he presents himself "as a friend not known but in distress" (V.ii.72). As with Ithamore he becomes positively effusive:

Governor, I enlarge thee; live with me,  
Go walk about the city, see thy friends.  
Tush, send not letters to'em, go thyself,  
And let me see what money thou canst make.  
Here is my hand that I'll set Malta free.  
And thus we cast it. (91-96)

They agree that Barabas will "render... The life of Calymath"(79-80) to Ferneze and annihilate the Turkish army. Ferneze exits, and then comes the strangest speech of all, in which Barabas again denies the affection he has just displayed:

Thus loving neither, will I live with both  
Making a profit of my policy;  
And he from whom my most advantage comes  
Shall be my friend. (111-14)

Yet how can he talk about "living with both" when he has just made arrangements to utterly destroy one of the parties? It seems to me that he is deceiving himself in believing he is still practising Machiavellian policy. It really appears as if he has inverted Machiavelli's famous dictum that it is better to be feared than loved. As Levin remarks:

[Barabas] is conscious of being hated, and wants to be loved. To be loved--yes, that desire is his secret shame.... His hatred is the bravado of the outsider whom nobody loves, and his revenges are compensatory efforts to supply people with good reasons for hating him. Poor Barabas, poor old rich man! That he should end by trusting anybody, least of all the one man who wronged him in the beginning!  
(The Overreacher 99)

Barabas has failed in his own role of the perfectly evil villain. In a perverse sense his crawling back into Malta to be revenged after being tossed over the walls--"What, all alone?"(V.i.61)--is really an expression of his need to belong. Underneath the monstrous mask which spouts, "For so I live, perish may all the world"(V.v.10), lies a pitiful individual who never succeeds in taking on either the responsibilities or the satisfying relationships of a real man.

Thus it could be said of Barabas' career that a series of unstable "counterfeit professions" lead him inexorably to a precarious pinnacle, where he is destroyed by a negative and fatal "unseen hypocrisy": his own lack of awareness of a dark and complex mixture of accumulated insecurities, fears, and longings, which could never be released or "worked through" in more human, natural ways. And while it could hardly be said that Ferneze shows us Barabas' polar opposite--a warm and loving human being--I think those who describe the Governor as simply a cool and ruthless politician ignore the fact that Ferneze, unlike Barabas, is genuinely grieved for the loss of his child. Our reservations about Lodowick's character should not interfere with our appreciation of the pain Ferneze suffers at his son's death:

What sight is this? My Lodowick slain!  
 These arms of mine shall be thy selpulchre.  
 . . . . .  
 Then take them up, and let them be interred

Within one sacred monument of stone;  
 Upon which altar I will offer up  
 My daily sacrifice of sighs and tears,  
 And with my prayers pierce impartial heavens  
 Till they reveal the causers of our smarts....  
 (III.ii.10-34)

The desire to be revenged, if "un-Christian," is altogether natural and human, and in Ferneze's double-crossing of Barabas at the end of the play the Governor is able to merge political and personal advantage-taking. His prayers have been answered (not only in revealing but also in punishing the perpetrator of the crime) and, if we can see that it is very much a case of God helping those who help themselves, we should nevertheless hesitate to dismiss Ferneze's last lines in the play as laughably hypocritical. "Let due praise be given/ Neither to fate nor fortune, but to heaven" may strike modern ears as gross hypocrisy, yet with respect to Ferneze's own attitude the statement is perhaps better described as a comforting delusion--and a very necessary one for the maintenance of social stability. Actually, Ferneze has not come out completely on top at the end of the play, for, as Bartels points out, Del Bosco remains on stage beside Ferneze in the final scene, reminding us of "the colonizing voice behind the colonizing voice"(16). Ferneze must still deal with the delicate task of both exercising and submitting to authority.

While I think it true that Marlowe identifies very closely with Barabas, I believe it also true that Ferneze (even in spite of his failings) represents the kind of man

the playwright was working towards, in the sense of admiring or hoping to emulate: the self-possessed yet adaptable individual not tortured by the compromises necessary in human experience, the "difference of things." Ferneze is very much a precursor of the later figures of Navarre and Edward III. The fact that these characters are sketchily portrayed indicates that Marlowe, in the brief time remaining to him, did not move very far in his artistic and personal realization of this kind of individual. At the time of the writing of The Jew of Malta it is probable that Marlowe was still very much what Hunter terms a "God-haunted atheist"(240), that curious condition in which one wants very much to live independent of a concept of God yet remains obsessed by religion's condemnation of self-sufficiency.<sup>24</sup> Marlowe must have been particularly fascinated by the statement of Christ's alluded to by Barabas: "be ye therefore wise as serpentes, and innocent as doues"(Matthew 10:16); it seems a surprisingly Machiavellian thing for Jesus to say. Barabas' version of it--"Now will I show myself to have more of the serpent than the dove; that is, more knave than fool"(II.iii.36-37)--

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<sup>24</sup>I would disagree, however, with Hunter's statement that Marlowe was "simultaneously fascinated and horrified by the apparent self-sufficiency of the fallen world"(240). This assumes a kind of orthodoxy which I do not believe Marlowe possessed. He was certainly fascinated by the world's "self-sufficiency," but not at all horrified by it. The tension in his work arises from personal doubts and fears concerning his own ability to become self-sufficient.

reduces, as Bawcutt remarks, "Christ's subtle paradox to a simple alternative, 'cheat or be cheated'"(107). One suspects a link between Barabas' tendency to reduce things to black and white, to either-or situations, and Marlowe's own struggle against the bleak repent-or-be-damned formula of the Church: it is the struggle to dismiss such doctrine as not only essentially useless but actually seriously detrimental to the constructive development of the self; to replace the bald morality of religion with a more flexible and creative dialectic of assertion and surrender. The struggle becomes particularly intense in Marlowe's writing because it involves not only the religious ideas he attacked so vigorously but also his own fears of sexual surrender and a growing realization of his own homosexuality. I think it is no accident that Barabas' words to Ferneze, "live with me," again allude to his own lyric of romantic invitation. Ferneze represents not only a man Marlowe ultimately wanted to become like, but also, on a barely subconscious level, one he desired to surrender to sexually.

## Chapter 6: The Massacre at Paris

While it seems likely that readers will continue to disagree as to which of Tamburlaine, Doctor Faustus, or Edward II is Marlowe's best play, there will probably always be universal agreement that The Massacre at Paris is his worst. Yet the play is difficult to assess fairly since we possess what is presumably a reported text, "put together by memorial reconstruction" as H.J. Oliver conjectures.<sup>1</sup> We are thus left forever wondering how faithfully the "singularly crude and unpoetic potboiler"<sup>2</sup> that has come down to us represents the original form of the play.

In the face of this limitation, and in spite of Oliver's warning of "how dangerous it is to reach conclusions even about characterizations from such a text" (lv), I believe that the play's meaning and its place in the Marlowe canon can best be understood by concentrating on three characters: the Duke of Guise, Navarre, and Henry III. We have seen the importance of the Barabas/Ferneze contrast in The Jew of Malta, and in what I assume to be Marlowe's

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<sup>1</sup>Dido Queen of Carthage and The Massacre at Paris (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968) lix. All references to the play will be from this edition.

<sup>2</sup>Harry Levin, Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher (1952; rpt. London: Faber & Faber, 1961) 106.

subsequent plays--The Massacre and Edward II--he moves even further away from the monodrama of Tamburlaine and Faustus. It is therefore wrong to see The Massacre as centred wholly on the Guise, and I cannot agree with Kocher when he claims that Marlowe assembles "bloody deeds from all quarters of his source to construct one of those titans of evil who so delighted him, and at the same time diminish[es] the other actors until they scarcely reach to the Guise's knees."<sup>3</sup> Levin, who also exaggerates the Guise's importance in the play, nevertheless very astutely remarks that if Marlowe "does nothing else in The Massacre at Paris, he exorcises this devil [the hero as villain] which he has raised [in The Jew of Malta]." <sup>4</sup> The Massacre is very much a play in which the author works through, or tries to work past, the versions of pathological self-assertion he has previously explored. While the ideal figure of Navarre towards whom Marlowe struggles remains shadowy and unconvincing, a third figure emerges--the homosexual Henry III--who, in spite of the fact that he also lacks consistency and credibility, most fully embodies Marlowe's psychological concerns. The portrayal of Henry paves the way for Marlowe's much greater artistic achievement in Edward II, a play which may be regarded, if not as Marlowe's greatest, then certainly as

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<sup>3</sup>"François Hotman and 'The Massacre at Paris'," PMLA 56 (1941): 368.

<sup>4</sup>Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher, 103-104.

his most honest work.

Before examining the three characterizations in more detail I would briefly like to discuss my overall impression of The Massacre, or what I feel its purpose to be, and to do this may require a little critical honesty of my own. Kocher has stated that Marlowe "is consciously, and perhaps cynically, pandering to the most brutal appetites and prejudices of the Elizabethan spectator" ("François Hotman," 368). Sanders entitles his chapter on The Massacre "Dramatist as Jingoist," and suggests the play's badness "raises most pressingly the question of Marlowe's real stature."<sup>5</sup> Douglas Cole, though not as hard on Marlowe as a whole, agrees that The Massacre "remains inevitably a crude spectacle of sensationalistic propaganda."<sup>6</sup> More recently Julia Briggs has objected by raising questions which must cross the minds of all Marlowe admirers. In answer to the widespread assumption that the play "is 'obviously' a piece of crude Protestant propaganda," Briggs remarks that the "very obviousness of [this] supposition ought to arouse suspicion, for in Marlowe's dramaturgy things are so seldom exactly what they

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<sup>5</sup>The Dramatist and the Received Idea (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1968) 36.

<sup>6</sup>Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1962) 155.

seem."<sup>7</sup> Later she adds: "Elsewhere [Marlowe's] plays reveal his fascination with morally complex situations--it is hard to understand why this play has traditionally been regarded as the exception"(260). Briggs also cites Judith Weil, who in Merlin's Prophet claims that the play's pervading irony is "dependent less upon 'hard' allusions, more upon dramatic structure and implicit ideas," and functions very "obliquely."<sup>8</sup> Weil's argument itself is at times so oblique that I must confess I have difficulty following it, though the gist of her discussion may be garnered from her "hypothesis that The Massacre at Paris is a satire on the inhuman worldliness of Christian rulers"(102). Being a Marlowe admirer myself, I want very much to accept an argument in favour of The Massacre as a subtle or sophisticated work of literature. However, I cannot help feeling that we are on very thin critical ice indeed when Weil remarks: "Never does the obliqueness of [Marlowe's] ironic style appear more irresponsible. The Massacre at Paris badly needs a Shavian preface"(85). Even Briggs in her discussion eventually admits that "Whatever reservations may remain with regard to Navarre's fine sentiments or the Guise's gross cynicism, the play's obvious tendency is to invite our approval of the former and our condemnation of

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<sup>7</sup>"Marlowe's Massacre at Paris: A Reconsideration," Review of English Studies 34 (1983): 259-60.

<sup>8</sup>Christopher Marlowe: Merlin's Prophet (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977) 82.

the latter"(273). This seems to me the inescapable point-- what the play really is trying to do. Thus, while Weil makes several interesting and valid observations during her discussion, I feel it impossible either to accept her thesis that the work is a subtle satire (at least a consistently developed one) or to ignore the strong identification with the Protestant figures in the play. Cole's argument on this point seems to me irrefutable: while "Marlowe had given to the victims of Barabas, with the exception of Abigail, a disreputable coloring which served to minimize any possible sympathy," in The Massacre at Paris "the majority of victims are presented as pious and helpless Protestants, fully deserving the audience's complete sympathy"(144). Marlowe has begun to identify more with the victims than the villain-heroes, and in a manner which does not allow for a vigorous satire on all the Christian rulers in the play.

I would like to speculate for a moment on why such a response should occur at this moment in Marlowe's career. I believe it possible that Marlowe found The Jew of Malta as painful an experience in the writing as audiences over the years have found it in the reading or (depending on the sensitivity of the performance) the watching. Marlowe's strong identification with the "negative identity" of Barabas involved a heavy psychological burden which he desired to escape; Barabas' ejaculation "What, all alone?" and his creeping back into Malta very much reflect Marlowe's

own desire to belong to a larger group or supporting social structure, to save himself from the pain of continued emotional and social isolation. Thus, in spite of Baines' claim that Marlowe declared all Protestants to be "Hypocriticall asses," The Massacre represents a rather desperate attempt by the playwright to re-identify with his national and religious roots, to re-establish himself as a member of his own community. Evil or badness could then be projected onto an "other"--in this case the Catholics, especially the Guise--with whom the playwright would not be personally implicated. There may be another reason for Marlowe's identification with the Protestant cause: his continuing iconoclasm and rebellion against religious authority. Seeing this response in Freudian terms, Kuriyama remarks: "Insofar as Protestantism is indeed a revolt against the paternal authority of the Pope and his hierarchy, Marlowe probably felt a sporadic and transitory identification with the Protestant cause"; she then adds, "however, given the play's suggestion that one must be unscrupulous to survive, this identification appears to be quite shallow."<sup>9</sup> I agree that this identification is complicated and in some ways undermined, but I believe that the play suggests--or rather was trying to suggest, as Marlowe originally conceived it--that one need not be

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<sup>9</sup>Hammer or Anvil: Psychological Patterns in Christopher Marlowe's Plays (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1980) 91.

unscrupulous to survive. It is that very idea enunciated by Kuriyama--the Machiavellian vision so energetically explored in The Jew of Malta--that Marlowe attempts to move away from in The Massacre. Due to his own increasing self-awareness, Marlowe had reached a point where he could no longer portray deception as a viable or even dramatically engaging method of personal survival.

We may begin with Marlowe's artistic "exorcism" of the Machiavellian hero-villain. Though some critics have found the Guise admirable or heroic--Steane calls his first soliloquy "one of Marlowe's great speeches" which "starts with a characteristic sense of exciting possibilities opening out"<sup>10</sup>--it is in fact the sense of pointless aspiration and violence, the lack of exciting possibilities opening out in this speech, which precludes any sympathy we might feel for the character. His first short speech in the play at the beginning of Scene ii--"If ever Hymen lour'd at marriage-rites/ And had his altars deck'd with dusky lights..."--has something of the quality of Barabas' witch-like chant over the poisoned pot of porridge. And if The Massacre lacks an Ithamore to undercut the overblown rhetoric ("What a blessing has he given't! Was ever pot of rice-porridge so sauced?"[III.iv.106]), surely the melodramatic, exaggerated nature of the sentiments is

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<sup>10</sup>Marlowe: A Critical Study (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1964) 239.

plainly evident from the speech itself. Having them comically undercut would in fact be inappropriate in this play, for, considering Marlowe's greater identification with the victims, there can no longer be anything amusing about the Guise's pathological behaviour. Weil points out that the words "resolution" and "revenge" recur as key terms in the play (84), yet the early scenes of The Massacre only emphasize the gratuitous quality of both the Guise's revenge and his resolution. What does he wish to revenge except a royal marriage that had promised to bring peace and harmony to the realm? His resolution can therefore only seem unheroic and maliciously self-serving. Unlike Barabas he is not personally injured at this point in the play, and there is thus no temptation to identify with his heroic project as being at all admirable or even meaningful; his assertiveness in no way promises the possibility of personal growth.

It is worth examining the long soliloquy in more detail. In spite of Steane's admiration and of Oliver's comment that the speech "has a true Marlovian note"(99), Kuriyama is more accurate when she comments on "its bloated language and its air of smug self-assurance" and adds that "One can recognize, dimly, the familiar features of Tamburlaine's rhetoric, distorted by unnatural swelling, and now accompanied by a most disagreeable stench"(83). We have seen from The Jew of Malta that Marlowe is a writer quite capable of self-parody, and it seems to me that that is

exactly what the Guise's soliloquy represents: a parody of the rhetoric of Marlowe's earlier aspiring heroes. Even if those earlier heroes' aspirations were also (though more subtly) undercut in various ways, never has Marlowe portrayed self-definition as such a hollow and pointless act; never has the rhetoric itself come so close to the ridiculous:

Now, Guise, begins those deep-engender'd thoughts  
 To burst abroad those never-dying flames  
 Which cannot be extinguish'd but by blood.  
 Oft have I levell'd, and at last have learn'd  
 That peril is the chiefest way to happiness,  
 And resolution honour's fairest aim.  
 What glory is there in a common good  
 That hangs for every peasant to achieve?  
 That like I best that flies beyond my reach.  
 Set me to scale the high Pyramides,  
 And thereon set the diadem of France,  
 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.31-44)

Here we have the Guise's ostensible object identified--the French "diadem"--though, as Weil points out (86), we quickly lose sight of it in the following lines. The confusing metaphor involving the diadem set on the "Pyramides" may show, as Oliver argues, "the characteristic refusal to see a middle way"(lxxiii), since the Guise would either mount to the top (on wings) or fall into hell, yet he first talks of either climbing the pyramids or tearing them to pieces--that is, if the "it" in line 42 refers to "Pyramides" as a collective singular, as Oliver argues (100). However, it is possible to take "it" as referring to

the diadem itself, so we get an odd rhetorical conflation of the ends with the means. The confusion here may very well result from faulty reporting. Yet the uncertainty of the antecedent is conceivably deliberate on Marlowe's part, to show the destructiveness--the self-cancelling nature--of the Guise's aspirations, since he apparently would both destroy the thing he aspires to and his means of getting to it (though in the latter case tearing apart the pyramid would presumably allow the crown to fall into his hands). A similar suggestion may arise when the Duke exclaims:

For this, my quenchless thirst whereon I build  
 Hath often pleaded kindred to the King.  
 (47-48, my emphasis)

Levin comments on this "curious metaphor which intermixes the acts of construction and consumption"(106) and relates it to the Guise's desire either to climb or to destroy the pyramids. The irony inherent in the Guise's self-destructive stance becomes more apparent when he remarks:

For this, this head, this heart, this hand and sword,  
 Contrives, imagines, and fully executes  
 Matters of import, aim'd at by many,  
 Yet understood by none;  
 For this, hath heaven engender'd me of earth.  
 (49-53)

Considering the grammatical and metaphoric confusion of the previous lines, the phrase "Yet understood by none" does not come as a surprise, and surely the inescapable assumption here is that "none" includes the Guise himself. The metrical space after the half-line gives us a moment to come to this realization: the Guise really has no idea what he is

talking about, or aiming at. The antecedent of the frequently repeated "this"--it is presumably at first the French crown, or the act of aspiring towards it--becomes less and less certain as the speech progresses, until he belatedly reminds us (and himself) that he means to "deal [him]self a king"(87).

The speech thus communicates more a sense of uncontrolled restlessness than of steady purpose. There is an emphasis on "engendering"(31,53) which suggests that the Guise is involved in the same struggle to give birth to himself--to establish a sense of identity--that we have observed with Faustus and Barabas. The trouble is, he seems very confused as to what he identifies with, or defines himself against. At one moment he seems to require the whole earth as his "other"--"For this, this earth sustains my body's weight"(54)--which modulates into his dream of possessing the French crown--"And with this weight I'll counterpoise a crown"(55)--which itself is replaced by an aimless and juvenile threat--"Or with seditions weary all the world"(56). He gloats over the support he receives from the Pope and the Queen Mother, and goes on to vaguely identify with thousands of Catholics in "colleges. monasteries, priories, abbeys, and halls"(77-78) so that he can speak finally of bringing "the will of our desires to end"(84, my emphasis). It is not at all clear, however, how they share a common desire; obviously, they cannot all

possess the French crown, though perhaps the Guise egotistically assumes that these men actively support his claim to the throne. Yet if he expects military support from the "thirty thousand able men"(79) and the "thousand sturdy student Catholics"(81), he surely cannot expect it from the "Five hundred fat Franciscan friars and priests"(82); and his earlier rejection of religion makes it clear he does not expect their prayers. The Guise next considers his opponents, beginning with his arch-enemy:

Ay, but Navarre, Navarre--'tis but a nook of France,  
Sufficient yet for such a petty King  
That, with a rabblement of his heretics,  
Blinds Europe's eyes and troubleth our estate:  
Him will we-- Pointing to his sword.  
(88-92)

If we have hitherto been unimpressed by the Guise's rhetoric, this feeble moment certainly validates such a response, since words themselves fail him. He then considers his own countrymen who oppose him, and reacts to this threat by assuming a fantastic Tamburlainean stance that in the more realistic, less poetic context of The Massacre can only seem ridiculous:

Give me a look that, when I bend the brows,  
Pale death may walk in furrows of my face;  
A hand that with a grasp may gripe the world.  
(97-99)

Yet the image of the superman suddenly falls bathetically into the more mundane one of an eavesdropper who, presumably, actually needs to forestall his enemies' plans:

An ear to hear what my detractors say....(100)

This is followed by a banal reiteration of the Guise's object of desire:

A royal seat, a sceptre, and a crown (101),  
and then by a return to hyperbole, the rhetorical force of which is crippled by anacoluthon:<sup>11</sup>

That those which do behold, they may become  
As men that stand and gaze against the sun.  
(102-103).

The Guise concludes:

The plot is laid, and things shall come to pass  
Where resolution strives for victory.

The only plot we have seen him lay in this scene, however, is the poisoning of the Queen Mother of Navarre. We are left wondering if the Guise has any clearer idea than we do what other "things shall come to pass," and we are mystified by the hollowness of the final line, especially the empty sound of "victory."

As Kuriyama suggests (83), such language has aptly been described by Sanders as "gigantic self-assertions of gigantic non-entities, resounding in a poetic void"(32), yet Sanders does not consider the possibility that Marlowe was striving for just such an effect. The ironies are too pointed to be accidental. For example, the Guise accuses Navarre of blinding Europe's eyes, but he himself wants to be a sun-king whom men "stand and gaze against" and are

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<sup>11</sup>Though one wonders if Oxberry's emendation, cited by Oliver(104), does not likely reflect what Marlowe originally wrote: "That those which do behold them may become...."



the Collier leaf,<sup>12</sup> where the Guise stands gloating over the body of the King's minion who has cuckolded him, and whom he has just had murdered. After the Guise's remark--"Revenge it, Henry, as thou list or dare;/ I did it only in despite of thee"(xix.15-16)--the Collier leaf adds the following:

Fondly hast thou incens'd the Guise's soul,  
That of itself was hot enough to work  
Thy just digestion with extremest shame!  
The army I have gathered now shall aim  
More at thy end than exterpation;  
And when thou think'st I have forgotten this,  
And that thou most reposest on my faith,  
Then will I wake thee from thy foolish dream  
And let thee see thyself my prisoner. (Boas 170)

Steane suggests that there is here "the egoist's sense that only he lives a full, waking life; the others [only] dream"(238). However, the great irony is that throughout the play it is the Guise who lives with his eyes closed, in a foolish dream. King Henry has no trouble hoodwinking him at the end by pretending to love him and have faith in him, when he has already arranged the Guise's murder:

K. Henry. Cousin, assure you I am resolute--  
Whatsoever any whisper in mine ears--  
Not to suspect disloyalty in thee:  
And so, sweet coz, farewell.  
Exit KING [with EPERNOUN and Captain of the Guard]  
Guise. So; now sues the King for favour to the Guise,  
And all his minions stoop when I command.  
Why, this 'tis to have an army in the field.  
Now by the holy sacrament I swear:  
As ancient Romans over their captive lords,  
So will I triumph over this wanton king,  
And he shall follow my proud chariot's wheels.  
Now do I but begin to look about,  
And all my former time was spent in vain.

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<sup>12</sup>See Boas, Appendix to Chapter X, Christopher Marlowe, 168-71, for a discussion of this manuscript fragment.

Hold, sword, for in thee is the Duke of Guise's hope.  
(xxi. 44-57, my emphasis)

Marlowe has not portrayed any of his previous heroes or villains as being quite this stupid or blind. The irony of the italicized line could not be more blatant, and it is in fact intensified by the subsequent action. A repentant Third Murderer comes on stage to warn the Guise of the impending ambush. The nobleman decides to proceed, trusting again to the power of his Tamburlaine gaze:

Yet Caesar shall go forth.  
Let mean conceits and baser men fear death:  
Tut, they are peasants; I am Duke of Guise;  
And princes with their looks engender fear.  
(67-70)

In what follows I accept Oliver's interpretation of the action. The Guise exclaims, "As pale as ashes!" at the "ghastly" face of the Third Murderer, and suddenly loses confidence. "Nay, then, 'tis time to look about," he says in a cringing attempt to retreat, and the phrase perfectly inverts the sense of his former boastful, "Now do I but begin to look about." The murderers then fall upon him, and he dies ignobly: "To die by peasants, what a grief is this"(81). "Vive la messe! Perish Huguenots!" he cries, reminding us of the completely gratuitous nature of the religious murders he has committed, since he has not personally believed in any religion. Although Cole argues that "there is more propaganda value than consistency"(148) in this final curse, there is something psychologically credible about the Guise's inconsistency: we can understand

this last-ditch attempt by a dying man to identify with a larger cause, to tack on meaning to an otherwise meaningless struggle.

I therefore believe that, in the context of The Massacre at Paris, the Guise's initial rejection of religion is presented as reprehensible, even if its iconoclasm is somewhat akin to Marlowe's own attitudes, and his own personal struggle:

For this, have I a largess from the Pope,  
 A pension and a dispensation too;  
 And by that privilege to work upon,  
 My policy hath fram'd religion.  
 Religion: O Diabole!  
 Fie, I am asham'd, however that I seem,  
 To think a word of such a simple sound,  
 Of so great matter should be made the ground.  
 (ii.59-66)

It is surely the very groundlessness of the Guise, in life and in death, that should make us carefully reconsider these lines. I cannot help feeling that with this moment in the speech--and with the irony it produces in light of the Guise's eventual fate--we come close to the divided mind which Marlowe's work as a whole reflects: to assert and define oneself at all costs, ostensibly brooking no limitations, but always with the hesitation, the fear, of isolating oneself from a larger order or pattern of meaning. In spite of Marlowe's vision of the indifference of God in Faustus, and his attacks on religion in The Jew of Malta, he never quite transcends a desire for religious consolation, for the surrender of personal struggle in the arms of a

greater being. And if Marlowe in his career moves towards the argument that, for the majority of humankind, God must remain "only" an act of imagination, the playwright nevertheless seems to want to regard it as a very important act, and not always simply as personal hypocrisy.

With the Guise we clearly have another case of failed imagination which results at least in part from his complete rejection of religious identification. Such a rejection leaves him psychologically isolated, forced to depend on sources of support which he must underplay or hypocritically denigrate; he thus relishes his pension from the Pope at the same time that he is "ashamed" of the Pope's religion. In spite of his "gigantic self-assertions" he is hardly self-sufficient, and his reliance on the Pope and Philip of Spain seriously damages his heroic image. As Kuriyama remarks, he begins to look like a "mere tool"(87):

Eper. Thou able to maintain an host in pay,  
That livest by foreign exhibition!  
The Pope and King of Spain are thy good friends,  
Else all France knows how poor a Duke thou art.  
(xix.37-40)

The Guise compensates by assuming the heroic identity of Caesar, a figure the pro-Catholic League pamphlets often compared him to.<sup>13</sup> Yet he seems blind to the tragic fate implied by this identification. For awhile he believes himself capable of a superman's career, and his grim joke at

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<sup>13</sup>See Kocher, "Contemporary Pamphlet Backgrounds for Marlowe's The Massacre at Paris," Modern Language Quarterly 8 (1947): 155.

the expense of Ramus' life--"Argumentum testimonii est inartificiale/ To contradict which, I say: Ramus shall die"(ix.34-35)--is reminiscent of Tamburlaine's boast that "Will and shall best fitteth Tamburlaine." Yet in his final brief moment of defiance and daring examined above--"Yet Caesar shall go forth./ Let mean conceits and baser men fear death"--he finds, "as Tamburlaine did not, that his emblematic appearance cannot help him"(Weil 98). The imagined identity cannot come to terms with reality, and here I must disagree with Briggs' assertion that the Guise's death is heroic: "...the Guise declares 'Thus Caesar did go forth, and thus he died'(xxi.87)--that is to say, 'thus he went forth bravely, despite warnings' and 'thus he died, treacherously murdered by a trusted friend.'"(266) The Guise as Marlowe portrays him hardly shows genuine courage, and Henry hardly represents Brutus, a trusted friend, for the Guise all along has schemed to destroy him.

The fact is that the Guise has no trusted friends or satisfying personal relationships. His vaguely sexual rapport with the Queen Mother again only serves to cast doubt on his integrity and independence, by raising the question of who is using whom. It is Catherine who speaks the first voice of dissent in the play:

K. Char. Come, mother, let us go to honour this  
solemnity.

Q. Cath. [Aside] Which I'll dissolve with blood and  
cruelty.  
(i.24-25)

She certainly speaks as an independent agent here, and her later speeches give no evidence that she intends to share the power to which she aspires:

Tush, man, let me alone with him  
 To work the way to bring this thing to pass;  
 And if he do deny what I do say,  
 I'll despatch him with his brother presently,  
 And then shall Monsieur [Alençon] wear the diadem.  
 Tush, all shall die unless I have my will,  
 For, while she lives, Catherine will be Queen.  
 Come, my Lords, let us go seek the Guise,  
 And then determine of this enterprise.

(xiv.60-68, which closely parallels xi.37-45)

In the light of such speeches the Guise begins to look very much like a pawn of the Queen Mother, though we may wonder if Catherine's viewpoint is not as distorted as the Guise's. Kuriyama argues that "the Guise may be taken as another of Catherine's sons" and that her final speech "suggests that the Guise is the favored prehomosexual son, her conspirator and confidant"(88). Her response to the Guise's death certainly involves a surprising emotional intensity:

Sweet Guise, would he [Henry] had died,  
so thou wert here!  
 To whom shall I bewray my secrets now  
 Or who will help to build religion?  
 . . . . .  
 But sorrow seize upon my toiling soul,  
 For since the Guise is dead, I will not live.  
(xxi.153-61)

Yet again we must question whether his view of their relationship would be comparable to hers, or whether he would have expressed this depth of emotional suffering had she been the one to die first. In other words, the Guise may not be quite the Freudian "mother's boy" that Kuriyama

makes him out to be.

Marlowe nevertheless attaches a strong sense of sexual failure to the Duke's career. Like Tamburlaine, the Guise seems obsessed with his sword's point (ii.92,ix.79,xxi.57) in a way which suggests a compensatory phallic aggression. His marital relations are a complete embarrassment, since his wife is carrying on an affair with one of the King's minions, Mugeroun--a man whose ambiguous sexual role at court makes him, from the Duke's perspective, an extremely damaging masculine rival. In the scene where the Guise discovers proof of his wife's infidelity there is again an emphasis on sight and eyes, perhaps because this is one of the few times he actually has his eyes opened, and he displays here something approaching genuine human suffering. The scene therefore seems more real, more dramatically convincing, than almost any other in the play. The Duchess, thinking of her lover, begins by wishing for a rendez-vous in "some place/ Where we may one enjoy the other's sight"(xv.7-8), a romantic reciprocity which we assume she can never enjoy with her egotistical husband. The Guise enters and, smelling a rat, insists that he "must see" the "secrets of [her] heart"(19-20). He then castigates her:

Is all my love forgot which held thee dear,  
 Ay, dearer than the apple of mine eye?  
 Is Guise's glory but a cloudy mist  
 In sight and judgment of thy lustful eye?  
(27-30)

In spite of the characteristic emphasis on his glory, there

is also here a hint of injured affection--"dearer than the apple of mine eye"--and, with his concern for his image in her eyes, a suggestion that her love and her thoughts had been important to him. Yet his final sense of betrayal-- "Now I do see that from the very first/ Her eyes and looks sow'd seeds of perjury"(37-38)--ironically recalls to us his own treacherous behaviour, not to mention his moral blindness and solipsism. He is clearly a man worth betraying, a man who has inspired no affection in others, with the exception of the venomous Queen Mother.

In contrast to the Guise's failed marriage, the brief glimpse we are given of Navarre's married state suggests that it will be one of cooperation and caring. In what seems perhaps an overly schematic fashion, Queen Margaret is shown both tempering her husband's forcefulness and steeling his weakness. When Navarre responds too harshly to his mother's fear of having been poisoned--

The late suspicion of the Duke of Guise  
Might well have mov'd Your Highness to beware  
How you did meddle with such dangerous gifts  
(iii.12-14)--

his wife seeks to soften the effect of his speech:

Too late it is, my Lord, if that be true,  
To blame Her Highness; but I hope it be  
Only some natural passion makes her sick.  
(15-17)

Yet when the worst is realized, Navarre displays the Marlovian tendency to premature surrender in which one can hardly overlook Freudian implications:

My mother poison'd here before my face!  
 O gracious God, what times are these?  
 O grant, sweet God, my days may end with hers,  
 That I with her may die and live again.

(21-24)

Margaret now reponds with the will to endure which her husband lacks:

Let not this heavy chance, my dearest Lord,  
 (For whose effects my soul is massacred)  
 Infect thy gracious breast with fresh supply  
 To aggravate our sudden misery.

(25-28)

She thus combines sensitivity or depth of feeling with resolution, and it is significant that such resolution in this instance comes from the woman. Marlowe is apparently moving away from the dichotomy of masculine aggression versus feminine submissiveness established in Tamburlaine, but without replacing it with the complete inversion of masculine and feminine roles which occurs periodically in Dido Queen of Carthage. And if, in The Massacre, Queen Catherine represents female aggressiveness in the extreme, Margaret, unlike Catherine or Dido, displays strength of character without all-consuming wilfulness. The Navarre-Margaret relationship promises to be one of mutual cooperation and support rather than a power struggle.

While such a reading may seem to attach a great deal of significance to a very brief episode in the play, there are other indications that Marlowe was attempting, in his characterization of Navarre and of those closely associated with him, to portray human beings who succeed in balancing

or at least managing their conflicting impulses. Oliver, I believe, comes very close to the heart of what Marlowe was trying to do with Navarre's characterization when he remarks:

...some may see incongruity in the conjunction of ideas when he decides to flee from France:  
 I'll muster up an army secretly,  
 For fear that Guise, join'd with the King of Spain,  
 Might seem to cross me in mine enterprise.  
 But God that always doth defend the right  
 Will show his mercy and preserve us still  
 (xiii.37-41)

(but Cromwell was neither hypocritical nor irreligious when he gave his famous advice to trust in God and keep your powders dry). (lxv)

Navarre, like Ferneze before him, becomes very much a representative of the principle that God helps those who help themselves. I suspect, along with Oliver, that Navarre's character "may have lost some of its complexity in the 'reporting'"(lxvi) and therefore must disagree with those critics who see him as "the merest patchwork of Protestant commonplaces"<sup>14</sup> or as one who merely spouts "pious platitudes."<sup>15</sup> Navarre's facile faith at the beginning of the play is in fact seriously questioned by the subsequent action. Cole attempts to argue that the play's "outcome is as inevitable as it is orthodox--in fact, it is assured at the very start by the words of Navarre"(150):

But He that sits and rules above the clouds  
 Doth hear and see the prayers of the just,  
 And will revenge the blood of innocents

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<sup>14</sup>Kocher, "Contemporary Pamphlet Backgrounds," 316.

<sup>15</sup>Cole, Suffering and Evil, 156.

That Guise hath slain by treason of his heart  
 And brou'nt by murder to their timeless ends.  
 (i.41-45)

Hardly a prophetic "assurance," this speech seems more a case of premature optimism, coming as it does before the massacre itself, when hundreds of Protestants are slaughtered and Navarre barely escapes with his life. What God actually sees and hears remains moot, and "revenge," as Navarre comes to learn, is something he must effect himself. When Cole argues that the scene (xii) involving the murder of five or six Protestants at prayers is "obviously intended to increase the indignation of a Protestant audience toward the protagonist [the Guise]"(151), he is undoubtedly correct, but I suspect he misses the full significance; for behind this obvious manipulation of audience reactions Marlowe is again questioning the efficacy of prayer (we recall Faustus' ironic, "Ay, pray for me, pray for me"); the playwright is inclined to dismiss it as a completely "passive" religious response. With the victory over Joyeux, a matured Navarre can remark, "Thus God, we see, doth ever guide the right,/ To make his glory great upon the earth" (xviii.3-4), but only after he has insisted, before the battle, that "We must with resolute minds resolve to fight/ In honour of our God and country's good"(xvi.10-11, my emphasis). It is the individual assertion that matters most, but for inspiration and strength Navarre is careful to identify with a larger cause. As Navarre points out, this

identification is exactly what the self-centred Guise lacks:  
 "So he be safe, he cares not what becomes/ Of King or  
 country--no, not for them both"(xvi.42-43). It is  
 interesting to note, however, that by the end of the play  
 Navarre's faith in his own individual assertions seem to  
 have won out over his religious sentiments; as Steane  
 remarks, the "last words of the play are hard and  
 vindictive"(245):

And then I vow for to revenge his [Henry's] death  
 As Rome and all those popish prelates there  
 Shall curse the time that e'er Navarre was king  
 And rul'd in France by Henry's fatal death!  
(xxiv.108-11)

Steane in fact gives a very accurate description of the  
 play's resolution:

We are not left with a fairy-tale world, where all  
 is as it was in the beginning: order re-established  
 and everything happy ever after. What triumphs is a  
 'good' (as opposed to Machiavellian) political  
 realism, and it is a hard and not idyllic re-  
 establishment of order. Revenge, death, curse and  
rule are the tone-definers in Navarre's last speech  
 (where religious league, princely love, hearts etc.,  
 were the relatively comfortable terms qualifying the  
 initial 'order'). (244)

The ending is thus only guardedly optimistic, for resolution  
 and endurance, rather than love and cooperation, prove to be  
 the necessary ingredients for survival in society. Without  
 any mention of God's guidance or mercy in the final speech,  
 readers may feel that Navarre is in some danger of hardening  
 into the assertive tyranny of a Tamburlainean hero.

Certainly, however, we are meant to see, as Steane  
 suggests, a triumph of "good" over Machiavellian political

realism in Navarre's forthrightness and directness, for even the figure of Henry III has to pay the ultimate price for his employment of Machiavellian tactics in spite of his eventual "conversion." Kocher finds "the contrast between the Anjou of [the massacre] scenes and the sympathetic Henry III of the closing scenes of the play... so sharp as to render the character wellnigh unintelligible,"<sup>16</sup> and indeed Henry is not very skilfully developed. Yet the disparate elements in his characterization make him--in relation to Marlowe's own psychological conflicts--the most interesting figure in the play. He at first seems as Machiavellian as the Guise. In his reply to Charles' objection to the massacre--which reveals, according to Kuriyama, "a firmer grasp of the situation"(78)--we have in fact the rhetoric of pure evil:

Though gentle minds should pity others' pains,  
 Yet will the wisest note their proper griefs,  
 And rather seek to scourge their enemies  
 Than be themselves base subjects to the whip.  
(iv.13-16)

Kuriyama presumably finds such an argument politic since "survival depends on striking first and hardest"(77), yet the Protestants have assembled in Paris to celebrate a wedding, not to attack the Catholics! Henry displays the same motiveless malignancy during the massacre: "I am disguis'd and none knows who I am,/ And therefore mean to murder all I meet"(v.5-6). By temporarily evading the

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<sup>16</sup>"François Hotman," 367-68.

responsibility of maintaining an acceptable identity, the young prince is able to practise as much aggression and violence as possible. Such behaviour would appear to have one major advantage: Henry survives while his weak-willed and passive older brother is easily and ruthlessly removed from the picture. Having learned brutal assertiveness, however, Henry also begins to cultivate a certain amount of political savvy and foresight. In his acceptance of the Polish crown (Scene x), Henry "shrewdly assesses the challenge the offer entails," as Kuriyama remarks (78), and also ensures that his inheritance of the French crown will not be prevented. The fact that Scene x is oddly and ahistorically inserted in the midst of the continuing drama of the massacre suggests that Marlowe was at some pains to highlight the more positive aspects of Henry's character early in the play, though one still wonders why Marlowe made Anjou an active participant in the massacre, since his source material did not insist upon this (see Kocher, "François Hotman," 367).

The most interesting aspect of Henry's character, however, is not made apparent until he becomes King of France, and at his coronation declares:

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 affection from his bent;  
As now you are, so shall you still persist,  
Removeless from the favours of your king.  
(xiv.16-22)

Here is remarkable resolution: to harbour both majesty (power) and love, and a kind of love which his society is not likely to condone. We must thus decide whether Henry's behaviour represents foolish and irresponsible dotage, or a legitimate attempt to balance love and duty.

A brief examination of some of Marlowe's source materials may prove helpful. Briggs points out that the pamphlets of the pro-Catholic League "indulged in the most extravagant character assassinations of Henry III (whom they consistently demoted to 'Henry of Valois') for his failure to adopt their own hard line on the Huguenot issue"(263).

Kocher informs us that such publications

spread tales of riot and homosexuality. In its public demands that the mignons be dismissed, the League charged waste of public funds, giving of bad counsel to the King, displacing of the older nobility by these upstarts, and the like. The issue was useful to the League in undermining confidence in the King. Protestants, on the other hand, were faintly apologetic for the mignons, hoping thus to woo Henry away from the League.<sup>17</sup>

Marlowe as well is at least "apologetic" for the minions (a matter to which I will return in a moment), and while some of Henry's subsequent actions are irresponsible, he shows signs of developing into a mature and competent ruler. His sending of "sweet Joyeux" to do battle with Navarre is reminiscent of the embarrassing Mycetes-Meander rapport in Tamburlaine, and his making horns at the Guise is a puerile jest that serves only to incite the Guise and place Mugeroun

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<sup>17</sup>"Contemporary Pamphlet Backgrounds," 169.

in more immediate danger. (Dramatically it certainly would not inspire any respect or admiration from the audience.) However, he appears to recognize his foolishness quickly, and (though it is too late to save his friend) he thereafter acts with more force and maturity: when confronted with the Guise's recalcitrance, he ironically exclaims:

Guise, wear our crown, and be thou King of France,  
And as dictator make or war or peace  
Whilst I cry placet like a senator!  
I cannot brook thy haughty insolence:  
Dismiss thy camp, or else by our edict  
Be thou proclaim'd a traitor throughout France.  
(xix.55-60)

Yet the roller coaster ride of our opinion of him continues. Faced with the Guise's dissembling, Henry unfortunately decides to descend to the level of his opponent. His treacherous entrapment of the Duke--as well as the murder of his brother--results eventually in his own betrayal at the hands of the fanatical Friar. With "revenge" recurring as a key word, the law of an eye-for-an-eye hangs over the action of the play like a dark cloud; witness the short exchange between Henry and the Guise's son:

K. Henry. Boy, look where your father lies.  
G.'s Son. My father slain! Who hath done this deed?  
K. Henry. Sirrah, 'twas I that slew him; and will slay  
Thee too, and thou prove such a traitor.  
G.'s Son. Art thou a king, and hast done this  
bloody deed?  
I'll be reveng'd!  
He offereth to throw his dagger.  
K. Henry. Away to prison with him! I'll clip his wings  
Or e'er he pass my hands; away with him!  
(xxi.117-24)

The Massacre thus degenerates from a wedding celebration to

a state in which individuals can barely be restrained from killing each other (even after the massacre proper), and the chain reaction of violence promises to go on indefinitely. This strong suggestion of unending bloodshed perhaps explains the Biblical parody in the coronation scene, when Mugeroun cuts off the Cutpurse's ear and Henry "forgives" the thief for his offense. As Weil points out (97), this incident would recall Peter's actions in Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested, and Christ's admonition (Matthew 26:52): "All that take the sworde, shal perishe with the sworde." If such a warning forms part of the underlying message of the play, then Navarre's final emphasis on revenge is perhaps more ominous than one would first think (and Marlowe's play surprisingly prophetic, since Navarre himself was eventually assassinated).

Yet the play elsewhere shows us the necessity of individual assertiveness (provided it is controlled and rational) and so it could hardly be claimed that The Massacre advocates a philosophy of complete non-resistance. Despite the underhanded method of dispatching the Guise, this action allows Henry, unlike Charles, to escape from his mother's domination and to assert his independence:

Mother, how like you this device of mine?  
 I slew the Guise, because I would be King.  
 Cry out, exclaim, howl till thy throat be hoarse,  
 The Guise is slain, and I rejoice therefore!  
 (xxi.136-49)

Significantly, Henry is helped to this new sense of identity and power by Epernoun, who first suggests that the Guise be murdered:

My Lord, I think, for safety of your royal person,  
It would be good the Guise were made away,  
And so to quite Your Grace of all suspect.  
(xix.82-84)

Though Henry tells Epernoun, "I will be rul'd by thee"(81), the King seems far less a mere tool of his lover<sup>18</sup> than Edward II does of Gaveston. Henry apparently moves from an initial stage of irresponsibility and indulgence with a group of minions to a more mature stage where he settles down with Epernoun, in a relationship which seems constructive and mutually supportive. Again unlike Gaveston's for Edward, Epernoun's affection for Henry appears genuine and selfless. Epernoun is concerned for Henry's safety and suspicious of the Friar in the final scene, and, when the King is injured, expresses the true depth of his love:

Nav. [to Henry] Long may you live, and still be  
King of France.

Eper. Or else die Epernoun.

K. Henry. Sweet Epernoun, thy King must die.

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Ah Epernoun, is this thy love to me?  
Henry the King wipes off these childish  
tears  
And bids thee whet thy sword on Sixtus'  
bones

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<sup>18</sup>That Marlowe portrays Henry and Epernoun as lovers should not be doubted, since even his pamphlet sources strongly suggest this fact; Briggs states that "Explicit accusations of homosexuality were frequently made against the King, in particular with Epernon"(264, my emphasis).

That it may keenly slice the Catholics.  
(xxiv.87-99)

Though the only alternative to self-surrender seems to be revenge, even Henry's curse-like conclusion cannot hide the fact that he, unlike the Guise, has inspired real, selfless affection in another human being.

That the most intimate and intense relationship in the play is homosexual suggests that Marlowe, by this stage in his career, was facing rather than struggling against his own sexual tendencies. In his portrayal of the alliance of Henry and Navarre, Marlowe was able to combine the re-identification with his national and religious roots (and, it must be pointed out, Henry's two references to Elizabeth are really the most jingoistic moments of the play) with a hope that his own sexual identity might become acceptable, or at least tolerable, to others in his community. Perhaps the more sympathetic treatment of Henry in the Protestant pamphlets contributed to this hope.

Having examined the three characterizations in some detail, I must add that none is especially convincing or successful. The conversion of Henry from a murderous and unscrupulous young man to a more mature (if still flawed) individual allied with the forces of good is particularly difficult to accept, at least in the shortened form of the play we possess. I believe that Marlowe was experiencing such a crucial and difficult transition stage at the moment he wrote The Massacre that it is difficult not to accept

Kuriyama's general argument that the play's "aesthetic deficiencies originate in [an] underlying... [psychological] confusion"(93). The Massacre may even, as she suggests, have the "aridity of a futile exercise"(93), though the play is not without its moments of human affirmation. The scholar Ramus, for example, dies with tragic dignity in the face of the senseless violence embodied by the Guise. Ramus' question to the terrified Taleus, "Wherefore should I fly"(ix.6), recalls Faustus' utterance, "Whither should I fly"(v.77), but Ramus displays stoic acceptance rather than panic and fear. Marlowe was perhaps originally attracted to this figure because of his intellectual iconoclasm; however, as John Ronald Glenn remarks, "After the bitter anti-Aristotle excesses of his youth, [Ramus] had in fact spent much of his life claiming that he was not opposed to Aristotle at all, but only to the vain scholastics who buried Aristotle under heaps of sterile commentary."<sup>19</sup> We thus again see a pattern of immature self-assertion followed by a more mature recognition of the need for both individual aspiration and an acceptance of authorities external to the self. Marlowe was certainly aware of the development of Ramus' later thought, for the scholar's final dignified defense before being stabbed (40-52) reveals his belief that it was "the marriage of Church and Aristotle which had made

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<sup>19</sup>"The Martyrdom of Ramus in Marlowe's The Massacre at Paris," Papers on Language and Literature 9 (1973): 375.

academic learning a sterile affair and discouraged thinkers from following their own courses." Ramus' last words, as Glenn states,

are a passionate indictment of the vanity and inconsistency of the Catholic "Sorbonests"[l. 50], more zealous defending their mountains of quasi-Aristotelian philosophy ("their workes"[l.51]) than in disseminating knowledge for the purpose of equipping man's reason to serve God. (376)

Ramus, who had earlier converted to Protestantism, also reveals his humaneness and moral flexibility by carrying on an intimate friendship with the Catholic Taleus in a society where Catholics and Protestants had become bitter enemies. In spite of the strong Protestant identification in the play, one wonders if Marlowe did not at the same time want to stress that personal qualities rather than religious affiliation determine the worth of an individual. There exists one tantalizing scrap of evidence--outside of the text that has come down to us--that suggests this idea was developed further in the original form of the play. F.P. Wilson informs us that in Thomas Fuller's Pisgah of Palestine (1650), page 95, may be found the following quotation: "I seasonably remember how one being asked in the Massacre at Paris, whether he was a Catholike or an Hugonite, answered he was a Physician."<sup>20</sup>

Considering the sympathetic portraits of both the

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<sup>20</sup>"The Massacre at Paris and Edward II," Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Clifford Leech (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964) 128.

Ramus-Taleus<sup>21</sup> and Henry-Epernoun relationships, Marlowe would also seem to be suggesting that personal qualities rather than sexual affiliation determine the worth of an individual. In the final analysis the religious implications of The Massacre remain unclear. Ramus' dedication "to the service of the eternal God"(ix.52) does not save him (any more than it saves Abigail), Henry dies through a foolish belief that "friars are holy men"(xxiv.23), and even Navarre's final emphasis on personal revenge casts doubts on his future dedication to the Heavenly Father. After The Massacre Marlowe abandons his attempt to determine what role God--even as an act of imagination--should play in human experience. In his final play he concentrates almost exclusively on the individual's struggle to maintain and exercise personal control while clamouring for the fulfillment of sexual love. The idea of God recurs briefly only as a forgotten dream, though, as we shall see, it still echoes in the emptiness at the core of Marlowe's artistic vision.

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<sup>21</sup>Retes' remark--"'Tis Taleus, Ramus' bedfellow"(ix.12) --leaves little doubt as to the nature of their relationship.

## Chapter 7: Edward II

Because of its direct treatment of homosexual love, Edward II<sup>1</sup> is a crucial play in the Marlowe canon, and deserves the most careful--I am tempted to say "delicate"--critical attention. For this reason the present chapter will begin with what may seem an unusually long preamble. Kuriyama remarks that "the play has sparked no lively critical controversy.... The poet's attitude toward his protagonist, for once, is clear and consistent: our

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<sup>1</sup>As I remarked in my introduction to this study, I have followed Ellis-Fermor's chronology of Marlowe's plays, agreeing in general with the reasons elaborated by Leonora Leet Brodwin in her essay "Edward II: Marlowe's Culminating Treatment of Love" [ELH 31 (1964): 139-55]. While I have admitted the uncertainty involved in adopting any particular chronology of the plays, I feel it worth mentioning here one point raised by Briggs which, in addition to my remarks in the previous chapter, strongly suggests that Edward II followed The Massacre at Paris. Briggs comments on the "striking parallels" developed in a "notorious" Catholic League pamphlet by Jean Boucher entitled Histoire tragique et mémorable de Pierre de Gaveston, published in July 1588. Boucher in his preface "makes explicit" the analogy between Gaveston and Epernoun, both corrupters of kings, and warns Henry III of Edward's fate, who died impaled upon "une broche rouge de feu" [Briggs, "Marlowe's Massacre at Paris: A Reconsideration," Review of English Studies 34 (1983): 264]. It seems to me extremely likely that the parallel drawn by Boucher prompted Marlowe, for his subsequent dramatic endeavour, to turn to Holinshed in order to investigate the details of Edward's reign.

sympathies are encouraged to run fairly close to Kent's."<sup>2</sup> While this statement may be true with respect to the general manipulation of audience sympathies, the play certainly has become (and promises to remain) more controversial than Kuriyama suggests. She does refer to the "generic" dispute over whether Edward II is to be regarded as an Elizabethan history play or rather the personal tragedy of an individual who "happens to be the head of a state," as Levin puts it.<sup>3</sup> This raises the question of what exactly is supposed to constitute an "Elizabethan history play," and may very well make one wonder--since Marlowe's play obviously treats seriously Edward's failure to accept the responsibilities of kingship--why the work cannot be regarded as a legitimate history play. Claude J. Summers, in "Sex, Politics, and Self-Realization in Edward II," points out that the play has been dismissed as a proper "history" because of "its failure to promulgate a political lesson compatible with Tudor orthodoxy"; that is, it fails to offer a providential vision of history.<sup>4</sup> While it may appear to some a perversion of modern sensibility to assume that such a failure should make the play more, not less, compelling as a work of art, I

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<sup>2</sup>Hammer or Anvil: Psychological Patterns in Christopher Marlowe's Plays (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1980) 175.

<sup>3</sup>Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher (1952; rpt. London: Faber & Faber, 1961) 110.

<sup>4</sup>"A Poet and a filthy Play-maker": New Essays on Christopher Marlowe, ed. Kenneth Friedenreich, Roma Gill, and Constance B. Kuriyama (New York: AMS Press, 1988) 222.

agree with Summers that "Rather than constituting either a flaw or an irrelevancy, the refusal to moralize history is at the heart of both the play's profound political heterodoxy and the personal tragedy of the king"(222).

However, I must express my misgivings concerning what Summers eventually makes of the king's personal tragedy. I have remarked, in my previous chapter, that Edward II is Marlowe's most honest work, and therefore agree with Kuriyama's statement that it is "the play in which Marlowe seems determined to face his fears most directly"(195). I perhaps would even qualify this statement by suggesting that "fear" is by this stage in Marlowe's development too strong a term; assuming that Hero and Leander followed Edward II relatively closely in time (since by 1592 Marlowe was fast running out of it altogether), it is difficult to believe that a poet who could describe Leander so warmly was still struggling deeply with forbidden sexual impulses. However, considering that poem from Leander's point of view--extrapolating from the myth, the reader foresees the youth's death at the hands of the homosexual Neptune--one still detects a certain reservation on the part of the poet with respect to his new sense of sexual identity. In fact, it seems to me debatable whether Marlowe would even have seen this personal admission of sexual attraction as constituting a separate and coherent sexual identity. Summers, citing Alan Bray's study Homosexuality in Renaissance England

(London: Gay Men's Press, 1982), remarks that

in the Renaissance sodomy generally did not denote a specific identity or relate to a particular kind of person, but was considered a temptation to which all men were subject and a symptom of universal dissolution. In this context, Marlowe's intuition of sexuality as a defining characteristic of personality is all the more remarkable. (238)

We may question, however, whether the "intuition" referred to by Summers is not more the modern reader's than it is Marlowe's. Summers remarks that Bray's book is "brief and sometimes debatable in details." I do not possess the historical knowledge to challenge or even to doubt Bray's argument, and surely the point to which Summers assents, that sodomy in the Renaissance did not denote a specific sexual identity, should make us pause in an assessment of Edward II as a play which presents sexuality as a "defining characteristic of personality." I do not mean we should not talk of a "homosexual identity," for of course I have been doing so all through this dissertation. But I have regarded such an identity in the sense of an individual recognizing--or resisting--predominantly homosexual impulses. I do not believe that Marlowe in the 1590's, even having made this recognition, would easily see it as embodying an acceptable, independent, alternative "personality type." Marlowe's concept of his own sexuality may very well never have fully escaped the lingering influence of the "negative identity" we have observed in The Jew of Malta and earlier plays. To accept this probability is simply to recognize that Marlowe,

like all men and women, was in part a creature of his time.

I wish to add here that I do not presume to offer an easy answer to the mystery of human identity, sexual or otherwise. All critics have personal biases; I am willing to admit mine here. The whole premise on which this study is based--the Augustinian belief that the human self is an illusory one constructed in ignorance of a potential, and perhaps eventually realized, spiritual identity--I find a useful enough concept to "believe in" its possibility, even while I do not find it a particularly attractive condition of being. As for specifically sexual identity, different moments in history have offered us, and will no doubt continue to offer us, different models. Forced to adopt one for the present time, I would lean towards Kinsey's suggestion of a continuum involving various percentages of homosexual and heterosexual inclination in each individual. But I realize at the same time the potential of this model to offend both heterosexuals and homosexuals who, out of fear or self-esteem, or out of a demand for "sub-culture" or "dominant-culture" rights, insist on a clear distinction between the two.

It is certainly true, as Summers contends, that Edward II is remarkable for "its resolute failure to condemn homosexuality"(222), a point already established by Purvis Boyette in "Wanton Humour and Wanton Poets: Homosexuality in

Marlowe's Edward II."<sup>5</sup> No doubt both Summers and Boyette would agree with Toby Robertson's refreshingly colloquial assessment, given in an interview based on his 1958 production:

There is no condemnation of the homosexual relationship at all. This is not what the barons mind about it. There's that long speech by the elder Mortimer: "The mightiest kings have had their minions/ Great Alexander loved Hephaestion..." The real issue is: have your favorite and don't let him get involved with the politics of the realm. A distinction is made between public behaviour and private morals. The play is not concerned with morals.<sup>6</sup>

This point of view is extremely persuasive, although I feel we must still entertain a few reservations. First, in the face of Boyette's claim that moral judgement is "a fiction [Marlowe] chooses to ignore"(36) there is still the knotty issue of the "psychological" or "symbolic" or "moral" significance of the manner of Edward's death.<sup>7</sup> Second, while the barons, or at least Mortimer, do not seem to "mind" Edward's homosexuality ("Uncle, his wanton humour grieves not me"[I.iv.401]), they are hardly moral exemplars; an audience is certainly free to object to something that characters within the play are willing to

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<sup>5</sup>Tulane Studies in English 12 (1977): 33-50.

<sup>6</sup>"Directing Edward II," Tulane Drama Review 8 (1964): 178.

<sup>7</sup>As Kuriyama argues, "Marlowe certainly invites the interpretation first suggested by Empson--that the manner of Edward's death is a Dantesque talion punishment for his sexual transgression"(178). Critics qualify or deny this "theory" in various ways; I shall consider the matter again later in the chapter.

overlook, and while modern audiences (some at least) are less likely to react negatively to the portrayal of homosexuality, one would expect sixteenth-century ones to be more hostile. It may in fact be an assumption of just such a response by the Elizabethans that helped the play get past the censors in the first place, for the portrayal of homosexuality is much more detailed in Edward II than in The Massacre at Paris. Finally, while Mortimer Senior in the speech referred to by Robertson does excuse Edward's tendencies with a series of historical and mythical precedents (I.iv.385-400), it is significant that the nobleman concludes with the remark:

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.

There is an interesting ambiguity here. Edward's behaviour is regarded as a temporary "stage" on the way to mature adulthood. The question is, does Mortimer Senior suggest that in riper years Edward will be weaned from immature homosexual relations like the one with Gaveston and proceed to more mature ones, or does he mean the king will be weaned from homosexuality altogether? The latter seems the more likely answer, especially in the context of Mortimer Junior's reply, "Uncle, his wanton humour grieves not me." Presumably Mortimer Senior's tolerance would not last indefinitely.

Thus, while I agree with Summers' point that Edward II

takes a surprisingly unmoralistic approach to homosexuality, I feel that Boyette exaggerates when he calls the play a "seditious and demonic" work, guaranteed to "make an enemy of every dogmatic moralist"(33). Such a statement seems to me far from reflecting the true artistic intention or motivation behind the work, for I do not believe the play's main purpose is to challenge or attack traditional sexual morality. I prefer to see the play as, in part, a courageous but relatively calm request for tolerance rather than a vigorous act of defiance.

Yet what primarily disturbs me about Summers' and Boyette's approach is not their point about the play's attitude to homosexuality per se, but rather the way in which they view the Edward-Gaveston relationship. Boyette, having considered Edward's vow that he will "either die or live with Gaveston" (I.i.137), remarks that "Edward is fully aware of the stakes in this conflict"(40), a statement patently untrue since until his death scene Edward is characterized by almost uninterrupted self-delusion. Boyette argues that Marlowe has "internalized the conflict in Edward's heart, whereby Edward perceives his love for Gaveston as the creation of a spiritual wholeness, Eros in union with Anteros"(40); the critic repeats the point a short while later: "Gaveston affords [Edward] a spiritual wholeness he finds nowhere else, and the effect is a transformation of consciousness that sets him at odds with

an unsympathetic world"(41). I must confess that my initial reaction to the idea of "spiritual wholeness" is to wonder if I have read the same play as Boyette, yet the interpretation would seem possible, for a version of it recurs in Summers' essay:

[Edward's] attachment to Gaveston represents freedom from responsibility and escape into a world of eroticism at variance with his social identity, but it is also, and more fundamentally, a quest for selfhood and wholeness. For Edward, self-realization is inextricably linked to communion with another, specifically with Gaveston, to whom his soul is knit [III.iii.42]. Thus Gaveston is both a person of sacred worth and a mirror in which the king sees reflected his own possibilities of selfhood. (233)

I can agree that Edward's attachment to Gaveston represents "freedom from responsibility and escape into a world of eroticism," but I feel less comfortable with the assertion that it is "more fundamentally" a quest for selfhood. Summers' emphasis on selfhood is obviously of great importance, since, as I have been arguing, all of Marlowe's plays are "fundamentally" about the quest for selfhood--or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say, the failure of such a quest. What I object to in Summers' assessment is his implied separation of "responsibility" from the quest for selfhood. While some critics may find "responsibility" a rather mundane, moralistic concept, it remains, in Marlowe criticism, a key term since the idea is so inextricably linked with the integrity of the self. In Edward II "the refusal to moralize history" in fact intensifies the play's emphasis on personal responsibility,

by nullifying the possibility of divine intervention in political and social destiny. The play deals with individuals who succeed or fail to fulfill the roles society has granted them. The quest for selfhood in the arena of personal relationships is just as much a responsibility as is fulfilling one's social duties,<sup>8</sup> and Edward II is, in part, about a man who fails on both counts.

I feel compelled, I must admit, to adopt a paradoxical approach to this play. I wish very much to accept Leonora Brodwin's vision of Edward II as a "culminating treatment of love," in which "some apparent conversion, either actual or purely imaginative, which Marlowe made to homosexual love... provided such a release of his sympathies that he could feel empathy with all expressions of love";<sup>9</sup> yet at the same time I feel that in the final analysis Edward II is a play in which no one really loves anybody. Edward is certainly not alone in this respect, for Gaveston, Isabella, and Mortimer also fail to transcend their own self-love. We are actually less ready to condemn Edward than the others for this failing, for a reason that has been most succinctly expressed by Clifford Leech. Having quoted the famous exchange between Mortimer and Edward--"Why should you love him whom the world hates so?/ Because he loves me more than

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<sup>8</sup>That is, they both require the giving of oneself to an "other" at the same time that one maintains individual integrity.

<sup>9</sup>"Edward II: Marlowe's Culminating Treatment of Love," 155.

all the world"(I.iv.76-77)--Leech comments:

We know what Gaveston's love is worth, yet this naive--but psychologically profound--utterance of Edward is enough to put us, for the moment, on his side; he becomes an emblem of the human need for love, and of the very human joy when love seems offered.<sup>10</sup>

This statement is at the heart of the artistic "release" which Brodwin has identified in the play, yet it is significant that Leech refers to the need for love, and the joy when love seems offered, for there is no true realization of love in the play. I am aware that my position raises the question of a true definition of "love"; rather than choosing to dismiss such a topic as necessarily involving an exploration of unhelpful clichés, I in fact think the play forces the very question upon us--but only by showing us, finally, love's genuine absence. I therefore find the idea of "spiritual wholeness" between Edward and Gaveston clearly absurd, not, I am convinced, because I react homophobically to the text. It is in fact the absence of spiritual wholeness which lies at the heart of the "meaning" of the play.

I intend to proceed by examining more closely the characters of Edward II, Gaveston, Isabella, Mortimer, and finally Edward III. In doing so I would like to keep in mind Leech's suggestion of Edward as an "emblem," and how we are to deal with this remark alongside Kuriyama's very valid

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<sup>10</sup>Christopher Marlowe: Poet for the Stage (New York: AMS Press, 1986) 134.

statement that Edward is "Marlowe's most ambitious attempt to create a credible human being."<sup>11</sup> Edward II, like all Marlowe's work, is concerned with the tension between art and reality; yet it seems to me that this tension takes on a peculiar manifestation in this play. As in The Jew of Malta, Edward II explores the idea of role-playing in the sense of establishing socially viable, if illusory, identities, although the vision is now (if such a thing is possible) even bleaker than before because being "viable" no longer seems an achievement worth striving for. Self-fashioning almost seems parodied by human beings becoming "merely" artefacts when they had previously appeared like very "real" people. In Tamburlaine the metamorphoses of humans into artefacts was a function of the tyranny of the protagonist; in Faustus and The Jew it was function of the hero's failure to achieve natural or legitimate self-fashioning. In Edward II this process--while repeating the pattern of Faustus and The Jew--at moments seems an inexorable part of the artistic interpretation of reality. The play thus comes close to denying art's ability to give meaning to, or make sense out of, experience at all.

The first words of the play are in fact Edward's, although they proceed from Gaveston's mouth, who is quoting a letter from the new king. This dramatic technique is in itself significant, for Edward's failure to speak for

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<sup>11</sup>Hammer or Anvil, 181.

himself (here symbolic) underlines his later failure at self-assertion, at establishing an integrated, independent self. This failure is also subtly suggested by the words Edward has chosen:

'My father is deceased; come Gaveston,  
And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend.'<sup>12</sup>

There is no reference to his father as "the king" and thus no recognition of the responsibility Edward has inherited. Moreover, there is no sense of mourning over his father's death, in contrast to Edward III's behaviour at the end of the play.<sup>13</sup> The line, "My father is deceased; come Gaveston," is thus psychologically revealing since the loss of a father is not recognized by Edward as a challenge to become himself an independent adult, to go through the "mourning" or suffering of self-development; Edward instead simply replaces one dependency with another. Unlike Faustus, who, as I remarked, appears in his Prologue to metamorphose from a thing that gives and nourishes, into one that seizes and devours, Edward is never anything more than a thing that seeks to be satiated. W.M. Merchant rightly calls attention to Gaveston's use of the word "surfeit" in

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<sup>12</sup>All quotations of the play are from the New Mermaids edition, ed. W. Moelwyn Merchant (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1967).

<sup>13</sup>See Sara Munson Deats' article "Marlowe's Fearful Symmetry in Edward II," "A Poet and a filthy Play-maker": New Essays on Christopher Marlowe, 241-62, for a discussion of the structure of the play as two symmetrical halves containing significant parallels and contrasts.

the subsequent line, "Ah words that make me surfeit with delight," by remarking that it "is characteristic of the temper of the opening scenes that the sense of appetite should be appealed to"(7). Even the word "share" in line 2, besides emphasizing Edward's inability to assume personal responsibility for governing the kingdom, also carries with it the suggestion of the realm as a huge meal to be devoured by Edward and Gaveston.

But of course the kingdom does not really interest Edward at all, and he is soon willing to leave the "sharing" of the realm to others:

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.70-73)

Making several kingdoms of a monarchy is obviously an invitation to political disaster, as Gorboduc had emphasized, and the word "frolic" perfectly expresses Edward's infantile fantasy of evading responsibility; he seems to use the term with no awareness of its (under the circumstances) pejorative sense, which is evident when the Queen uses the word slightly earlier: "let him frolic with his minion"(I.ii.67). It is, however, this child-like quality of Edward which partially mitigates our condemnation of him, even in the earlier scenes of the play. It seems he never achieves the stature necessary for him to commit a real tragic error, and indeed his career involves the

curious sense of incongruity of a small child who has been forced to take on the role of a tragic hero. Edward never arrives at those "riper years" referred to by Mortimer Senior, and the references to "aged Edward" and "old Edward" in Act V (when in fact he was only forty-three at his death) elicit from us something of the pity and terror one feels towards young children with the horrifying disease which causes them to age prematurely. The irony and poignancy increase at the end as well because Edward indeed finds himself with nothing but a "nook or corner left," and in that dark and filthy dungeon he certainly cannot frolic.

Edward's final enclosure is thus an ironic answer to his desire to withdraw from the demands of kingship and from adulthood. It does not strike me as too moralistic to remark that such a fate seems the natural result of what Kuriyama calls Edward's "deadly combination" of personal traits--weakness and willfulness (181). With regard to Marlowe's major protagonists, it is surprising that, of a shepherd, a scholar, a merchant, and a king, the last should turn out to be the weakest, and that the character whose field of concern should be the largest--that of governing a kingdom--reduces his interests to the smallest sphere of activity. There seems an inverse relation between the external demands placed on these characters and their ability to accept challenges. But it is perhaps not surprising that Marlowe's final drama offers another

memorable example of the fantasy of control without sacrifice, power without responsibility--a fantasy we have observed since the prologue to his earliest play. As I pointed out in the discussion of Dido Queen of Carthage, there are interesting parallels between Dido and Edward. Like Dido, Edward's obsessive sexual passion causes him to dismiss his country's welfare:

Edward. How now, what news? is Gaveston arrived?  
Mortimer Jr. Nothing but Gaveston; what means  
your grace?  
You have matters of more weight to think upon;  
The King of France sets foot in Normandy.  
Edward. A trifle; we'll expel him when we please.  
(II.ii.6-10)

Even the weak Edward, inspired by his rage over Gaveston's death, does indeed temporarily rise to a challenge, but then shows the same indiscriminate and tyrannical disregard for his people that Dido displayed:

Mortimer Jr. Then Edward, thou wilt fight it  
to the last  
And rather bathe thy sword in subjects' blood  
Than banish that pernicious company.  
Edward. Ay, traitors all, rather than thus be braved,  
Make England's civil towns huge heaps of  
stones  
And ploughs to go about our palace gates.  
(III.iii.26-31)

It is indeed, as Warwick remarks, "A desperate and unnatural resolution"(32). We can understand his desire for revenge, but we cannot forgive his disregard for his subjects. In fact, his own complaints about the rebels underline obviously and painfully his sole concerns: "Rebels! will they appoint their sovereign/ His sports, his pleasures, and



that "Will and Shall best fitteth Tamburlaine"(Part I, III.iii.41) or that his "words are oracles"(III.iii.102); what he "wills" verbally comes to pass physically. He is thus the polar opposite of Edward, whose threats for the most part are ineffectual, and who laments after his capture, "Well, that shall be, shall be; part we must"(IV.vi.94). (He in fact resembles the despised Mycetes in 1 Tamburlaine.) Faustus and Barabas represent intermediate stages in this decline of rhetorical might. The apparent power of Faustus' conjurations turns out to be deceptive, and necromancy comes at a terrible price. Of course there is nothing at all supernatural about Barabas' utterances, since he operates only through the rhetoric of treachery and deception (made comically obvious through the technique of the aside). Moving from Tamburlaine to Edward II we see a process which M.C. Bradbrook defines as "the substitution of a technique of action for a technique of verse."<sup>15</sup> As the action of the plays becomes progressively more complex, the central characters grow less able to control it. In the episodic Tamburlaine the hero remains in almost complete control of the stage action, pretty well accomplishing whatever he chooses. Aside from repenting, Faustus as well appears to do what he pleases, though on borrowed time and power, and even during the 24 years

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<sup>15</sup>"The Jew of Malta and Edward II," Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Clifford Leech (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964) 122.

Mephostophilis is not always as "pliant" as Faustus originally assumed. Barabas is never in complete control of the stage action; he lays plots whose loose ends force him to lay new plots, until he is eventually undone by his own miscalculations. Edward, finally, is rarely in control of the action at all; bullied by his nobles and a slave to his own passions, he eventually becomes more acted against than acting. As the sinister Lightborn puts it, "ne'er was there any/ So finely handled as this king shall be"(V.v.38-39).

A consideration of both the technique of verse and the technique of action raises not only the idea of the "protagonist as poet" but also the "protagonist as playwright" or at least "director and stage-manager." While clearly the master poet of the group, Tamburlaine is also a master of stage symbols and theatrical effects. The changing colours of his army's tents indicate his theatrical flair, but even more to the point is his acquisition of symbolic objects which reflect his own prowess and glory. Such objects include not only the gold and wealth he amasses and exhibits on stage, but also the crowns he captures and the human beings he conquers. He uses Bajazeth as a footstool to mount his throne, and parades him around in a cage as a kind of permanent sideshow, a source of entertainment for himself and his companions. Faustus even more obviously becomes director and stage manager, putting on shows for the German Emperor and the Duke and Duchess of

Vanholt, as well as for his friends in his private study, where he conjures up Helen. Barabas clearly "stages" the duel between Lodowick and Mathias and then proceeds to watch it from above. Yet there is a tendency with the later protagonists to get caught up in their own theatrics. Faustus clearly loses self-control in the second conjuration of Helen, and his final agony serves as a "play" for the devils watching from above (B-text). Barabas must enter as an actor in the French musician interlude (a play that does not go well from the point of view of his evil designs), and of course his last little piece of ingenious staging serves ironically as his own deathtrap.

Yet what seems to happen to Faustus and Barabas only gradually--getting caught up within theatrical devices rather than controlling them from the outside--happens to Edward from the beginning of Edward II. As Gaveston muses in the opening scene:

I must have wanton poets, pleasant wits,  
Musicians, that with touching of a string  
May draw the pliant king which way I please;  
Music and poetry is his delight,  
Therefore I'll have Italian masques by night,  
Sweet speeches, comedies and pleasing shows.  
(50-55)

Gaveston, rather than Edward, is clearly the stage manager, and while Gaveston is out to use the "pliant king," he also wishes to gratify a side of the king's nature which many of us will find attractive. With respect to this speech, Levin points out an important alteration from the source material:

Marlowe is here refining on Holinshed's description of Edward 'passing his time in voluptuous pleasure, and riotous excesse', corrupted by Gaveston, who 'furnished his court with companies of iesters, ruffians, flattering parasites, musicians, and other vile and naughtie ribalds, that the king might spend both daies and nights in iesting, plaieng, blanketing [sic], and in such other filthie and dishonorable exercises'. Between that medieval brawl and Marlowe's Renaissance pageant, the contrast is brilliantly illuminating.<sup>16</sup>

The change indicates that Marlowe is very much concerned, as in the earlier plays, with the role of art and imagination in experience; yet, as before, we find art being used as an escape or surrogate for experience rather than a means of coming to terms with it. This tendency is stressed later when Mortimer Junior remarks:

When wert thou in the field with banner spread?  
 But once, and then thy soldiers marched like players,  
 With garish robes, not armour, and thyself  
 Bedaubed with gold, rode laughing at the rest,  
 Nodding and shaking of thy spangled crest,  
 Where women's favours hung like labels down.  
 (II.ii.182-87)

This is perhaps the most obvious example of the metamorphosis of Edward's real duties as a king into a parodic, "poetic" version. The artistic version forms a substitution, rather than a reflection, of Edward's true role as sovereign; as pageantry, therefore, it appears completely hollow. Edward gets "caught up" in theatrics to the extent that he suggests, with poetic exaggeration, arrangements for his own funeral procession. When the king and his friends have been discovered at the abbey, and

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<sup>16</sup>Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher, 114.

Leicester proposes to remove Edward in a litter, the king exclaims:

A litter hast thou? Lay me in a hearse,  
 And to the gates of hell convey me hence;  
 Let Pluto's bells ring out my fatal knell,  
 And hags howl for my death at Charon's shore.  
(IV.vi.86-89)

Edward's histrionic despair here seems only to hasten his own destruction, and in fact almost all the instances of poetic indulgence and self-dramatization in the play ironically expose, in retrospect, art's inability to insulate the individual from real suffering. It is an irony which, as we shall see, cuts very deep.

Bent Sunesen in his essay "Marlowe and the Dumb Show" claims that Gaveston's soliloquy referred to above "has an important status in the tragedy as a kind of emblematic telescoping of the total structure." The fact that the soliloquy "is a show, if only in Gaveston's imagination" suggests that it serves a similar function to the dumb shows in pre-Marlovian English drama: it prefigures the play's course of events by allegorical means.<sup>17</sup> Sunesen finds particular significance in the reference to the Actaeon myth, and suggests that "'one like Actaeon peeping through the grove' is King Edward himself," who is hunted down by his nobles, the "yelping hounds"; they are "the Eumenides of Marlowe's drama... a necessary corrective of sin," though still "fundamentally hateful"(246). Sara Munson Deats, in

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<sup>17</sup>English Studies 35 (1954): 248.

"Myth and Metamorphosis in Marlowe's Edward II,"<sup>18</sup> adds another level of significance to the allegory by pointing out that in the Renaissance the "yelping hounds" of the myth were commonly interpreted as representing "Actaeon's own devouring [sexual] desires." Thus the line, "By yelping hounds pulled down and seem to die"(69), suggests "the Elizabethan pun for sexual intercourse, [and] implies that the erotic masque may conclude with a mock murder but actual rape, perhaps adumbrating the mode of Edward's slaying, which is a grotesque parody of his forbidden sodomy"(311). Sunesen finds another significance in "seem to die":

On a deep level of the tragedy there is an overwhelming rightness in that 'seem'. For in the underlying sacrificial ritual the king as national symbol does not really die.... Edward, the guilty individual, must suffer death, it is true; but Edward, the King, the embodiment of the nation, is immortal.... That is why, conforming to a common chronicle-play design, the drama does not end with Edward's death but goes on until we have been assured that the monarchy will survive in the firm hold of young King Edward, and the latter has had Mortimer executed, thus demonstrating that the era of purification is over and done with. (248)

Sunesen's emphasis on purification can be related to Deats' remark that "the Actaeon analogy stresses Edward II as a dramatization of one of man's most universal myths, the cleansing of the kingdom and the restoring of order through the hunting down and killing of the scapegoat king"; hence "the frequent allegorizing of both the stag and Actaeon as

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<sup>18</sup>Texas Studies in Literature and Language 22 (1980): 304-21.

types of Christ"(311).

I would like to raise a third significance to the words "seem to die." While no doubt Deats is correct to see the phrase as foreshadowing the horrible conflation of sexual and literal death which finally comes to pass for Edward, there is another profoundly disturbing suggestion which is related to Sunesen's idea that Edward as King is "symbolically" immortal. From Sunesen's remarks we certainly cannot infer that Edward himself only dies symbolically. I have often pondered why I find Act V, Scene v of Edward II so particularly horrible, and why I am so ready to agree with Lamb that Edward's death scene is as moving as anything in ancient or modern drama. For want of subtler or more accurate terms, I must say here that it is the most realistic--and therefore the most disturbing death scene in English drama; there seems no aesthetic distancing (apart from the physical "masking" necessary in order to stage it) to mitigate the humiliation, degradation, and terror. Even the pathetic Richard II is given one last moment of heroic assertiveness which serves to place his death throes in a dramatic or artistic context; in other words, we in the audience are somehow reassured that what we are watching is another version of "seem to die." But perhaps a contrast from within Edward II itself will prove more significant. Mortimer, whose demise the title of the play refers to as "the tragicall fall," ends his career with

the following speech:

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 traveller  
 Goes to discover countries yet unknown.  
 (V.vi.59-66)

Though Steane remarks that this speech "is the only one in the play which is truly heroic,"<sup>19</sup> I am more inclined to echo Leech's comment that there is "indeed a rather empty rhetoric in Mortimer's acceptance of the turning wheel and his readiness for what may come."<sup>20</sup> Mortimer's speech sounds formulaic, a made-to-order speech for "the tragic hero," and it seems to me that the idea of "undiscovered countries" would not be rendered in terms convincing or vigorously appealing to the imagination until Shakespeare wrote Hamlet. Certainly we are artistically distanced from Mortimer's death, not only by the conventional rhetoric but by the fact that the execution occurs offstage. His head is brought on stage at the conclusion--perhaps a significant touch of realistic horror--but by this point he has completely devolved into an artefact, a stage prop signifying Edward III's ascendancy.

By contrast the emblematic nature of Edward's death

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<sup>19</sup>Marlowe: A Critical Study (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1964) 217.

<sup>20</sup>Poet for the Stage, 142.

intensifies the horror. This may in fact be due to our knowledge "that the 'punishment-fitting-the-crime' aspect of his death is not an invention of Marlowe's to add thematic unity to the play, but the literal truth as recorded in the chronicles."<sup>21</sup> Much of the horror arises from the portrayal of the human cost of becoming a symbol, of being sacrificed to an artistic or aesthetic sense that wants to impose order on or make sense of experience.<sup>22</sup> Edward's death is not "seems to die"; this is "dying"--horrible, painful, unbearable. "Oh spare me, or dispatch me in a trice," he pleads, yet his death is prolonged and excruciating, and his terror fully realized. I am intrigued by Sunesen's explanation of "seem to die," because I am reminded of my response to symbolic significances in other literature with a supposedly historical basis. The most obvious example is the Bible: its anecdotes were enough to give me nightmares as a child; as I got older I was offered more sophisticated, "symbolic" readings, yet I never overcame a feeling of unease concerning the human, individual cost that real

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<sup>21</sup>Mulryne and Fender, "Marlowe and the 'Comic Distance'," Christopher Marlowe: Mermaid Critical Commentaries, ed. Brian Morris (London: Ernest Benn, 1968) 60-61.

<sup>22</sup>The horror of literalized metaphor is also present in Faustus, when the Second Scholar cries, "here are Faustus' limbs,/ All torn asunder by the hand of death"(xx.6-7). To say that Faustus' identity or self-image is disintegrating (psychologically) is all very well and good, but to find out he has actually been torn to pieces (physically) is disturbing, to say the least. However, we don't see this process in action.

people (as I saw it) payed for becoming emblems in "symbolically" meaningful stories. As a "literal metaphor" for the principle of spiritual rebirth the crucifixion seemed a little extreme, to say the least. Of course the crucifixion meant more than that, it meant an atonement for everyone else's sin, but I still could not help feeling queasy. Sunesen's and Deats' references to the "sacrificial ritual" and the "scapegoat king" evoke in me a similar response: the artistic, or political, or universal significance in my mind cannot "atone" for the individual agony.

Yet my final response to Edward's death is more complicated than simply a feeling of personal injustice. Boyette also brings up the idea of the scapegoat king when he remarks that the "rape of Edward... is so treated in the play as to make him the archetypal Victim, a scapegoat for the personal, cultural and social forces that have repudiated his essential humanity, his decline into flesh--bodies, music and poetry"(48). Much as I pity Edward at the end, I am not prepared to exonerate him completely as "the archetypal Victim" of forces repudiating his "essential humanity." "Essential humanity" may in fact be what Edward possesses too little of, and one is tempted to argue that his "decline into flesh" goes rather too far--not into homosexuality, but out of personal responsibility. Edward fails to come to terms with the demands of reality, and so

his becoming in the end a symbol or metaphor--or perhaps more accurately, his dying at the hands of one--is not altogether inappropriate. What Boyette calls Edward's "decline into flesh" is better termed his "decline into imagination." (Boyette's definition of "flesh"--"bodies, music and poetry"--is curiously contradictory.) Edward never acquires the personal integrity necessary to function successfully outside the world of music and poetry. He doesn't use art to come to terms with the demands of reality; art uses him, in the end rather gruesomely.

Quite simply, Edward never grows up; he never becomes enough of a man to deal with the responsibilities of adulthood. Sunesen discusses the issue of manhood in relation to Edward's vow to make Gaveston "Lord High Chamberlain,/ Chief Secretary to the State and me,/ Earl of Cornwall, King and Lord of Man"(I.i.153-55):

A pun may very well be intended here. The isle of Man was officially a kingdom; so Edward could actually, in supreme favouritism, confer the title of king upon his 'minion'. Holinshed mentions this detail, and Marlowe, free to skip such particulars, keeps it, presumably because he feels that the grand gesture is really a symbolic act, by which Edward delivers the complete sovereignty over himself as a private man into Gaveston's hands.... The gesture is ... an abdication of manliness. (245)

Edward's relationship with Gaveston is not wrong because it is homosexual but because, to quote from Peter Donaldson's discussion of Tamburlaine, Gaveston is "just another mirror of a self that must desperately find its reflection..."

rather than face its own emptiness."<sup>23</sup> Edward's initial greeting of Gaveston--"knowest thou not who I am?/ Thy friend, thy self, another Gaveston"(I.i.141-42)--is less an example of a Platonic union of souls than it is evidence for Edward's absolute lack of integrity, his complete dependency. Edward does not have his own "self" to offer his lover, and therefore their relationship can in no way proceed as a meaningful dialectic between two developing personalities. Moreover, I share Leech's view that Edward is completely mistaken in asserting that Gaveston loves him more than all the world. It is really Edward who has declared the world well lost for love; he projects his own intense love onto Gaveston. Thus in a sense Gaveston functions for Edward, as Abigail for Barabas, as a reflection of his own self-love, an object which can be replaced by another--Spencer Junior--just as Barabas replaces Abigail with Ithamore. While Edward is certainly not as adept as Tamburlaine at controlling and arranging the "selfobjects" that surround him, the "love" he experiences is in truth merely an ineffectual, rather than skilful, manipulation of other people as objects. Such love places Edward in the impossible position of needing to control, and wanting to relinquish control, at the same time.

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<sup>23</sup>"Conflict and Coherence: Narcissism and Tragic Structure in Marlowe," Narcissism and the Text: Studies in Literature and the Psychology of Self, ed. Lynne Layton and Barbara Ann Schapiro (New York: New York UP, 1986) 46.

It may be worth examining Edward's aborted attempts at self-assertion briefly, especially with respect to the religious references in the play. Significantly, the first person Edward defies in the play, after his joyous reunion with Gaveston, is the Bishop of Coventry, on whom Edward "lives to be revenged"(I.i.177) for banishing Gaveston in the first place. Yet the Bishop, who is hurrying off "To celebrate [Edward's] father's exequies"(175) (thus underlining the new king's failure to properly mourn his father), retorts that "I did no more than I was bound to do"(181). (The Bishop's sense of being "bound" to duty or responsibility has important ironic implications later in the play for those who have acted irresponsibly: Gaveston laments that he dies "in bands"[III.i.3] and of course Edward dies in captivity.) Edward ignores the Bishop's retort, commanding his attendants to "Throw off his golden mitre, rend his stole,/ And in the channel christen him anew"(186-89), a threat which again finds an ironic response in the later action of the play (V.i,iii).<sup>24</sup> Edward is encouraged in his defiance by Gaveston, although the king initially shows a desire to be more lenient than his lover:

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<sup>24</sup>As Deats points out in "Marlowe's Fearful Symmetry in Edward II," the threat "graphically foreshadow[s] Edward's uncrowning, stripping, loss of kingdom, and shaving in ditch water.... In both instances, a dignitary is first denuded of his headgear and robes, emblems of his regimen, later dispossessed of his actual property, and finally humiliated by an inverted ritual [the "christening" in channel-water]"(248).

Gaveston. Let him complain unto the see of hell,  
 I'll be revenged on him for my exile.  
Edward. No, spare his life but seize upon his goods.  
 Be thou lord bishop, and receive his rents,  
 And make him serve thee as thy chaplain,  
 I give him thee; here use him as thou wilt.  
 (190-95)

Yet when Gaveston inclines to show the Bishop no mercy,  
 Edward does not attempt to mitigate his lover's cruelty:

Gaveston. He shall to prison and there die in bolts.  
Edward. Ay, to the Tower, the Fleet, or where thou  
 wilt.  
 (196-97)

I find the subsequent exchange particularly interesting:

Bishop. For this offense be thou accurst of God.  
Edward. Who's there? convey this priest to the Tower.  
 (198-99)

Edward's remark, "Who's there?," is obviously made to the attendants whom he expects to "convey" the Bishop to prison; however, I have never been able to read this exchange without suspecting that Marlowe also intended "Who's there?" as a reference to the "God" of the previous line, as if Edward were (subconsciously) questioning the existence of God. It is his way of challenging any external authority, of having to answer to any "other," yet ironically the king persists in his defiance only so he can retain the one "other" he feels he cannot live without:

How fast they run to banish him I love;  
 They would not stir, were it to do me good.  
 Why should a king be subject to a priest?  
 Proud Rome, that hatchest such imperial grooms,  
 For these thy superstitious taper lights,  
 Wherewith thy antichristian churches blaze,  
 I'll fire thy crazed buildings and enforce  
 The papal towers to kiss the lowly ground;  
 With slaughtered priests may Tiber's channel swell

And banks raised higher with their sepulchres;  
 As for the peers that back the clergy thus,  
 If I be king, not one of them shall live.

(I.iv.94-105)

Claude Summers in Christopher Marlowe and the Politics of Power suggests that in such speeches "Marlowe plays to the violent anti-Roman prejudices of his audience and actually gains sympathy for Edward."<sup>25</sup> The above speech is very close to one given by the dying Henry III in The Massacre at Paris:

These bloody hands shall tear his triple crown  
 And fire accursed Rome about his ears.  
 I'll fire his crazed buildings, and incense  
 The papal towers to kiss the holy earth.

(xxiv.60-63)

There may indeed be a plea for sympathy or support in Marlowe's portrayal of Edward's strongly "Protestant" sentiments. Yet I do not think it would be going too far to see in these portraits of homosexual iconoclasts something of Kuriyama's Freudian reading of a revolt against the paternal authority of the Pope, a revolt which is not fully realized but remains a rhetorical threat or gesture. Edward's defiance is motivated primarily by his desire to please and possess Gaveston; because of his dependency he never acquires the personal strength to completely make good on his threats. Though he appears to triumph temporarily in the middle of the play, he does so only by transferring his dependency onto Spenser Junior, whom he "marries" by

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<sup>25</sup>(Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1974) 167-68.

ironically challenging his nobles: "see how I do divorce [Embraces Spenser]/ Spenser from me"(III.ii.175-76). Yet Spenser eventually fails as a source of power; he can only counsel Edward to "fly, fly" when the Queen and Mortimer return from France (IV.v).

In spite of his defiance of the Church's authority, Edward's emotional dependency acquires religious overtones when his career lies in ruins. I have remarked in the previous chapter that Marlowe never quite transcends a desire for religious consolation, for the surrender of personal struggle in the arms of a greater being. This desire clearly still haunts the playwright, and receives its most obviously sexual expression, in his portrayal of Edward seeking refuge in Neath Abbey:

Father, this life contemplative is heaven,  
Oh that I might this life in quiet lead.

. . . . .  
                    Good father, on thy lap  
Lay I this head, laden with mickle care,  
Oh might I never open these eyes again,  
Never again lift up this drooping head,  
Oh never more lift up this dying heart!

(IV.vi.20-43).

This scene recalls Doctor Faustus, where, as I remarked, the dream of heaven interferes with the individual's attempts to assert his "manliness" or human cohesiveness. Yet Edward's inability to rely on his own integrity or personal strength receives its most poignant and terrifying expression in the final scene with Lightborn. Here the existence of God has suddenly assumed an all-important role in Edward's mind:

Yet stay awhile, forbear thy bloody hand  
 And let me see the stroke before it comes  
 That even then when I shall lose my life  
 My mind may be more steadfast on my God.

. . . . .  
 I am too weak and feeble to resist;  
 Assist me, sweet God, and receive my soul.

(V.v.74-108)

The epithet "sweet," the characteristic Marlovian term of love and endearment, emphasizes Edward's final need for an "other," a lover--a need we all fully recognize because we all share his terror, not so much of death, but of dying, and of having to do it alone, unassisted.<sup>26</sup> Peter Donaldson remarks that as Edward approaches his end "the evil that befalls him becomes less a matter of a conflict of will, purposes, and personalities, and more a confrontation with an underlying horror inherent in the character of human emotional needs"(58). The Lightborn scene carries a further disturbing suggestion of emotional and sexual dependency which emerges in the interview with Toby Robertson:

It wasn't entirely deliberate when I began, but once we were in rehearsal it became clear that this was almost the last "love scene" in the play.... We played this with Edward almost lying in Lightborn's lap and sort of crooning to him. He's very gently stroking him and it became like a child asking for love, wanting love, affection. And, of course, this is the trouble--this is what Edward needs. You feel it in the beginning of the play. (179)

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<sup>26</sup>It is worth noting here that Kuriyama finds Mortimer's final speech not flat or formulaic but impressive, because he courageously faces those unknown countries alone: "Mortimer, like Edward, is most attractive when he bows to forces he cannot control, although Mortimer, whose personality was stronger to begin with, bows with more manly grace, declining to submit himself, like the weaker, 'feminine' characters, to God"(200).

Since Lightborn's name "is neither more nor less than an Anglicization of 'Lucifer',"<sup>27</sup> we have what amounts to a curious recurrence of the situation we observed in Doctor Faustus, where both God and Lucifer figured in homoerotic terms, since the desire for them was somehow related to the individual male's failure to assert his own independent "manliness." However, Lightborn is after all a man not a deity, and his utterly gratuitous cruelty towards Edward perhaps signifies most clearly, in the final analysis, the unfathomable depths of human evil and the perversion of the human creative capacity. Lightborn's speech to Mortimer, detailing "ingenious" methods of murder--not to mention the "ingenious" murder of Edward itself--shows us human imagination at its most horrific.

W.M. Merchant points out that "Lightborn's skills are those of the Italianate Machiavel"(96), and it will now be worth exploring how almost every character in the play other than Edward displays some element of "Machiavellianism," though I am using the term in its broadest sense to mean a propensity towards self-assertion and self-preservation. I have remarked that Edward becomes more acted against than acting; the most obvious meaning of this is of course that the king fails to take control and to command, but if we take "acting" in the sense of role-playing we find another perspective from which to evaluate Edward's tragedy. At the

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<sup>27</sup>Levin, Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher, 124.

conclusion of her essay "Myth and Metamorphosis in Edward II" Deats remarks:

...although both Edward II and his brother Kent attempt to dissemble lest they die [paraphrasing Kent's remark at IV.v.21], they are pathetically ineffectual. Nevertheless, hypocrisy thrives in the world of Edward II, and the metamorphosis imagery provides a provocative symbol for the shape-shifting of the various Machiavellian opportunists, not only the Protean Gaveston with his many masques, but an entire cast of consummate role players and fine dissemblers, including Spenser, Baldock, Mortimer, and Isabella. (316)

While considering the "Machiavellianism" and "hypocrisy" referred to by Deats, however, we should keep in mind the context of my discussion of The Jew of Malta, where "Machiavellianism" appeared a prerequisite for survival in society and "unseen hypocrisy" emerged as a not altogether negative strategy for living. Ironically for a man who gets caught up in theatrics, Edward for the first two-thirds of the play cannot really act, but displays only that odd combination of naiveté and wilfulness, behaving, as so many critics have commented, like a spoiled child. No one takes his role as king seriously--quite simply because he doesn't --and his nobles, acting like spoiled children themselves in response, have no compunction in ridiculing their sovereign and interrupting him:

Warwick. O, our heads!

Edward. Ay yours, and therefore I would wish you  
grant...

Warwick. Bridle thy anger gentle Mortimer.

(I.i.118-20)

He in short never learns the "Machiavellian" trick that

adults must learn: how to adopt a "fictional" self, a role in the world, which allows one to function constructively with others in society. We should consider such role-playing "hypocritical" only if the individual uses it to manipulate others to an unacceptable or unusual degree (for none of us is guiltless of manipulating others at least to a certain degree). Thus, while The Massacre condemns deception as a viable method of personal survival, that vision seems to be qualified in Edward II, where some degree of role-playing is recognized as necessary. We might also regard role-playing as hypocrisy if--to borrow Summers' terms<sup>28</sup>--the discrepancy between the "real identity" and the "social identity" of the individual is too great. Yet as I have suggested, the mystery of "real identity" is not an easy one to solve. It is difficult, in the context of human experience, to consider "real identity" independently of "social identity"; I am inclined rather to argue that, in terms of our practical lives and our personal integrity, human society is the inescapable arena where we must pass judgement. Certainly Edward's strong homosexual impulses seem inherent, a factor beyond his control (and on this point one shudders to consider what anti-essentialists like Belsey and Dollimore might eventually--according to their own theories--be forced to suggest in the way of cultural

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<sup>28</sup>"Sex, Politics, and Self-Realization in Edward II," 224.

reconditioning). Yet I don't believe we can characterize Edward as simply a passive victim of an unresolvable conflict between his "real" and his "social" identity. History offers examples of homosexuals who have managed their public careers successfully, and Edward's position of privilege in fact gives him a little more room to manoeuvre than he might otherwise have.<sup>29</sup> Admittedly Edward's designated social role as king is a very difficult and challenging one, but he never begins to attempt to adjust his own personal characteristics with the demands of the external world. Not only does he fail to live up to the demands of his social role; he never even seems to seriously try out for the part! There is never any moment of reflection in the play where he says to himself, "This isn't working. What can I do to alter my behaviour?" It is only when he is forceably removed from society that he begins his

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<sup>29</sup>For a converse view, see Stephen Guy-Bray, "Homophobia and the Depoliticizing of Edward II," English Studies in Canada 17.2 (1991): 125-33. Guy-Bray quotes, apparently approvingly, Lawrence Danson's suggestion [in "Continuity and Character in Shakespeare and Marlowe," SEL 26 (1986): 217-34] that the prominence of Edward's social position turns "what might otherwise be seen as eccentricity" into "a sociopolitical offense" (130). This seems to contradict Guy-Bray's later acknowledgement that the barons do not appear to be bothered by the homosexual nature of the Edward-Gaveston relationship. More importantly, Guy-Bray fails to consider Edward's disastrous mismanagement of the affairs of state. Thus when he argues that "the connection of sexual and social unorthodoxy in Edward provides the tragedy of the play," I feel forced to conclude that "social unorthodoxy" is an evasive euphemism for the complete irresponsibility that Edward displays and the critic refuses to recognize.

true "histrionic" career. It is from the moment he throws off his disguise at Neath Abbey--"Hence feigned weeds, unfeigned are my woes"(IV.vi.96)--that he truly becomes concerned with his "role," his own identity as Edward II, not as a reflection of Gaveston or Spencer Junior. The tragedy is that it is now too late. During his abdication he can only indulge in self-pitying self-dramatizations; his role no longer matters to others since he is being stripped of political power. The abdication becomes a performance in a social void, Edward's "cave of care."

Unlike Edward, most of the other characters carry out their acting or role-playing much more subtly, and to much more practical effect. Gaveston, for example, quite handily adopts the role of Edward's intimate friend and lover, though in fact he makes no real emotional investment in their relationship. I am certainly supported in my view by Toby Robertson, whom I quote yet again because I find particular weight in the opinion of someone who has actually worked closely with the play on stage:

...the horrifying power that Gaveston has over him is shown, and Edward becomes like a crawling sycophant; one realizes what is particularly horrifying: Edward is totally in love with Gaveston--is dotty about him --but Gaveston is just using Edward.... I think this is all of it for him ["drawing the pliant king which way I please"]; he does it for his own aggrandizement. (178-79)

It must be acknowledged, however, that other critics have viewed Gaveston more sympathetically. Summers, for example, asserts that "Gaveston does love Edward more than all the

world. He rejects the invitation to 'share the kingdom' [I.i.2], finding 'bliss' and 'felicities' only in the king's embraces."<sup>30</sup> There does seem an awkward incongruity between Gaveston's reference in his opening lines to "him I hold so dear,/ The king, upon whose bosom let me die," and his subsequent desire to "draw the pliant king which way I please." Sanders remarks that "there is no dramatically realized 'self' in the lines which could mediate between the passionate lover and the cynical opportunist in his character. The two traits are simply juxtaposed and we (or the actor) must make of it what we can"(134). Sanders may be right to suggest that we must "make up Marlowe's mind for him" here; there is something about Gaveston's opening lines which suggest Marlowe's, rather than his character's, artistic "release" (to adopt Brodwin's term again); it's as if Gaveston doesn't really settle into character until around line 18. However, it is possible that Gaveston, like Edward, is--to borrow a modern cliché--a little in love with the idea of love. Although he is far more self-aware than the king, he is also susceptible to fantasies, to indulging in imaginative dream worlds. After all, the "Renaissance pageant" of lines 50-70 does come straight out of his imagination.

Yet it is the manipulative side of Gaveston's character

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<sup>30</sup>"Sex, Politics, and Self-Realization in Edward II," 233.

which soon predominates. This is made immediately apparent in his treatment of the three Poor Men: "But yet it is no pain to speak men fair;/ I'll flatter these, and make them live in hope"(41-42). Gaveston's "role" becomes more obvious when, in reply to Edward's offer of titles and powers, he humbly replies, "It shall suffice me to enjoy your love"(170); yet a few lines later he is using his new power to seek cruel revenge on the Bishop of Coventry, and to encourage Edward to do so as well. Apparently Edward stupidly misses the obvious irony in Gaveston's acceptance of the king's offers:

It shall suffice me to enjoy your love,  
Which whiles I have I think myself as great  
As Caesar riding in the roman street,  
With captive kings at his triumphant car.

(170-73, my emphasis)

The allusion to Caesar puts Gaveston in the same league as the Guise in The Massacre at Paris. Gaveston's lack of real concern for the king becomes even more apparent when Edward capitulates to his nobles and agrees to banish Gaveston, and then attempts to comfort his lover:

...sweet friend, take it patiently;  
Live where thou wilt, I'll send thee gold enough,  
And thou shalt not stay, or if thou dost,  
I'll come to thee; my love shall ne'er decline.

(I.iv.112-15)

Instead of gratefully acknowledging the king's affection, Gaveston can only peevishly reply, "Is all my hope turned to this hell of grief?"(116), and it is clear that Edward's love isn't what Gaveston really wants, but rather the social



to give sexual favours in exchange for social advancement; he in fact acts as if it increases his prestige. He and Gaveston have presumably encountered each other in the past, and (allowing for a pun on the verb "prefer") the suggestion of the last line is that Gaveston would have "preferred" Spencer sexually except that Edward proved much more rewarding in a material sense.<sup>32</sup> Gaveston's sexual mercinariness becomes even more apparent in the subsequent dialogue:

Baldock. But he is banished; there's small hope  
of him.

Spencer Jr. Ay for a while, but, Baldock,  
mark the end:

A friend of mine told me in secrecy,  
That he's repealed and sent for back again  
And even now a post came from the court  
With letters to our lady from the king,  
And as she read, she smiled, which makes me  
think

It is about her lover, Gaveston.  
(15-22)

Gaveston is willing to play the role not only of the king's intimate friend but also of the lover and husband of the king's niece. Indeed, Edward's announcement of this marriage in the previous scene comes as something of a shock, and in my mind casts further doubts on Summers' assertion that Edward II establishes sexuality as a "defining characteristic of personality." Gaveston is

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<sup>32</sup>I cannot help seeing a hint of fellatio in Gaveston's remark in his opening soliloquy, "Farewell base stooping to the lordly peers;/ My knee shall bow to none but to the king"(18-19). The sense would be, then, that from now on Gaveston will "sell himself" sexually only to the best.

apparently quite flexible sexually, and is not above using either sex for his personal advancement.<sup>33</sup>

While Gaveston is a very adept role-player in society, his talent is equally matched by Isabella's. Since in this sense Gaveston and Isabella are very much birds of a feather, I am a little surprised to find Summers taking so favourable a view of the Frenchman, for it is this critic who first convincingly argues that "Marlowe is not guilty of implausibly transforming an innocent Isabella into a wicked schemer."<sup>34</sup> As Summers demonstrates, it is Isabella--in her private tête-à-tête with Mortimer--who first suggests that Gaveston be recalled from banishment so that he can be more easily murdered. She is thus thoroughly Machiavellian from the start; a consummate role-player, she has adopted the

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<sup>33</sup>See Sara M. Deats' interesting discussion of Gaveston in "Edward II: A Study in Androgyny," Ball State University Forum 22 (1981): 30-41, in which she suggests that "even while Gaveston plays the Femme Fatale to Edward's uxorious lover, his personality remains intrinsically 'masculine'" (38), in spite of the way he is characterized by the barons. While I do not suggest that "masculinity" is inevitably linked with heterosexuality, I have always felt that Gaveston, if placed on Kinsey's scale, would come up with a higher "heterosexual" reading than Edward. Gaveston's opening soliloquy concerning the transvestite masques, for example, may seem to some readers a good example of "gay pornography," but it has always struck me as a perfect example of how a heterosexual mind would conceive of "gay pornography." Gaveston assumes that sexually ambivalent or feminine figures--pages dressed as "sylvan nymphs" and "a lovely boy in Dian's shape"--will "best please his majesty," but Edward's consuming passion is for the "intrinsically 'masculine'" Gaveston himself.

<sup>34</sup>"Isabella's Plea for Gaveston in Marlowe's Edward II," Philological Quarterly 52 (1973): 310.

mask of an innocent and long-suffering Queen. Yet, as Deats remarks in "Edward II: A Study in Androgyny," "from the beginning of the play, Isabella's Griselda mask fits loosely, and a penetrating glance may discern beneath this camouflage a very different kind of woman--a forceful, disciplined, calculating female, fighting with all the weapons in her arsenal to preserve her present status in the state and to regain her lost position in Edward's affections"(32). Deats' analysis of Isabella is compelling: she demonstrates how cleverly Isabella manipulates the men around her, and how she is largely responsible not only for Gaveston's death but also for Edward's (note how she prods Mortimer at V.ii.42-45). At the same time Deats does real justice to the complexity of Isabella's character, as when she carries out an analysis of Isabella's "somewhat obscured motivation"(34). Upon examining the evidence, Deats concludes that

although Isabella's personal ambition and her amorous liaison with Mortimer may be partial inducements for her rebellion, her chief goal is revenge upon the loose, misgoverning, and unfaithful King. Ultimately, therefore, the love that hatcheth death and hate is Isabella's frustrated desire for Edward, not her illicit passion for Mortimer. (34)

I welcome this analysis since it helps to explain another of Isabella's speeches which had continued to trouble me even after I had begun to accept the view of "Isabella as Machiavel" put forth by Summers and elaborated by subsequent critics:

Heavens witness I love none but you [Edward];  
 From my embracements thus he breaks away;  
 Oh that mine arms could close this isle about,  
 That I might pull him to me where I would,  
 Or that these tears that drizzle from mine eyes  
 Had power to mollify his stony heart,  
 That when I had him we might never part.

(II.iv.15-21)

In the New Mermaid edition this speech is preceded by the conjectural stage direction "[Exeunt all but Isabella]"; the speech itself suggests that Edward leaves after the first line, when Isabella is certainly left alone on stage. The speech is thus a soliloquy; Isabella has no audience, no one to affect or manipulate, so then surely her sentiments here must be genuine. She really, in some sense, must love Edward, as Deats suggests. But we must inquire into the nature of this "love." The idea of enclosure in these lines--"Oh that mine arms could close this isle about,/ That I might pull him to me where I would"--is ominous, since, as we have seen, enclosures in Marlowe often have deeply ironic implications. Isabella's desire recalls Dido's dream of retaining Aeneas in her arms even while rich Carthage fledged upon the sea; it is a fantasy of romantic control. What Isabella truly desires, I believe, what she truly loves, is her position as Queen. That is why, in spite of her sexual attraction for Mortimer, she can never get over her resentment towards Edward, because Mortimer can never quite offer her the security she enjoyed in the first place. Indeed, her fear for her security is why she resolves to have Edward murdered: "But Mortimer, as long as he survives/

What safety rests for us or for my son?"(V.ii.42-43). Like Gaveston, Isabella is primarily in love with what Edward as king can, or could have, offered her. Her emotional behaviour reveals another version of self-love.

While the apparent inconsistency of Isabella's transformation from "long-suffering wife" into "wicked schemer" may be resolved through a recognition of her talent at role-playing and her psychological complexity, it remains doubtful whether Mortimer's transformation over the course of the play can be similarly explained. Mortimer is at first notable not for a Machiavellian talent at dissembling but rather for his straightforwardness: he is brash, blunt and appealingly irascible in a manner that makes one suspect he could very well have served as a model for Hotspur.<sup>35</sup> He thus stands apart from all the other role-players that Marlowe shows us in Act I, Scene ii. For example, Lancaster bursts out sanctimoniously at the beginning of the scene:

What! will they tyrannize upon the Church?  
 Ah, wicked king! accursed Gaveston!  
 This ground which is corrupted with their steps,  
 Shall be their timeless sepulchre or mine.  
 (3-6)

Then subsequently, and almost comically, Mortimer Senior must ask him--as if no one has taken the sentiments in the above speech at all seriously--"How now, why droops the Earl of Lancaster?"(9). The pouting Lancaster replies, "That

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<sup>35</sup>See Sanders, The Dramatist and the Received Idea, 133 and n. 17.

villain Gaveston is made an earl"(11), indicating that his dismay arises not from the offense done to the Church but from the fact that the baseborn Gaveston has been promoted to the nobility. The Bishop of Canterbury demonstrates a similar hypocrisy. When asked by Lancaster if he will take up arms against the king, the prelate piously declares, "What need I? God himself is up in arms/ When violence is offered to the Church"(40-41). Mortimer then quickly cuts through this ostensible refusal by immediately interjecting a slightly altered request, "Then will you join with us that be his peers/ To banish or behead that Gaveston?"(42-43), to which the Bishop, revealing his self-interest, pragmatically replies, "What else my lords? for it concerns me near;/ The bishopric of Coventry is his"(44-45). The early Mortimer's ability to cut through cant receives a convincing transformation in the later, Machiavellian Mortimer's interruption of Isabella's speech upon their return from France (IV.iv.15), as well as his treatment of Spencer Senior in IV.v:

Mortimer Jr. Madam, have done with care and  
sad complaint;  
 Your king hath wronged your country and himself  
 And we must seek to right it as we may;  
 Meanwhile, have hence this rebel to the block;  
 Your lordship cannot privilege your head.  
Spencer Sr. Rebel is he that fights against his prince,  
 So fought not they that fought in Edward's right.  
Mortimer Jr. Take him away, he prates; you, Rice  
ap Howell,  
 Shall do good service to her majesty....  
(75-83, my emphasis)

Though Mortimer here brutally squelches what amounts to a

valid (and politically dangerous) point by Spencer Senior, such behaviour seems a logical development of Mortimer's earlier brashness and impatience. However, Sanders cannot be completely refuted when he complains that in Act V "Mortimer's irascible ambivalence is reduced to a monolithic and herculean Machiavellianism" which "dramatically and poetically... is as much of a blind alley as the earlier characterisation of Mortimer was fraught with possibilities"(133). The critic cites the following examples:

Feared am I more than loved, let me be feared,  
And when I frown make all the court look pale.

(V.iv.51-52)

Mine enemies will I plague, my friends advance,  
And what I list command, who dare control?

(V.iv.66-67)

As for myself, I stand as Jove's huge tree,  
And others are but shrubs compared to me.

(V.vi.11-12)

The character of Mortimer seems indeed to have degenerated into a stock Machiavellian villain whose rhetoric, we may feel, approaches the ridiculous "gigantic self-assertions" of the Duke of Guise. Yet the portrayal of Mortimer is more restrained, and his characterization is better described by saying he has become, like the Mower, a talking emblem--a description especially apt with respect to the third example quoted above. Mortimer has in effect become an artefact: the stereotypical Machiavellian villain is not a role men play in society, it is a role characters play in fiction, in art, and in Edward II it strains the realistic mode of the

play. The question remains, is this dehumanizing of character a failure in the play, or an effect that Marlowe consciously intended?

It is tempting to argue that the dehumanizing of Mortimer is as a result of his failure of imagination (that is, of self-fashioning) rather than of Marlowe's failure of imagination (that is, of character creation). Certainly Mortimer's formulaic farewell to Isabella underlines the essential lovelessness of their relationship; as Leech comments, "it would be difficult to find two other lovers in Elizabethan drama who part with words so chill"(142). Yet if Marlowe had wanted to show us the dehumanizing, corrupting effect of political power, he could have done it more subtly, by portraying a more psychologically credible degeneration. Part of the reason for Marlowe's failure in Mortimer's case may be that, having "exorcised" the idea of the Machiavellian hero-villain in The Massacre at Paris, he is no longer profoundly interested in it, and thus gives it only a rather perfunctory artistic treatment. But I want to offer as well a subtler explanation. It is possible that Mortimer's sudden crystallization into emblem can be related to Marlowe's own realization of the absolute hopelessness of achieving a perfectly "masculine" identity (as Deats remarks in "Edward II: A Study in Androgyny," Mortimer is the stereotypic, "masculine" male [35]). The sense of failure is countered by reducing such a persona to "only" a

stereotype or artistic emblem. This reduction from virile (and to Marlowe probably very attractive) man to stock Machiavellian villain also facilitates the "replacement" of Mortimer by Edward III, a replacement which, as we shall see, is not free from the sense of an "artistic" or theoretical solution.

In her discussion of the play Kuriyama remarks that the lack of credibility in some of the characterizations--the awkward shifts--arises from the fact that the "other characters exist primarily as foils to set off the lambent and somewhat tarnished jewel--Marlowe's incompetent and harried King." Kuriyama suggests that the "most glaring of these shifts... is in the handling of Spencer and Baldock, who at first appear ambitious and unprincipled, yet burst into poetic lament and stoical resignation when they part from Edward and are led away to their deaths"(180). The "poetic laments" of Spencer Junior and Baldock (IV.vi.99-111) provide another example of the aestheticizing of death and, like Mortimer's farewell speech, form a glaring contrast to the way in which Edward suffers his end.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>I should at this point add a word concerning Gaveston's death. Deats, referring to the "religious diction" in Gaveston's lines, "Oh must this day be period of my life,/ Centre of all my bliss"(III.i.4-5) and noting his "yearning cry", "Sweet sovereign, yet I come/ To see thee ere I die"(II.v.95-96), argues that he reveals "at least the potential for authentic affection" ("Edward II: A Study in Androgyny," 40). While Kuriyama elsewhere in Hammer or Anvil irritates me by her refusal to recognize anything positive or attractive in the homosexual sentiments expressed in the plays, in this case I am inclined to agree

Kuriyama adds that while these speeches of Spencer and Baldock "serve the purpose of characterization poorly, they do contribute to the tone of grief and resignation that dominates the latter portion of the play. The effect is operatic or symphonic rather than dramatic, but it is not, as it may first appear, a gross blunder"(180). I am struck by Kuriyama's use of artistic metaphors (jewelry, poetry, music) and by the fact that she elsewhere praises "the degree of conscious design" in the play, its "deliberate structuring and orchestration of effects"(175-76). Of course, admiration for Edward II's formal perfection is not a new phenomenon among critics, and is the driving force behind Deats' recent and excellent essay, "Marlowe's Fearful Symmetry in Edward II." It seems necessary in a play of this nature to take into account the idea of "the medium is the message" in determining the overall meaning. What I want to turn to now is how the formal pattern gives moral and artistic weight to the "corrective" behaviour of Edward III at the end of the play in contrast to the irresponsible

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with her that, with respect to Gaveston's "yearning cry," his "eagerness to see the King once more before his death is tainted by his obvious hope of saving himself"(184). With respect to the "centre of all my bliss" quotation, Deats (following Ribner) takes this passage as meaning: "must this day, which should have been the centre of all my bliss (through reunion with Edward) become instead the last day of my life." I find this reading doubtful. However, even if we are to accept the "nobility" of Gaveston's final feelings and statements, it would be one more example of Marlowe's "romanticizing" of death in contrast to Edward's horrible murder.

behaviour of Edward II at the beginning.

Edward III is certainly the most crucial "minor" character of the play, and it will prove illuminating to examine how critics have variously assessed his contribution to the play's meaning. Steane states that Edward III is the "only character to combine humanity with strength"(213). Taking a similar approach, Kuriyama argues that "Young Edward at the end shows himself to be both compassionate and just, ordering a swift execution for Mortimer and sending his mother to the Tower for 'further triall'[V.vi.80] even though the necessity of committing her reduces him to tears. Unlike old Edward, he knows his limits and seeks 'the aide and succour of his peeres'[21]"(207). In a most interesting version of this "balancing" thesis, Deats in "A Study in Androgyny" suggests that "the young Edward III may mature to combine the felicitous balance of 'feminine' feeling with 'masculine' firmness that his parents so tragically lacked";<sup>37</sup> Edward and Isabella have failed, the critic argues, "not through an excess but through a defect in androgyny"(41). Edward III thus has something in common with Navarre, who, as I argued, shows a potential for balancing conflicting impulses, assertive and passive behaviour. Yet the difficulties Marlowe experiences in his

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<sup>37</sup>In a kind of disclaimer that begins this article, Deats laments that "So imprinted on our consciousness are these conventional male-female epithets that it becomes impossible to examine traditional sexual roles without adopting this accepted terminology"(30).

portrayal of Navarre have perhaps not been overcome in Edward III. Some may feel there is something too facile, too artful, in the resolution of the play's central issues. Edward III may not be as emblematic as the Mower, but he seems to fulfil too neatly the role determined--indeed forced upon him--by the formal construction of the play. Thus Claude Summers complains that despite "the rise of Edward III in the final scene, Marlowe's play offers little consolation. His depiction of the world as a solipsistic universe challenges received ideas too completely to be... displaced by the perfunctory restoration of order in the final scene" ("Sex, Politics, and Self-Realization," 236). And Kuriyama remarks: "If the emergence of young Edward at the end of the play does not particularly inspire or reassure us, we can probably attribute our lack of enthusiasm to the fact that young Edward's triumph is theoretical, not something that Marlowe feels" (209).

We therefore have a divided response to what is a crucial element in our interpretation of the play, and I have strong sympathies for both sides. Those supporting the "balancing" thesis make a good case, and we have also seen Marlowe begin to formulate the idea of balancing, though less obviously, in The Jew of Malta and The Massacre at Paris. Yet one certainly does not feel completely "reassured," as Kuriyama remarks, because Edward III's triumph is indeed too theoretical or artful. Marlowe has

very carefully arranged for Edward III to regain the control forfeited by his father, both rhetorically and in terms of the stage action. "Traitor, in me my loving father speaks" (V.vi.41) he says to Mortimer; Edward has found his true voice, the voice of power, in his son. Unlike his father, Edward III conducts himself with force and authority. He orders the execution of Mortimer; then, when the head is brought back on stage, he orders his father's hearse and his own funeral robes. Thus he consummately manages the final "theatrical contrivance," even using, not unlike Tamburlaine, the spoils of victory (Mortimer's head) as a stage prop. While this seems a little too "Tamburlaineian," too artistically contrived, I also have reservations about how young Edward's character personally or psychologically resolves the Marlovian conflicts we have been exploring. For one thing he remains prepubescent at the end of the play; thus, although he apparently triumphs in a Freudian sense over the domineering mother, we still have no idea how he will deal with his own sexual impulses. For another thing, I cannot help suspecting that his consummate handling of business in the final scene is just that: a consummate performance. Can we completely believe him when he says of his mother, "Away with her, her words enforce these tears/  
And I shall pity her if she speak again"(85-86). If we entertain any doubts, his basic "humanity" is called into question. His final insistence in the play's last lines--

"let these tears distilling from mine eyes/ Be witness of my grief and innocency"--can (like Mortimer's unpointed letter) be interpreted in two ways. Either we can believe that we have here, finally, a perfect congruency of inner emotion with outer show, or else Edward's histrionically calling attention to his tears as "witnesses" is more liable to make us doubt the sincerity of his grief. Similarly, the phrase "help me to mourn, my lords"(98) can also be interpreted in two ways. As a command it nicely intimates how Edward will combine self-assertiveness with the realization that he must function with the cooperation and assistance of those around him. Or, more subversively, it indicates that his grief is not deep or genuine, and he needs help in his show of mourning.

There may in fact be more complexity in Edward III's character than has hitherto been recognized. At any rate, whichever way he is regarded the fact remains that the final scene fails to mitigate the horror we feel over Edward II's death. Peter Donaldson focuses on this failure in his psychological reading of the play's resolution:

Like the accession of the good son Fortinbras to the Danish throne at the end of Hamlet, the assertive triumph of Edward III resolves none of the questions the play has raised about the human self, and which Edward's sufferings have exemplified. Rather, the final scene is a turn toward superficiality and a closing off of tragic vision--the world of firmer selves, of sons ready to succeed their fathers, punish rivals, and discipline mothers, the world of Oedipal conflict and success, is inimical to depth. The deepest concern of the play is not centred upon either the conflicts that destroy Edward II or those

that establish his son as the great king he would go on to be, but rather with Edward's tendency to fragmentation, and his growth to tragic stature as he becomes conscious of both the urgency of the need for cohesion and the impossibility of achieving it. (58)

While I would amend this by remarking how difficult it would be to separate Edward's "tendency to fragmentation" from "the conflicts that destroy him," I would agree that the deepest concern of the play is centred upon Edward's tragedy, rather than the political or personal implications of the play's resolution. Yet now I must conclude by questioning whether "tragic stature" is the appropriate term for what Edward finally represents to us.

My approach in this discussion has been somewhat similar to that taken by Mulryne and Fender in "Marlowe and the 'Comic Distance'," where the critics suggest that the emblems and other symbolic action in the play "do not ratify the realistic action" but instead "act as false leads, promising a falsely comforting 'meaning' which is then discomfited in the realistic action"(62). However, I am disappointed when Mulryne and Fender conclude simply that the play functions as a "model of absurdity," for I think the exact nature of that "absurdity" needs to be determined. In spite of Edward II's failure to promulgate a providential vision of history, I believe that Augustine, rather than Camus, serves as a philosophical basis for our understanding of the play. Edward II is a tragedy about the failure of self-fashioning, but it also shows us that successful self-

fashioning is only an act, only the creation of an illusion --and here our doubts about Edward III's final performance take on a new significance. If, then, self-fashioning is an illusory process, why bother? The answer, clearly, is that it leads to personal competency and personal survival. Yet, depressingly, Edward II implies that the most we can obtain is competency and survival in an essentially loveless world. Marlowe's vision never gets past this; he did not live to explore how meaningful self-fashioning could be combined with meaningful personal relationships. However bleak this vision, it is not wrong to call it fundamentally religious, at least in an Augustinian sense. While references to God are notably absent from Edward III's assumption of power, they are notably present in Edward II's terrified attempts to face his own death. However skilfully man can play his social and political roles, and however effectively he can aesthetically distance himself from his inevitable mortality, Edward II casts all that into doubt by underlining man's ultimate failure of self-sufficiency, a dependency, in Marlowe's vision, incapable of romantic or sexual fulfilment. However artful Edward II's resolution--and indeed its entire construction--this poetic drama's most memorable and affecting utterance in performance is unquestionably the horrible scream with which Edward dies. What continues to haunt us in the play is the confused desire for sexual and religious surrender, the dream of

premature self-surrender turned to nightmare, the "incomplete" soul screaming in agony. As in Doctor Faustus, the greatest terror of Edward II arises from the fact that the "real" illusion--the fictional nature of the human self --is stripped from us before we can bear its loss.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

The "essentially loveless world" portrayed in Edward II seems in some ways an inevitable culmination of Marlowe's bleak artistic vision. The absence of meaningful personal relationships in the plays underlines the fictiveness of the human self by denying a major source of support for that illusion: romantic intimacy and interaction that makes human life at least temporarily bearable and tenable. It may seem to some readers that I have desired to have my critical cake and eat it too by putting forth moral cases against Marlowe's protagonists--by criticizing them for failing on human terms--when I have also suggested that those very terms are, in a spiritual or religious sense, called into question. However, if my emphasis on responsibility (taking charge in this world, though not tyrannically) seems to be in tension with the suggestion that Marlowe still suspected --or could never quite escape the belief--that human identity is indeed illusory, this tension is, I believe, very much at the heart of Marlowe's personality and of his plays. The irony of identity is that the individual must struggle to fashion, and is responsible for the integrity of, a self which can never assume complete control of its circumstances and must, according to its spiritual destiny,

eventually be surrendered. Such a project might seem an exercise in futility were it not for a hope (and perhaps it is more mine than Marlowe's) that the integrity the self assumes during this struggle can be incorporated in the final spiritual identity. What remains disturbing, in Marlowe's plays, is that in the self's weakness God's strength does not appear to be guaranteed, contrary to the Biblical promise. We find instead various forms of self-delusion (impractical self-fashioning) and the pain and despair of what I have termed the incomplete soul.

Marlowe's protagonists experience such great difficulty partly because of their confusion as to where the self ends and the "other" begins, almost at times to the extent that the "other" barely exists at all on its own terms. Thus Dido can exclaim incredulously, "The Gods? What Gods..." (V.i.128) and Tamburlaine's murky reasoning follows the line of "There is a God, if any God, but anyway I'll do whatever I please" and then a final, shocked, "What daring God torments my body thus?" (V.iii.42). With respect to human "others," Barabas and Edward replace their loved ones as easily as one would exchange a purchase from a department store. This inability to draw what modern psychologists term proper "ego boundaries" can be related, I believe, to the frequency of images of walls, barriers and enclosures in the plays, and the acts of breaking them down and retreating behind them. Tamburlaine breaks down walls; Barabas

scurries back inside the walls of Malta. Faustus bumps his head against the primum mobile and then gradually retreats back to the walls of his study, through which he enters the hellmouth. Edward threatens to make "England's civil towns huge heaps of stones"(III.iii.30) and "enforce the papal towers to kiss the lowly ground"(I.iv.100-101), but all he ever really wants is to walk with Gaveston about the walls of Tynemouth. The self is never stable enough to establish a definite limit, and therefore is either constantly expanding or shrinking, or experiencing a combination of the two.

Marlowe's protagonists fail to fashion themselves with respect to the demands of the external world because they give imagination too much power. They fail to see the correct relationship between an image in the mind and its role as a symbol in the external world, where it must signify personal effort and the establishment of individual integrity. We generally recognize figurative language as belonging to the domain of the imagination, where it seems to function in part as compensation for our personal limitations. The literalization of metaphor in the plays communicates a sense of the ridiculous or, carried to an extreme, the horrific. Words and images themselves do not have power; the energy must be supplied by the individual's own efforts--mental and physical--through the process of temporal experience. To say that magic, the key metaphor of

Marlowe's most famous play, is "after all a science of getting something for nothing"<sup>1</sup>--is to realize the centrality of this particular fantasy in his work.

"Consummatum est" is intensely ironic not only because of its shocking blasphemy, but because the words were uttered by Christ only after he had paid the price--in human suffering--for his divine career.

Both the excessive self-assertion and self-surrender displayed by Marlowe's protagonists are related to their failure of imagination, and in a way which seems to conflate the two terms, making them curiously paradoxical. The pathological self-assertions of Tamburlaine and Faustus result from an assumption of more power than the human individual can rightly expect to control or maintain, from a failure to give oneself, to surrender to a more natural pursuit; yet such power is acquired by creating or entering a kind of imaginary world where word is power, an act which is itself actually an evasion of normal responsibility, a surrender of worldly duties. Edward's intent to walk about the walls indefinitely with Gaveston, while an evasion of kingly duties, is also a remarkable act of personal assertiveness, at least on an imaginative level. One could give numerous other examples from the plays of such inversions or paradoxes, but I think that in each case one

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<sup>1</sup>David F. Stover, "The Individualism of Doctor Faustus," North Dakota Quarterly 57.4 (1989): 147.

would find consistently a self-protecting egoism and an evasion of responsibility. What exactly is this thing we call responsibility or duty? It is that which requires us to assert ourselves, to exercise power, but paradoxically in the service of some "other," be it God, a loved one, or the members of our society. Of course to do this requires "imagination," to be able to judge or foresee our own strengths and weaknesses, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of those with whom we interact. Marlowe's protagonists fail to make a realistic assessment of these very factors.

In his art Marlowe is certainly greatly concerned with delusion, with self-indulgent rather than creative or practical uses of imagination. This concern perhaps can be related to his theological training, and his emphasis on the perverting power of imagination does in fact have something in common with Augustine's extreme distrust of that faculty. In the Confessions Augustine has nothing good whatsoever to say about art, even though he admits shamefully (in his characteristic way of denying everything that was ever human or attractive about himself) that as a youth he preferred "empty romances," in particular Virgil's Aeneid, to "more valuable studies."<sup>2</sup> I find one section in Book IV particularly noteworthy, where Augustine laments that as a

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<sup>2</sup>Trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961) 34.

young man he had not yet learned that "man's mind is not the supreme good that does not vary":

I was struggling to reach you, but you thrust me back so that I knew the taste of death. For you thwart the proud. And what greater pride could there be than to assert, as I did in my strange madness, that by nature I was what you are? ... This is why you thrust me back and crushed my rearing pride, while my imagination continued to play on material forms. Myself a man of flesh and blood I blamed the flesh. I was as fickle as a breath of wind, unable to return to you. I drifted on, making my way towards things that had no existence in you or in myself or in the body. They were not created for me by your truth but were the inventions of my own foolish imagination working on material things. (86-87)

In spite of Augustine's famous struggle with his "disease of lust," the imagination and not the body emerges as his most formidable enemy:

My heart was full of bitter protests against the creations of my imagination, and this single truth [that God could never suffer decay or hurt or change] was the only weapon with which I could try to drive from my mind's eye all the unclean images which swarmed before it. But hardly had I brushed them aside than, in the flicker of an eyelid, they crowded upon me again. (133)

Similarly, Marlowe's protagonists suffer more from their descent into imagination than their descent into the flesh.

However, unlike Augustine, Marlowe does not cling singlemindedly to a need to somehow realize an unchangeable good beyond his comprehension. At some point in his life Marlowe either found it impossible to put on the armour of Christ or decided it was not a desirable alternative, and was thus faced with having to construct independently an identity even while suspecting its ultimate fictiveness.

Given his sexual inclinations and the strictures of his society, this was not an easy task. One should not underestimate the difficulty of self-fashioning outside the "structure of sacramental and blood relations that normally determine identity."<sup>3</sup> Having no one to share the illusion of self with, the illusion becomes that much more difficult to maintain. In such cases, in fact, one is being constantly thrown back on one's own imaginative resources. Arthur Lindley, in a recent essay, defines Marlovian heroism simply as "a capacity for believing one's own propaganda."<sup>4</sup> "Blindness is power," Lindley writes, but adds that the "correlative of this process is that no Marlovian protagonist has any lasting effect on the world." Therefore each of Marlowe's heroes "is a kind of gap in the proceedings of history, a burp at the cosmic feast." However, lest I appear to have taken my own moral condemnation of the protagonists too far, I would emphasize that some of our attention--particularly in the later plays--should be directed not to the foolishness of the protagonists but to a tragic realization that their "propaganda" often receives little support from the fictions of their society. If we are thus poised rather uncertainly

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<sup>3</sup>Greenblatt, "Marlowe and Renaissance Self-Fashioning," Two Renaissance Mythmakers, ed. Alvin Kernan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977) 56.

<sup>4</sup>"The Unbeing of the Overreacher: Proteanism and the Marlovian Hero," Modern Language Review 84.1 (1989): 16.

--even uncomfortably--between moral evaluation of these characters and a sympathetic identification with their suffering selves, this tension is partly what makes Marlowe's tragedies such a rich and engaging experience for reader and audience.

I have argued that the plays are "orthodox" in their exposure of human limitation, but heterodox in their treatment of traditional religious doctrine. Thus, in spite of my emphasis on personal responsibility, my iconoclastic, psychological readings place me--perhaps unfashionably, but then trends in Marlowe criticism have recently become more difficult to characterize--in the "romantic" camp, or at least somewhere near it. The irony of identity is a complex irony which refuses to delineate or morally distinguish assertive and passive behaviour according to a code of religious ethics. If Marlowe's protagonists misuse their imaginations, or delude themselves into believing their own unrealistic propaganda, we can understand and sympathize. Experience forces us all to create our own "propaganda," even while some of us can choose, with less effort, to "buy into" already established agendas. The extent to which our projects of self-fashioning turn into tragedy rather than comedy sometimes depends on elements of psychology and sexuality over which we seem to have little control. That is why the Divine Creator in Marlowe turns out to be a rather unlovable bystander, as he waits in the

wings--or rather, in keeping with the Elizabethan theatre, as he sits on one side of the stage as privileged spectator --watching us make ourselves only so we can unmake ourselves.

To return now to the Donne lyric with which I began, Marlowe was very intent on the voyage of self-assertion westward, but he also kept, as I have continually suggested, an image somewhere in his mind of what he had turned his back on. As Kyd informs us, the story of the prodigal son had a fascination for Marlowe, who claimed "That the prodigall Childes portion was but fower nobles, he held his purse so neere the bottom in all pictures, and that it either was a iest or els fowr nobles then was thought a great patrimony not thinking it a parable."<sup>5</sup> Behind Marlowe's own jest here--and clearly the story was for him a very significant parable--lies a bitterness not surprising in light of the ideas I have been exploring. If, according to God's scheme, having returned to the father's house is so much better than having never left at all, Marlowe was quite prepared to make the effort, yet not without a certain despair concerning the paucity of personal resources some individuals set out with, a resentment at how poorly the father furnishes his children for the arduous journey. What is truly remarkable about Marlowe's personal career is the

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<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Frederick Boas, Christopher Marlowe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) 243.

amount of courage he displayed in the midst of his anxiety and doubt. He pursued surely one of the most dangerous of activities--employment in the secret service--at the same time that he became a popular and successful playwright. Unlike some of his characters, Marlowe did not attempt to escape the "real" world. If he did in truth die cursing and blaspheming, one cannot help admiring his energy and tenacity.

The remarkable irony, however, is that, like Faustus, Barabas and Edward, Marlowe ended his career by becoming a kind of unwilling artefact in a morality fable. I am referring of course to works such as Thomas Beard's Theatre of Gods Iudgements (1597) and Edmunde Rudierde's The Thunderbolt of Gods Wrath against Hard-Hearted and stiffe-necked sinners (1618), the titles of which sufficiently indicate their authors' interpretations of the moral significance of Marlowe's death. Still, Marlowe deserves honour rather than revilement for his great artistic achievement and his "tenacity." His struggle was, I believe, based on a conviction that any idea of religious "truth" must in some way be tested against what the self experiences in this world; that is, the self owes its first allegiance to its own sanity and survival. It is very likely that Marlowe hoped to succeed where his characters failed, to survive what Ellis-Fermor termed the period of negation and emerge a more mature and adaptable, but a no

less creative, human being. To end with a fantasy of my own, I imagine that after all the audiences have gone home, and the critics have penned their reviews and gone to bed, God still sits in the empty theatre, quietly applauding Marlowe's performance.

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