

Marlowe and Monarchy

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Focusing on the works of Christopher Marlowe (1564-93), this thesis explores the complex engagement of popular drama with the political and religious writing of the Elizabethan *fin de siècle*. It focuses on the five plays by Marlowe that feature royal protagonists: *1-2 Tamburlaine* (1587), *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1588), *Edward II* (1592), and *The Massacre at Paris* (1593). By interpreting each play in its immediate political context, it shows that Marlowe did not deal with monarchy in the abstract but responded to current affairs – from the incursions of the Ottoman Empire to the threat of the Spanish Armada, from the conspiracy claims of Catholic polemic to the debate surrounding England's involvement in continental warfare.

The introduction situates the thesis in the critical and historiographical context relating to Marlowe and to the relationship between literature and politics in the early modern period; it provides the justification for reading Marlowe's plays as topical statements. Chapter One looks at *1-2 Tamburlaine* in the light of contemporary attitudes to the Ottoman-Safavid War. Chapter Two shows that *Dido, Queen of Carthage* adapted the stories and tropes of polemic to reflect fears of Catholic conspiracy and Spanish invasion. Chapter Three reads *Edward II* as a creative response to the print war of 1591-2, which centred on the moral character of the queen's closest counsellors. Chapter Four proposes that Marlowe's final play, *The Massacre at Paris*, employed arguments drawn from Reason of State to influence decisions at the 1593 Parliament. The thesis concludes by suggesting that despite Marlowe's reputation as a radical overreacher, his drama displays considerable sympathy for the monarchs who must rule precariously and without the option of private happiness.

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I dedicate my thesis to the memory of Craig Robinson and to the memory of my grandfather, Alan Okell.

A Note on Editions Cited

Unless stated otherwise, I quote from the following editions of Marlowe:

Dido, Queen of Carthage, in *Dido, Queen of Carthage; and, The Massacre at Paris*, ed. by H.J. Oliver (London: Methuen, 1968), pp. 1-90.

Edward the Second, ed. by Charles R. Forker (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

The Jew of Malta, ed. by N.W. Bawcutt (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978).

'Lucan's First Book', in *The Complete Poems and Translations*, ed. by Stephen Orgel (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 197-202.

The Massacre at Paris, in *Dido Queen of Carthage; and, The Massacre at Paris*, ed. by H.J. Oliver (London: Methuen, 1968), pp. 91-163.

Tamburlaine, ed. by J.S. Cunningham (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

Introduction

Focusing on the works of Christopher Marlowe (1564-93), this thesis explores the complex engagement of popular drama with the political and religious writing of the Elizabethan *fin de siècle*. There is good reason for this focus. Marlowe's plays are set in diverse locations and periods, but they all speak, in one way or another, to the political preoccupations of late sixteenth-century England. Such topicality is particularly to be found in the five plays which centre on issues relating to monarchy.

The two parts of *Tamburlaine* (1587) use a past example of Persian conquest to reflect on the causes and meaning of Europe's weakness in the face of Near Eastern military might. They subvert the didactic function of the mirror-for-princes genre – invoked by the metaphor of the 'tragic glass' (Part One, Prologue, l. 7) – by presenting a 'puissant and mighty monarch' whose example cannot be matched by leaders in Europe.¹

Dido, Queen of Carthage (1588) turns a classical story to the topical purpose of representing the dangers of conspiracy and invasion – an urgent concern in the year of the Armada – and shows how a monarch's romantic interests can undermine state security. In doing the latter, the play probes the partisan use of the ubiquitous distinction between the office of the monarch (the body politic) and the personal inclinations of the officeholder (the natural body) to suggest that tensions between the two are only to be expected.

Edward II (1592) represents the sensational downfall of a mediaeval monarch in terms that also address the demand that leaders place their public duty before desire. But the arguments put to Edward – opposing royal favouritism, defending the legitimacy of resistance – speak to the contexts of partisan religious polemic in Europe, and suggest that

¹ The second quotation is taken from the 1590 title page, reproduced in Cunningham (ed.) on p. ii.

the king is held to a standard informed more by factional self-interest than by any concern for 'England's good' (4.1.2; 5.1.38).

The Massacre at Paris (1593), a bloody retelling of recent French history, invokes the new theory of Reason of State to weigh up the argument for lending support to Henri IV in the fight against the Catholic League. In doing so, it explores the proposition that monarchs must deviate sometimes from the path of princely virtue, with Navarre presented as a pious but pragmatic leader operating in extraordinary circumstances.

Written by the most successful, controversial, and influential dramatist of his day, these plays show how contemporary writers were able to respond imaginatively to pressing political concerns. At the same time, as well as providing new insights into the practices of the late Elizabethan stage, placing Marlowe within his political moment calls into question many of the critical assumptions that are still prevalent in Marlowe studies – in particular, the idea that the playwright was a subversive whose writings were designed to challenge outright the orthodoxies of his time. In a careful re-examination of the evidence about Marlowe (e.g. the Baines Note; Thomas Kyd's letter to Sir John Puckering; the report from the Coroner's Inquest in June 1593), J.A. Downie has shown that 'we know next to nothing about Christopher Marlowe. When we speak or write about him, we are really referring to a construct called "Marlowe"'.² Similarly, Lukas Erne explains that 'Marlowe's cultural and, in particular, academic capital results to no small degree from a mythographic creation with which it is in our [i.e. academics'] best interest to be complicit'.³ In this regard, my work on the politics of Marlowe's drama contributes to the important process of re-evaluating his life and works free from the sometimes disapproving, often romanticized view that emerged following Marlowe's death in May

² J.A. Downie, 'Marlowe: Fact and Fictions', in *Constructing Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by J.A. Downie and J.T. Parnell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 13-29 (p. 13).

³ Lukas Erne, 'Biography, Mythography, and Criticism: The Life and Works of Christopher Marlowe', *Modern Philology*, 103:1 (2005), 28-50 (p. 30).

1593.⁴ As Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith point out, ‘we are used to an idea of Marlowe as socially, dramatically, poetically, and sexually subversive, but this [...] is a construct in need of fresh assessment’.⁵

Thomas Dabbs has shown that the construction of the Marlowe myth began in the nineteenth century, and the celebration of Marlowe as a dangerous radical persisted even throughout the 1980s, with Stephen Greenblatt describing the writer as ‘an exception’ to the otherwise inflexible rule that the assertion of individuality always ‘involves submission to an absolute power or authority’.⁶ With the myth having survived these pressures of the totalizing society, it was only in the 2000s that concerted efforts were made to recover the writer and the interpretation of his works from a critical framework that was loaded with Romantic values. Notable among these reappraisals were the collection of essays edited by Downie and J.T. Parnell (2000), the biography by Constance Brown Kuriyama (2002), Ruth Lunney’s monograph on Marlowe’s indebtedness to the popular dramatic tradition (2002), and Lukas Erne’s dismantling of the aforementioned ‘mythographic creation’ (2005); all of these show the value of testing claims about Marlowe against the available historical evidence.⁷ Since then, a second wave of scholarship – to be found in the volumes edited by Sara Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan (2008 and 2015), Sarah Scott and M.L. Stapleton (2010), and Emily C. Bartels and

⁴ Thomas Dabbs, *Reforming Marlowe: The Nineteenth-Century Canonization of a Renaissance Dramatist* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1991); Constance Brown Kuriyama, *Christopher Marlowe: A Renaissance Life* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), Ch. 9.

⁵ Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith, ‘Introduction’, in *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, ed. by Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1-3 (p. 2).

⁶ Dabbs, *Reforming Marlowe*; Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 9. Dabbs suggests that ‘the Marlowe Greenblatt presents – the artist bravely forging human values in the face of an impersonal, abysmal universe – is not far removed from the subjective views of the playwright one routinely finds in Victorian letters’ (p. 139). On Greenblatt’s compulsion to identify Marlowe as ‘an exception’ to the New Historicist rule, see: Frank Lentricchia, ‘Foucault’s Legacy: A New Historicism?’ in *The New Historicism*, ed. by Aram Veeseer (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 231-42; Richard Wilson, ‘“Writ in blood”: Marlowe and the New Historicists’, in *Constructing Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by J.A. Downie and J.T. Parnell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 116-32.

⁷ Downie and Parnell (eds), *Constructing Christopher Marlowe*; Kuriyama, *Christopher Marlowe: A Renaissance Life*; Ruth Lunney, *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition: Innovation in the English Drama before 1595* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Erne, ‘Biography, Mythography, and Criticism’.

Emma Smith (2013) – has also gone back to history, producing findings that encourage fresh thinking about the nature of Marlowe’s career and the aims of his writing.⁸

Of particular relevance to my own concern with Marlowe’s interest in monarchy, Paulina Kewes has shown how Marlowe adapted his primary source material for *Edward II* and *The Massacre at Paris* – the second edition of *Holinshed’s Chronicles* (1587; first edition pub. 1577), and Huguenot and Catholic polemic, respectively – to address up-to-date concerns. Kewes writes that ‘whilst Marlowe’s imaginative writings always transcend their immediate moment, [they] make no bones about bending the past to tackle some of the most pressing issues of the day’.⁹ In similar fashion, Chloe Kathleen Preedy has explored Marlowe’s engagement with the period’s ‘oppositional and mutually contradicting polemic’.¹⁰ Detailing Marlowe’s interest in the commonplace accusation of ‘politic’ piety, she reveals how the playwright was able to take high matters of theology (as well as the playground insults from the confessional war of words) and turn them to the business of popular entertainment.

Building on and complementing this work, my research shows that Marlowe’s plays are not the work of an outrageous radical. Rather, they offer a thoughtful (though always entertaining) set of responses to current affairs. To support this point, I draw on a range of scholarship from the fields of political and religious history, which allows me to highlight the specificity of Marlowe’s interest in matters relating to monarchy – from the subject of East-West relations to the Armada, from Catholic libels targeting Elizabeth’s advisors to controversial theories of political prudence. I seek to combine rigorous contextual historicism (exploring the immediate context of each play’s production) with a

⁸ Sara Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan (eds), *Placing the Plays of Christopher Marlowe: Fresh Cultural Contexts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Sarah Scott and M.L. Stapleton (eds), *Christopher Marlowe the Craftsman: Lives, Stage and Page* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Bartels and Smith (eds), *Christopher Marlowe in Context*; Deats and Logan (eds), *Christopher Marlowe at 450* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

⁹ Paulina Kewes, ‘Marlowe, History, and Politics’, in *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, ed. by Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 138-54.

¹⁰ Chloe Kathleen Preedy, *Marlowe’s Literary Scepticism: Politic Religion and Post-Reformation Polemic* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2012), p. 15.

clear focus on the rhetoric and dramaturgy of Marlowe and his contemporaries. In doing so, I work from the conviction that ‘a failure to understand Marlowe’s use of politics as dramatic devices often results in a failure to understand fully his plays’.¹¹ Claude J. Summers makes this injunction in the first monograph to consider the writer’s ‘dramatic use of politics’; published in 1974, the work is out-dated on account of its faithful adherence to E.M.W. Tillyard’s idea of the ‘Elizabethan world picture’, but it remains useful in reminding us not to view Marlowe’s plays as ‘political documents’ but as ‘works of art’.¹²

In taking this approach, my research differs from the scholarship concerned primarily with discovering the playwright’s own political sympathies. Excessively preoccupied with locating signs of a coherent political vision that may run through Marlowe’s works – and directed in this search by the writer’s reputation for heterodoxy – such scholarship has failed to recognize that Marlowe was characteristically less concerned with proffering a personal view than he was with taking apart the conflicting, though often symmetrical, arguments of contemporary polemic.¹³ In the work of Patrick Cheney, such scholarship has also tended to assume that the arguments of political writing were determined more by abstract theoretical convictions (such as a lasting belief in the desirability of republican government) than by the specific and ever-changing demands of the moment (such as the need to exclude a particular person from the succession).¹⁴ This was not true of topical pamphleteering, with texts such as John Stubbs’ *The Discovery of a Gaping Gulf* (1579) responding directly to the immediate danger of the Anjou marriage negotiations, and the assumption is equally questionable when it comes to works of political theory now considered canonical, such as George Buchanan’s *De Iure Regni apud Scotos* (1579). In *Marlowe’s Republican Authorship* (2010), Cheney claims that ‘Scotland,

¹¹ Claude J. Summers, *Christopher Marlowe and the Politics of Power* (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, University of Salzburg, 1974), p. 189.

¹² Summers, pp. 189, iii-iv; E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1943).

¹³ The symmetry of confessional polemic will be discussed in greater detail below.

¹⁴ Patrick Cheney, *Marlowe’s Republican Authorship: Lucan, Liberty, and the Sublime* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). See also: Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

like the Netherlands and France, had a strong republican tradition' and he describes Buchanan as 'the key Scottish political theorist'.¹⁵ Buchanan was certainly an advocate of resistance, but to associate him with republicanism is to ignore his clear distinction between monarchy and tyranny – exemplified by the claim that 'heaven can grant us nothing finer than a good king' – as well as the fact that he dedicated *De Iure Regni* to James VI.¹⁶

It is highly tenuous, therefore, for Cheney to infer republican sympathy in Marlowe simply from his alleged assertion (reported in Kyd's letter to Puckering) that he would 'go unto the King of Scots'.¹⁷ But then, what was republicanism? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, REPUBLICANISM entails 'support for or adherence to republican principles' (*n.* 1.), such principles are said to involve 'favouring, supporting, or advocating the republic as a form or state of government' (REPUBLICAN *adj.* 1a.), and a REPUBLIC is defined in that sense (i.e. as a form of government) as 'a state in which power rests with the people or their representatives; *spec.* a state without a monarchy' (*n.* 2a.). But though the *OED* lists a use of the term REPUBLIC to describe the constitutional arrangement of Venice from 1596, there is no general use before the seventeenth century. Throughout Marlowe's lifetime, the term was held more commonly to refer to 'the state, the community; the common good' (*n.* 1) – a usage that dates from 1549 and does not entail opposition to monarchy. The words REPUBLICAN and REPUBLICANISM were first used in 1653 and 1685 respectively.¹⁸ Thus, when Andrew Hadfield asks 'was Shakespeare a republican? Does it matter whether he was? And what do we mean by republicanism?' –

¹⁵ Cheney, pp. 29-30.

¹⁶ Roger A. Mason and Martin S. Smith (eds. and trans.), *A Dialogue on the Law of Kingship among the Scots: A Critical Edition and Translation of George Buchanan's De Iure Regni apud Scotos Dialogus* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 107, 3. Subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

¹⁷ Quoted in Cheney, p. 29. Cheney raises but disregards the obvious interpretation that Marlowe was simply stating his support for James VI as Elizabeth's successor; he also fails to explain how the plan to 'go unto the King of Scots' can be construed as a republican gesture – a particular problem given the absolutist leanings of the king in question.

¹⁸ 'republicanism, n.', *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) [accessed online 20 November 2015]; 'republican, adj. and n.', *OED Online* [accessed online 20 November 2015]; 'republic, n.' *OED Online* [accessed online 20 November 2015].

he is faced immediately with the problem that Shakespeare would not have recognized the political label that Hadfield attaches to him.¹⁹ And the same goes for Marlowe.

The search for republicanism between the lines of early modern literature does not reflect the political reality of the late sixteenth century, as many historians have shown when clarifying the concept of the ‘monarchical republic’. Some literary scholars have taken this concept as an indication of nascent republicanism, when Patrick Collinson introduced it much more precisely to describe a series of (unused) emergency procedures that were designed to ensure a smooth succession – that is, to safeguard monarchy, not bring about its demise – upon the sudden death of Elizabeth.²⁰ As Collinson later explained, ‘here was republicanism, not in the sense that it excluded monarchy, which was a fact of life; but in the sense that in certain circumstances, monarchy was thought to be too important a matter to be left to ill-advised monarchs’.²¹ It is quite a leap, then, for Cheney to suggest that the circumstances Collinson describes, along with two distinctly non-republican texts – *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos* (1579) and Sir Thomas Smith’s *De Republica Anglorum* (1565; pub. 1583) – ‘alert us to the tip of a republican iceberg within Elizabethan culture’.²² This misinterpretation arises, I suspect, from a longstanding tendency in literary scholarship to assume that political literature (especially drama) can

¹⁹ Hadfield, p. 1. Whilst early modern dramatists were no doubt indebted to – and interested in – writings related to the classical republics, Hadfield and Cheney frequently allow the evidence of this ‘civic republicanism’ (to use Blair Worden’s shorthand) to stand in for, and imply, the ‘constitutional republicanism’ of a later date. This tendency among literary scholars and historians is discussed in Worden, ‘Republicanism, Regicide and Republic: The English Experience’, in *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage, Vol. 1: Republicanism and Constitutionalism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 307-27.

²⁰ Patrick Collinson, ‘The Monarchical Republic of Queen Elizabeth I’, in *Elizabethan Essays* (London: Hambledon Press, 1994), pp. 31-57. Also see: Worden, ‘Republicanism, Regicide’, p. 314; Lake, ‘“The Monarchical Republic of Elizabeth I” Revisited (by its Victims) as a Conspiracy’, in *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe: From the Waldensians to the French Revolution*, ed. by Barry Coward and Julian Swann (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 87-111 (pp. 87-90); Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes, ‘Introduction: A Historiographical Perspective’, in *Doubtful and Dangerous: The Question of Succession in Late Elizabethan England*, ed. by Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), pp. 1-19 (pp. 14-15); Norman Jones, *Governing by Virtue: Lord Burghley and the Management of Elizabethan England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 3-5.

²¹ Collinson, ‘Afterword’, in *The Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England: Essays in Response to Patrick Collinson*, ed. by John F. McDiarmid (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 245-60 (p. 247).

²² Cheney, p. 34.

only criticize or endorse, undermine or reinforce the ruling regime. Given earlier studies that claim a republican vein to the works of Shakespeare (Hadfield) and Ben Jonson (Julie Sanders), Cheney might have seen Marlowe as the obvious third choice – the next in line for a study of that sort.²³ But with a critical history in which readers have routinely pinned their hopes for subversion on the Marlowe myth, we might also conclude that Marlowe would appear to be the perfect candidate for challenging monarchy.

Unlike Cheney, I do not propose to uncover any overarching political philosophy in the works of Marlowe, and my research is attentive to the unique conditions that produced political writing and drama alike. My aim is to show that Marlowe's plays are acutely sensitive to complex questions of the moment and tease out how and to what ends they appropriate, manipulate, and experiment with the expedient and partisan vocabulary of current debate. My research demonstrates that Marlowe's plays are consistently sceptical in their treatment of monarchy – highlighting as they do the tendency of kings and queens to follow their personal inclinations at the expense of duty – but that these conclusions always arise from the playwright's precise consideration of specific issues such as East-West military conflict, the threat of the Armada, attacks on favouritism, and the moral ambiguities of statecraft at a time of religious warfare. Marlowe's writing was not driven by any single political conviction but grew out of an interest in how politics and political language shaped the world around him.

Topical Drama

My findings are presented in four case studies. In line with the observation that Marlowe's plays were inspired by topical incidents more than timeless questions about the nature of monarchy, each play (or plays, in the case of *Tamburlaine*) will be discussed with close reference to the precise context that produced it. Contexts can be imported artificially, as Greenblatt's brand of contextual reading illustrates: Neema Parvini describes the New

²³ Julie Sanders, *Ben Jonson's Theatrical Republics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998).

Historicist approach as ‘a criticism that is ahistorical, arbitrarily connecting monarchs and playwrights, anecdotes and literary texts’, which is borne out by Greenblatt’s reading of *Measure for Measure* (1604) in the light of a sermon delivered by Hugh Latimer in 1552, and his reading of *Twelfth Night* (1601) in the context of a story about a transvestite told to Michel de Montaigne in September 1580.²⁴ By connecting these disparate examples (literary as well as non-literary), Greenblatt assumes commonality, occluding the historical and/or cultural difference that might exist, say, between French and English discourses of sexuality (Montaigne’s story was set in France), or between two texts (a sermon and a play) that were written according to different conventions more than 50 years apart; and this is not to mention the theatrical regulations – different in France – that gave rise to a meta-convention whereby actors’ cross-dressing was comically highlighted onstage. By connecting moments in history without allowing for the change and discontinuity that might be expected, Greenblatt’s version of historicism thus involves a static conception of context.

By contrast, my contextual readings are based on a careful understanding of the year (and, in some cases, the month) in which Marlowe’s plays were written. The circumstances in which Marlowe wrote the first part of *Tamburlaine* were different to those in which he wrote his final play, *The Massacre at Paris*, so it would be wrong to expect Marlowe’s drama to reveal a consistent line of thought, as if the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, continental conflict, official crackdowns on recusancy, the rising factionalism among privy councillors, and a host of other events were inconsequential to how Elizabethans perceived and discussed politics. Research by Lisa Ferraro Parmelee, Paul J. Voss, Susan Doran, and Joad Raymond has shown that news spread quickly and by

²⁴ Neema Parvini, *Shakespeare’s History Plays: Rethinking Historicism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 29. Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 65, 73-5, 129-32.

various means to produce an informed, news-hungry public.²⁵ It has also been shown – in the classic studies of topical drama by David Bevington (1968) and Marie Axton (1977) – that playwrights designed their plays to participate in the discussion of such news and debates surrounding major points of policy.²⁶

Of course, a play's meaning – its 'message' – would often depend on its social function, with elite theatre of the royal court and Inns of Court, progress entertainments, and public drama each catering to a distinct group of people with competing interests and loyalties, varying degrees of insider knowledge, and a wide spectrum of beliefs and prejudices.²⁷ On this topic, Brian Walsh raises the problem that 'a full portrait of Elizabethan theatre patrons, either as individuals or as variously conceived heterogeneous or homogeneous groups', remains elusive; whilst we may be safe to assume a greater degree of insider knowledge was held among the audience of a court drama, how can we estimate the news-knowledge of the average playgoer, not least when the notion of an 'average' playgoer is problematic in itself?²⁸ Walsh's suggestion is that we should 'do the work of imagining the early modern audience by keeping in mind the fact that, from the playwright's side of things, "imagined audiences shape dramas at the inception of the composition process"; put simply, we should try to infer what audiences might have

²⁵ Lisa Ferraro Parmelee, *Good Newes from Fraunce: French Anti-League Propaganda in Late Elizabethan England* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1996); Paul J. Voss, *Elizabethan News Pamphlets: Shakespeare, Spenser, Marlowe and the Birth of Journalism* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001); Susan Doran, 'The Politics of Renaissance Europe', in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Europe*, ed. by Andrew Hadfield and Paul Hammond (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004), pp. 21-52; Joad Raymond, 'News Writing', in *The Oxford Handbook of English Prose, 1500-1640*, ed. by Andrew Hadfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 396-414.

²⁶ David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977).

²⁷ For the progress entertainments, see: Elizabeth Goldring, Faith Eales, Elizabeth Clarke, and Jayne Elisabeth Archer (eds), *John Nichols's The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I: A New Edition of the Early Modern Sources*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²⁸ Brian Walsh, 'Marlowe and the Elizabethan Theatre Audience', in *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, ed. by Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 68-79 (p. 69).

understood from the dramaturgical decisions that Marlowe made when writing for them.²⁹ However, we must still attend to the diversity of Marlowe's audience, as illustrated by the reactions to *Tamburlaine, Part One* (outlined in Chapter One) that reveal the disparaging attitude of some theatregoers towards the pleasure taken in the play by others. What might be said, cautiously, is that the topical content in Marlowe's drama presumes at least some familiarity with current affairs.

For good reason, then, the question of how writers were able to produce plays on current political and religious matters has been the subject of much study, with particular focus given to drama of the 1560s and 70s and, later, to the plays of Shakespeare and Jonson, notably by Blair Worden, Lake, Kewes, David Womersley, and Alexandra Gajda.³⁰ What is clear from all of these accounts, as Gajda explains, is that when Elizabethans and Jacobean thought about current affairs, they did so through the prism of commonly known 'historical paradigms and narratives': stories of Richard II, Edward II, classical

²⁹ Walsh, p. 70. The embedded quotation comes from Jennifer A. Low and Nova Myhill, 'Audience and Audiences', in *Imagining the Audience in Early Modern Drama, 1558-1642*, ed. by Jennifer A. Low and Nova Myhill (New York: Palgrave, 2011), pp. 1-18 (p. 1).

³⁰ Worden, 'Ben Jonson among the Historians', in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, ed. by Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 67-90; Lake, 'From *Leicester His Commonwealth* to *Sejanus His Fall*: Ben Jonson and the Politics of Roman (Catholic) Virtue', in *Catholics and the 'Protestant Nation': Religious Politics and Identity in Early Modern England*, ed. by Ethan H. Shagan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 128-61; Lake, 'Ben Jonson and the Politics of "Conversions": *Catiline* and the Relocation of Roman (Catholic) Virtue', *The Ben Jonson Journal*, 19:2 (2012), 163-89; Lake, 'Putting the Politics of Conscience on the Public Stage in *Sir John Oldcastle, part I*', in *Getting Along? Religious Identities and Confessional Relations in Early Modern England: Essays in Honour of Professor W.J. Sheils*, ed. by Nadine Lewycky and Adam Morton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 153-68; Lake, 'Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and the Search for a Usable (Christian?) Past', in *Shakespeare and Early Modern Religion*, ed. by David Loewenstein and Michael Witmore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 111-30; Kewes, 'Contemporary Europe in Elizabethan and Stuart Drama', in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Europe*, ed. by Andrew Hadfield and Paul Hammond (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004), pp. 150-92; Kewes, 'History Plays and the Royal Succession', in *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed's Chronicles*, ed. by Felicity Heal, Ian W. Archer, and Paulina Kewes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 493-510; Kewes, 'Marlowe, History, and Politics', in *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, ed. by Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 138-54; Kewes, "'Jerusalem thou dydst promise to buylde vp": Kingship, Counsel, and Early Elizabethan Drama', in *The Politics of Counsel in England and Scotland, 1286-1707*, ed. by Jacqueline Rose (forthcoming); David Womersley, *Divinity and State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Alexandra Gajda, *The Earl of Essex and Late Elizabethan Political Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), Ch. 6.

Rome, and so on.³¹ It was in Marlowe's professional interests, therefore, to stage the most topically resonant stories and examples, and to reference ideas and arguments that were in current circulation and which spoke to urgent anxieties. In his efforts to do so, Marlowe was blessed with two considerable advantages: education, as a Parker Scholar at both King's School in Canterbury and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge; and having greater access to confidential information through his government intelligence work.³² His plays were demonstrably popular, and in analysing the result of his labours, the aim of my four case studies will be to unpack the political resonances that the playwright expected his plays to carry, and that would have been recognized by many, if not all, members of an audience that was well versed in – and eager to locate – the presence of political subtexts.

To do this, it is important to account for some of the interpretative challenges that topical drama entails. First, the resonance of a play could be altered by circumstances that lay beyond its author's control, as illustrated by the notorious (and disputed) performance of Shakespeare's *Richard II* (c. 1595) in February 1601 on the eve of the revolt led by Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex.³³ It is possible, for instance, that the first edition of *Tamburlaine* (1590) was interpreted differently following the publication of Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* (1589), which reproduced friendly correspondence between Elizabeth and Murad III that cut against the popular anti-Ottoman feeling that the plays would seem to endorse. Likewise, it is very likely that audiences reacted differently to the 1594 revival of *The Massacre at Paris* in the wake of Henri IV's conversion to Catholicism; seen in that context, the character's proclamations of Protestant fervour might have seemed bitterly ironic, even funny. The complication of these textual afterlives, though in some respects challenging the notion of a stable authorial meaning, speaks to

³¹ Gajda, p. 216. See also: Kewes, 'History Plays and the Royal Succession', pp. 494-95; Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³² On Marlowe's likely intelligence work, see: Erne, p. 31.

³³ On this topic, see: Blair Worden, 'Which Play was Performed at the Globe Theatre on 7 February 1601?', *London Review of Books*, 25:13 (2003), 22-24; Paul E. J. Hammer, 'Shakespeare's *Richard II*, the Play of 7 February 1601, and the Essex Rising', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 59:1 (2008), 1-35; Jason Scott-Warren, 'Was Elizabeth I Richard II?: The Authenticity of Lambarde's "Conversation"', *Review of English Studies*, 64:264 (2013), 208-30.

the power of early modern drama to be seen as a vehicle for the most up-to-the-minute commentary. Indeed, the fact that events would occasionally overtake the content of the drama shows how quickly and directly the theatre responded to the politics of its time.

Second, topical drama raises questions about the exact nature of the correspondence between characters onstage and real-life personalities. In *The Massacre at Paris*, Marlowe's Navarre is certainly meant to represent the real Henri III of Navarre who became Henri IV of France. Whilst allowing for artistic licence, the same can also be said for George Peele's representation of key figures in *The Battle of Alcazar* (1591). In other plays, however, the use of historical analogues creates a distance between the first-level narrative and the topical subtext, as in Robert Greene's *James IV* (1590) where an earlier Scottish reign is used to examine the character of Elizabeth's likely successor, James VI. In Greene's case, no effort is made to disguise the play's contemporary application; quite the opposite, in fact, since the induction makes clear that the spectacle of 'a king, overruled with parasites [and] misled by lust, [is] much like our court of Scotland this day' (Induction, ll. 106-9).³⁴ But generally, as Paul Raffield explains, 'the setting of plays in distant historical, mythological or quasi-mythical locations served the pragmatic purpose of disguising or blurring overt references to contemporary political events' – thereby increasing the chance that a company's production would escape the attention of Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels between 1579 and 1610.³⁵

Suspicious were, of course, frequently aroused. Perhaps most famous in this regard is Elizabeth's reputed comment from August 1601 – 'I am Richard II, know ye not

³⁴ Quotations are taken from Robert Greene, *The Scottish History of James the Fourth*, ed. by Norman Sanders (London: Methuen, 1970). For the earliest allegorical reading of the play, see Ruth Hudson, 'Greene's *James IV* and Contemporary Allusions to Scotland', *PMLA*, 47:3 (1932), 652-67. Hudson couches her interpretation in the English interest in the succession, as illustrated by the re-publication in the same year of Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville's *Gorboduc* (first performed in 1561).

³⁵ Paul Raffield, *Shakespeare's Imaginary Constitution: Late-Elizabethan Politics and the Theatre of the Law* (Oxford: Hart, 2010), p. 10. On censorship of the stage, see: Janet Clare, "'Greater Themes for Insurrection's Arguing": Political Censorship of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Stage', *Review of English Studies*, 38:150 (1987), 169-83; Richard Dutton, *Licensing, Censorship and Authorship in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000); and Dutton, *Mastering the Revels: The Regulation and Censorship of English Renaissance Drama* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991).

that?' – that points to the sensitivity of those in the public eye to the potential that historical characters would be used to present veiled criticism.³⁶ The same sensitivity can also be found in Lady Arbella Stuart's sensing of a salacious slur in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene; or, The Silent Women* (1609), which is evidenced by the playwright's subsequent disclaimers. In an additional prologue (titled 'Another') that was 'occasioned by some person's impertinent exception', Jonson explains that if any audience member should 'with particular sleight of application' read the play as an allegory, the offence lies with them, since 'they make a libel which he made a play' (11-13).³⁷ When *Epicoene* was printed, Jonson complained once more, observing in the dedication 'how much a man's innocency may be endangered by an uncertain accusation' (p. 120). Thus, while dramatists tended to hide behind historical and/or fictionalized narratives, their choices of topic were expected to evoke real situations and figures.

Topical drama did not report the news directly, with real events mentioned only fleetingly, as in Shakespeare's brief reference in *Henry V* (1599) to the campaign in Ireland.³⁸ Instead, it enabled its audience to ruminate on current affairs through the presentation of analogous situations, and it was effective in doing so because it could represent different positions through its different characters – that is, arguing *in utramque partem*. No doubt this would reflect the breadth of opinion among theatregoers, too. Responding to the New Historicist and Cultural Materialist scholarship of the 1980s and early 1990s, which tended to look at drama as engaging with powerful agencies beyond the theatre, Graham Bradshaw reminds us of the social make-up inside it. He points out that 'Shakespeare belonged to that first generation of English dramatists whose living

³⁶ Scott-Warren, 'Was Elizabeth I Richard II?' argues for the authenticity of this reported comment, *pace* Jonathan Bate, *Soul of the Age: The Life, Mind and World of William Shakespeare* (London: Viking, 2008), pp. 249-86.

³⁷ Quotations are taken from Ben Jonson, *Epicoene; or, The Silent Women*, in *The Alchemist and Other Plays*, ed. by Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 119-209. The circumstances of the second prologue's composition are taken from its subtitle, reproduced on p. 122.

³⁸ William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, ed. by Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.0.28-34. See corresponding note and Taylor's introduction, pp. 4-5.

depended on pleasing a mixed audience', and for that reason it should not be surprising that 'he peopled his stage with Elizabethans who think and feel differently about different matters – like their counterparts in the audience'.³⁹ It might be useful, therefore, to think of topical drama as the recreation of debate more than as the simple re-enactment of events; that is to say, if art imitates life, the life being imitated onstage was that of the audience, with theatregoers' varying points of view made manifest in the choice of dramatic examples and broad range of characterization.

As Joel B. Altman and others have shown, the development of English drama in the sixteenth century owed much to the forensic rhetoric that was taught in the Elizabethan grammar school.⁴⁰ The influence can be seen, for example, in the quality of disputation that is found in mid-century Inns of Court drama: in Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville's *Gorboduc* (1561), there is a striking scene in which the king's councillors offer several perspectives on the wisdom of splitting the realm between Ferrex and Porrex (1.2). A key objective of the following chapters will be to analyse the ways that Marlowe used similar interrogative techniques to reflect the varied concerns of his later audience of the 1580s and 1590s, whether that audience was made of more elite theatregoers attending performances by the Children of the Chapel Royal or the mixed crowd drawn to the Rose Theatre in the liberty of Southwark. By explaining how plays such as *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and *Edward II* incorporate competing arguments, set against one another often in unresolved tension, I will show that the theatre offered more than just a fictionalized rehearsal of who did what and when; it provided a space where people could

³⁹ Graham Bradshaw, *Misrepresentations: Shakespeare and the Materialists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 32.

⁴⁰ Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Neil Rhodes, *Shakespeare and the Origins of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Ch. 3; Lorna Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Chs. 3-4; Quentin Skinner, *Forensic Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). On the grammar school instruction in rhetoric, see Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Ch. 1.

think through the causes and implications of real-life situations, weighing alternative perspectives and considering possible futures through the frequent reversals of plot.

The paradox of topical drama, then, is that it frequently addressed topical issues at the same time as it avoided the direct representation of the parties involved. This would probably have much to do with the official prohibition on plays dealing with ‘matters of religion or of the governance of the estate of the commonweal’.⁴¹ At the same time, however, scholars have shown that there were several other advantages to a distance being created between a play’s literal meaning and its subtext. First, it has been suggested that distance allowed for greater thoughtfulness. Of plays that were not set in the English past, such as George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh’s *Jocasta* (1566) and the Seneca translations from the same period, Jessica Winston claims that ‘in their appeal to foreign, mythological and fictional calamities, rather than to national history, the dramatists perhaps [...] enhanced the ability of their works to promote reflection and contemplation’ – the unfamiliarity of setting ‘[providing] what might best be described as a rhetorical space to speculate on the nature of power’.⁴²

Second, it has been suggested that the lack of corroboration gave a commercial benefit to the promise of hidden meanings: Claire Jowitt notes that plays had the ‘potential to excite in their audiences a belief that they are witnessing the imparting of privileged information’, and that this ‘ensured a full audience (and hence a profit)’.⁴³ Observing that ‘plays [can] accommodate a variety of topical allegorical readings but do not necessarily [have to] authorise any one particular interpretation’, Jowitt writes that ‘the variety of allegorical interpretations and the “functional ambiguity” of the play can [...] be seen as a shrewd commercial marketing device enabling the play to maximise its appeal to a

⁴¹ Paul L. Hughes and James Francis Larkin (eds), *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, 3 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), vol. 2, p. 115.

⁴² Jessica Winston, ‘National History to Foreign Calamity: *A Mirror for Magistrates* and Early English Tragedy’, in *Shakespeare’s Histories and Counter-Histories*, ed. by Dermot Cavanagh, Stuart Hampton-Reeves, and Stephen Longstaffe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 152-65 (p. 162).

⁴³ Claire Jowitt, *Voyage Drama and Gender Politics, 1589-1642: Real and Imagined Worlds* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 6-7.

heterogeneous audience'.⁴⁴ Likewise, though Thomas Middleton's *A Game at Chess* (1624) is routinely interpreted as being wholly transparent, Richard Burt has shown that it tantalizes the audience 'not [with] a single coherent allegory (political, religious, or moral) but dispersed, fragmentary allegories which do not come together' – a situation that is strangely echoed in the play's complex textual history.⁴⁵

Artistic possibilities thus combine in topical drama with prudential and commercial considerations to face the playwright not only with the challenge of writing about politics but also the challenge of producing viable vehicles of profit in line with strict censorship laws. In Marlowe's case, a combination of these factors helps to explain the playwright's engagement with topical issues – and, crucially, with the language in which politics were discussed. There is much to be said, therefore, for Bevington's observation that a play's topical meaning cannot be accounted for entirely by the reductive search for 'one-to-one analogy' – what Bevington calls 'the "coincidence" theory of interpretation'.⁴⁶ For Bevington, dramatists were concerned with 'ideas and platforms rather than personalities'; to equate Shakespeare's *Richard II* exclusively with Elizabeth I, or Marlowe's *Edward II* with Henri III, would be to lose that sense of early modern drama as the testing ground for political thought.⁴⁷

For an illustration of this more sophisticated, allusive engagement with 'ideas and platforms', we might look to the genre of the history play that became wildly popular after the second edition of *Holinshed's Chronicles* was published in 1587. As Kewes points out, plays such as George Peele's *The Troublesome Reign of King John* (1589-90) and the anonymous *True Tragedy of Richard III* (c. 1590-1) aired many of the constitutional

⁴⁴ Jowitt, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁵ Richard Burt, 'Thomas Middleton, Uncut: Castration, Censorship, and the Regulation of Dramatic Discourse in Early Modern England', in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to the Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 182-94 (p. 192). On the playtext, see Gary Taylor, 'A Game at Chess: General Textual Introduction', in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture*, ed. by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 712-874.

⁴⁶ Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, p. 154.

⁴⁷ Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, p. 25.

arguments – election versus hereditary right – that were reconfigured in Catholic tracts on the succession following the execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587, at which point arguments not grounded in hereditary right were needed in support of candidates such as the Spanish Infanta, Isabella Clara Eugenia. The reversal in Catholic arguments from supporting Mary on hereditary grounds to claiming – as in Robert Persons' *A Conference about the Next Succession* (1594/5) – that Elizabeth's successor should be chosen for her suitability is reflected, Kewes argues, in the way that *The Troublesome Reign* attacks the concept of election by leaving it 'purposely tarnished by association with papal intermeddling and the foreign yoke'.⁴⁸

At the same time, other plays such as Marlowe's *Edward II* are shown to explore the same arguments in ways that are 'far more complex and ambivalent', with less interest in settling the question at hand.⁴⁹ Kewes thus observes that 'the public nature of the drama made it a potent vehicle for disseminating political ideas and imaginatively experimenting with novel constitutional solutions'.⁵⁰ In this respect, the succession plays of the early 1590s provide a clear demonstration of how drama was able to participate in contemporary debate by using loaded historical examples that were cited routinely in confessional polemic. It also reminds us that playwrights would evoke issues such as the succession for different purposes, some (like Peele) to advance a particular position, some (like Marlowe) to serve a critique or at least raise questions in theatregoers' minds about the nature of political discourse.

Monarchs and Monarchy

What was Marlowe trying to achieve in writing plays about monarchs? Cheney, who sees Marlowe as a radical outsider – a critic of his society – assumes that Marlowe must have had an agenda: to undermine the political, religious, and moral justification for the

⁴⁸ Kewes, 'History Plays and the Royal Succession', p. 503.

⁴⁹ Kewes, 'History Plays and the Royal Succession', p. 503.

⁵⁰ Kewes, 'History Plays and the Royal Succession', p. 494.

Elizabethan state and/or the very concept of monarchy. The grounds for such thinking lie in the divergent perspectives of literary and historical studies, as illustrated by readings of topical plays that were performed at court and the Inns of Court during the early years of Elizabeth's reign. From a historical perspective, such drama was designed primarily to push certain agendas relating (most often) to the need for further reform and to the queen's marriage and the consequent settling of the succession. Lasting approximately to the end of the 1560s, the early succession crisis has been discussed by many scholars – from Mortimer Levine (1966) to Stephen Alford (1998) to Doran and Kewes (2014) – and plays such as *Gorboduc* are understood to have played an important part in driving home the message to the queen and her advisors.⁵¹

In literary studies, by comparison, Dermot Cavanagh has challenged the correctness of acutely political readings. Discussing *Gorboduc*, he extends Altman's notion of interrogative drama – whereby the play 'encourages multiple ways of seeing the issue at stake so that the full complexity of the problem is grasped rather than the solution to it' – to the point where the play's purpose is to highlight the unsolvable nature of the succession issue: Cavanagh claims that 'as successive scenes and speeches qualify and counter each other, the argument of the play becomes more unfathomable', meaning that 'no one can find a solution that will resolve the tragic crisis'.⁵² By focusing on the play's literary dynamics (i.e. its appeal to the emotions, and the capacity for drama to argue *in utramque partem*), this reading tends to overlook the historical context of *Gorboduc*'s

⁵¹ Mortimer Levine, *The Early Elizabethan Succession Question, 1558-1568* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966); Stephen Alford, *The Early Elizabethan Polity: William Cecil and the British Succession Crisis, 1558-1569* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Doran and Kewes, 'The Earlier Elizabethan Succession Question Revisited', in *Doubtful and Dangerous: The Question of Succession in Late Elizabethan England*, ed. by Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), pp. 20-44. For drama's involvement, see: Axton, *Queen's Two Bodies*; Lisa Hopkins, *Drama and the Succession to the Crown, 1561-1633* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Kewes, *This Great Matter of Succession: Drama, History, and Elizabethan Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). Hopkins' work – despite the date range in the title – is concerned primarily with later drama, though *Tamburlaine* is compared with *Gorboduc* on pp. 24-26.

⁵² Dermot Cavanagh, 'Political Tragedy in the 1560s: *Cambises* and *Gorboduc*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature, 1485-1603*, ed. by Mike Pincombe and Cathy Shrank (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 494, 501.

composition and performance, which would indicate that a practical solution was both recognized and desired: the play was sponsored by a supporter of the Suffolk claim in favour of Lady Catherine Grey; it contains anti-Scottish sentiments that tally with opposition to Mary Queen of Scots; and its second performance was at Whitehall, with Elizabeth present, in January 1562.⁵³

This critical impasse highlights a crucial difference in the formal and contextual bases for interpretation. In Marlowe's case, the difference is especially important because it helps to explain how the playwright's ambiguity – a quality that is celebrated in the majority of Marlowe scholarship – can sometimes cloud the historical picture. Indeed, it can do so in ways that make disagreements about *Gorboduc* appear trivial: in Cavanagh's view, *Gorboduc's* political message is merely complicated by the play's multi-sidedness; in Marlowe criticism, by contrast, multi-sidedness is taken to be the whole point, revealing the playwright's subversive intentions in the refusal of consensus.⁵⁴

The challenge, then, is to find an approach that can account for the contextual as well as dramaturgical factors that produce the political meaning of Marlowe's plays. First, it is important not to view the Elizabethan state monolithically. Indeed, the very idea of a unified Elizabethan 'state' – much like the abstract concepts of 'power' and 'authority' employed by New Historicists and Cultural Materialists, and implicit to the republican reading of Hadfield and Cheney – presupposes a stable historical background that is less true than might be convenient for scholars whose primary interest lies in the literature. At the same time, the historical analysis of a play such as *The Massacre at Paris* should account for its subtle shifts in characterization and moral balance; Andrew Pettegree, for instance, suggests misleadingly that 'literary specialists tend to dismiss the play because it is so bad'.⁵⁵ On this point, as Blair Worden (1996) argues in his classic interdisciplinary

⁵³ Hopkins, pp. 11-12; Doran and Kewes, 'The Earlier Elizabethan Succession Question', pp. 23-24.

⁵⁴ For the classic statement, see: Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Ch. 5.

⁵⁵ Andrew Pettegree, *Europe in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 211.

study of Sir Philip Sidney, there is much that scholars from history and English can learn from one another:

The approaches of literary critics to the Elizabethan political scene, especially when indebted to literary theory and its related abstractions, sometimes strike historians as fanciful or anachronistic. The approaches of historians to the same subject, especially those which anatomise parliamentary procedures or patterns of political allegiance, sometimes strike literary critics as narrow or antiquarian. There is, I believe, a middle way.⁵⁶

In the pursuit of this middle way, research has benefited from several related developments, each of which highlights the interconnectedness of literature and history. First, there was the ‘linguistic turn’ that drew new attention to the textual qualities of political thought – that is, the importance of language and the encapsulation of ideas in ‘texts’ – as embodied in the work of J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner in the 1970s.⁵⁷ Second, as R. Malcolm Smuts explains, there was the revisionist methodology popularized by Conrad Russell, John Morrill, and Kevin Sharpe in the late 1980s and 1990s which led to an increased focus on ‘precisely defined periods and contexts’ at the expense of ‘large-scale historical paradigms’ (Marxist, Whig, and so on) – a shift that complemented the earlier focus on language in attending to the fine grain of historical details that drove events and ways of thinking.⁵⁸

Third, as George Southcombe explains, there has also been a ‘historical turn’ that has seen scholars from literary studies as well as history ‘produce readings of texts that [are] firmly grounded in specific historical contexts’ – a development that is illustrated by the research of Nigel Smith, Worden, and David Norbrook, and that shows its

⁵⁶ Worden, *The Sound of Virtue: Philip Sidney’s Arcadia and Elizabethan Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. xxi.

⁵⁷ J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

⁵⁸ R. Malcolm Smuts, ‘Introduction: Reflections on Interdisciplinary Frontiers’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Age of Shakespeare*, ed. by R. Malcolm Smuts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). I am grateful to Professor Smuts for allowing me to see an advance copy of this chapter. Also on revisionism, see: Lori Anne Ferrell (ed.), *Revisiting Revisionism*, special issue of *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 78:4 (2015).

interdisciplinary nature in the divergent departmental origins of its lead practitioners.⁵⁹ Amongst others, Lake has drawn attention to the highly contingent nature of political thought and argument, as can be seen from the wholesale reapplication of certain accusations from one target to the next: he details, for instance, how *'Leicester's Commonwealth* [1584] reproduced precisely the same account of the Elizabethan regime as that contained in [*The Treatise of Treasons*, 1572], only now with Leicester not Cecil as the villain of the piece'.⁶⁰ As we shall see, Marlowe turned the symmetry and reapplications of these polemical positions to his own creative purposes, but taken by themselves, the similarity of *Leicester's Commonwealth* and *The Treatise of Treasons* should not be treated as evidence of a static mindset but of the constant need for political arguments to be refashioned and reframed as new circumstances dictated.

Together, these various developments point to the need for an understanding of political writing as a genre that is strongly rooted in the needs and concerns of the moment, and since literary texts arose out of the same circumstances – and were, in any case, often political documents themselves and/or the work of writers with political 'day jobs' – it is incumbent on English scholars to approach the objects of their studies accordingly, as the examples cited above (in footnote 30) show can be possible.⁶¹ These studies of early modern drama show that it is possible to gain a greater understanding of a play's political meaning when the subtleties and variation in the contextual matter (e.g. historical documents, shifts in policy, the rise and fall of individuals' influence) are subject to the same careful analysis that is given as a matter of course to the celebrated literary

⁵⁹ George Southcombe, 'Reading Early Modern Literature Historically', *Literature Compass*, 7:10 (2010), 954-64 (p. 960). See: Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Worden, *The Sound of Virtue*; David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁶⁰ Lake, "The Monarchical Republic of Elizabeth I", p. 103; also see: Lake, "The politics of "popularity" and the public sphere: the "Monarchical Republic" of Elizabeth I defends itself", in *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, ed. by Peter Lake and Steven Pincus (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 59-94.

⁶¹ For a discussion of the challenges and rewards of a contextual approach to literary study, see the Introduction to Ann Baynes Coiro and Thomas Fulton (eds), *Rethinking Historicism from Shakespeare to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

text. To appreciate how drama was able to respond and comment on the society, it is also important to remember that when writing about monarchs and the political power brokering of the court, playwrights were not concerned so much with theory as with the actions of specific personalities in the here-and-now – including the person wearing the crown. As Christopher Morris argued over half a century ago, Elizabethans ‘talked more of the monarch than of the monarchy, more of the sovereign than of sovereignty’.⁶²

Throughout this thesis, accordingly, I shall refer to numerous instances where political thought was centred on precise situations and personalities rather than abstract theory, but the point can be supported here with three examples that demonstrate the short-termism of the arguments that were made by writers of all persuasions and with vastly different agendas. First, *Persons’ Conference* shows how historical examples were used to bolster the position of the arguer, but also how the position that was held could alter dramatically as circumstances changed. Having previously supported the hereditary claim of Mary Queen of Scots, *Persons* uses examples drawn from English chronicle history – John, Henry III, Edward II, Henry VI, and Richard II – to illustrate the point that ‘lawful Princes have oftentimes by their commonwealths been lawfully deposed for misgovernment’; from here it is only a short leap to the claim that since ‘God hath allowed and assisted the [removal of] kings lawfully set in possession, then much more hath the said commonwealth power and authority to alter the succession of such as do but yet pretend to that dignity’.⁶³ The need to justify the claim of the Spanish Infanta thus led to a wholesale reversal of constitutional principle.

Second, in the conclusion to Smith’s *De Republica Anglorum*, we find that notions of a theoretically ideal government – such as might be instituted were Englishmen to start again with a blank slate – are given short shrift:

⁶² Christopher Morris, *Political Thought in England: Tyndale to Hooker* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 1-2.

⁶³ Robert Persons, *A Conference about the Next Succession* (Antwerp: 1594/5), pp. 62-3.

I have [...] set before your eyes the principal points [...] not in that sort as Plato made his commonwealth, or Xenophon his kingdom of Persia, nor as Sir Thomas More his *Utopia* feigned commonwealths, such as never was nor never shall be, vain imaginations, fantasies of philosophers to occupy the time and to exercise their wits; but so as England standeth and is governed at this day the 28th March Anno 1565, in the seventh year of the reign and administration thereof by the most virtuous and noble Queen Elizabeth, daughter to King Henry the Eighth, and in the one and [fiftieth] year or mine age, when I was ambassador for her majesty in the court of France, the sceptre whereof at that time the noble prince and of great hope Charles Maximilian [Charles IX] did hold, having then reigned four years.⁶⁴

In dating his account so solidly to 1565, and by dismissing the ‘vain imaginations’ of others – Plato’s *Republic*, Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*, and Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* – Smith makes clear that his description is grounded in reality, the implication being that constructed ‘fantasies’ are a waste of time. While Persons makes a show of describing how things ought to be, Smith disregards the whole exercise.

Third, there is a clear streak of pragmatism to the ‘Monarchomach’ and Huguenot resistance theories that came, respectively, out of Scotland in the wake of Mary Queen of Scots’ deposition (1567) and from France during the Wars of Religion: writers such as Buchanan, in *De Iure Regni apud Scotos*, were not concerned with defining perfect governmental structures but with solving the immediate problems that faced them. In *De Iure Regni*, for instance, Buchanan reminds his interlocutor – a fictionalized version of Thomas Maitland – that they live in an imperfect world and must plan accordingly:

Still less did I think I should bring before you the Stoic king such as Seneca describes in his *Thyestes*, not so much because his portrait of the true king is not perfect as because that model of a good prince can be more readily imagined in the mind than hoped for some day. (pp. 39-41)

It is clear from this statement that Buchanan’s proposals for limited monarchy were not based on abstract ideals but responded to the specific circumstances of Scotland in the 1560s. Like Persons and Smith – two men of vastly different persuasions – Buchanan, too, was principally concerned with the challenges of the moment, *pace* literary scholars who read his work as a template of republican thinking for the following century.

⁶⁴ Sir Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, ed. by Mary Dewar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 144.

As these three examples illustrate, the culture of political argument to which Marlowe responded was not driven by high-minded principles but the need to get things done – and this was a culture in which drama itself was implicated, most obviously in the ties of patronage that gave acting companies their status and part of their income.⁶⁵ Referring to Lake's concept of the 'public sphere' (derived from Jürgen Habermas), Smuts explains that 'the stage [...] both drew upon and contributed materially to an emerging public political discourse'.⁶⁶ Marlowe's plays may borrow the language of polemical argument and share many of its historical examples, but this does not make them passive; the plays were political interventions in their own right, though the precise nature of that intervention – not nearly as instructive as court drama on the topic of the queen's marriage – has often been obscured by the critical focus that is routinely given to Marlowe's characteristic ambiguity. Just as Cavanagh's reading of *Gorboduc* does not match precisely with historical accounts of its purpose in the 1560s court, there is often a critical disconnect between scholars' appreciation of Marlowe's literariness and of the reasons for his writing. The aim of the following chapters will be to account for both, and to do this it is vital that we attend to the specificity of Elizabethans' interest in monarchs as opposed to monarchy.

What was Marlowe's message, if he had one? Discussing Marlowe's engagement with the later succession crisis post-1587, Lisa Hopkins suggests that 'the principal interest of [Marlowe's] plays is in the question of succession in the abstract, that is, in the principles which govern it, rather than in any particular candidates'.⁶⁷ Certainly, unlike the tracts that circulated in support of specific claimants, Marlowe's plays – like the history plays that were based on *Holinshed* – do not necessarily draw a direct line between historical examples and the real-life candidates who were being lined up by various factions. Instead, the plays examine the relative merits of different constitutional

⁶⁵ Jones, *Governing by Virtue*, Ch. 10.

⁶⁶ Smuts, 'Introduction: Reflections on Interdisciplinary Frontiers'.

⁶⁷ Hopkins, p. 20.

arrangements, with elective modes of succession set against the claims of hereditary tradition and divine right. In this respect, Hopkins argues, Marlowe's drama reflects the fact that 'many commentators, especially those with legal training, were genuinely interested not only in *who* succeeded but in the question of on what *basis* they were doing so – not to mention the question of whether anyone ought to be succeeding to thrones at all'.⁶⁸

Setting aside the issue of proto-republicanism, this account of political discussion, and of the drama that it influenced, only pays attention to the surface level of argument, with the underlying motives left unexamined. Marlowe's plays deal in the 'abstract' insofar as they resist straightforward allegorical connections, but this does not mean that Marlowe was unconscious of how different constitutional positions were being used to bolster the claims of particular individuals – as we have seen was the case in Persons' *Conference*. Whilst ostensibly dealing in principles, succession arguments were uniformly tailored to the particular context of deciding which candidate would be the most favourable, usually in confessional terms but also with reference to personal qualities (as in allusions to James VI's inability to keep control of his court). In echoing the terms of this debate, and simply by writing plays that were open to 'application', Marlowe cannot be seen as operating independently from the cut-and-thrust of this fervent effort to decide exactly who would follow Elizabeth.

As the following chapters will argue, the same is true of how Marlowe's plays engage with a whole range of issues relating to monarchy. As well as exploring the question of Elizabeth's successor, the five plays that I focus upon demonstrate a clear interest in the specific languages of political discussion relating, amongst other things, to England's relationship with the Ottoman Empire, the undue influence of certain privy councillors, and the need for pragmatic solutions in defence of England and the Protestant cause. Marlowe's plays are deeply imbedded, then, in a discourse of monarchs more than

⁶⁸ Hopkins, p. 20.

monarchy, and for this reason we should avoid the temptation to infer abstract principles from the drama.

That said, Marlowe does at times question the workability of monarchical rule, not by analysing its theoretical justifications (as Hopkins implies) but by focusing on the experience of being a monarch under the particular stresses of the late sixteenth century. In succession tracts, anti-favourite polemic, resistance theories, and many other examples of political writing, the monarch was subject to a host of direct as well as indirect instructions about how to act. By playing out the logic of those instructions onstage, Marlowe's plays highlight the improbability that anyone would be willing or able to meet them, at least not whilst preserving some semblance of personal happiness – as illustrated most forcefully by the conflict between public duty and private desire that leads to the demise of Dido and Edward II. By focusing on the experience of being a monarch and not the theory of monarchy, the plays do not offer any (republican) alternatives to the *status quo*. Instead, they show things as they are, drawing out the implications of sixteenth-century political argument by showing how these arguments translate into reality. Monarchy was a 'fact of life', which Marlowe treated satirically and viewed with no small amount of pessimism.

Plays and Themes

In each of the five plays that I analyse, Marlowe examines the experience of the monarch and the nature of political argument. These topics are not addressed by Marlowe in abstraction, raising drama to the status of philosophy, but explored in the close context of current political affairs and the language that was used in public debate by those of all persuasions: Protestant, Puritan, and Catholic; those in power as well as those out of it; voices from England and from the continent. In keeping with the observation that Marlowe's plays should not be seen as stages in a preconceived literary 'career' (*pace* Cheney), each play (or plays) will be placed firmly within the moment of its first

appearance on the London stage.⁶⁹ Its political meaning will be understood to lie somewhere in the dialogic space between the playwright and the audience, with Marlowe's intentions and the audience's general knowledge of political affairs both being relevant to how a particular text might participate in the discourse of its period.

Broader claims about Marlowe's views on monarchy – as opposed to the experience of particular monarchs in particular circumstances – are raised throughout the course of the thesis, and are summarized in the conclusion. It should not be surprising that a single person expressed similar thoughts across a relatively short period, but this fact does not transform the whole of the Marlowe canon into a consistent body of ideas that can be described as 'Marlovian'. In any case, the aspiration of Marlowe's Tamburlaine – to 'reach the ripest fruit of all, / That perfect bliss and sole felicity, / The sweet fruition of an earthly crown' (Part One, 2.7.27-29) – contrasts sharply with the dying lament of Charles IX: 'I have deserv'd a scourge, I must confess' (*Massacre*, 13.9). That being said, the chronological arrangement of the chapters, from *Tamburlaine* in 1587 to *The Massacre at Paris* in 1593, is designed to reveal what general trends might be discerned in Marlowe's representation of monarchy.

In addition to the five plays under discussion, Marlowe was responsible for two more: *Doctor Faustus* (1588) and *The Jew of Malta* (1589). He was also a famous and controversial poet, whose near-complete translation of Ovid's *Amores* – published later as *All Ovid's Elegies* (after 1602) – so offended the Archbishop of Canterbury that he instructed copies of the first edition, from c. 1599, to be destroyed.⁷⁰ *Hero and Leander* was (possibly) unfinished at the time of Marlowe's death, and *Lucan's First Book* (pub. 1600) – a translation of the first book of Lucan's *Pharsalia* – addresses several themes that are

⁶⁹ Cheney, *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Cheney, *Marlowe's Republican Authorship*.

⁷⁰ Catherine Clifford and Martin Wiggins, 'A Chronology of Marlowe's Life and Works', in *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, ed. by Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. xv-xxvii (pp. xvi-xvii).

pertinent to my four case studies, including ambition, resistance theory, and the destructive horrors of civil war:⁷¹

Aye me, O what a world of land and sea
Might they have won whom civil broils have slain! (ll. 13-14)

Indeed, throughout Marlowe's works, there are many consistent thematic interests, as shown, for instance, by Summers' observation that each poem or play somehow explores 'questions of power' – and by Preedy's demonstration of how Marlowe repeatedly raises the topic of religious hypocrisy.⁷² However, in selecting only the plays that feature monarchs for protagonists – not governors, not statesmen, not scholars with an interest in magic – and in selecting Marlowe's plays, not his poetry, it becomes possible to discern a much more specific interest on Marlowe's part with taking topical arguments about *particular circumstances* involving *particular monarchs* and bringing them to life before a popular audience – an audience that would include many illiterates who would not have been able to access polemic directly.⁷³ When interpreted in this way, these plays do not simply explore abstract themes but react to – and exploit – the immediate concerns of their audience regarding the queen's conduct and security, and the strength of England's place in the world.

Chapter One looks at Marlowe's depiction of a 'puissant and mighty monarch' whose success cannot be explained or imitated. Recent accounts have read the *Tamburlaine* plays as a reflection upon the moral imperatives of Christian-Islamic conflict: should England side with Europe in the defence of Christendom, or support the Ottoman Empire to the disadvantage of her greatest Catholic adversary, Spain? By considering the plays alongside their principal source, George Whetstone's *The English Mirror* (1586), I show that Marlowe's interest lies rather in the unanswerable question of what makes Tamburlaine successful: are his victories the result of providence or statecraft, divine

⁷¹ The reception and political uses of Lucan in the period, see: Edward Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar: Responses to Lucan's Bellum Ciuile, ca. 1580-1650* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁷² Summers, pp. iii-iv.

⁷³ Kewes, 'Contemporary Europe in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Drama', p. 159.

protection or human talent? I argue that the specific focus on a Persian hero lends new relevance to the subject of Marlowe's ambiguity, suggesting that when we recognize how the effect of ambiguity in *Tamburlaine* derives from uncertainties aroused by the Near East, it becomes possible to reach a new understanding of the playwright's estimation of European monarchs. I show that Marlowe uses ideas of the Near East to place *Tamburlaine* always out of reach, the mysterious nature of his success making the character an impossible example to copy. With reference to some of the plays that sought to imitate *Tamburlaine*, including *Lochrine* (c. 1591) as well as Robert Greene's *Alphonsus, King of Aragon* (c. 1589) and *Selimus* (c. 1590), I conclude the chapter by showing that without their effect of ambiguity, Marlowe's doublet of plays would not make for such a compelling dramatic experience.

Chapter Two explores *Dido, Queen of Carthage* as Marlowe's response to the acute and deepening concern regarding England's security against Catholic conspiracy and Spanish invasion. In contrast to previous readings of the play as a straightforward allegory on the issue of the queen's marriage, with particular reference made to the unsuccessful courtship of Elizabeth by François, Duke of Anjou during 1579-81, I suggest that Marlowe was more concerned with events at the time he was writing. *Dido* does use many of the same stories and tropes that can be found in accounts of the Anjou match, as I demonstrate with reference to John Stubbs' *The Discovery of a Gaping Gulf* and William Gager's neo-Latin drama, *Dido* (1583). But those same stories and tropes were also used in 1587-88 as the Armada loomed. By reading *Dido* alongside Protestant and Catholic polemic from this later period – including Michael Renniger's *An Exhortation to True Love/A Treatise against Treasons* (1587) and Cardinal William Allen's *Admonition to the Nobility and People of England* (1588) – I show that Marlowe sought to complicate and adapt the partisan language of political debate (in particular, the metaphors of 'ships' and 'walls') in the interests of more ambivalent and ambiguous dramatic expression. I also argue that Marlowe's play shows it to be inevitable that monarchs will indulge their

personal inclinations at the expense of public duty. He does this by not focusing simply on the failings of Dido – or ‘Eliza’ (4.2.10) – but by drawing attention to the failings of several other royal figures: Aeneas, Iarbas, Priam, and Jupiter. In this respect, I argue, Marlowe shows some sympathy for his queen’s position.

Chapter Three looks at how Marlowe’s mediaeval history, *Edward II*, interrogates current Catholic polemic. In addition to the play’s interest in the dangers of royal favouritism, it has been argued that Marlowe uses the story of Edward II to reflect – and, crucially, to support – the accusations of conspiracy made against Elizabeth’s closest advisers by disaffected Catholic exiles. The main target of these attacks became Lord Burghley due to his role in drafting the 1591 proclamation ‘Establishing Commissions against Seminary Priests and Jesuits’. But whilst many of the accusations made against Burghley – in works such as Verstegan’s *A Declaration of the True Causes* (1592) – are mirrored by the confessional alignments presented in Marlowe’s play, *Edward II* does not demonstrate a Catholic bias. Instead, I show that Marlowe’s dramatic technique draws attention to the formulaic strategies of polemical writing, with Burghley just the latest of many victims on both sides of the confessional divide. This is crucial to the meaning of Marlowe’s representation of monarchy because it shows that the peers oppose Edward for reasons that do not relate exclusively or even primarily to ‘England’s good’ but the satisfaction of their own self-interest. I thus argue that Marlowe presents Edward’s demise as the inevitable consequence of a situation where the king will always be vulnerable to the wrathful dissatisfaction of one faction or another, and subject to the strategically motivated definitions of kingship they employ. This reading is substantiated with reference to the enduring influence of Scottish ‘Monarchomach’ theories of tyrannicide, most notably Buchanan’s *De Iure Regni*.

Chapter Four examines *The Massacre at Paris* and reflects upon Marlowe’s interest in the moral and practical issues surrounding contemporary theories of statecraft. Following its critical rehabilitation in the 1980s, Marlowe’s last play has been seen as an

ambiguous text designed to highlight the equivalence between Protestant and Catholic acts of atrocity. This reading rests, however, on the assumption that evil characters are the only ones to employ unsavoury methods – that Machiavellianism is the only alternative to the traditional idea of princely virtue. But this fails to account for the advent of a more open acknowledgement of Reason of State as the most effective method for ruling. By reading the play alongside Justus Lipsius' *Politicorum sive Civilis Doctrinae Libri Sex* (1589) – one of the first works to advance what was already, in the words of Giovanni Botero, a 'constant subject of discussion' – I show that *The Massacre* explores the circumstances that were thought to excuse a monarch for selecting expedient action at the expense of moral standing.⁷⁴ I further argue that in writing the play, Marlowe spoke to the more immediate concern of how Elizabeth might choose to intervene in the French Wars of Religion. By comparing the balance of *The Massacre's* sympathies with the complimentary language used to describe Henri IV during the 1593 Parliament, I suggest that *The Massacre* should be counted as part of the campaign to promote assistance for the French king in the fight against the Catholic League. I suggest that whilst the nature of this intervention may diminish Marlowe's reputation for dissidence – since lending support to Lord Burghley was hardly a radical position to take – the play's topicality still demonstrates its writer's willingness to tackle the most difficult questions.

Dating Marlowe's Plays

If we are to discern the topical resonance of Marlowe's plays, it is important, naturally, that our readings should be based on sound dating. Discussing an interpretation offered by Margo Hendricks – according to which *Dido, Queen of Carthage* was composed in response to the Spanish Armada – Martin Wiggins notes that 'the dating is merely asserted [by Hendricks] in order to facilitate a reading of the play as a political allegory. That is

⁷⁴ Giovanni Botero, *The Reason of State*, trans. by P.J. Waley and D.P. Waley (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), p. xiii. Subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

surely doing things the wrong way round'.⁷⁵ (Hendricks dates the play to 'between 1588 and 1592'.⁷⁶) As Wiggins indicates, topical interpretations should not precede or sway how we assess when plays were likely written and performed – and, indeed, interpreting the topical meaning of a play where the date is uncertain must be undertaken with considerable caution.

Fortunately, there is no great dispute when it comes to dating *Tamburlaine, Parts One and Two* (1587), *Edward II* (1592), and *The Massacre at Paris* (1593). The timescale for the two parts of *Tamburlaine* is bounded, at the earliest, by Marlowe's move to London in the spring of 1587 and, at the latest, by audience testimony from November 1587 that records a fatal mishap that occurred in what was likely a performance of Part Two.⁷⁷ *Edward II* was written for the Earl of Pembroke's Men, a company that existed from 1591, and its date of composition is pushed into the following year by evidence of textual borrowings (from Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays and George Peele's script for the Lord Mayor's pageant) and by Marlowe's arrest in Flushing that places him abroad in the winter of 1591-92.⁷⁸ *The Massacre at Paris*, Marlowe's final play, is the easiest of all to date: it appears in Philip Henslowe's diary with the earliest performance recorded in late January 1593 (Henslowe records performances from February 1592).⁷⁹

In the case of *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, however, there is far less agreement about the probable date of composition and first performance. Suggestions range from 1584 to 1593, with the majority of scholars describing *Dido* as Marlowe's earliest play (c. 1584-85) and many dismissing the putative contribution of Thomas Nashe.⁸⁰ But these views have

⁷⁵ Wiggins, 'When Did Marlowe Write *Dido, Queen of Carthage*?', *Review of English Studies*, 59:241 (2008), 521-41 (p. 522).

⁷⁶ Margo Hendricks, 'Managing the Barbarian: *Dido, Queen of Carthage*', *Renaissance Drama*, 23 (1992), 165-88 (p. 167).

⁷⁷ Wiggins, 'Marlowe's Chronology and Canon', in *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, ed. by Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 7-14 (pp. 8-9); Cunningham (ed.), *Tamburlaine*, pp. 22-23.

⁷⁸ Wiggins, 'Marlowe's Chronology and Canon', pp. 9-10; Forker (ed.), *Edward II*, pp. 14-17.

⁷⁹ Wiggins, 'Marlowe's Chronology and Canon', p. 9; Oliver (ed.), *Dido*, p. xlix.

⁸⁰ Wiggins, 'When Did Marlowe Write *Dido, Queen of Carthage*?', pp. 522-23. Illustrating the tendency to place *Dido* earliest in the Marlowe canon, the editors of *Christopher Marlowe at 450*

been challenged by Wiggins, who dates the play to 1588 and concludes that it was written in collaboration with Nashe, as indicated by the 1594 title page, and performed by the Children of the Chapel Royal somewhere in London. Wiggins' rationale can be summarized thus:

(1) *Dido* could not have been performed at Cambridge because the university prohibited the production of plays in English from the 1570s to the late 1590s.⁸¹

(2) Several moments in *Dido* call for child actors. University neo-Latin plays that required child *characters* avoided the inclusion of dramatic scenarios that would draw attention to the physical size of the undergraduates performing. The 'dandling' of Ganymede on Jupiter's knee (1.1.0SD) and Dido's instruction to Cupid (disguised as Ascanius) to 'sit in my lap' (3.1.25) would suggest that child actors were available.⁸²

(3) Even without original stage directions, the deaths of Dido (5.1.312), Iarbas (5.1.318), and Anna (5.1.328) can be seen to require some kind of trapdoor, otherwise the actors would have to remain onstage or else return to life at the play's conclusion. This supports the hypothesis that *Dido* was at least written with a permanent theatre in mind – presumably one that Marlowe and Nashe knew well. Some adaptation would have been required for the play to go on tour, as the Children of the Chapel Royal are known to have done in 1587 (East Anglia, including Ipswich and Norwich), 1590 (the south, from Kent to Dorset), and 1591 (the midlands, including Leicester).⁸³

(4) *Dido* bears a number of similarities with *The Wars of Cyrus*, primarily in terms of stage requirements (a discovery space and trapdoor) but also textual overlap. Contrary to arguments that ascribe *Cyrus* to Richard Farrant, manager of the Children of the Chapel

explain that chapters are arranged 'chronologically', with Ruth Lunney's piece on *Dido* appearing as Chapter One (Sara Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan, 'Introduction', pp. 1-10 (p. 2)). The suggestion that *Dido* was *not* Marlowe's earliest play can be found in Hendricks (quoted above) and Bevington, 'Marlowe's Plays in Performance: A Brief History', in *Christopher Marlowe at 450*, ed. by Sara Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 257-79 (p. 257). Bevington posits 'any time between 1587 and 1593'.

⁸¹ Wiggins, 'When Did Marlowe Write *Dido, Queen of Carthage?*', p. 530.

⁸² Wiggins, 'When Did Marlowe Write *Dido, Queen of Carthage?*', p. 527.

⁸³ Wiggins, 'When Did Marlowe Write *Dido, Queen of Carthage?*', pp. 533, 538-9.

Royal until his death in 1580, Wiggins shows that *Cyrus* was written later to capitalize on the popularity of *Tamburlaine*, meaning it must be the work of another writer. It is speculated that ‘the Children of the Chapel [...] attempted to compete with their adult rivals, and climbed onto the *Tamburlaine* bandwagon. One response was to commission scripts like *The Wars of Cyrus* which accommodated Marlowe’s new style to the typical themes, strengths, and scope of choirboy theatre’; another was to ‘[head-hunt] the playwright who had spearheaded the innovation’, thus leading to *Dido*.⁸⁴

There is one flaw in Wiggins’ logic. Of *Cyrus* and *Dido*, he admits that ‘it is impossible to say for certain which of the two plays was the earlier’.⁸⁵ It might be argued, therefore, that proof that *Cyrus* followed *Tamburlaine* does not necessarily stand as evidence that *Dido* did as well. But, on the basis that an English play could not have been performed at Cambridge, and that *Dido*’s dramaturgy seems to call for a permanent theatre setting, it is safe to conclude that the play was written primarily for a London performance. A date of 1588 is also reasonable when the correspondences between *Dido* and *Cyrus* – the fact of their similar staging requirements, and these being the only extant plays to use the adjective ‘Sidonian’ (1.1.213 in *Dido*; l. 74 in *Cyrus*) – are placed alongside the thematic development of Marlowe’s drama.⁸⁶ As Wiggins explains, *Dido* would seem to continue a ‘thematic trail’ that leads from *Tamburlaine* to *Doctor Faustus* (1588); in writing *Dido*, it is claimed that ‘they [Marlowe and Nashe] dealt with something [...] that was on Marlowe’s mind at the time, the tension between human wishes and divine will which is at the heart of *Doctor Faustus*’.⁸⁷ For these reasons, I support a tentative dating of 1588.

Then there is the question of authorship. For many scholars, the appearance of Nashe’s name in a smaller font size on the 1594 title page points to a lesser role, perhaps

⁸⁴ Wiggins, ‘When Did Marlowe Write *Dido, Queen of Carthage?*’, p. 541.

⁸⁵ Wiggins, ‘When Did Marlowe Write *Dido, Queen of Carthage?*’, p. 540.

⁸⁶ Wiggins, ‘When Did Marlowe Write *Dido, Queen of Carthage?*’, pp. 539-40.

⁸⁷ Wiggins, ‘When Did Marlowe Write *Dido, Queen of Carthage?*’, p. 541.

even relegating Nashe to the status of a 'literary executor' who tidied up the work for publication after Marlowe's death; A.L. Rowse, for instance, writes that 'Nashe was always bumptious, and not ashamed to have his name connected with Marlowe's; I do not suppose that its minimal appearance on the title-page indicates more than a subsidiary part in the publication'.⁸⁸ Yet, as Wiggins recognizes, the font size is 'a design feature, not a declaration of status', which fits – along with the alternation of roman and italic – with the wider aesthetic scheme of the page.⁸⁹ There is also a telling coincidence in *The Wars of Cyrus* and *Dido* both appearing in print in the same year, which Wiggins cites as evidence of the Children of the Chapel Royal disbanding around that time. What Wiggins fails to notice is that this circumstance provides another reason to argue for Nashe's involvement as *author* as opposed to *editor*, since the company's demise – and the subsequent sale of its works – would suggest that Marlowe's death did not prompt the publication as thought.

On what grounds, then, can the play be attributed solely to Marlowe? Logometric analysis (looking at the frequency of the words *and*, *but*, *I*, *no*, and *not*) by Thomas Merriam suggests that Marlowe wrote the earlier part of the play, Nashe the latter; analysis of vocabulary, classical allusion, and spelling by H.J. Oliver leaves the question open; analysis by Hugh Craig and Marcus Dahl – using 'computational stylistics' in unpublished research seen by Ruth Lunney – suggests that Marlowe wrote the play by himself.⁹⁰ As shown by these contradictory findings, no definitive verdict has been reached on the extent of Nashe's contribution – though it might be wondered whether or not the play's co-authorship would even be under question were it not for the impressions wrongly taken from the 1594 title page. Without any clear means to distinguish the voice of Marlowe from that of Nashe, I shall thus follow Oliver's lead in using the name Marlowe

⁸⁸ Roma Gill, quoted in Wiggins, 'When Did Marlowe Write *Dido, Queen of Carthage?*', p. 525; A.L. Rowse, quoted in Thomas Merriam, 'Marlowe and Nashe in *Dido Queen of Carthage*', *Notes and Queries*, 245 (2000), 425-28 (p. 425).

⁸⁹ Wiggins, 'When Did Marlowe Write *Dido, Queen of Carthage?*', p. 525.

⁹⁰ Wiggins, 'When Did Marlowe Write *Dido, Queen of Carthage?*', p. 526; Merriam, 'Marlowe and Nashe'; Oliver (ed.), *Dido*, pp. xxii-xxv; Ruth Lunney, 'Dido, Queen of Carthage', in *Christopher Marlowe at 450*, ed. by Sara Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 13-49 (p. 16).

as ‘a kind of shorthand for “the author or authors of the play, whoever he or they may have been”’.⁹¹ That said, Chapter Two will draw attention to one aspect where the possibility of co-authorship may carry some significance for how we understand Marlowe’s interest in representing monarchy; this relates to early modern playwrights’ tendency to avoid the issue of female monarchy – as Kewes observes particularly in drama of the 1560s and 70s – and the fact that Marlowe’s plays otherwise focus their engagement with topical issues on male monarchs.⁹²

With respect to male monarchs, my four case studies begin with the most conspicuous example of *virtù* in any of Marlowe’s works. As we shall see, however, for all the thrill of Tamburlaine’s exploits as the ‘puissant and mighty monarch’, the two *Tamburlaine* plays set a precedent for Marlowe’s repeatedly bleak assessment of monarchies closer to home.

⁹¹ Oliver (ed.), *Dido*, p. xxv.

⁹² Kewes, “‘Ierusalem thou dydst promise to buylde vp”.

Chapter One

Tamburlaine: Ambiguity and the Near Eastern Hero

The two parts of *Tamburlaine* (written and performed in 1587) were published for the first time in 1590. The title page describes the upward trajectory of the plays' protagonist: originally 'a Scythian shepherd', we are told that Tamburlaine, as a result of 'his rare and wonderful conquests, became a most puissant and mighty monarch'.¹ So far, so good: the words 'rare', 'wonderful', 'puissant', and 'mighty' attest to the awesome nature of this self-made monarch whose 'martial acts' – to quote from one of Marlowe's main sources – rival those of 'the illustrious [...] Romans and Grecians'.² But the title page goes on to mention that 'for his tyranny, and terror in war', Tamburlaine 'was termed, the Scourge of God'. In the period, this label served an important conceptual function: it brought the horrifying, faith-shaking triumphs of dreadful opponents within the framework of providence.³ The emphasis here is not so much on what Tamburlaine has achieved through his own volition as on the sinfulness of those who deserve the 'tyranny' and 'terror' of God's punishment. Having been presented initially as a symbol of exceptional human power – a perspective on Tamburlaine that is typified elsewhere by the printer's admiring reference to 'so great a conqueror and so mighty a monarch' (p. 111) – in this view, as 'the Scourge of God', Marlowe's protagonist is deprived of agency to become the vehicle of God's hand in history. The title page introduces an opposition that leaves the reader uncertain about whether the reasons for Tamburlaine's success are human or divine.

¹ [Christopher Marlowe], *Tamburlaine the Great* (London: Richard Jones, 1590), sig. A1^r. The 1590 title page is reproduced in Cunningham (ed.), p. ii.

² George Whetstone, *The English Mirror* (London: G. Seton, 1586), p. 79. Subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

³ On the currency of providential beliefs in the period, see: Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

In this chapter, I am concerned with how the two parts of *Tamburlaine* hold these rival perspectives in suspension. My suggestion is that the dual effect derives in part from sixteenth-century ideas about the Near East – the area of western Asia, just beyond the fringes of Europe, encompassing the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Persia. Recognizing that the plays' ambiguity springs from uncertainties about their subject matter contributes to our understanding of early modern perceptions of the Near East, but it also improves our understanding of Marlowe's attitude to monarchy and the hope that European monarchs might match the example of their Near Eastern allies and rivals. Exploring the ways that Marlowe uses the Near East to reflect on monarchies closer to home, I will discuss the plays alongside their principal source text: George Whetstone's *The English Mirror* (1586). Whetstone draws his account of Timur (or 'Tamburlaine') from a French translation of a Spanish history. This sequence of histories in Spanish, French, and English – there is also a Latin translation of the Spanish – highlights the extent of Europeans' interest in the subject of the Near East, but the importance of this interest to the meaning of *Tamburlaine* has only been recognized in the past fifteen or so years.⁴

Most recent is Jane Grogan's work on the relationship between *Tamburlaine* and the subject of 'intra-Islamic conflict and schism'.⁵ Encouraging us to consider the religious dimension of the Ottoman-Safavid War (1578-90), Grogan suggests that 'Marlowe enlists latent domestic sympathies [...] to build on certain prevailing connections between Protestant England and Shi'a Persia, connections that might suggest Persia as the more

⁴ Jonathan Burton, 'Anglo-Ottoman Relations and the Image of the Turk in *Tamburlaine*', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 30:1 (2000), 125-56; Richmond Barbour, *Before Orientalism: London's Theatre of the East, 1576-1626* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 41-56; Matthew Dimmock, *New Turkes: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 135-61; Stephan Schmuck, 'From Sermon to Play: Literary Representations of "Turks" in Renaissance England 1550-1625', *Literature Compass*, 2 (2006), 1-20 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2006.00156.x>> [accessed 1 January 2013]; Jane Grogan, "'A warre ... commodious': Dramatizing Islamic Schism in and after *Tamburlaine*", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 54:1 (2012), 45-78. For a broader analysis of early modern representations of Persia, see: Grogan, *The Persian Empire in English Renaissance Writing, 1549-1622* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). On Marlowe's sources, see: Cunningham (ed.), pp. 9-20; Vivien Thomas and William Tydeman (eds), *Christopher Marlowe: The Plays and their Sources* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 69-168.

⁵ Grogan, "'A warre ... commodious'", p. 46.

logical and congenial trading partner, and the Persian model of empire as an alternative exemplar to the Ottoman one'.⁶ This chapter observes, however, that a different meaning emerges when we consider how ideas about the Near East influenced Marlowe at the level of dramaturgy. Doubtless, the plays are more sympathetic to the Persian Empire than they are to the Ottoman Empire. But this does not equate to a straightforward recommendation of Persia as a new ally for England. Nor does it make Tamburlaine a straightforward model for Christian monarchs to imitate.

Instead, when we look to the 1590 title page as an early reading of *Tamburlaine* – the wording is unlikely to be Marlowe's – we discover a deep uncertainty about the causes and meaning of the hero's 'rare and wonderful conquests'. This uncertainty suggests that Marlowe did not try to shift perceptions, and thereby influence English foreign policy, but exploited the complex questions that were raised by the Near East in the service of compelling drama. Displaying for the first time the bleak and satirical view that would characterize his later work, the playwright does not offer any practical advice: far from promoting a new alliance with Persia or a nascent English imperialism, the victories of Tamburlaine against the Ottoman 'Turk' only compound the sense – created by references to the Siege of Constantinople (1402) – that Europe is defenceless against the threat of Islamic military might. In this regard, we might say that *Tamburlaine* transforms the 'tragic glass' from a device aimed at instruction to one of hopeless recognition (Part One, Prologue, l. 7). Likewise, in terms of the example that is set by Tamburlaine's leadership, there is little advice to be taken: Tamburlaine is presented as a 'puissant and mighty monarch' but since the reasons for his success remain unclear, it is difficult to see how anyone in Europe might match his 'wonderful' accomplishments.

⁶ Grogan, "A warre ... commodious", p. 59.

Representing the Near East

Contemporary perceptions of the Near East influenced the dramaturgy of *Tamburlaine* in several important ways. As well as lending a high degree of topical relevance to the drama, the ideas attached to Marlowe's subject matter contributed to the effect of ambiguity – or 'wonder' – that is recognized as the plays' distinguishing feature and the defining theatrical mode of their author. Questions about the place of Islamic conquests within the Christian scheme of history are thus intertwined with those about the nature of Marlowe's originality. In what follows, I shall draw together two important strands of Marlowe criticism. First, I will engage with the recent accounts that read Marlowe's plays in the light of contemporary responses to Islam, the Ottoman Empire, and the Persian Empire. Less straightforward than a simple case of the West interpreting the East along the lines of Edward W. Saïd's *Orientalism* (1978), these responses were sometimes English in character, sometimes European, sometimes Protestant and sometimes Catholic.⁷ But given the strength of existing work in this field, I do not propose a new account of East-West relations. Nor do I claim to be the first to argue that reading the *Tamburlaine* plays for their topical meaning requires us to appreciate how their audience (and their author) might have perceived the Near East. What I suggest is that contemporary ideas about the meaning of Islamic conquests were formative in the development of Marlowe's distinctive *literary* style, and that recognizing the influence of the Near East at the level of dramaturgy is essential to our understanding of *Tamburlaine's* attitude to monarchs in Europe.

To support this argument, I turn to the long critical tradition concerned with the subject of the playwright's originality. In this second strand of scholarship I include the influential work on ambiguity by Eugene M. Waith (1962) and Joel B. Altman (1978); my

⁷ Edward W. Saïd, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978). Revisionist studies of East-West relations in the early modern period include: Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Daniel J. Vitkus, 'Early Modern Orientalism: Representations of Islam in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe', in *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other*, ed. by David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 207-30.

aim is to show that the dramatic effects they describe are derived in part from the context of East-West relations.⁸ When we recognize this influence upon Marlowe's style, it becomes easier to understand what makes *Tamburlaine* function as a compelling dramatic experience – as the evidence of the plays' early reception suggests they did.⁹ But, crucially, it can also tell us something about Marlowe's purposes in presenting a new kind of hero on the English stage: does *Tamburlaine* represent the ideal leader or challenge the moral certainties of Christendom? What do his victories say about the strength of contemporary monarchs in Europe? These are just some of the questions that are raised by *Tamburlaine*. But before trying to answer them, it is necessary for us to consider how Europeans saw the Near East in the latter part of the sixteenth century.

It is often assumed that Marlowe cannot be concerned with Persian history for its own sake – that the plays must be an allegory of England's military endeavours against 'Turkish' Spain or else something to do with England's 'need for heroes'.¹⁰ For instance, though seeming to situate *Tamburlaine* within the context of East-West relations, Emily Bartels' reading reduces the Near East to a landscape of 'otherness' that defines England's place in the world. Bartels observes astutely that 'Marlowe builds *Tamburlaine*'s characterization upon a series of inconsistent and contradictory impressions like those characterizing Orientalist discourse'; for Bartels, the contradictoriness of English attitudes towards the Ottoman Empire – which rendered the 'Turk' as both enemy and ally – is

⁸ Eugene M. Waith, *The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962); Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind*. On the same subject, see: Christopher G. Fanta, *Marlowe's 'Agonists': An Approach to the Ambiguity of his Plays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970); Lawrence Danson, 'Marlowe: The Questioner', *English Literary Renaissance*, 12 (1982), 183-205; Sara Munson Deats, 'Marlowe's Interrogative Drama: *Dido*, *Tamburlaine*, *Doctor Faustus*, and *Edward II*', in *Marlowe's Empery: Expanding His Critical Contexts*, ed. by Sara Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), pp. 107-30.

⁹ Richard Levin, 'The Contemporary Perception of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England: An Annual Gathering of Research, Criticism, and Reviews*, 1 (1984), 51-70.

¹⁰ Simon Shepherd, *Marlowe and the Politics of Elizabethan Theatre* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), pp. 142-52 (p. 150). See also: Emily C. Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation, and Marlowe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 53-81; Richard Wilson, 'Visible Bullets: *Tamburlaine the Great* and *Ivan the Terrible*', in *Christopher Marlowe and English Renaissance Culture*, ed. by Darryll Grantley and Peter Roberts (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), pp. 51-69.

reflected in the manner that Marlowe 'refuses to determine whether his Eastern ruler is a barbarous villain or an awe-inspiring hero'.¹¹ But the relevance of 'Orientalist discourse', in Marlowe's plays and more generally, is thought to centre back on English empire-building: in Bartels' view, the barbarous and civilized images of the 'Turk' were alike insofar as they both served to initiate English aspirations to rival – 'to suppress or surpass' – the Ottomans' 'seemingly invulnerable campaign'.¹² Having claimed that 'Turkish imperialism provided a crucial impetus for England's own', Bartels thus presents the two parts of *Tamburlaine* as being primarily about England.¹³

For Richard Wilson, Marlowe's plays allegorize the activities of the Muscovy Company in its relationship with Ivan IV (the Terrible), Tsar of Russia. The claim is that '[Tamburlaine's] campaign "to march [towards] Persia, / Along Armenia and the Caspian Sea' [Part Two, 5.3.126-7] accords exactly with Company goals', so much so, it is argued, that 'if Marlowe's atlas was [Abraham] Ortelius's, Tamburlaine's map was actually the one surveyed for the cartographer in 1562 by the Company factor Antony Jenkinson and dedicated to its governor, Sir Henry Sidney of Penshurst'.¹⁴ Until his death in 1584, Ivan dominated the Eastern frontier just as Tamburlaine comes to dominate the same region in Marlowe's plays, and this prompts Wilson to argue that the character of Tamburlaine embodies English trading ambitions.¹⁵ Finding references in Part One (3.3.248-59) and Part Two (1.1.39-41) to the 'blockade of the 1580s', Wilson reads Tamburlaine as 'a blockade runner for England's eastern enterprise', breaking down cultural as well as literal barriers to the safe passage of trade between East and West; he is 'neither Christian

¹¹ Bartels, p. 60. See pp. 57-8.

¹² Bartels, pp. 57, 54.

¹³ Bartels, pp. 57, 54.

¹⁴ Wilson, p. 54. The classic study of Marlowe's geography is: Ethel Seaton, 'Marlowe's Map', *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, 10 (1924), 13-35. Also see: Jacques Lezra, 'Geography and Marlowe', in *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, ed. by Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 125-37; Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., 'Geography and Identity in Marlowe', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Patrick Cheney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 231-44.

¹⁵ Wilson, p. 55. See p. 66n22 for reference to a similar comparison between Tamburlaine and Ivan made by A.L. Rowse.

nor Muslim, Asian nor European', but 'the placeless New Man or *Conquistador* of the Renaissance'.¹⁶

For Simon Shepherd, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* is also a 'new man' but his fight is against the Catholic power of Spain – a 'more immediate' enemy than the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷ This reading rests on the use of the term 'Turk' as an insult in cross-confessional Christian polemic: as well as denoting 'an Islamic state with its own characteristic institutions of government and military', Shepherd points out that the term functioned metaphorically as 'a description of behaviour or character – the Turks "being of nature cruel and heartless" – which may be applied also to Christians'.¹⁸ Though Shepherd does detail some of the horror that was felt about the threat posed to Europe by the real 'Turk', his analysis of *Tamburlaine* focuses entirely on the term's figurative employment as a label to be applied to confessional opponents, with Marlowe's representation seen primarily through the lens of England's need for a suitable leader – someone like Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester or Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex – to take on the fight against Spain.¹⁹ In finding that the message of *Tamburlaine* comes down to the matter of who should lead England militarily – the lesson being that Spain's 'Turkish tyranny can only be defeated by the new man' – Shepherd's analysis, like Bartels' and Wilson's, is consistent with Stephen Greenblatt's assertion that when Marlowe dramatizes foreign characters, 'it is his own countrymen that he broods upon and depicts'.²⁰

It is true that both Catholics and Reformers employed the term 'Turk' as 'a topical metaphor through which [they] could justify and define their policies' and vilify the enemies of 'true' religion; this usage derived its rhetorical power from the frightening prospect that 'Ottoman incursions into Christian territory' reflected the punitive judgment of God, and it is on this basis that contemporary applications of the term have been used to

¹⁶ Wilson, pp. 57-8.

¹⁷ Shepherd, p. 144

¹⁸ Shepherd, p. 142.

¹⁹ Shepherd, pp. 142-4, 149-50.

²⁰ Shepherd, p. 151; Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 194.

support the argument that *Tamburlaine* is a reflection of Anglo-Spanish hostility.²¹ But the use of the term in a European context should not lead us to disregard its primary denotation. Indeed, whilst the plays do evoke some local European concerns – relating to matters such as the payment of soldiers in the Netherlands – they result primarily from an interest in the specific details of Ottoman-Persian conflict, the subject of ‘intra-Islamic [...] schism’, and the life of the historical Tamburlaine.²²

The evidence of this interest (detailed below) goes against the grain of the suggestion that an early modern audience would think primarily of Spain and Catholicism upon hearing the term ‘Turk’, let alone associate the character of Tamburlaine with specific Englishmen. Though the confessional politics of Europe were influential in the formation of England’s diplomatic alliance with the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, the plays make no allusion whatsoever to England’s presence on the international stage, nor do their ‘structural oppositions’ reflect the ‘prevailing tenets of late Elizabethan foreign policy’.²³ In England and throughout Europe, the cultural, military, and mercantile achievements of the ‘Turk’ were subjects of great interest in their own right, and the use of the term ‘Turk’ in Christian polemic reflects that interest; it does not suggest that the term was meaningful only for how it could be used to describe the sinfulness of European Catholics or Reformers. For this reason, as Jonathan Burton argues, there is no reason for us to doubt ‘that Marlowe’s representation of Turkish strength is representative of *actual Turkish strength*’.²⁴

More recent scholarship – particularly by Burton, Richmond Barbour, Matthew Dimmock, Grogan, and Stephan Schmuck (cited above) – has endeavoured to place Marlowe’s plays within the context of the Near East. In this work, reference is often made

²¹ Schmuck, pp. 11-12.

²² Shepherd suggests that Tamburlaine’s reference to ‘heaps of gold’, delivered by Jove ‘as if he meant to give my soldiers pay’ (1.2.181-2), would have carried ‘topical overtones after the recent Netherlands campaign in which funds for the army were so slow in coming through that [the Earl of] Leicester had to pay soldiers out of his own pocket’ (p. 149).

²³ Dimmock, *New Turkes*, pp. 160, 141.

²⁴ Burton, p. 127 (my emphasis).

to the diplomatic alliance that was formed between England and the Ottoman Empire, which brings us to the subject of how the Elizabethan regime, and the trading companies it licensed, engaged directly with the Islamic world. Most important in this regard are the Capitulations of 1580 – a ‘codification’ of Anglo-Ottoman trade relations that served the geopolitical interests of both parties, helping to satisfy the ‘Ottoman need for armaments’ in the war against Persia (hence the English sale of bell metal) as well as increase the likelihood that England would benefit from ‘Ottoman military assistance against Spain’.²⁵ Scholars who stress the importance of the Near East for understanding *Tamburlaine* characteristically advert to this subject of English foreign policy, and the hope that aiding the ‘Turk’ in the Ottoman-Safavid War would result in the destruction of England’s greatest adversary. This tendency is illustrated clearly by Burton’s reading of the cross-faith treaty at the beginning of Part Two:

Like the treaty sworn to by Orcanes and Sigismund, the notorious association of Elizabeth I and Murad III was conditioned by a recognition of how a staunch contraposition of Christianity and Islam failed to address the growing complexities of early modern global economics and geopolitics. Whereas *Tamburlaine* stands threateningly poised just beyond the scene of Orcanes and Sigismund’s meeting, Elizabethan-Ottoman relations were similarly actuated by the presence of Spain to the west and Persia to the east.²⁶

The problem here is that by reading Part Two in the context of the Capitulations, we have no alternative but to view the Persian *Tamburlaine* as a hindrance to English foreign policy, delaying the prospect of a combined military effort against Spain. This interpretation does not stand up to scrutiny, however, because the play does not differentiate between different kinds of Christian; simply, there is no ‘Spain’. So, far from suggesting that Sigismund agrees to the treaty to gain a strategic advantage within Europe, it would seem that *Tamburlaine*’s ‘presence [...] to the east’ is either bad for all,

²⁵ Dimmock, *New Turkes*, pp. 87-9. See also: V.L. Ménage, ‘The English Capitulation of 1580: A Review Article’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 12:3 (1980), 373-83; S.A. Skilliter, *William Harborne and the Trade with Turkey, 1578-1582: A Documentary Study of the First Anglo-Ottoman Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Dimmock, ‘“Captive to the Turk”’: Responses to the Anglo-Ottoman Capitulations of 1580’, in *Cultural Encounters between East and West, 1453-1699*, ed. by Matthew Birchwood and Matthew Dimmock (Amersham: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005), pp. 43-63.

²⁶ Burton, p. 128.

endangering the whole of Christendom equally, or good for all, saving Europe from continued Ottoman pressure (see 1.1.86-105).

In this regard, the situation matches the Bajazeth episode in Part One where Tamburlaine promises to 'subdue the Turk, and then enlarge / Those Christian captives which [are kept] as slaves' (3.3.46-7). Though the reasons for its success remain unclear – with the workings of providence indistinguishable from coincidence – Tamburlaine's military career relieves Europe from those that 'make quick havoc of the Christian blood' (3.3.58). On this basis, we may conclude that English diplomatic relations did little to influence Marlowe's representation of the Near East. The premise of the Anglo-Ottoman reading is that *Tamburlaine* offers 'a perspective on early modern England's need to produce a rhetoric that could justify its controversial dealings with the Turks'.²⁷ But since the Capitulations of 1580 saw England supporting the Ottoman Empire, it is difficult to see how the victories of the 'king of Persia' can be taken as an endorsement (Part One, 2.7.67).

Certainly, the cultivation of Anglo-Ottoman relations formed a crucial part of English foreign policy in the 1580s. Faced with difficulties in the Netherlands, the threat of foreign invasion, and the debate surrounding the proposed execution of Mary Queen of Scots, it made practical sense for Elizabeth to ally herself with the 'Turk' as a means of frustrating Spanish imperial expansion. Based on the hope that Spain might be distracted from its European concerns by the Ottoman Empire – itself distracted by its conflict with Persia – the strategy did not prove successful. But the English were not the only ones who thought it might work. In a Spanish memorandum seen by Lord Burghley in 1587, Philip II is strongly encouraged to 'resolve upon the enterprise against England'; he is told there is no 'better [...] time' to make such an assault, given the state of 'matters in the East':²⁸

There will not want those who will speak of some stirring on the part of the Turk, which presupposes that he is freed from the Persians and Tartars, whereas it is

²⁷ Burton, p. 129.

²⁸ *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth: Preserved in the Public Record Office, Vol. XXI Part 1: June 1586 – June 1588*, ed. by Sophie Crawford Lomas (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1927), pp. 341-5 (p. 341). Abbreviated subsequently as *CSPF, 1586-1588*.

notorious how they press upon him and that he could do nothing more than some incursions and plundering of villages and open places upon the coast [...].²⁹

As this passage shows, the prospect of a Spanish invasion of England was tied to speculation regarding the progress of the Ottoman-Safavid War. A letter to Elizabeth from John Casimir, Duke of Saxe-Coburg, explains that one of ‘the many reasons [...] prompting the King of Spain to concentrate all his power and forces on the overthrow of the Queen of England [is] a fear lest the Turks, having made peace with the Persians, may turn aside to make war on him’.³⁰ Such interpretations of Spanish foreign policy help to explain the urgency of England’s interest in the Near East. Far from being a peripheral concern, the war between ‘the Turks’ and ‘the Persians’ was seen to be crucial in determining the immediate course of confessional conflict within Europe.

As the Spanish memorandum and the letter from the Duke of Saxe-Coburg suggest, it was widely held that ‘some stirring on the part of the Turk’ would be beneficial to those at war with Spain. Besides influencing Philip’s plans for the Armada, the progress of Islamic war was also important for the dynastic dispute in Portugal – itself a consequence of King Sebastian’s involvement in the Battle of Alcazar (1578), which was represented onstage in George Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar* (c. 1588) and the anonymous *Life and Death of Captain Thomas Stukeley* (c. 1596).³¹ Speaking in Parliament on 24th February 1587, Sir Henry Knyvet ‘advocated help to Don António, claimant to the Portuguese throne’.³² Petitions to Murad III stressed the importance of the cause and the need for Ottoman involvement, with Philip described as the ‘common enemy’; if António could be helped, it was promised that ‘the greatness of the proud Spaniard would be bridled and his Majesty [i.e. Murad] would gain far greater power and honour than from this Persian

²⁹ *CSPF, 1586-1588*, pp. 344-5.

³⁰ *CSPF, 1586-1588*, p. 558.

³¹ On the background to these plays, see the introduction to Charles Edelman (ed.), *The Stukeley Plays: ‘The Battle of Alcazar’ by George Peele and ‘The Famous History of the Life and Death of Captain Thomas Stukeley’* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

³² J.E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments, 1584-1601* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1957), p. 179.

war'.³³ Accordingly, great interest was shown in the development of the 'Persian war', with Elizabeth's advisors hoping for a swift resolution in favour of their ally.

Evidence of this interest can be found in newsletters and the correspondence sent to Sir Francis Walsingham by Stephen Powle. But Powle could only inform Walsingham that 'the Persian wars continue more [hotly] than ever'.³⁴ Indeed, rather than witness any progress in the war, Powle's reports are marked by a growing awareness that England would gain no benefit from an Ottoman force yet to be freed from 'matters in the East'. In another letter to Walsingham, the ambassador William Harborne records 'the common report' that 'affairs in Persia [...] do so prosper that [the Ottomans] hope to reap an entire victory this present year'. But he explains that 'the like "fame" has been spread before in vain, and I credit it not'.³⁵ In a later dispatch, Harborne is still waiting for this 'report' to be substantiated; he notes that the Anglo-Ottoman 'league' serves little purpose because '[Ottoman] treasure is much exhausted in these Persian proceedings, which are not yet likely to end'.³⁶ Thus, at the time when Marlowe composed *Tamburlaine*, Elizabethan foreign policy was obstructed by Persian resilience. It is unlikely, therefore, that Marlowe meant his plays to reflect the diplomatic operations of the Elizabethan regime (if, indeed, he was aware of them) – unless, of course, he intended his plays to ridicule England's new ally and praise the Persian army for hindering the fight against Spain.

More likely, Marlowe looked to popular perceptions of the Near East. For in major prose histories such as *The English Mirror* – a proven source of Marlowe's doublet of plays – *Tamburlaine* is afforded lavish praise for relieving Europe from the pressures of Ottoman invasion. These incursions were met with a mixture of fear and admiration. In the 1583 edition of *Acts and Monuments*, John Foxe offers an account of Ottoman conquest

³³ *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth: Preserved in the Public Record Office, Vol. xxii: July – December 1588*, ed. by Richard Bruce Wernham (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1936), pp. 101-3 (pp. 101, 103). Abbreviated subsequently as *CSPF, 1588*.

³⁴ *CSPF, 1586-1588*, pp. 503-7 (p. 505). See also: pp. 418, 460-1, 477.

³⁵ *CSPF, 1586-1588*, pp. 647-50 (p. 648).

³⁶ *CSPF, 1588*, p. 101.

that combines providential reasoning (as embodied in the concept of the 'scourge') with appreciation for the Turkish army's excellent organization and morale.³⁷ Similarly, Whetstone refers to 'the puissant kingdom of the Turks [...] as a scourge sent and suffered by God for the sins and iniquities of the Christians' as well as noting the practical means of their success (p. 69). This perspective on the Near East is complicated enough – with Ottoman victories attributed to human as well as divine factors – but matters become even murkier when we consider how these writers respond to the interventions of Persia.

Whetstone, for instance, describes the theory that Tamburlaine was an ancestor of 'the first Sophy, who to this day (to the benefit of all Christendom) maintaineth mortal wars against the great Turk' (p. 83).³⁸ This view is difficult to reconcile with the belief that Ottomans are the 'scourge [...] of the Christians', for it places the 'benefit of all Christendom' at odds with the punishment 'sent and suffered' by God. Such complications did not, however, trouble these writers excessively, nor do they disrupt their emphasis on the need for religious unity in the face of Islam. Indeed, as Stephan Schmuck notes, a 'notable characteristic of these prose historiographies is their invocation of a European "common Corp of Christendom"'.³⁹ In the preface to his translation of *A Notable History of the Saracens* (1575), Thomas Newton asks 'why have we such delight in civil wars and domestical murder?' before claiming that 'these wars [...] will in the end bring all Christendom to utter ruin and woeful desolation' at the hands of 'the most unmerciful enemy the great Turk'; what Newton suggests, to avoid this calamity, is that Christian countries overcome their 'factions' and work together to 'repulse this our common

³⁷ On how the Ottoman Empire's military might was understood within the schema of 'God's hand in history', and on the confessional dimension of this understanding, see: C.A. Patrides, "'The Bloody and Cruell Turke": The Background of a Renaissance Commonplace', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 10 (1963), 126-35.

³⁸ This section from *The English Mirror* is not quoted fully in the appendix of Cunningham (ed.), *Tamburlaine* (pp. 320-4), which creates the impression that Whetstone believed the ancestral theory to be true. In fact, Whetstone goes on to argue that 'one named Ishmael, a false Prophet, gathered a multitude of the common people together, of whom (by continual favour of time and fortune) the Sophy is grown, of power to encounter the great Turk' (p. 83).

³⁹ Schmuck p. 16. See also: Franklin L. Baumer, 'England, the Turk, and the Common Corps of Christendom', *The American Historical Review*, 50:1 (1944), 26-48; Shepherd, pp. 142-5.

danger'.⁴⁰ In this respect, Tamburlaine's military exploits are aligned perfectly with the anti-Ottoman bias of popular print, which may explain Marlowe's tendency to distance his protagonist from the image of the Ottoman 'Turk' and to associate him more directly with the crown of Persia.

Insofar as they match the sympathies of Newton, Foxe, and Whetstone, Marlowe's perceptions of the Near East are thus quite conventional; they hardly bolster the playwright's reputation as a dangerous subversive, challenging the supposed Elizabethan worldview. But there is good reason why Marlowe might have chosen the Tamburlaine story for his first dramatic effort. This takes us back to a classical model of biography and the appeal it would have had to an ambitious new playwright with an education in Greek.⁴¹ When he picked up his copy of *The English Mirror*, Marlowe would have found Whetstone observing what a 'pity' it is that Tamburlaine's 'policies and battles be not largely written' (p. 80): perhaps Marlowe realized that compensating for the oversight Whetstone describes could make his reputation, placing him within a tradition of Persian-focussed biography dating back to Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. This is only conjecture, but Marlowe must have been thinking about Cyrus when mistaking him for Darius at the outset of Part One (see 1.1.130).

A Xenophonic model of authorship also reflects the specificity of *Tamburlaine's* interest in the leadership qualities of the Near Eastern hero. As we shall see, Marlowe presents his protagonist as a direct challenge to the exemplary function of the mirror-for-princes genre, and he makes this challenge on the strength of current uncertainties about the causes and meaning of Islamic 'conquests' in Europe. To comprehend Tamburlaine as a monarch, therefore, requires an understanding of what contemporaries made of Persia, for it is clear that Marlowe locates the drama firmly within the geographical and cultural

⁴⁰ Thomas Newton (trans.), *A Notable History of the Saracens* (London: Abraham Veale, 1575), sigs. B4r-C1v.

⁴¹ On Marlowe's education in Greek, see: Rhodes, 'Marlowe and the Greeks', *Renaissance Studies*, 27:2 (2013), 199-218.

context of the Near East: Tamburlaine is not meant to be an analogue for England or its 'heroes' in the fight against Spain; Marlowe's Turks are Turks and his Persians are Persians. If the plays do tell us something about England and its place in the world, it has to do with the difficulties of understanding Persia, and the geopolitics of the Ottoman-Safavid War, from an English point of view: are Persian victories the result of 'military discipline' or divine will (Whetstone, p. 80)? And if the latter, is Tamburlaine sent by God towards Europe as a scourge or saviour?

The Effect of 'Wonder'

When we recognize the familiarity with intra-Islamic warfare in the works by Whetstone, Foxe, and others, it becomes obvious that the topical resonance of *Tamburlaine* reflects a level of interest that went beyond the specific details of Anglo-Ottoman cooperation. The questions posed at the end of the last section were questions that occupied English culture. To gather material for his first plays, Marlowe did not need any kind of privileged insight to the politic manoeuvring that produced England's alliance with the Ottoman Empire; indeed, the celebratory aspect that is given to Bajazeth's defeat would indicate that Marlowe thought less of anti-Spanish pragmatism than the need to halt a further Ottoman advance – a point of cross-confessional interest that agrees with Foxe and Whetstone. But the plays' source material provided Marlowe with more than just a popular and timely subject, or a subject that could place him in the company of Xenophon. Reading the plays in a Persian context alerts us to their topical appeal, but it also helps to explain the sense of originality that is often recognized in the plays and their protagonist – the sense of Marlowe as 'the destroyer of the old and the creator of a new drama'.⁴² Given

⁴² Alvin Kernan, 'The Plays and the Playwrights', in *The Revels History of Drama in English: Vol. III: 1576-1613*, ed. by J. Leeds Barroll and others (London: Methuen, 1975), pp. 237-474 (p. 251); quoted in Lunney, *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition*, p. 1. Referencing earlier work by Harry Levin as well as more recent work by Robert N. Watson, Lunney shows that the originality of Marlowe is 'a premise [...] built into most commentaries on the plays, outlasting whole generations of change in critical fashions' (p. 1). Lunney's own position is that Marlowe's status as 'the first and most

the longstanding concern with ‘reckoning what was “new” about [...] Marlowe’, it can thus be said that new scholarship on England’s interest in the Near East makes it possible for us to answer old questions.⁴³

As Sara Munson Deats explains, the ‘popularity’ of interrogative drama has been attributed to ‘the censorship laws of the 1590s’ (too late to have influenced *Tamburlaine*), ‘the rhetorical traditions of arguing on both sides of the question’, and ‘the period’s fascination with dual aspect paintings’.⁴⁴ When we note the principal focus of Marlowe’s debut work, however, we might conclude that its effect of ambiguity derives as much from contemporary uncertainties surrounding the nature of Islamic ‘conquests’. In this section of the chapter, I explain how this influence on Marlowe’s dramaturgy affects the meaning of his plays’ representation of power (military and dramatic), which is vested in the hero but conspicuous by its absence from all other monarchs. Since *Tamburlaine*’s characterization arises from the ambiguous phenomenon of Islamic military success – and since his scourging of the Ottoman ‘scourge’ complicates Persia’s place within the Christian scheme of history – Marlowe’s protagonist cannot be viewed as a model that is seriously intended for imitation.

Indeed, the playwright says as much in the Part One Prologue; as Deats explains, the Prologue ‘rejects the strident and reductive didacticism that often turned early modern dramas into sermons, the stage into a pulpit’.⁴⁵ In Marlowe’s handling, the Near Eastern hero is presented as a ‘puissant and mighty monarch’ whose ‘rare and wonderful conquests’ cannot be explained, which means that they cannot be copied. This subversion of the didactic formula is crucial, I argue, to our understanding of the playwright’s attitude towards monarchs in Europe, for it shows that Marlowe intended *Tamburlaine* as an

significant innovator in the playhouse drama [before 1595]’ should be seen as the result of his ‘dialogue with tradition’ – ‘his engagement with the conventional dramatic practices of the time’ (pp. 27, 2).

⁴³ Lunney, *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition*, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Deats, ‘Marlowe’s Interrogative Drama’, p. 108. The critics mentioned are Annabel Patterson, Altman, and Ernest B. Gilman.

⁴⁵ Deats, ‘Marlowe’s Interrogative Drama’, p. 113.

exemplary hero always out of reach – an image of leadership that cannot be matched by anyone watching the plays on the London stage.

This reading of Marlowe's aims becomes clearer when we turn to what is arguably still the best account of ambiguity in *Tamburlaine*.⁴⁶ In his description of Tamburlaine as 'the Herculean hero', Waith offers a far more instructive analysis than those who view the plays' ambiguity as a problem to be solved – as an exercise in deciding the 'Either/Or' of the text at the expense of 'Both/And'.⁴⁷ Whereas some characters may be taken apart for the purposes of schematic interpretation, Waith recognizes the dramatic value of presenting heroes that defy easy categorization:

In the depiction of the Herculean hero there is no relaxation of the tensions between his egotism and altruism, his cruelties and benefactions, his human limitations and his divine potentialities. Marlowe never lets his audience forget these antitheses.⁴⁸

Waith's point is that Marlowe's style prevents the audience from placing the character of Tamburlaine within a clear 'explanatory framework' – the kind that we find elsewhere, as in offshoots of *Tamburlaine* such as Robert Greene's *Alphonsus, King of Aragon* (c. 1589) and *Selimus* (c. 1590).⁴⁹ Waith goes on to argue that this accounts for the character's special dramatic power, since 'the very paradoxes of Tamburlaine's nature excite wonder'.⁵⁰ This account of the 'tensions' or 'antitheses' in *Tamburlaine* identifies what makes Marlowe's plays, and their protagonist, so powerfully resistant to conventional forms of reading. But we may decide that the term Waith uses to describe this character is inappropriate, rooted firmly as it is within the Western tradition of 'illustrious [...] Romans and Grecians'. Given the specificity of Marlowe's interest in conflict between the Ottomans and the Persians, instead of describing Tamburlaine as 'Herculean', we might view the

⁴⁶ Waith, pp. 60-87. *The Herculean Hero* anticipates many of Altman's conclusions regarding ambiguity and the effect of 'wonder'. See Altman, pp. 1-11, 321-88.

⁴⁷ Developing the ideas of Empson, these are conceptual markers (and chapter titles) used by Norman Rabkin in *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). See: Rhodes, *Shakespeare and the Origins of English*, pp. 88-90.

⁴⁸ Waith, p. 86

⁴⁹ G.K. Hunter, *English Drama, 1586-1642: The Age of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 49-68 (p. 53).

⁵⁰ Waith, p. 87.

character as the product of an alternative Persian tradition that can explain the effect of ‘wonder’ as well as the topical appeal of the character for English theatregoers in the 1580s. Indeed, the title of the relevant chapter in Whetstone refers to ‘the *wonderful* conquest of Tamburlaine’ (p. 78; my emphasis).

To demonstrate the extent of Whetstone’s influence on this new kind of character, we must look at how the story of Tamburlaine is told. For as well as providing Marlowe with the basic narrative of Tamburlaine’s rise from ‘a poor labourer, or in the best degree a mean soldier’ to ‘King of Persia’ and a formidable military leader (pp. 79, 80), Whetstone supplies the conceptual framework for the effect of ‘wonder’ that Waith associates with ‘the Herculean hero’. In Whetstone, many of Tamburlaine’s achievements are attributed to human gifts and virtues: we are told that ‘even from his infancy [Tamburlaine] had a reaching and an imaginative mind’ and ‘a ruling desire’; Whetstone also describes ‘the strength and comeliness of his body [and] the haughtiness of his heart’ (p. 79). Troubling Waith’s assumption that ‘limitations’ must be human, ‘potentialities’ divine, this description does much to celebrate the human factors contributing to Tamburlaine’s success – a point that is supported by Whetstone’s reference to ‘military discipline’.

In the early days of his success, ‘[Tamburlaine] parted the spoil [...] among his companions and entertained them with such faithfulness and love, as the rumour thereof daily increased his strength’ (p. 79); we are told that ‘in his army was never found mutiny, that ‘he was wise, liberal, and rewarded every soldier with his desert’, that ‘his government and order was such that his camp seemed a goodly city’ (p. 80). Whetstone thus presents a model of brilliant leadership to be ‘feared and loved’ (p. 80). But as well as stressing the human basis of Tamburlaine’s ‘policy and prowess’ (p. 81), Whetstone places the hero within a providential context. When challenged by a Genoese merchant about the ‘cruelty’ of his behaviour, Tamburlaine responded furiously with a clear statement of his divine function: ‘thou supposest that I am a man, but thou art deceived, for I am no other than the ire of God, and the destruction of the world’ (p. 82). This is no delusion, for

Whetstone affirms that ‘in truth Tamburlaine, although he was endowed with many excellencies and virtues, yet it seemed by his cruelty [that] God raised him to chasten the kings and proud people of the earth’ (p. 82), and that his victory against Bajazeth was an example of ‘God’s will’ (p. 81). This confusion of perspectives reflects Christian anxieties about Islamic military success. But it also shows us where Marlowe found the conceptual framework – not just the material – to produce a character whose ‘nature excite[s] wonder’.

This point can be illustrated with reference to the first major episode of Part One. Developed from the account given by Whetstone, who explains that ‘envy’ brought about ‘discord between the king [...] and his brother’ (p. 79), the opening episode of the first play is concerned exclusively with the fallen pomp of ‘unhappy Persia, that in former age / Hast been the seat of mighty conquerors’ (1.1.6-7) – with the condition of its monarchy, its embattled existence hemmed in by aggressive foreign powers; the relevance of Islamic-Christian conflict comes later. In the opening moments of Act 1, the Persian king Mycetes is warned by his brother, Cosroe, that ‘Turks and Tartars shake their swords at thee, / Meaning to mangle all thy provinces’ (1.1.16-17; see ll. 113-32). There is also the threat posed by ‘Tamburlaine, that sturdy Scythian thief, / That robs [the] merchants of Persepolis’ (1.1.36-7), a reference that identifies Tamburlaine as one of Persia’s enemies. But things soon change: having been viewed first of all as a dangerous foreigner, ‘that paltry Scythian’ and ‘thievish villain’, Tamburlaine exploits the brothers’ rivalry to take the crown for himself (1.1.53; 2.2.3); his new status is accepted without demur – there is no avenging son in the style of Callapine (see Part Two, 1.2.77-8) – and soon Persia’s political fortunes are restored. We are presented, to use Whetstone’s language, with the spectacle of a heroic leader ‘redeeming [...] his country from [...] servitude’ (p. 80).

But is this Tamburlaine’s ‘country’? Certainly, the claim is complicated by his status as usurper – Zabina explains that he ‘unlawfully usurpest the Persian seat’ (4.2.56-7) – and by his previous role as the agent of Persia’s decline. In contrast, Cosroe displays

sincere concern for the effects of his brother's misgovernment. He is not envious, as in Whetstone, but desperate for a 'wiser king' (1.1.92); he is 'vexed [...] To see [his] neighbours that were wont to quake / And tremble at the Persian monarch's name' no longer do so, and it is on this basis that he accepts the 'plot [...] laid by Persian noblemen / And captains of the Median garrisons' (1.1.114-16; 1.1.110-11) to remove Mycetes and take his place:

Well, since I see the state of Persia droop
 And languish in my brother's government,
 I willingly receive th'imperial crown
 And vow to wear it for my country's good,
 In spite of them shall malice my estate. (1.2.155-60)

Unlike Cosroe, whose concern rests with the 'country's good', Tamburlaine chooses to pursue the same 'crown' on a whim – contemplating the idea with childlike enthusiasm:

MENAPHON: Your majesty [i.e. Cosroe] shall shortly have your wish,
 And ride in triumph through Persepolis. *Exeunt.*
Manet Tamburlaine, Theridamas, Techelles, Usumcasane.
 TAMBURLAINE: And ride in triumph through Persepolis!
 Is it not brave to be a king, Techelles?
 Usumcasane and Theridamas,
 Is it not passing brave to be a king,
 And ride in triumph through Persepolis! (2.5.48-54)

As well as asking several more rhetorical questions (at ll. 65, 70, 72-4, 78-9), Tamburlaine announces his confidence that 'if I should desire the Persian crown / I could attain it with a wondrous ease' (2.5.76-7; see 2.5.97-8); the impression is created that he will 'attain' the 'crown' simply because he wants it. By establishing such a direct contrast between the two characters, Marlowe thus refuses any kind of 'explanatory framework'. Far from endorsing a merit-based attitude to the succession, which would point to the election of Cosroe by his 'gentlemen' followers and the 'commons of this mighty monarchy' (1.1.140; 1.1.138), the blunt fact of Tamburlaine's victory frustrates all expectations regarding the logic, and the fundamental justice, of the historical narrative that Marlowe presents onstage.

This helps to produce the effect of 'wonder' because the reasons why Tamburlaine successfully gains the Persian crown remain unclear. Rather than support a particular

view of history, the play's first episode presents the audience with a confusing variety of possible explanations. When Tamburlaine first encounters Theridamas and his 'thousand horsemen', he says that their number is 'too great for us to stand against' (1.2.121-2). Rather than fight, he chooses to 'play the orator' and stage-manage a spectacle of 'golden wedges' that will 'amaze the Persians', thereby persuading them that his power is the greater (1.2.129; 1.2.139-4). But later, in similar circumstances, he promises to 'make but a jest to win the Persian crown' and even decides to offer his opponent 'more warriors' (2.5.98; 2.5.103).

As well as confusing the audience, such inconsistency exacerbates the problem of fixing Tamburlaine's origins. Prior to battle, Meander speculates that 'some powers divine, or else infernal, mixed / Their angry seeds at his conception', thus supporting the claim that '[Tamburlaine] was never sprung of human race' (2.6.9-11). But the play offers no indication that this interpretation is correct. Instead, Cosroe and his followers are left to fight Tamburlaine without knowing 'whether from earth, or hell, or heaven he grow' (2.6.23; see 2.6.15-18), and their confusion is only amplified by Tamburlaine's own comments about his position relative to the gods:

Draw forth thy sword, thou mighty man-at-arms,
Intending but to raze my charmed skin,
And Jove himself will stretch his hand from heaven
To ward thy blow and shield me safe from harm. (1.2.177-80)

Here, the suggestion of divine assistance does more than just imply the immanence of divine regulation at the expense of human agency: Tamburlaine uses the claim to enhance his reputation as a fearsome, unstoppable force in the world. But just as frequently, he defines himself in opposition to the gods, as illustrated by his later observation that 'Jove, viewing me in arms, looks pale and wan, / Fearing my power should pull him from his throne' (5.1.453-4).

Against the backdrop of Europe's relationship to the Near East, this unresolved question reflects a wider concern about the meaning of major events. Cosroe takes a

providential view when describing ‘the loathsome circle of [his] dated life’ but he also suggests that far from being the results of divine decree, Tamburlaine’s military efforts go ‘against the gods’ (2.6.37; 2.6.39). Having been defeated, Cosroe then decides that Tamburlaine’s function was ‘to deprive [him] of [his] crown and life’ (2.7.2) – a lesson that he explicates, pointing to the treachery of ‘false Theridamas’ (2.7.3), with conventional emphasis on the impermanence of worldly success:

Even at the morning of my happy state,
Scarce being seated in my royal throne,
To work my downfall and untimely end! (2.7.4-6)

Despite calling for ‘fearful vengeance [to] light upon [them] both’ (2.7.52), Cosroe locates an obvious form of exemplary meaning in the victory of Theridamas and Tamburlaine; it is a lesson that applies particularly to him, whether caused by ‘the gods’ or not. In this regard, Marlowe matches Whetstone’s emphasis on the cautionary significance of Tamburlaine’s story in the inevitable punishment of ‘envy’.

But, as in *The English Mirror*, there are also indications that Tamburlaine’s success is attributable to a distinctly human set of factors. Following his defeat, Cosroe is amazed by the camaraderie that Tamburlaine cultivates among his followers (see 2.7.12-39):

The strangest men that ever Nature made!
I know not how to take their tyrannies. (2.7.40-1)

The reasons for such strangeness are easy to recognize: with a topically suggestive reference to elected forms of monarchy, Tamburlaine flatters Theridamas, Techelles, and Usumcasane by promising to take the position of ‘great commander of this eastern world’ only with their approval: ‘if you but say that Tamburlaine shall reign’ (2.7.62-3). Naturally, this strategy proves effective in securing their loyalty. But it also raises questions about the nature – and limits – of Tamburlaine’s power:

ALL: Long live Tamburlaine, and reign in Asia!
TAMBURLAINE: So, now it is more surer on my head,
Than if the gods had held a parliament,
And all pronounced me king of Persia. (2.7.64-7)

By presenting these conflicting explanations, Marlowe prompts the audience to consider why Tamburlaine proves so successful: does he succeed by the strength of his leadership, frightening his foes and rewarding his 'sweet friends and followers' for their service (1.2.60), or because he enjoys the providential care of 'Jove' and the 'oracles of heaven' (1.2.179; 2.3.7)? The playwright's refusal to answer this question satisfactorily is what makes the first episode of Part One so compelling.

Of course, it is nothing new to point out this function of Marlowe's ambiguity; since Waith, the observation has become commonplace. But in the case of *Tamburlaine*, it is important that we recognize that the effect has less to do with the schoolroom practice of arguing *in utramque partem* than a feeling of uncertainty about the place of 'intra-Islamic conflict' within the Christian scheme of history. This explains why Marlowe establishes the Persian identity of Tamburlaine so emphatically: it allows him to play with current ideas regarding the debated role of Persia in the war against the Ottomans.

In the second major episode of Part One, when Tamburlaine frustrates the Ottoman siege of Constantinople (based on the historical Siege of 1402), the Emperor Bajazeth complains that 'the Christian miscreants' – 'those foul idolaters' – will be 'ringing with joy their superstitious bells' (3.3.236-9). Is this a good thing? Has Tamburlaine helped 'all Christendom' or has he just helped Catholics? Similar celebrations took place in England following the victory at Lepanto (1571), but these are 'superstitious bells' rung by 'foul idolaters'.⁵¹ In Part Two, Marlowe makes no distinction between different kinds of Christian, nor is there any suggestion of intra-Christian conflict of the kind that 'actuated' the Anglo-Ottoman Capitulations. Likewise, in this episode from Part One, our approval of Tamburlaine's victory should not be viewed in the context of the awkward moral negotiation that saw the English regime take sides with the 'Turk', thus betraying the

⁵¹ Dimmock, *New Turkes*, pp. 145-7; David Cressy makes clear in *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), p. 76. The year prior to *Tamburlaine*, bells were rung to celebrate the failure of the Babington Plot (Cressy, p. 76).

'common Corps of Christendom'. To read the scene in this way would mean that Marlowe is actively discouraging the audience from sympathizing with the play's protagonist, which seems unlikely given the obvious appeal of the character's exploits.⁵² Instead, it may be argued that the evocation of Catholic bell-ringing refers to a more general – but no less urgent – appreciation that Christian confessional discord is to blame for the Ottoman threat, which we have seen already was a point commonly made in the available print matter on the issue.⁵³

To recognize this, we must first note the lengths to which Marlowe goes in order to emphasize Tamburlaine's hatred of the 'Turk' and to downplay his adherence to Islam.⁵⁴ For having made this distinction, Marlowe is able to establish Tamburlaine quite clearly as the saviour that Europe cannot provide for itself. That the character is designed to perform this role is highlighted by the promise that he makes prior to meeting Bajazeth:

I that am termed the scourge and wrath of God,
The only fear and terror of the world,
Will first subdue the Turk, and then enlarge
Those Christian captives which you keep as slaves,
Burdening their bodies with your heavy chains
And feeding them with thin and slender fare
That naked row about the Terrene sea. (3.3.44-50)

The situation that Tamburlaine describes was familiar enough to English travellers in the Mediterranean. In fact, after Lepanto and the start of the Ottoman-Safavid War, slavery

⁵² As R. Levin explains, some scholars claim that Marlowe intended for his audience to disapprove of Tamburlaine; Levin terms these 'the ironic critics' (p. 51), and goes on to show, using many contemporaneous examples (some of which I cite below) that most audience members (a) did not think that this was Marlowe's intention and (b) clearly approved of Tamburlaine's exploits.

⁵³ Despite the sale of bell-metal, there was still a tradition of Protestant bell-ringing, as Cressy makes clear: 'advanced Protestants might criticize the bells as Romish remnants, but they were too deeply integrated into parish life to be readily jettisoned' (p. 71; see pp. 67-80). The difference, simply, is that the bells in *Tamburlaine* are 'superstitious' and rung by 'foul idolators' – two indications of Catholicism.

⁵⁴ Whereas Bajazeth refers to 'Mahomet' (3.1.54; 3.3.269; 4.2.2) and the 'Alcaron' (3.3.76), Tamburlaine refers only to the classical gods or to a vaguely defined 'chiefest God' that does nothing to associate him with Islam (4.2.8). It may also be suggested – even if we accept that Europeans were highly aware of Islamic schism, as Grogan argues – that hatred of the 'Turk' would have been taken itself as an implicitly anti-Islamic stance, as suggested by Tamburlaine's mock that 'Turks are full of brags / And menace more than they can well perform' (3.3.3-4).

gave greater cause for worry than the prospect of military aggression.⁵⁵ By introducing this point of identification with seafaring ‘captives’ – figures to whom a Protestant audience might relate – then subverting it with the reference to ‘foul idolaters’, Marlowe reflects upon the opinion that Christian in-fighting is the reason why Islamic forces pose a danger to Europe.

In *Acts and Monuments*, Foxe claims that ‘this horrible persecution of the Turks [arises] chiefly by our discord and dissension among ourselves [i.e. Christians]’, and ‘discord’ is likewise the cause identified by Newton.⁵⁶ In *Tamburlaine*, Marlowe makes the same point less bluntly. Rather than repeat the didactic formula of *Acts and Monuments*, perhaps with a character expounding the moral of the episode, he communicates the effects of ‘discord and dissension’ at the more visceral level of dramatic experience – as the ‘scourge’ turns unexpected saviour. At first, the indications are that Tamburlaine will fulfil the anti-Ottoman fantasies of the audience in straightforward fashion, rescuing ‘Christian captives’ from ‘the force of Turkish arms / Which lately made all Europe quake for fear’ (3.3.134-5). Matters are complicated, however, when the Christians are identified as Catholic: Tamburlaine remains the hero, Bajazeth remains the villain, but the revelation does little for the imagined sympathies of a sixteenth-century Protestant audience; the effect is jarring. In this regard, the change from ‘captives’ to ‘foul idolaters’ points to a lack of religious unity for which the audience is held partly responsible – and this, in turn, helps to explain why the Christians in the play cannot defend themselves but rely on the efforts of Tamburlaine.

By thus emphasizing Europe’s dependence on the ‘king of Persia’, as well as the reasons for it, Marlowe raises an important question about the historical function of the Persian army: if the ‘Turk’ is ‘a scourge sent and suffered by God’ – as Whetstone argues – what is the divine purpose of Bajazeth’s defeat? Can Tamburlaine also be ‘the scourge and

⁵⁵ Matar, pp. 4-9.

⁵⁶ John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (London: John Day, 1583), p. 785; Newton, sig. B4^r.

wrath of God' or are his claims to that effect meaningless? Characteristically, Marlowe leaves these questions unanswered. When Tamburlaine goes on to treat his enemies with cruelty, there is nothing to prove that this represents the punitive judgement of God. In the later scenes of Part One, Tamburlaine humiliates and degrades Bajazeth and Zabina (see 4.4.10-108); he also commands the execution of 'lovely virgins' sent to win 'mercy' for Damascus (5.1.34; 5.1.54), telling his men 'to charge these dames, and show my servant Death, / Sitting in scarlet on their armed spears' (5.1.117-18). These episodes may satisfy conventional expectations of the 'scourge' (and, in the case of Bajazeth's treatment, anti-Ottoman sentiment) but they also provoke feelings of moral discomfiture. Thus, when Arabia asks 'what cursed power guides the murdering hands / Of this infamous tyrant's soldiers / That no escape may save their enemies / Nor fortune keep themselves from victory?' (5.1.404-7), it is a question that speaks to the concerns of the audience. In Part One, Marlowe intimates that Tamburlaine is the 'scourge' of a punitive God who relishes the murder of innocents; at the same time, it is possible that the character's claims of divine protection are false, with the rescue of 'Christian captives' no more than a convenient by-product of his hatred of the 'Turk'.

These contradictory impressions, though they might risk accusations of dramatic incoherence, do not seem to have undermined the sense of Tamburlaine as a believable character when the plays were first performed. Richard Levin has catalogued the available evidence of audience reaction – from the disparagement of Marlowe's style and content that came from Greene, Joseph Hall, George Wither, and many others, to the commercially minded promotion of the plays that can be seen in the preface to the 1590 edition. Levin shows that whilst particular observers (especially those fancying themselves as experts) might have taken issue with Marlowe's 'scenicall strutting' that catered purely to 'the ignorant gapers', it was accepted by all observers that most theatregoers were awestruck

and impressed by the character's power.⁵⁷ Wither, for instance, associates Tamburlaine's speech with the capacity to 'strike his hearers dead with admiration', and the epithet of 'mighty' that was used in many contemporaneous references to Tamburlaine – as employed by Greene, George Peele, and Thomas Dekker, as well as by Marlowe's publisher, Richard Jones – would also indicate that the historical Tamburlaine, if not necessarily Marlowe's version, was seen to be 'a triumphant figure who possessed and wielded tremendous power'.⁵⁸

Levin notes that in Hall's description of the 'gazing scaffolders' (in *Virgidemiarum* from 1597), there is evidence of a 'positive response in contemporary audiences' that can be described best as 'amoral wonder' – and the appeal of Tamburlaine can be seen elsewhere in the adoption of the 'Tamburlaine' pseudonym by the author (probably Thomas Deloney) of the Dutch Church Libel (1593).⁵⁹ The overriding effect, then, is that Tamburlaine functions (or, at least, functioned) as an appealing character irrespective of his origins or purpose, suggesting that the ideal (or, at least, most effective) monarch cannot be viewed in the binary terms of divine right *versus* strength, moral virtue *versus* Machiavellian statecraft, humanism *versus* barbarism. For whereas other characters that follow in Tamburlaine's footsteps – within the play (i.e. Tamburlaine's sons) and in other plays that copy Marlowe's style – are defined by neat categories of legitimacy and ethical value, Marlowe presents a character that flouts them all and yet succeeds regardless, and does so to the audience's delight.

So far, I have argued that Marlowe's plays refuse to categorize Tamburlaine according to any logic – conventional or otherwise – that would help to explain his success, and I shall argue below that the offshoots of *Tamburlaine*, particularly *Selimus*, fail artistically for the simple reason that they reinstate the 'explanatory framework' that

⁵⁷ Jonson, *Timber; or Discoveries*, quoted in R. Levin, p. 54.

⁵⁸ Wither, *Britain's Remembrancer*, quoted in R. Levin, p. 54; for the 'mighty' epithet, see p. 56.

⁵⁹ R. Levin, p. 53; Dimmock, 'Tamburlaine's Curse: An Answer to a Great Marlowe Mystery', *Times Literary Supplement* (19 November 2010), 16-17.

Marlowe rejects. But in saying that the *Tamburlaine* plays ultimately resist all types of narrative explanation (e.g. providentialism, Machiavellianism, and so on) is not to say that the plays do not gesture towards them – that Marlowe does not activate potential modes of interpretation for the audience to consider. He does this, I suggest, not to endorse any single way of understanding history but to create certain kinds of dramatic effect. We have seen already that by stressing Tamburlaine's Persian identity and by toning down the character's Islamic associations throughout Part One, Marlowe is able to elicit a more positive reaction from the audience towards his hero as well as probe tricky questions about what has caused Europe's weakness in the face of the Ottoman Empire and why Europe cannot defend itself and must rely instead upon a saviour from the Near East (the relief to Christians caused by Bajazeth's defeat being roughly equivalent to the relief caused by the Safavid Empire).

In Part Two, however, it serves Marlowe's dramaturgical interests to change tack by introducing a new religious dimension to Tamburlaine. Indeed, it has been noted by several observers that the character becomes more closely associated with the image of the 'Turk'. Having 'not mention[ed] "Mahomet" once in Part I', Tamburlaine makes two positive references to 'sacred Mahomet', the 'mighty friend' of Jove (1.3.109; 4.1.121), before finally rejecting his 'foolish laws' in controversial circumstances (5.1.172-201); for Dimmock, this illustrates 'the way in which Marlowe incorporates diverse cultural responses' – in particular, those that view Tamburlaine as a follower of Islam, reflecting a more general application of the term 'Turk', and those that view him as the opponent of Islam, based on the idea that anti-Ottoman sentiments are identical to anti-Islamic ones.⁶⁰ For Grogan, it reflects Marlowe's 'engagement with a more complex and varied idea of

⁶⁰ Dimmock, *New Turkes*, pp. 152-9 (pp. 153, 159). When discussing Part One, Dimmock points out that some remarks do 'suggest a wider sense of Islamic worship in "the East" [1.2.184] than that simply confined by the scope of the Ottoman forces' (p. 154). But the overriding impression, so Dimmock argues, is one of Islamic/Ottoman conflation as typified by the 'proud, arrogant and bombastic Bajazeth, whose "sacred" [3.3.268] identity is predicated upon his status as "Mahomet's" kinsman [3.3.75]' (p. 153).

Islam than the “Turk” stereotype [...] acknowledges’.⁶¹ But it is also important to recognize the dramaturgical function of Tamburlaine’s new identification with Islam.

Since the play’s opening episode is concerned primarily with the business of a cross-faith treaty, we should note that the shift in representation sharpens the idea of Tamburlaine as a threat to Christendom that is equal to, if not greater than, the threat of the Ottoman ‘Turk’. Whereas Part One is designed to show Tamburlaine as the saviour of Europe, at this point Marlowe requires Tamburlaine to function as a dangerous threat – in simplest terms, as the bad guy – that necessitates a religious compromise between Sigismond and Orcanes. In his efforts to do this, if Marlowe did little to accentuate the fearsome, ‘Turkish’ qualities of Tamburlaine – in the reference to ‘Mahomet’ but also in how the character is shown to treat his sons (see 1.3.17-105) – the sense of peril for the parties involved would not be communicated as strongly, and the ironies of European foreign policy (as represented by Sigismond) would not be highlighted as effectively.⁶²

At the same time, this episode makes it even more difficult to grasp the reasons for Tamburlaine’s success: this is because Sigismond and Orcanes endorse different worldviews – one trusting Machiavellian ‘policy’, the other showing faith in providential justice – yet both find themselves defeated. By introducing these different modes of historical understanding, and by discrediting them both in turn, Marlowe further creates the impression that Tamburlaine’s feats cannot be rationalized, let alone replicated. It is especially difficult for the audience to develop an idea of how a European monarch, such as Sigismond, would be best to act in the same circumstances. The threat is certainly real: as well as being accentuated by Tamburlaine’s new association with Islam, it is evident from Theridamas’ claim to have ‘made a voyage into Europe’ (1.3.208). But Orcanes displays the same faith as Tamburlaine. He, too, swears by the name of ‘sacred Mahomet’

⁶¹ Grogan, “A warre ... commodious”, p. 46.

⁶² Dimmock refers to the murder of Calyphas (in 4.1) when describing how Tamburlaine ‘assumes [...] the barbarism that many earlier texts attribute to the Ottomans’ (*New Turkes*, p. 156). Marlowe prepares the ground for this murder, thus accentuating the ‘Turkish’ qualities of his protagonist, in 1.3.

(1.1.137) – in contrast to Sigismond, who uses the name of ‘him that made the world and saved my soul, / The son of God and issue of a maid, / Sweet Jesus Christ’ (1.1.133-5). Also, the Christians remember ‘what cruel slaughter of [their] Christian bloods / These heathenish Turks and pagans lately made’ (2.1.5-6), which is a memory that disrupts the process of prudent policy-making.

For the Ottomans, by contrast, it is clear that the Persians’ terrifying power necessitates compromise with a lesser enemy:

’Tis requisite to parley for a peace
 With Sigismond the king of Hungary,
 And save our forces for the hot assaults
 Proud Tamburlaine intends for Natolia. (1.1.50-3)

What, then, should Sigismond do? Whereas Orcanes perceives Tamburlaine to be the greatest threat to Ottoman survival, with the vast scale of the Persian army – ‘a world of people’ (1.1.66) – identified as the ‘cause the Christians shall have peace’ (1.1.57; see 1.1.54-77), the Christians themselves cannot look past their immediate hatred of the ‘heathenish Turks’. Thus, rather than uphold ‘the articles of peace [they] have both confirmed’ (2.2.30), Sigismond is encouraged to betray Orcanes and capitalize on the Ottomans’ distraction, thereby taking the chance to ‘venge our Christians’ death / And scourge their foul blasphemous paganism’ (2.152-3). The morality of this proposed double-crossing, not to mention the question of its wisdom (given the looming presence of Tamburlaine), is undermined by its contrast with a pious interpretation of history propounded by the Christians’ foe – a contrast that is all the starker for the Muslim character’s surprising respect for Christ’s role as a ‘just and dreadful punisher of sin’ (2.3.4).

Orcanes’ subsequent victory against Sigismond, and his attribution of this success to the ‘justice of his Christ’ (2.3.28), may thus suggest the presence of a providential hand in history. Yet this interpretation of the battle is equally undercut, first in the observation of Gazellus after the defeat of Sigismond – ‘’Tis but the fortune of the wars, my lord, /

Whose power is often proved a miracle' (2.3.31-2) – and then, of course, by Orcanes' defeat at the hands of Tamburlaine, which he suffers alongside Callapine, son of Bajazeth, in a manner that quashes any realistic expectation for poetic justice. Having thus complicated two opposing interpretations of history, and having shown neither to be an accurate reflection of why things happen the way they do, the triumphant Tamburlaine emerges with the audience still left none the wiser as to why he proves victorious time after time.

As noted above, several scholars have suggested that this episode must have reminded Marlowe's audience of the position that was taken by Elizabeth in support of the Ottomans. It is possible, certainly, that the cross-faith treaty between Sigismond and Orcanes brought the Anglo-Ottoman situation fleetingly to mind, though Sigismond's betrayal leaves the question of the treaty's potential effectiveness tantalizingly open: might Tamburlaine have been defeated if the two parties had stayed together? By not revealing the answer, but at least showing the short-sightedness of Sigismond's opportunistic grab at victory, it might be argued that Marlowe uses Part Two to hint at the wisdom of alliance with a stronger Islamic state.

But the allegorical reading cannot be sustained, primarily because there is no Catholic/Protestant divide in Part Two: we have seen already that England wanted to free the Ottoman Empire for a fight against Spain, whereas in the play there is no benefit for Sigismond beyond halting the Persians' encroachment into Europe. Indeed, it is clear that if freed from war with the Persian Tamburlaine, Orcanes and the Ottomans would simply resume their assault on Sigismond and Hungary, not turn their attentions elsewhere to Hungary's benefit – as reflected by the decision that is finally taken by Sigismond to attack the Ottomans while the circumstances appear to be favourable:

It resteth now, then, that your majesty
Take all advantages of time and power,
And work revenge upon these infidels.
Your highness knows for Tamburlaine's repair,
That strikes a terror to all Turkish hearts,

Natolia hath dismissed the greatest part
Of all his army [...] (2.1.11-17)

Persuaded by the arguments of ‘advantage’ (2.1.22), ‘necessary policy’ (2.1.38), and ‘opportunity’ (2.1.51) – all references to the theory of political pragmatism that Marlowe explores more closely in *The Massacre at Paris* – Sigismond resolves to ‘assail the pagan’ on the basis that Christians are only obliged to obey Christian oaths (2.1.62; see 2.1.33-41). It has long been recognized that Marlowe’s focus on these arguments challenges the validity of a Eurocentric, Christian worldview. But it also points conspicuously to Europe’s weakness in the face of Islamic force. For even when taking ‘all advantages of time and power’, the Christians suffer defeat – and if they cannot succeed against Orcanes, especially when he is missing ‘the greatest part / Of all his army’, what chance would they have against the foe ‘that strikes a terror to all Turkish hearts’?

Given the level of interest in the Near East – at least among the literate, as reflected by publications such as *The English Mirror* – it might be suggested that Part Two thus offers a sobering analysis of how Europe, not to mention England, is placed in terms of its military strength and assumed position on the right side of history. As this episode from Part Two demonstrates, Marlowe saw the dramatic potential in current ideas about Persia and used the contradictory indications regarding Islamic military prowess (Ottoman as well as Persian) to reflect on Europe’s strategic weakness. Moreover, this episode shows that the significance of Marlowe’s engagement with the Near East is not confined to his plays’ political meaning: Marlowe also used ideas about Persia to create a powerful protagonist whose dramatic appeal lies in his resistance to the rigid framework of the exemplary tradition, with old and new logics of causation both shown to be insufficient to account for the events depicted onstage.

Throughout this section, I have argued that our interest in ‘what was “new” about the plays of Christopher Marlowe’, and the assumption that they ‘discard old ways and old

values', arises partly from the forms in which writers like Whetstone described Persia.⁶³ Naturally, not all of Marlowe's innovations can be traced to *The English Mirror*, but the influence of Whetstone is part of what makes the first part of *Tamburlaine* seem so radical: it explains the uncertainties surrounding the military success of the Persian hero. For despite Whetstone's moral purpose in writing *The English Mirror*, *Tamburlaine's* career is not presented as a cautionary tale in the way we might expect; there is no obvious lesson to be drawn.

In his dramatic retelling of the story, Marlowe hints at the possibility of such a reading in Part Two, not least in the Prologue's promise that 'the progress of [Tamburlaine's] pomp' will be ended abruptly by his 'death' (l. 4): the hero's fall into 'sickness' proximate to the instruction that 'the Turkish Alcaron [...] shall be burnt' (5.1.221; 5.1.172-5), his dying regret at leaving 'a world of ground [...] unconquered' (5.3.145-50), and the indications that Amyras will prove unqualified to 'ascend' his father's 'seat' (5.3.207) – these moments do suggest some kind of cautionary significance. But the playwright offers no confirmation that this is how we should take them. *Tamburlaine's* book burning can be read ironically, 'as a satirical comment upon Christian belief', since it targets 'Mahomet' rather than a Christian God (5.1.174), and his statement of thwarted ambition – 'and shall I die, and this unconquered?' (5.3.150; 5.3.158) – is matched by a lengthy description of the lands that he *has* 'conquered', covering an area of 'near five thousand leagues' (5.3.144; see 5.3.123-58).⁶⁴

Given Marlowe's indebtedness to Whetstone, this ambiguity should come as no surprise. Whetstone tells us that 'this great personage, without disgrace of fortune, after sundry great victories, *by the course of nature* died' – not as a result of providential justice – and the only failure that *Tamburlaine* stands for in *The English Mirror* is the failure that

⁶³ Lunney, *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition*, p. 1.

⁶⁴ Dimmock, *New Turkes*, p. 159. For Grogan, 'rather than being simply a hubristic, blasphemous, or even anti-Islamic act, the Koran-burning scene [is] a powerful if hyperbolic statement of the schism between Shi'a Persians and Sunni Ottomans' (p. 47).

history has not remembered him (p. 82; my emphasis). Of all the accomplishments of ancient 'Romans and Grecians', we are told that 'none of [...] their martial acts deserve[s] to be proclaimed with more renown than the conquest and military disciplines of Tamburlaine; but such was the injury of his fortune as no worthy writers undertook his history' (p. 79). The omission is blamed on Tamburlaine's 'two sons', whose 'incapacities to govern the conquests of their father' led to the fall of the 'Empire' and the sorry fact that soon 'there was no remembrance left, either of him or his lineage' (p. 82).

In the second *Tamburlaine* play, there is also the heavy prospect that Amyras will fall like 'Phaeton' (5.3.244). But thanks to Marlowe, this does not mean his father will be forgotten; as I have suggested, it might even be said that the impetus Marlowe felt to compose *Tamburlaine* arose from his reading of Whetstone's lament – that Marlowe perceived in the 'injury' to Tamburlaine's 'fortune' a career-making opportunity. Certainly, in the plays that proved 'delightful' when 'showed in London upon stages', and which continued to be popular when 'published in print' (running to three editions in the 1590s), the two *Tamburlaine* plays secured the belated 'renown' of their protagonist as well as the early renown of their author.⁶⁵ As well as providing the perfect model for 'the Herculean hero', Whetstone's account of the Near Eastern military leader gave the aspiring playwright the chance to present himself as a 'worthy' writer capable of securing fame for a 'great personage'.

Marlowe's Mirror

If the ambiguities of *Tamburlaine* produce the effect of 'wonder', it may be concluded that Marlowe took more from his source material than just the basic narrative of the conquering hero. In addition to its topical overtones – with Tamburlaine's defeat of Bajazeth alluding to sixteenth-century geopolitics – Whetstone's 'wonderful' story

⁶⁵ The remarks relating to performance and publication are taken from the publisher's preface to the 1590 edition (in Cunningham (ed.), p. 111).

furnished the conceptual framework that Waith describes in *The Herculean Hero*. We have seen that the plays' contradictory indications regarding the question of Tamburlaine's origins are developed from the way that Whetstone presents his account of mediaeval Persian history. This tells us something about the sense of originality that is often associated with Marlowe. But the influence of Whetstone also holds significance when it comes to understanding the *political* meaning of the playwright's earliest work. Accordingly, in this section of the chapter, I am concerned with how the effect of Marlowe's ambiguity relates to the place of *Tamburlaine* within the mirror-for-princes genre. For, if the plays frustrate attempts to reconcile Tamburlaine with Christian historiography, it is difficult to see how they might have served any serious didactic purpose. I shall try to explain, therefore, why Marlowe might have chosen the metaphor of the 'tragic glass' when introducing his Persian hero to the English stage.

To understand the function of this metaphor, we must look at how Marlowe uses it within the context of English theatrical tradition. On this topic, Ruth Lunney claims that 'Marlowe's "newness" lies, as much as anything, in transforming the familiar, in the way he makes use of – rather than discards – old ways and old values'.⁶⁶ This is particularly true of the Part One Prologue. As Lunney points out, 'earlier prologues insist conscientiously on the playing space as a place of *proof and example* rather than as a place of *story and experience*'; Marlowe's Prologue can be seen as original, therefore, not because it 'discards' an outdated dramaturgical form, but because 'eyes and ears are now enlisted to register the high points of the narrative' – because 'the "glass" retained from the old didacticism offers, not moral certainties, but an opportunity to "applaud [...] as you please" [Prologue, l. 8]'.⁶⁷

The inheritance of the *speculum* tradition is evident in drama – examples include the description of Oedipus as the 'mirror of misery' in Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh's

⁶⁶ Lunney, *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition*, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Lunney, *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition*, p. 3 (my emphasis).

Jocasta (performed at Gray's Inn in 1566), as well as Gascoigne's later play, *The Glass of Government* (1575) – in the poems known collectively as *A Mirror for Magistrates* (first published in 1559), and in major prose histories such as *The English Mirror*.⁶⁸ But Marlowe reconfigures the metaphor to suit changing tastes and the ambiguities of his subject matter. By dispensing with the instructive purpose declared in such works as *The English Mirror*, Marlowe brings the image of the 'glass' in line with the interrogative forms of drama discussed by Altman, and the decision whether or not to 'applaud' is left to the audience's discretion without being tied to a fixed explanation of the play's meaning. As Lunney suggests, this is a significant innovation for the 1580s.

But if we are to recognize the full extent of Marlowe's departure from dramatic tradition, we must also consider more specifically the function of Persia as an exemplary model in the mirror-for-princes genre. Evidence of Persia's attractiveness in this regard can be found in print translations of Persian history, especially in the pointed instructional messages that appear in their dedications. Having previously dedicated an English edition of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* to William Herbert, 1st Earl of Pembroke, the translator William Barker dedicated his 1572 edition to the 15-year old Philip, Earl of Surrey (later 1st Earl of Arundel); explaining that the 'intent of the book is to show what a noble man by good education may prove unto', and that of the many 'good inducements' of learning, 'better can there none be than the reading of such authors as for the matter be most worthy', Barker suggests that Cyrus stands as the perfect model on which the young nobleman may choose to base his character: 'I dare affirm this Xenophon, whom I now present unto you, to be most fit for you' (A3^{r-v}).⁶⁹

⁶⁸ George Gascoigne, *The Pleasantest Works of George Gascoigne, Esquire* (London: [R. Smith], 1587), p. 69. The dumb shows before Acts 1 and 5 (pp. 71, 108) are possible sources for the chariot pulled by kings in *Tamburlaine*, Part Two (4.3.0SD-56). See Lunney, *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition*, p. 195n.10. See: Harriet Archer, *The Mirror for Magistrates, 1559-1610: Transmission, Appropriation and the Poetics of Historiography* (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2013). On the connection between *A Mirror* and Senecan drama, see: Jessica Winston, 'National History to Foreign Calamity: *A Mirror for Magistrates* and Early English Tragedy'.

⁶⁹ Quotations are taken from William Barker (trans), *The VIII Books of Xenophon, containing the Institution, School, and Education of Cyrus the Noble King of Persia* (London: Reginald Wolfe, 1572).

At the same time – relevant perhaps to Marlowe’s declaration of literary talent and role in preserving the renown of Tamburlaine – Barker also reflects on the heroic responsibility of the writer in preserving classical examples of great leadership:

When Alexander the Great did pass by the pace where Achilles was buried, he said these words: ‘O happy Achilles, that haddest such a trumpet as Homer to sound thy glory to the world’. Of this saying did grow a disputation: whether the valiant captain, that by courage and policy attaineth to fame, or the skillful writer, that be learning and cunning maketh report thereof, is worthy more commendation. For as the doer of noble deeds giveth matter to the writer of goodly books, so those deeds should soon die if they did not live by writ. (sig. A2^r)

Persian history can also be found in early Elizabethan drama: in Thomas Preston’s *Cambises* (perhaps performed at court in 1561), discussed in my introduction, Persian history is used to celebrate the end of Marian tyranny but also to critique the ‘all-pervasive corruption’ of the English elites that facilitated the return to popery; in the anonymous *King Darius* (performed and published in 1565), it is used to urge greater zeal in the pursuit of religious reform, building on the ‘parallel in pulpit oratory and print’ between the building of the Second Temple and the reestablishment of the Protestant Church.⁷⁰ Persia thus provided a convenient mirror in which dramatists could show tragic consequences of misgovernment and thereby advise (if not reproach) those in a position to set England on a better course. But though these plays may communicate controversial or unpopular ideas – on matters mostly to do with Protestant reform – at a structural level they are less radical, treating Persian history as the storehouse of ‘proof and example’; whereas, in contrast, Marlowe’s debut work reconfigures the dramaturgical function of Persia as part of a wider move – illustrated by the Part One Prologue – from the didactic to the interrogative.

This brings us back to the question of Marlowe’s originality. Until recently, critical attention to the Part One Prologue has centred on the subject of Marlowe’s ‘newness’. Even when we accept Lunney’s caveat that Marlowe’s drama does not ‘discard old ways

The earlier, incomplete edition is Barker (trans), *The Books of Xenophon, containing the Discipline, School, and Education of Cyrus the Noble King of Persia* (London: Reginald Wolfe, 1552).

⁷⁰ Kewes, *This Great Matter of Succession*, Ch. 5.

and old values' so much as it 'transform[s] the familiar', there is much that supports a narrative placing Marlowe at the vanguard of dramatic innovation. This narrative becomes especially persuasive when we consider how Marlowe was able to harness blank verse more effectively to suit the patterns of English speech. But recent work prompts us to question whether or not the Prologue does refer to 'Marlowe's break with theatrical fashion' at all.⁷¹ Could it be that the Prologue advertises a contrast within Part One itself? Accordingly, Lukas Erne suggests that it 'describes and announces what Marlowe's play enacted' – that 'clownage' refers to the material removed by the publisher of the 1590 edition, and the disparaging reference to 'jigging veins of rhyming mother wits' anticipates the lacklustre oratory of Mycetes (ll. 1-2).⁷²

In this view, the Prologue identifies Mycetes' speech as a model for comparison with the 'high astounding terms' of Marlowe's more eloquent protagonist (l. 5). When Mycetes 'wills it so' (1.1.27), he does so ineffectually and for little more than appearance's sake, whereas Tamburlaine becomes synonymous with the words 'will' and 'shall' (3.3.41), thus creating the expectation of constant success. If we accept Erne's hypothesis, Marlowe does not use the Prologue to announce his own rhetorical mastery but that of his protagonist, thereby connecting the power of Tamburlaine's speech with the power of 'his conquering sword' (l. 6). Given the difficulty of understanding why Tamburlaine is so effective at 'threat'ning the world' and 'scourging kingdoms' (ll. 5-6), it is a connection that lends considerable relevance to the role that language plays in setting Tamburlaine apart.

A familiar claim of Marlowe scholarship is that many of the playwright's protagonists fulfil the role of the 'overreacher'. Used by George Puttenham in *The Art of English Poesie* (pub. 1589), this term for hyperbole has come to stand for the cluster of motivations that drive many of Marlowe's most aspirational characters; Harry Levin suggests that 'it could not have been more happily inspired to throw its illumination upon

⁷¹ Erne, 'Biography, Mythography, and Criticism', p. 38.

⁷² Erne, pp. 39-40 (p. 40). In his preface to the 1590 edition, Jones explains that he has 'purposely omitted and left out some fond and frivolous jestures [sic]' (in Cunningham (ed.), p. 111).

Marlowe – upon his style, which is so emphatically himself, and on his protagonists, overreachers all'.⁷³ Connecting these characters' transgressive aspirations with the exceeding of bounds at the rhetorical level, overreaching is seen to be the common thread that explains the singularity of Marlowe's voice and vision. Describing the playwright's 'style' and the spirit of his 'protagonists', it is an idea that also shapes much of the discussion of Marlowe's personality, even prompting Greenblatt to claim that Marlowe was the one author capable of resisting the socializing forces described by New Historicism.⁷⁴ Like Levin, who describes Marlowe's style as that of an 'extremist', Greenblatt draws our attention to 'the *excessive* quality of Marlowe's heroes, [...] their histrionic extremism', which is said to '[distinguish] their words as well as their actions from the surrounding society'.⁷⁵

This is certainly true in Part One, especially in the opening episode where the protagonist's language is juxtaposed with the 'insufficient' oratory of Mycetes, who declares himself unable to produce 'a great and thund'ring speech' (1.1.2-3; see also 1.1.49-56; 1.1.92-108), and whose failings in language reflect a similar weakness in his leadership. For just as Mycetes is forced by a lack of eloquence to ask others to speak on his behalf (at 1.1.4-5; 1.1.28-30; and 2.2.13), so too is he reliant upon the military might of his subordinates, particularly Theridamas (see 1.1.57-64). This anticipates Cosroe's similarly ill-fated reliance upon Tamburlaine (the subject of 2.1; also see 2.3.1-2), but it also draws attention to the deliberate uncertainty within the play about where political strength originates. Is a leader's legitimacy determined by hereditary right, which would make Cosroe a 'traitorous brother' (2.2.4); by an altruistic concern for the 'country's good' (1.2.158), which would lend some degree of credibility to Cosroe's usurpation of the Persian throne (2.5.21-3); or by strength of character and the simple fact of victory, a point that Tamburlaine makes at 4.2.79-81?

⁷³ Harry Levin, *Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), p. 42.

⁷⁴ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 9.

⁷⁵ H. Levin, p. 41; Greenblatt, p. 214.

If Tamburlaine's victories are bound up in the power of his speech, further questions are raised. Does Tamburlaine succeed because he puts on a good show of strength or because he and his army really are that strong? Are his 'vaunts' persuasive because they appear to be 'substantial', or because Tamburlaine is truly capable of putting words into action (1.2.212)? Marlowe does not provide an easy or obvious answer to these questions; instead, he teases the audience with a number of complex and contradictory possibilities. In the first scene of Part One, the comically insubstantial threat that is made by Mycetes (1.1.21-7) suggests that language is only effective when it conforms to the true capacity of the speaker – a conclusion that is supported by the clear contrast between Mycetes and Theridamas, whose 'words are swords' (1.1.74; see also 2.4.125), and later by Bazajeth's inability to meet his boasts: 'Turks are full of brags / And menace more than they can well perform' (3.3.3-4). There are, of course, plentiful suggestions that Tamburlaine's boasts will be justified, not least in the scene where Tamburlaine wins the loyalty and admiration of Theridamas with a speech of some 43 lines (1.2.165-208):

THERIDAMAS: Not Hermes, prolocutor to the gods,
 Could use persuasions more pathetic.
 TAMBURLAINE: Nor are Apollo's oracles more true
 Than thou shalt find my vaunts substantial. (1.2.209-12)

Once Tamburlaine is in league with Cosroe, Theridamas goes on to describe Tamburlaine's 'working words' (2.3.25), while Cosroe acknowledges that 'thy words assure me of kind success' (2.3.60). That Marlowe should establish such a direct contrast between effective and ineffective speech accentuates the point that Part One can offer no instructive model for its audience: since Tamburlaine's power rests primarily in language, with explanatory logics such as providence and *realpolitik* gestured towards but never confirmed, there is no practical lesson to be taken by anyone watching the play.

Indeed, since human and divine factors are given equal weight in the account of Tamburlaine's success, it may be suggested that the character's ability to speak well – the communication of his power in dramatic terms – only serves to highlight the disjunction

between the Persian hero and those who would imitate him if they only knew how. That is to say, the language of Tamburlaine sets him apart in the manner that Greenblatt describes, but does not stand as a blueprint for would-be monarchs – after all, for every other character in Marlowe’s drama (e.g. Mortimer Junior and the Duke of Guise), the use of the ‘overreacher’ (hyperbole) does not signal success but rather accentuates the folly of those characters’ self-glorification. In this regard, we may say that Marlowe’s interest in the equation of eloquence and power fits well with his interest in the ambiguities of the Near East. The *Tamburlaine* plays do raise important questions about the ethics of empire building and the practical value of primogeniture, but their overriding point is that the life of the Persian Tamburlaine stands beyond compare.

In addition to his eloquence, Tamburlaine’s appearance persuades onlookers of the likelihood that his imperial project will be successful. Zenocrate addresses Tamburlaine as a ‘shepherd’, but her hesitation in doing so – ‘if, as thou seemest, thou art so mean a man’ (1.2.7-8) – rather suggests that she can recognize the inherent nobility of his character. Soon thereafter, Zenocrate chooses to address Tamburlaine as ‘my lord’ because ‘so you do import’ (1.2.33), which could be a response to the lordliness of Tamburlaine’s speech, his appearance, or both.

The appearance of Tamburlaine also impresses Theridamas, who mentions in an aside that ‘his looks do menace heaven and dare the gods’ (1.2.156; see 1.2.154-60), and similar observations are made throughout the play, such as at 3.2.72-87 and 4.1.12-16, which create the impression that Tamburlaine really is ‘his fortune’s master’ (2.1.36) or, alternatively, that ‘fates and oracles of heaven have sworn / To royalise the deeds of Tamburlaine’ (2.3.7-9). Though these two possibilities involve Tamburlaine holding different amounts of agency, they both suggest that Tamburlaine cannot fail in his military exploits – a suggestion that is further supported by the character’s playful indulgence of

his opponents at 2.4.38-41 and 2.5.102-3.⁷⁶ In these respects, the first part of *Tamburlaine* suggests that appearance, like language, will only be successful when it accurately reflects (or predicts) the actions of which a leader is capable – such as when, for instance, Theridamas predicts what will happen ‘when you see his actions top his speech’ (2.3.26).

If the rise of *Tamburlaine* remains incomprehensible in Part One, the mirror’s lesson becomes no clearer in Part Two. In his description of the ‘wonderful’ in *Tamburlaine*, Altman focuses on the question of the protagonist’s death, observing that ‘whether he is stricken by an avenging deity or simply by natural disease remains unclear’.⁷⁷ Summarizing the Aristotelian definition of ‘wonder’ as ‘the primary response to [a] surprising turn of events’, Altman explains that ‘the degree of wonder that is felt is measured not simply by the shock of the unexpected, but precisely by our sense that the accidental may in fact be purposeful’.⁷⁸ In the case of *Tamburlaine*, there is the suggestion that the hero’s death is a direct consequence of his anti-Islamic gesture, thus forming, on Marlowe’s part, an ironic subversion of the Christian providential paradigm. It is also possible that *Tamburlaine* ‘must die’ because he has fulfilled his purpose as ‘the scourge of God’ (5.3.248). Alternatively, his death may hold no significance whatsoever. But there is nothing to confirm any of these readings; as Altman suggests, we form conclusions ‘at our own risk’.⁷⁹ Naturally, given the unresolved question of the ‘accidental’ or ‘purposeful’ nature of *Tamburlaine*’s death, the ending of Part Two has a destabilizing effect upon the two plays’ function as *specula* – unless, of course, the intended lesson is that the reason for historical events can never be understood satisfactorily.

That Marlowe should raise such a proposition speaks to the way that interrogative drama – an offshoot of educational practice in the sixteenth century – tended to undermine the comfort of the simple answer. But it also speaks to English perceptions of

⁷⁶ Criticism that emphasizes *Tamburlaine*’s Machiavellian ‘policy’ tends not to account for this apparently reckless disregard for good military strategy.

⁷⁷ Altman, pp. 348-50 (p. 348).

⁷⁸ Altman, p. 349.

⁷⁹ Altman, p. 350.

Persia. Rather than offer a complex but satisfying move towards comprehension, the ambiguity of *Tamburlaine* reflects the uncertainties of the Near East. It could be argued that Marlowe was well placed to reflect on such issues and see them from both sides: as a member of the Elizabethan secret service, he would perhaps have had some knowledge of the frustrations that were felt in England as a consequence of Persia's resilience in the Ottoman-Safavid War; as a reader of popular prose histories such as *The English Mirror*, he would have recognized the contrary argument that saw the Persian army as 'a bridle to the Turk, and a hinderer of damage to the Christians' (p. 75). But to gain a sense of these 'tensions' or 'antitheses' (to return to Waith), Marlowe would not have needed access to the confidential workings of the Elizabethan regime, for *The English Mirror* produces the effect by itself: Whetstone cannot decide whether Tamburlaine succeeds by virtue of his 'military discipline' – his 'policy and prowess' – or because 'God raised him to chasten the kings and proud people of the earth'. As we have seen, it is this uncertainty that accounts for Tamburlaine's appeal. In the case of Marlowe's earliest dramatic effort, therefore, the effect of the 'wonderful' is tied not to the practice of discovery but to the insurmountable problem of *not knowing*.

The consequence of this ambiguity is that no one can replicate the character's success. As well as being a problem for Marlowe's imitators – which might explain some of the criticism of Marlowe's style from writers such as Greene – it is a problem that the plays themselves address, most notably in the treatment of the post-Tamburlaine succession in Part Two. In this final episode, Tamburlaine uses the characteristically Marlovian myth of Phaeton to tell his eldest son how to rule effectively:

So, reign, my son, scourge and control those slaves,
 Guiding thy chariot with thy father's hand.
 As precious is the charge thou undertakest
 As that which Clymen's brain-sick son did guide
 When wandering Phoebe's ivory cheeks were scorched
 And all the earth, like Aetna, breathing fire. (5.2.229-33)

Far from suggesting a rosy future for the Persian Empire, these words highlight the fact that Tamburlaine is irreplaceable: Amyras is told to ‘scourge and control’ with his ‘father’s hand’, not his own, and the difference between ‘thy chariot’ and ‘myself’ points to a similar difference in ability. The point is then reinforced when Tamburlaine goes on to say that ‘the nature of thy chariot will not bear / A guide of baser temper than myself, / More than heaven’s coach the pride of Phaeton’ (5.2.242-4) – from Amyras’ point of view, a much unwanted classical example, but one that signals to the audience the unlikelihood that the character will prove to be competent following his father’s demise.

In relation to the horses that pull the chariot – in Amyras’ case, of course, the ‘proud rebelling jades’ are captured opponents (5.2.238) – Ovid’s Phaeton is told similarly to ‘curb their impatience’ (2.128), but the story in Ovid also stresses the importance of moderation as a guiding principle of behaviour:⁸⁰

Venture to climb too high, and you’ll burn the ceiling of heaven,
The earth if you sink too low; for safety remain in the middle. (2.134-40)

The same theme of moderation is also in Ovid’s story of Icarus, who is instructed to ‘listen carefully! / Keep to the middle way. If you fly too low, the water / will clog your wings; if you fly too high, they’ll be scorched by fire. / Fly between sea and sun’ (8.203-6). In Marlowe’s oeuvre, these myths are often associated with impossible ambition, but in the *Metamorphoses* the tasks that face Phaeton and Icarus are not impossible so much as they are badly executed – by sons who fail to follow their fathers’ instructions in holding a line between two extremes (‘high’ and ‘low’).⁸¹ For this reason, Tamburlaine’s choice of example is appropriate for more reasons than just the coincidental presence of a chariot

⁸⁰ Quotations are taken from Ovid, *Metamorphoses: A New Verse Translation*, trans. by David Raeburn (London: Penguin, 2004).

⁸¹ This is the moral that Michael Renniger takes from the Icarus story, as he explains in a treatise that was published in the same year as *Tamburlaine’s* first performance: ‘under a feigned device they [i.e. poets] carry us to a fruitful and wise warning, to content ourselves with our states and callings, and with that moderate course that God’s providence hath appointed us, neither making ourselves more abject, neither mounting above the possibilities by God’s providence allotted to us’ (*A Treatise containing Two Parts: An Exhortation to True Love, Loyalty, and Fidelity to her Majesty, and A Treatise against Treasons, Rebellions, and such Disloyalties* (London: Thomas Dawson, 1587), sigs. Q1^v-Q2^r). The application of this moral to Catholic conspiracy will be discussed in the following chapter. Subsequent quotations are taken from the same edition.

onstage: he, too, is a father instructing his son. But whereas Ovid's Phaeton and Icarus may be unprepared or simply too headstrong to succeed, it is clear that Marlowe's Tamburlaine sets little store by moderate action: he tells Amyras, a willing but daunted learner, that he should be 'full of thoughts / As pure and fiery as Phyteus' beams' (5.2.236-7), which is easier said than done.

That the play ends with this failure of instruction may be taken as a direct challenge to the didactic principles of theatrical tradition. In light of this, it becomes possible to offer some explanation for Marlowe's use of the 'glass' metaphor in the Part One Prologue:

View but his picture in this tragic glass
And then applaud his fortunes as you please. (ll. 7-8)

This could be taken as a residual effect of Marlowe's source material, the title of which announces the 'mirror' function of Whetstone's many narratives. But the ambivalence of the play's final line ('applaud [...] *as you please*') points toward a less obviously didactic function. We may conclude, therefore, that Marlowe employs the image of the 'glass' purposefully to advertise his departure from the tradition of 'proof and example' – a tradition of English drama that is notable for its use of Persian history. Like the eponymous hero of *The Wars of Cyrus* – or, indeed, of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* – Tamburlaine is offered in Parts One and Two as the supreme example of successful military leadership. Though the Lucianic scepticism of Marlowe does complicate Tamburlaine's moral standing, there is no question that the character represents the best of all things on 'earth' and from 'heaven': 'the pride of all her fruit' and 'his choicest living fire' (5.3.250-1).⁸² But the plays offer no hope that this exemplary hero can be matched – not by his heirs in the play, nor by the aspiring 'heroes' watching in the playhouse or those who rule them.

⁸² Rhodes, 'Marlowe and the Greeks', p. 17.

Instead, pointing once again to the unresolved question of Tamburlaine's origins, Part Two ends by emphasizing the inimitable nature of the character's career – and, by extension, the unrepeatability of the drama that Marlowe created to ensure his/their 'renown':

Let earth and heaven his timeless death deplore,
For both their worths will equal him no more. (5.3.252-3)

If the historical Tamburlaine's achievements were equal to those of 'the illustrious [...] Romans and Grecians', it follows that the writer who 'undertook his history' would not want anyone to outdo his example in future. For Marlowe, of course, this served just as well in terms of his professional career as a new London playwright. In *Tamburlaine*, he presents a 'puissant and mighty monarch' whose exceptional achievements make imitation impossible. Tamburlaine thus serves as the literary vehicle for Marlowe's own declaration of a 'rare and wonderful' talent. This does not say much for the playwright's estimation of his rivals, but the presentation of Tamburlaine as the inimitable Near Eastern hero is equally damning in the implication that it carries for contemporary monarchs in Europe. For the plays' celebration of the unrivalled strength of the 'King of Persia' is as much a reflection on the profound weakness of Christian monarchs closer to home.

Imitating Tamburlaine/*Tamburlaine*

Many attempts have been made to describe the influence of *Tamburlaine* on popular drama of the 1580s and early 1590s, and this has usually involved the disparagement of plays such as Greene's *Alphonsus, King of Aragon* and *Selimus*.⁸³ The comparison of

⁸³ Hunter, pp. 49-68. The unflattering view is exemplified by Wolfgang Clemen's observation from 1961 that '*Selimus* and Lodge's *The Wounds of Civil War* [...] illustrate various of the difficulties inherent in ill-advised attempts at imitation' (*English Tragedy before Shakespeare: The Development of Dramatic Speech* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 130-1). The greater estimation of *Tamburlaine* is also implicit to Shepherd's reading of *Tamburlaine* and *Selimus*, since one is afforded the respect of a non-reductive allegorical interpretation – Shepherd describes such an approach as being 'highly reductive' (p. 149) – and the other is given precisely that: Shepherd writes, 'here is the

Tamburlaine with these plays centres upon Marlowe's apparent refusal to situate his protagonist within a clear moral schema. For unlike *Tamburlaine*, Greene's plays retain the 'explanatory framework' that serves either to legitimize or demonize the hero – as demonstrated, for instance, by the revelation of Alphonsus' valid claim to the throne.⁸⁴ Marlowe's plays are thought to be different. Though there has been a parallel effort in modern criticism to read the tone of Marlowe's portrayal of *Tamburlaine* ironically – that is, as a travesty of the heroic ideal – contemporary accounts of his plays' success do not support this conclusion; Marlowe might have intended his protagonist as an object for outright derision and moral condemnation but the audience did not respond to the character in that way. Rather, as Dimmock notes, '[Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* was] an Asian warlord transformed into a peculiarly English hero in popular culture', and it is the strangeness of this situation – the peculiarity of *Tamburlaine*'s identification as the 'English hero' – that distinguishes Marlowe's first dramatic effort from those of his imitators.⁸⁵

That is not to say that *Tamburlaine* is presented as wholly good, for the character operates in a world of uncertain moral terrain: though *Tamburlaine* is shown at times to be heroic, these moments are complicated by the extremity of his behaviour as well as by the unavoidable fact of his origins in the Near East, a heritage that would still carry negative connotations despite the various forms of Western engagement through trade and diplomacy. But for all these complications, and the potential for discomfort that might have arisen for theatregoers faced with an image of Islamic invincibility, it is clear from audience accounts compiled that 1580s London gave Marlowe's protagonist a rapturous welcome – at least until the bombastic rhetoric that Marlowe popularized went out of fashion.

reduction: Selimus the young Essex, Master of the Horse, reading Marprelate pamphlets; Corcut the clerkly Robert Cecil, his rival; Acomat James VI of Scotland, married and with his own court' (p. 156).

⁸⁴ Hunter, p. 53.

⁸⁵ Dimmock, 'Tamburlaine's Curse', p. 17.

It is certainly the case that Tamburlaine became something of an English folk hero, as demonstrated by Thomas Deloney's use of his name as a pseudonym when writing the Dutch Church Libel. Few reasons have been given for this choice but it may have something to do with Tamburlaine's position of uncompromising opposition to a foreign rival (the Ottoman Empire) rather than willingness to engage in treaties, which resonates clearly with the libel's voice of opposition to the toleration, even preferential treatment, given by the authorities to foreign merchants masquerading as religious fugitives.⁸⁶ Indeed, this uncompromising aspect to the character might have also shaped the perceptions of Marlowe's audience at a time of revelations concerning the extent of Anglo-Ottoman cooperation during the 1580s. Confirming the allegations of English aid made by William Allen's *Admonition to the Nobility and People of England and Ireland* (1588), the first edition of Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* (1589) – published in quarto and dedicated to Sir Francis Walsingham – features some of the correspondence between Elizabeth I and Murad III.

Whilst work on the topical significance of *Tamburlaine* has tended to approach the Anglo-Ottoman alliance as a purely political phenomenon, what is significant about the contents of *Principal Navigations*, as Jack Beeching points out, is that 'nearly all these documents - ships' logs, salesmen's reports to head office, secret economic intelligence, captured enemy papers - relate, in the last analysis, to trade'.⁸⁷ Accordingly, as demonstrated by one of Elizabeth's letters dated 25th October 1579, the subject of the queen's correspondence with Murad is centred on the right of English merchants 'to come with merchandise both by sea and land to the countries and territories subject to your [i.e. Murad's] government, and from thence again to return home with good leave and

⁸⁶ Dimmock establishes Deloney as the author, and quotes the libel in full, in 'Tamburlaine's Curse'.

⁸⁷ Richard Hakluyt, *Voyages and Discoveries: The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, ed. by Jack Beeching (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 9.

liberty'.⁸⁸ It is precisely this kind of 'liberty of coming and going' that Tamburlaine rejects in his very first scene (in Part One):⁸⁹

But now you see these letters and commands
Are countermanded by a greater man,
And through my provinces you must expect
Letters of conduct from my mightiness
If you intend to keep your treasure safe. (1.2.21-5)

Whilst Zenocrate argues for her right to 'safe conduct' according to '[Zenocrate's uncle's] privy signet and hand' (1.2.15-16), the Median lord who accompanies her, Magnetes, tries to make something of the claim that 'besides rich presents from the puissant Cham / We have his highness' letters to command / Aid and assistance if we stand in need' (1.2.18-20). But though the document signed by Zenocrate's uncle – the king of Media – was sufficient for 'the mighty Turk' (1.2.14), Tamburlaine is 'a greater man' who accepts no one else's claim to authority but his own. The 'letters and commands' carried by Zenocrate and Magnetes are disregarded as an irrelevance since they are not 'letters of conduct' approved by Tamburlaine.

When details of the 1580 Capitulations emerged, the English readership of Hakluyt's collection could have been forgiven for thinking that Elizabeth adopted a position that disclosed her nation's dependence upon the good will of the Ottoman Empire. The queen's hope, recorded in a letter dated 5th September 1583, 'that by mutual traffic, the East may be joined and knit to the West' supports the emphasis on the West's engagement with the East (rather than domination) in the work of Matar, but it also hints at the urgency of England's need to establish amicable trading relations with a much greater power than itself – an urgency that is demonstrated by Elizabeth's insistence that England be given the same trading privileges as other European states.⁹⁰ In contrast, though he begins his career from a similar position of insignificance, Tamburlaine is not concerned with establishing amicable relations with his neighbours, nor will he admit to

⁸⁸ Hakluyt, p. 165.

⁸⁹ Hakluyt, p. 165.

⁹⁰ Hakluyt, p. 200; Matar, pp. 11-12.

other forms of authority besides his own. By not being implicated in the world of diplomatic and trading alliances – a world that involves compromise (and the recognition of other forms of authority) – Marlowe's protagonist ensures that he is always in a position where he can dictate the terms.

That is not to say that Marlowe's Tamburlaine was intended as a model for English imitation (*per* Bartels), for as we have seen, Marlowe makes clear that Tamburlaine cannot be copied. Whereas England's foreign policy – as it is revealed in *The Principal Navigations* – requires its queen to take part in the unseemly effort to form reciprocal arrangements with uncertain allies, Tamburlaine refuses to compromise or appear servile; the crown at which he aims may be 'earthly' but that does not mean he is willing to demean himself to attain it – a point on which the character may be compared with Mycetes in Part One:

For kings are clouts that every man shoots at,
Our crown the pin that thousands seek to cleave;
Therefore in policy I think it good
To hide it close [...]
Here will I hide it in this simple hole. (2.4.8-15)

Unlike Mycetes, whose comically inept attempt at 'policy' involves burying his crown in a 'simple hole', Tamburlaine refuses to make use of similar tricks to win the crown from him, which is much to the surprise of 'the witty king of Persia' (2.4.23); Mycetes is left to remark that 'I marvel much he stole it not away' (2.4.43). This observation, which ends the scene, coupled with Tamburlaine's promise not to take the crown 'till I may see thee hemmed with armed men' (2.4.39), serves to distinguish Tamburlaine's insistence upon doing things his way, in contrast to the much more desperate means by which other leaders cling to power. This is demonstrated, too, by Marlowe's decision to have Tamburlaine donate some of his soldiers to Cosroe before encountering him in battle (see 2.5.97-103).

How, then, were subsequent stage heroes to follow him? English theatregoers might have been impressed by Tamburlaine's unwillingness to compromise with foreign foes, and the evidence shows that they were thrilled as much as horrified by his martial

behaviour, but other dramatists were reluctant or else unable to produce that same sense of ‘amoral wonder’ that stems from the deliberate uncertainty surrounding the character’s origins and purpose. As Hunter explains, the innovations of *Tamburlaine* did not lead to a complete transformation of English drama but became part of a ‘mixed’ tradition, with playwrights continuing to affirm the normative moral values of an older form, retaining the ‘framework which “explains” the individual drive as only one part of a balanced system’.⁹¹ In *Selimus* and *Lochrine*, for instance, we find the ‘explanatory frameworks’ (moral, national, religious) with which the first part of *Tamburlaine* dispenses. *Selimus* copies the rhetorical bombast and geographical focus of Marlowe’s play but it reasserts the normative values of Christian drama. It does this by exploiting fears of Ottoman invasion and associating them with the main character, whereas Marlowe associates them with Bajazeth, not Tamburlaine. Although there is the surprise of Selimus’ continued, inexorable success, the play’s action retains a European, Christian moral framework.

Similarly, in *Lochrine*, the Tamburlaine-like character is Humber and the playwright creates the impression that the military success of this awful opponent cannot be stopped – that Humber ‘leads Fortune tied in a chain of gold’ (2.2.15).⁹² But Humber ultimately fails, his defeat explained by an excessive reliance upon ‘policy’ (2.5.8). Though frequently a sign of revolutionary strategic strength associated with Machiavelli, the character’s association with ‘policy’ also draws the audience’s attention to the uncertainties of conflict in a world governed by Fortuna. Humber is labelled as a character that deserves defeat in the form of providential justice, and though the workings of divine history are at odds with the randomness of fortune, both make it plain that Humber’s success will be temporary – an example of the ‘transitory pomp’ described by Marlowe’s Edward II (5.1.108).

⁹¹ Hunter, pp. 55-6.

⁹² Quotations are taken from Anon., *Lochrine*, in *William Shakespeare and Others: Collaborative Plays*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen with Jan Sewell and Will Sharpe (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 71-132. The editors suggest Greene or Peele as the likeliest authors, with possible involvement (prior to revision) from Charles Tilney (p. 74).

A less straightforward synthesis of Marlowe's 'heroic rhetoric' and the 'explanatory framework' of earlier drama can be found in *The Battle of Alcazar*. Though the character loosely equivalent to Tamburlaine remains subject to other factors of audience interpretation, Peele does more than just redefine the Tamburlaine-like hero as villain (as in *Selimus*): there is the 'ambitious tyranny' of Muly Muhamet (Second Dumb Show, l. 34), but there is also the mercenary behaviour of Thomas Stukeley – who claims that he will 'never cease t'aspire' (2.3.83) – and the religious hypocrisy of the Bishop, who is mocked by Hercules for claiming false Catholic zeal (as the justification for his involvement in the war against Abdelmelec) when really he is influenced by the 'desire of rule or benefit' that affects every other character (2.2.47).⁹³ Muly Mahamet is one among many villains in the play, and Peele presents him within a context of religious conflict in which even the most admirable character, the Portuguese king Sebastian, is rash and unwilling to heed counsel.

Likewise, in Thomas Lodge's Roman play *The Wounds of Civil War*, the moral balance of the action is artfully complicated. True, the actions of Sulla and Marius are presented always in relation to the political system and values of Rome. Putting aside its obvious connection with the prisoners pulling the chariot in the second part of *Tamburlaine* – which is anticipated by Part One but also by Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh's *Jocasta* – *The Wounds of Civil War* features comic murder scenes and numerous vaunts in the style of Marlowe: 'I [...] Will, shall, and dare attempt on Asia' (2.1.29-31).⁹⁴ But the play also anticipates forms of self-slaughter like those in Marlowe's *Edward II* and *The Massacre at Paris* – 'so many murders makest thou of thyself' (1.1.281) – and it is this wider view of society's collective culpability for violence which demonstrates that Lodge is doing more than just demonizing his heroes in the way that Greene does with *Selimus*; he

⁹³ Quotations are taken from Peele, *The Battle of Alcazar*, in *The Stukeley Plays*, pp. 59-128.

⁹⁴ Quotations are taken from Thomas Lodge, *The Wounds of Civil War*, ed. by Joseph W. Houppert (London: Edward Arnold, 1970). See: H. Levin, p. 67.

draws attention to the same natural selfishness that motivates most of the action in Marlowe's drama.

As these examples illustrate, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* did not just inspire hack-work but also more nuanced attempts to incorporate its fashionable elements within plays that either dealt with true events (*Battle of Alcazar*) or followed the conventions of a different genre with differing thematic associations (*Wounds of Civil War*). The style of *Tamburlaine* did not prove attractive for long; the failure of *Selimus*, in particular, can be inferred from the absence of any evidence that Greene composed a sequel, despite the initial promotion of the play as the first of two parts (aping the eventual two-part structure of *Tamburlaine*). But still the impact of *Tamburlaine* was considerable: though hackneyed imitations of Marlowe's style and content proved (unsurprisingly) to be less popular with audiences, and though the more successful offshoots did not accept *Tamburlaine's* innovations wholesale but adapted them to work alongside other dramatic features – and even, at times, subjected Marlowe's style to parody – *Tamburlaine* added significantly to drama's move beyond the straightforward didacticism that formed the early modern theatre's inheritance. That being said, the capacity of *Tamburlaine* to 'strike his hearers dead with admiration' (to repeat Wither's memorable phrase) remains peculiar to Marlowe's dramatic investment in capturing the ambiguities of Persia.

Scholarship is still concerned with defining the extent of Marlowe's contribution to the rise of professional theatre in the late sixteenth century. My own contribution to this topic, at least so far as *Tamburlaine* is concerned, has been to argue for a connection between contemporary ideas of the Near East and the increased ambiguity of Elizabethan drama. There was certainly an increased focus on the geopolitics of the region; alongside travel writing and prose histories, Elizabeth's reign witnessed a variety of plays that addressed the subject of the Near East. Meanwhile, the popularity of interrogative drama on the early modern stage has been attributed to a variety of causes, perhaps most plausibly the schoolroom practice of arguing *in utramque partem*. I have suggested that

these two strands of research should be brought together in the study of Marlowe's two earliest plays, proposing that their effect of ambiguity – or 'wonder' – derives in part from the manifold uncertainties aroused by the Near East. For as well as providing interrogative drama with subject matter, the Near East was itself an important *quaestio* in the political and religious culture of England. Ottoman conquests were subject to contrasting interpretations, and the military efforts of Safavid Persia – scourging the Ottoman 'scourge' – only increased confusion regarding the place of Islamic warfare within the Christian scheme of history. The Near East was conceptually suited, therefore, to a dramatic form that embraced ambiguity.

The multiple meanings of Persia, as well as being attractive for their didactic potential, played a crucial role in English drama's development from the instructive to the interrogative. Early modern playwrights – Marlowe especially – did not treat the Near East as simply the storehouse of example but took the uncertainties it aroused as the material for a new kind of dramatic experience. But whilst *Tamburlaine* opened up new avenues for English drama to pursue, the possibility for imitation did not extend in the real world to anyone who might wish to adopt Tamburlaine's style of leadership. In *De Republica Anglorum*, as we saw in my introduction, Sir Thomas Smith describes 'England [as it] standeth and is governed at this day the 28th March Anno 1565'; he does not waste any effort describing England as it would be in ideal circumstances:

I have [...] set before your eyes the principal points [...] not in that sort as Plato made his commonwealth, or Xenophon his kingdom of Persia, nor as Sir Thomas More his *Utopia* feigned commonwealths, such as never was nor never shall be, vain imaginations, fantasies of philosophers to occupy the time and to exercise their wits.⁹⁵

In the light of my reading of *Tamburlaine*, it is notable that Smith counts Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* among the 'feigned commonwealths' of Plato and More – as one of the 'fantasies of philosophers' that cannot be realized in the ordinary world that Smith inhabits. In this chapter, I have shown that Marlowe also places Persia out of reach.

⁹⁵ Smith, p. 144.

Though Tamburlaine is supremely successful – ‘a most puissant and mighty monarch’ – his example cannot be copied due to the uncertain question of what makes him successful.

Marlowe thus presents a mirror in which theatregoers recognize the limits and weaknesses of their own rulers in Europe.

Chapter Two

Marlowe's 'Eliza': Ships and Walls in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*

Dido, Queen of Carthage (1588) is based on Books 1, 2, and 4 of Virgil's *Aeneid*. It reshapes this material in ways that reflect contemporary concerns about England's readiness to defend itself against the internal threat of Catholic conspiracy and the external threat of Spanish invasion. Whilst it is difficult to decide whether Marlowe's play came before or after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in August 1588 (the dating is discussed in my introduction), in either case the story of Dido and Aeneas resonated with contemporary propaganda as written by those on both sides of the religious divide: the story features examples and images that were used widely in the late 1580s, by Catholics and Protestants, to explain the nature of England's predicament and the means by which the country might be saved.

In previous years, Catholics saw their prospects diminished by the failure of marriage negotiations, which reached their height in 1579-81, between Elizabeth I and François, Duke of Anjou; the alternative hope for a Catholic succession was through the hereditary claim of Mary Queen of Scots, but the hope was dashed by Mary's execution in February 1587. From this point onward, some Catholic exiles such as Cardinal William Allen and Robert Persons began to recommend an elective form of monarchy, doing so in favour of a Catholic candidate but also as the justification for removing Elizabeth as an unlawful queen – an action that they promoted through print material, some of which was to be distributed post-Armada, and through direct attempts to persuade Philip II of Spain to commit to the plan of invasion. From fearing domestic conspiracies such as the Babington Plot (1586) and the jeopardy in which the English religious settlement would find itself should Elizabeth choose to marry a foreign and Catholic prince, English

Protestants were now faced with the frightening prospect of full-scale war, which led some writers such as the clergyman Michael Renniger to compose works insisting on the need for national unity, loyalty to the queen, and prudent naval preparations. Marlowe's play, *I will show*, is sensitive to these concerns, using as it does many of the same stories and tropes that were common to parliamentary oratory and the printing press, both in the build-up to the Armada's launch and shortly thereafter in celebratory texts such as James Aske's *Elizabetha Triumphans* (1588).

To support my interpretation, I will focus in particular on two powerful images: I will explain first how 'ships' and 'walls' featured in the language of political debate, before analysing Marlowe's employment of the same images in *Dido*. In doing so, I will pay close attention to the allegorical readings of Donald Stump and Deanne Williams, who claim that *Dido* presents a straightforward message regarding the queen's conduct over the Anjou match – a claim that either requires Marlowe to have written the play much earlier than 1588 (to account for the otherwise out-dated choice of subject matter – Anjou had died in 1584) or to have ignored the continuing topical resonance of the Dido and Aeneas story in the intervening years. In contrast to Stump and Williams, I suggest that Marlowe sought instead to expose for his audience's scrutiny the familiar modes of argument that were deployed time and again, by Protestants and Catholics alike, upon the advent of each new crisis, with the Armada being Marlowe's main prompt to do so.

Dido is a multi-layered drama that does not adhere to any stable distinction between different character types such as leader, enemy, and citizen; as we shall see, Aeneas conforms at some point to each of these types. This, I will argue, reflects the way that the same stories and tropes could be adapted to suit new situations and agendas, and the way that the same individual (such as Elizabeth) could be discussed in a multitude of ways. Marlowe drew on a classical story that no doubt evoked the fierce controversy of 1579-81, but the story's persistent topicality – applicable as much to ongoing concerns regarding the queen's safety, the influence of favourites such as Robert Dudley, Earl of

Leicester, and, most significantly, the Armada's feared arrival off the English shore – made it possible for the playwright to evoke England's embattled existence at the time that he was writing *and* to reflect more generally on the long-term patterns of political debate (and thereby examine what the arguments of political writing meant for the monarch). As is evident from the rest of his drama, Marlowe's *métier* was ambiguity, and *Dido* certainly provides no blueprint for judging the moral weight of the various arguments that are made by its characters; as a wordsmith, Marlowe rather seems to delight in making it difficult for theatregoers to know where their sympathies should lie. But, at the same time, the tragic conclusion of *Dido* does draw attention to the human cost of those same stories and tropes that place such a strong emphasis on the monarch's duty to his/her subjects – a cost that Marlowe explored further in his final two plays, *Edward II* (1592) and *The Massacre at Paris* (1593).

'Eliza' and the Anjou Match

Upon his arrival at Carthage, Marlowe's Aeneas is keen to discover 'who inhabits this fair town, / What kind of people, and who governs them' (2.1.41-2). The answer that he receives – 'lovely Aeneas, these are Carthage walls / And here Queen Dido wears th'imperial crown' (2.1.62-3) – alerts the audience to the status of the play's title character. It indicates that Marlowe, unlike Virgil, is as much concerned with the public duties of 'Queen Dido' as with the providential demands that require Aeneas to seek the 'Lavinian shore' (5.1.78). Understandably, such interest in the exercise of female rule has led to a number of topical interpretations that associate Dido's fictional predicament with that of Elizabeth during the Anjou marriage negotiations of 1579-81 – an association that is supported by the playwright's use of the name 'Eliza' (4.2.10) in the description of a queen who 'yields up her beauty to a stranger's bed' (4.2.17).¹

¹ Donald Stump, 'Marlowe's Travesty of Virgil: *Dido* and Elizabethan Dreams of Empire', *Comparative Drama*, 34:1 (2000), 79-107; Deanne Williams, 'Dido, Queen of England', *ELH*, 73:1

This approach has much to recommend it, not least because *Dido* features many of the stories and tropes that were used to describe the Anjou match in printed polemic.² But topicality should not be confused with allegory. Though Marlowe experiments with much of the political vocabulary evoked in debates about the contentious issue of the queen's possible marriage, his play precludes the simplistic one-to-one identifications that have been inferred in much recent criticism. Rather than providing a stable and coherent account of contemporary events (in which Dido is solely representative of Elizabeth), Marlowe's tragedy, I shall argue, complicates and adapts the partisan language of political debate in the interests of more ambivalent and ambiguous dramatic expression. Furthermore, a straightforward reading that places *Dido* purely in the context of royal marriage fails to account for the myriad of other political concerns – such as favouritism, the twin threats of conspiracy and invasion, and the consequences of negligent leadership – that Marlowe explores in the course of the play. It also fails to account for the fact of Anjou's death in 1584. Indeed, by the time of the play's first performance in 1588, there was no longer any credible prospect that Elizabeth would marry, so when it comes to discerning the topical resonance of *Dido* – unless, of course, we wish to argue that Marlowe's play was mostly backward-looking – it is necessary that we consider the events of 1587-88 in greater detail.

That the story of Dido and Aeneas should be open to multiple applications ought not to be surprising. Quite aside from the topical flavour that it accrued before Anjou's death, the story elicited a number of diverse interpretations – and even when the queen's proposed marriage stood as the main point of real-world reference, the story was still applied in contrasting ways. For instance, the so-called Siena Sieve Portrait (1583),

(2006), 31-59; Hopkins, *Drama and the Succession to the Crown*, pp. 20-1. For the Spenserian connection of 'Eliza', see: Patrick Cheney, *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession*, pp. 99-105.

² For more information about the Anjou match, see: Susan Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony: The Courtships of Elizabeth I* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 154-94; Blair Worden, *The Sound of Virtue*, pp. 89-114. On the alterations in Elizabeth's iconographical representation during this episode, see: Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), Ch. 4.

attributed to Quentin Massys and probably commissioned by Sir Christopher Hatton, uses the example of Aeneas (not Dido) to indicate the course of action that Elizabeth should take: like Aeneas, she should abandon the distractions of love for a grand imperial narrative. The painting shows Elizabeth holding a sieve and standing next to a pillar adorned with scenes from the first four books of *The Aeneid*; as Susan Doran explains, the image of the sieve refers to the 'Vestal Virgin Tuccia, whose closed sieve magically reflected her chaste body and allowed her to ward off attacks on her reputation and life' – a pointed example of how Elizabeth should ward off the advances of the Duke of Anjou – whilst the illustrations on the pillar serve to 'identify Elizabeth with [...] Aeneas, who according to popular legend was the ancestor of the Roman people and (as the grandfather of the mythical Brutus) of English monarchs'.³

The point of this second association, as Doran points out, was to remind the observer that 'like her legendary ancestor, [Elizabeth's] destiny was to reject marriage and found an empire'.⁴ When combined with the reference to Tuccia, the function of the Aeneas myth is to show that the imperial project of England – not to mention the defence of the Protestant cause – is intertwined with the chaste independence of the queen from the influence of a foreign (and confessionally unreliable) bedfellow; together, the sieve and the image of Aeneas setting sail for Italy remind the viewer of Elizabeth's duty.

Similarly, in William Gager's neo-Latin drama *Dido* (1583), performed at Christ Church, Oxford, the story of Dido is used to advise the queen on the question of marriage, though this time the primary allegorical association is with Dido, not with the Trojan ancestor of the Tudor line. Like Anjou, Aeneas stands as a threat to the queen's autonomy, with the news of his arrival prompting worry as well as gossip: 'a new evil at hand gives us cause for fear'; 'everyone's talking about it'; 'they say that ships have come to our shore'

³ Doran, 'Virginity, Divinity and Power: The Portraits of Elizabeth I', in *The Myth of Elizabeth*, ed. by Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 171-200 (p. 187).

⁴ Doran, 'Virginity, Divinity and Power', p. 187.

(1.2).⁵ In 2.4, two characters discuss the possibility that Dido will fall in love with Aeneas, debating the question of whether or not she should be free to make her own choice. Maharbal asks ‘what wars, what chaos will this marriage unleash?’ He imagines, in what must be a reference to the domestic candidates for Elizabeth’s hand, that marriage between Dido and a foreigner would anger ‘the princes of Libya, whom she has spurned so many times’ – a point that is echoed later when the ghost of Sychaeus asks ‘has Libya not produced any princes worthy of your [i.e. Dido’s] love?’ (3.1). The counter-argument, voiced by Hanno, is made up of three points: it is said that choosing a suitor on Dido’s behalf would debase her role as queen (‘if I were minded to become king on such a principle, let me die’); that a Libyan husband would take charge improperly (‘I don’t want her taken as a wife only to be thrust aside so that he may rule in her place’) (the possibility that Aeneas might do the same is overlooked); and that forming an alliance with a strong foreign leader would enhance Carthage’s standing in the world (‘with a Trojan at the helm leading the Punic troops, Carthage will hold her head up proud amongst the other nations’).

But these arguments, though striking simply on account of their disruptive presence, are at odds with the overarching message of the play. Aeneas is a positive example so far as the history of Rome goes – ‘now Italy is my country, my wife’, he says when justifying his departure (4.2) – but the welcome that he is given at Carthage proves to be disastrous for Dido and her subjects: the Epilogue asks ‘each spectator to consider what moral he may draw from this play’, and the answer is that ‘foreign marriages rarely turn out well’. Fortunately, however, the Epilogue can reassure the audience that England’s queen will not fall into the same trap as her namesake:

I think women have grown wiser: I doubt any would be about to die for a difficult love affair.

But, Dido, one woman excels you by far: our virgin queen. How many reversals of fortune has she borne with pious faith! What kingdoms has she founded! What

⁵ William Gager, *Dido*, trans. by Elizabeth Sandis (unpublished). I am grateful to Elizabeth Sandis for allowing me to quote from her translation.

generous aid does she offer to strangers! Yet *she* has not deigned to take any Sychaeus for a husband, and may no Aeneas manipulate her mind.

Phoenician Elisa lies dead from a pitiful fate. But *our* Eliza lives, and, pray, may she live on [...]. You should offer your applause for *this* Elisa. (Epilogue)

In these two appropriations of the Dido and Aeneas story, albeit that Massys and Gager rely on contrasting topical identifications – one using Aeneas, the other Dido – the classical example of an unwise marriage is thus used to advise the English queen of the wisdom in rejecting a foreign suitor of dubious loyalty: as Gager puts it, the foreigner is ‘always planning schemes’ (Epilogue).

Of course, Massys and Gager were reacting to the specific prospects of a royal marriage. Since those prospects had faded by 1583, the portrait and poem can be described most accurately as works that underline a good decision that Elizabeth had made already – hence the certainty of Gager’s reassuring Epilogue – but, even so, Massys and Gager were using the Dido story to comment directly on English political life.⁶ More general interpretations of the story centred on the abstract conflict between desire and duty (or between passion and reason), and on the abuse perpetrated by Virgil in slandering the virtuous reputation of the ‘historical’ founder of Carthage.⁷ Disagreement on these issues meant that by the late sixteenth century, mediaeval and early modern readers of Virgil (and Ovid) had connected to the story a complex and somewhat contradictory set of meanings.⁸

To a large extent, this lack of agreement has been replicated in modern criticism concerned with Marlowe’s own efforts to retell the story for a theatrical audience: some arguments present Marlowe’s Aeneas as the dutiful proponent of Rome’s (but also

⁶ On the use of dramatic spectacle to promote the Anjou match – orchestrated by Thomas Radcliffe, 3rd Earl of Sussex – see: Neil Younger, ‘Drama, Politics, and News in the Earl of Sussex’s Entertainment of Elizabeth at New Hall, 1579’, *The Historical Journal*, 58:2 (2015), 343-66.

⁷ Don Cameron Allen, ‘Marlowe’s *Dido* and the Tradition’, in *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honour of Hardin Craig*, ed. by Richard Hosley (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 55-68; Williams, pp. 37-8.

⁸ Diane Purkiss, ‘The Queen on Stage: Marlowe’s *Dido*, *Queen of Carthage* and the Representation of Elizabeth I’, in *A Woman Scorn’d: Responses to the Dido Myth*, ed. by Michael Burden (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), pp. 151-67 (154-5).

England's) imperial destiny, others as a perjurer whose false valuation of honour is at odds with the romantic, Ovidian values of the play. For many, Marlowe's Dido is an innocent victim cruelly abused by the gods, then abandoned by an unfeeling cad; for others, she is the dangerous embodiment of foreign or illicit pleasures that Aeneas must shun in the interests of an embryonic Roman empire.⁹

A way to reconcile such different interpretations has been suggested by Sara Munson Deats, who argues that Marlowe's play, like those discussed in Joel B. Altman's *Tudor Play of Mind*, should be seen as 'an exemplar of [the] interrogative mode in which antitheses – the tragic and the comic, the romantic and moralistic – balance precariously, yet without generic or ethical synthesis, as the drama follows the traditional rhetorical practice of this period by arguing on both sides of the question'.¹⁰ As Deats shows, the dialectical basis of Dido does not support an absolute distinction between right and wrong but presents the audience with the subtle interpretative challenge of understanding the story from multiple points of view. Marlowe's Aeneas may be an excessively obedient vehicle of divine will, but this does not necessarily mean that he is at fault in following the commands he is given. Likewise, it is possible for the audience to sympathize with the plight of Marlowe's Dido whilst remaining aware that her reckless and sometimes cruel behaviour – however much it may be influenced by divine intervention – exemplifies the

⁹ Deats, 'Dido, Queen of Carthage and The Massacre at Paris', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Patrick Cheney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 193-206 (pp. 197-99). Critics also disagree on whether or not Marlowe was intending to produce a faithful dramatization of *The Aeneid*. Some – such as Roma Gill, 'Marlowe's Virgil: Dido Queene of Carthage', *Review of English Studies*, 28:110 (1977), 141-55; and, to a lesser extent, Hendricks, 'Managing the Barbarian' – believe he was. Others consider the play to be more subversive – a point that is supported by the comic potential of an epic story performed by child actors: Timothy D. Crowley, 'Arms and the Boy: Marlowe's Aeneas and the Parody of Imitation in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*', *English Literary Renaissance*, 38:3 (2008), 408-38; Clare R. Kinney, 'Epic Transgression and the Framing of Agency in *Dido Queen of Carthage*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 40:2 (2000), 261-76; Summers, *Christopher Marlowe and the Politics of Power*, pp. 20-40. Of this latter kind of interpretation, there is further division between those that stress the comic aspects of *Dido* – a category that includes Stump and Alan Shepherd, *Marlowe's Soldiers: Rhetorics of Masculinity in the Age of the Armada* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), Ch. 2 – and those that emphasize the seriousness of Marlowe's point about 'the limitation of human power in a world controlled by arbitrary, often perverse deities' (Summers, p. 21).

¹⁰ Deats, p. 199. See Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind*.

wilful self-concern of the Renaissance tyrant.¹¹ By balancing its arguments, *Dido* does not make a definitive statement about the relative values of desire and duty. Instead of supporting one side of the debate or the other, the play invites spectators to ponder the tragedy arising from the fact that these two concerns should come into conflict in the first place.

Conversely, the majority of topical interpretations find that *Dido* cannot be seen from more than one perspective. Rather than consider it as an example of interrogative drama, they assume that the play can be nothing but a straightforward (and unwaveringly Protestant) explanation of events surrounding the Anjou match. For example, though Williams concedes that 'the long tradition of contested interpretations of *Dido* lent itself to the ongoing and unresolved discussion of the queen's marital status', her account assumes that Marlowe's version of Virgil's story can be understood as a neat and linear argument.¹²

It is conceivable that the play was written with the aim of making such a specific point, but, tellingly, there has been no real agreement in recent criticism about what this point might be. Whilst Williams describes *Dido* as 'a negative example of the ruinous effects of love and the desire for marriage upon an otherwise competent (and glamorous) queen', Stump finds the play to be far less complimentary.¹³ He maintains that the abortive match with Anjou is evoked as a means of demonstrating the failures surrounding England's project of empire and the question of Elizabeth's military role in the Netherlands. The play is seen to be 'deriding Queen Elizabeth as an empire builder so blinded by love that she [is] capable of enlisting the feckless and inconstant Duke of Anjou as her champion'.¹⁴

¹¹ Mary Elizabeth Smith suggests that 'Marlowe's *Dido* is a spokesman for a view of kingship even more radical than most of the extreme theorists would allow' (*Love Kindling Fire: A Study of Christopher Marlowe's The Tragedy of Dido Queen of Carthage* (Salzburg: Institut für Englische sprache und Literatur, University of Salzburg, 1977), p. 89.

¹² Williams, p. 38.

¹³ Williams, p. 43.

¹⁴ Stump, p. 96.

The Anjou match was a contentious topic, so it is unsurprising that the story of Dido and Aeneas would be associated with such contradictory perspectives: for Williams, Marlowe's Dido is the anti-type of a real queen who is wise enough to avoid marriage for the sake of her nation; for Stump, she is the direct allegorical representation of a lovesick monarch whose enthusiasm to marry a foreign prince threatens to hinder the defence of the Protestant cause. To address Stump's reading: Elizabeth agreed to intervene in the Low Countries in 1585, by which time Anjou had died, so it is difficult to see why Marlowe would feel any need to make such a point in the mid-to-late 1580s (Stump places the first performance of *Dido* in Norwich or Ipswich during the touring season of 1586-87), not least when the absence of any other viable candidate meant that the queen's marriage had ceased to be a likely prospect – a point that is equally problematic for Williams' reading.¹⁵ Furthermore, given the standard educational practice of instructing grammar school students in the art of arguing from multiple perspectives – and drama's adoption of this style – Williams and Stump are not necessarily correct in their assumption that Marlowe's play must contain a single line of argument and be focused on a single issue.

Equally uncertain is the narrow definition that these critics apply to Marlowe's concern with the Anjou match. In the political discussions of the 1570s and 1580s, the question of the queen's marriage was not treated in isolation. Rather, it was associated with a number of major issues such as the perceived military threat of other European powers, the conspiracies relating to Mary Queen of Scots and recusant Catholics, and the personal incentives that were alleged to be driving evil counsellors and favourites in their efforts to settle the succession. In the attempt to read *Dido* exclusively as a reflection on the Anjou match, Stump and Williams are forced to downplay these other potential points of topical reference, even though many of them were discussed using examples (e.g. Dido and Aeneas) and images (e.g. ships and walls) that are to be found in Marlowe's play.

¹⁵ Stump, pp. 85-6, 97-8. See: Norman Rabkin (ed.), *The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (New York: Odyssey Press, 1963), p. xx.

Stump is also forced to counter his own reasonable objection that a playwright at work in the late 1580s would not '[concern] himself with royal marriage negotiations that had broken off more than half a decade earlier'.¹⁶ He notes that 'Marlowe's formal study of the *Aeneid* took place in the years 1579-81, precisely when Elizabeth was most actively pursuing marriage negotiations with the Duke of Anjou', and he then tries to maintain the relevance of Anjou with the observation that when *Dido* was first performed, '[Elizabeth's] schemes to employ amorous favourites such as Leicester and Anjou rather than seasoned military commanders in driving the Spanish from the Netherlands were once again a source of discontent among her people'.¹⁷

The only problem (as noted above) was that by 1586-87, the years to which Stump dates the play, Anjou was dead and so could not be counted among Elizabeth's 'amorous favourites'. Otherwise, England's foreign campaigns do serve as a valid topical background to a play that centres on the sense of duty that is felt by two military leaders towards the destinies of their people, with Aeneas setting sail for Italy and Dido having founded Carthage – a female accomplishment commemorated in the Virgilian motto *dux femina facti* ('a woman led the deed').¹⁸ Given his dating of the play to 1586-87, it is strange that Stump does not follow this reading to its natural conclusion by analysing how *Dido* would resonate with more current attitudes to religious conflict and the attacks that were made against favourites.

Since the articles by Stump and Williams were published, Martin Wiggins has shown that *Dido* was written and performed even later (as discussed in my introduction). Though the nature and extent of Thomas Nashe's involvement remains unclear, it is also agreed by most Marlowe scholars that *Dido* was a collaborative composition – as was Marlowe's other play from 1588, *Doctor Faustus*. As with *Faustus*, however, most scholars

¹⁶ Stump p. 86.

¹⁷ Stump, pp. 95, 102. Williams places the date of composition 'sometime between 1585 and 1588' (p. 31).

¹⁸ Heather James, *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 18.

opt for the convenience of discussing the play as if it were ‘written by Marlowe’ on account of the difficulty in discerning the authors’ separate contributions and the sense that the play is, in any case, somehow more ‘Marlovian’ – however vaguely defined that sense might be, and however much it might be informed by the Marlowe myth discussed in my introduction.

Easier to explain are the reasons why Marlowe (and Nashe) would light upon the Dido story in 1588, not least when we attend to the radical enlargement that is given to the roles of Jupiter and Ganymede in the play’s novel framing device.¹⁹ By contextualizing the worldly actions of Aeneas *et al.* against a god’s carefree sexual indulgence, with Venus chastising Jupiter for ignoring his divine care of duty, *Dido* raises the importance of careful leadership as a key theme to be addressed throughout. Even more significantly, as we shall see, the frame serves the dramaturgical as well as topical function of drawing attention to the multiple angles from which Aeneas might be seen: that is, as a victim of Jupiter’s poor leadership, not just as a threat to Carthage and the guardian of the Trojan line. In the period of 1587-88, Elizabeth herself was understood from a range of perspectives – as both ‘the wicked Jezebel’ and ‘a maiden queen [...] of courage stout’ – just as the causes of England’s predicament were attributed variously to malevolent favourites and counsellors, Catholics conspirators, and overseas forces backed by Rome.²⁰

Similarly divergent accusations had been put forward prior to the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, but thereafter the likelihood of some military effort from Spain greatly increased. For this reason, a familiar story that centred on the images of ships and walls, the causes and consequences of invasion (imagined for Carthage and described at

¹⁹ Hendricks reads the play as a post-Armada comment on ‘Englishness’, claiming that ‘Troy and Carthage serve as gendered racial tropes for England and Spain’ (p. 166); the analysis focuses on the discourses of race and conquest, with no attention given to the context of the Armada itself. By contrast, Alan Shepherd does read the play with attention to the anxieties (prior to) and celebrations (post-) Armada, providing a useful discussion of the Trojan myth as used by other writers in the mid- to late-1580s (pp. 53-7). Also see: Preedy, p. 130.

²⁰ William Allen, *Admonition to the Nobility and People of England and Ireland* (Antwerp: 1588), p. 5; James Aske, *Elizabetha Triumpans* (London: Thomas Gubbin and Thomas Newman, 1588), p. 1. Subsequent quotations are taken from these editions.

Troy), and that featured images and characters that were common to the most pointed examples of political writing (e.g. Dido, Aeneas, and the Trojan Horse) must have carried an obvious appeal for two daring writers such as Marlowe and Nashe. There is no need, therefore, for Stump and Williams to anchor their readings to the events of the Anjou match. Though *Dido* may glance at Anjou – and probably does so in its reapplication of the Dido story – the play’s representation of political crisis would have satisfied more than just a narrow interest in the specific events of 1579-81.²¹

It is important to note, moreover, that despite the playwrights’ best efforts, theatregoers were still free to make various connections of their own – and *Dido*, I suggest, is equally concerned with exploring the ongoing trends of polemical discourse. Far from reshaping the story, tone, and characters of *The Aeneid* simply to address the concerns of one particular moment, I propose that the play also reveals a literary interest in familiar modes of argument. Indeed, by considering the play alongside pamphlets such as John Stubbs’ *The Discovery of a Gaping Gulf* (1579), the anonymous *Leicester’s Commonwealth* (1584), and Michael Renniger’s *An Exhortation to True Love/A Treatise against Treasons* (1587), it can be seen that Marlowe evokes and manipulates longstanding polemical tropes – an indication that he is keener to explore the dramatic potential of recent events than share his own opinion. That being said, since the play was first performed in 1588, the stories and images in *Dido* would have spoken most directly to anxieties about the threat of Catholic conspiracy and invasion, and this is demonstrated most clearly, as we shall see, by the imaginative use to which Marlowe puts two metaphors that were central to current political debate: ships and walls.

²¹ On the European context of the Anjou match, see: Wallace T. MacCaffrey, ‘The Anjou Match and the Making of Elizabethan Foreign Policy’, in *The English Commonwealth 1547-1640: Essays in Politics and Society Presented to Joel Hurstfield*, ed. by Peter Clark and others (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1979), pp. 59-75.

Ships and Walls: From Anjou to Armada

The possibility that the queen would marry the Duke of Anjou (who was vilified as a foreigner, a Catholic, and an atheist) raised fears that she would become subordinate to her husband in every respect.²² A public expression of this fear can be found in John Stubbs' *The Gaping Gulf*, which claims that upon marriage Anjou will use his position of domestic superiority to usurp Elizabeth's control of the nation: 'yet shall he bear a great sway with her who bears all the sway with us' (p. 37).²³ For Stubbs, anxiety about the Anjou match has everything to do with the embattled existence of the English state. Fearful of France, the papacy, and Mary Queen of Scots, he presents his argument as the honest counsel of 'a true Englishman, a sworn liegeman to Her Majesty' (p. 91) whose opposition is not to the queen but to those who seek her downfall.

Nevertheless, the publication of Stubbs' treatise led to a rather gruesome punishment: the loss of his right hand – a sign, perhaps, of the transparency of Stubbs' rhetorical strategy in attaching blame to the queen's advisers.²⁴ Though conventional in his acceptance that the 'meaner sort' should perform no greater act of resistance than pray to God in the hope that He will choose to frustrate the Anjou match – 'for his church, for this commonweal, and for the Queen' (p. 192) – Stubbs makes clear that he is personally prepared to test the boundaries of acceptable discourse by telling truth to power through the public medium of the printing press.²⁵ He claims that 'the weal and well-doing of Christ's Church, of a Christian state, and of a good prince's person are so interfolded as

²² Theodora A. Jankowski, *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp. 133-8.

²³ See also, p. 11: 'and if the husband, which is the head, be drawn aside by his wife, over whom nevertheless he hath authority and rule, how much more easily shall the wife be perverted by her husband, howsoever the laws by prerogative or her place by pre-eminence may privilege her'. Quotations are taken from Lloyd E. Berry (ed.), *John Stubbs's Gaping Gulf with Letters and Other Relevant Documents* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968).

²⁴ Natalie Mears, 'Counsel, Public Debate, and Queenship: John Stubbs's *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf*, 1579', *The Historical Journal*, 44:3 (2001), 629-50 (p. 638); Markku Peltonen, *Rhetoric, Politics and Popularity in Pre-Revolutionary England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), Ch. 6.

²⁵ In contrast to Stubbs, who shared his arguments through the printing press, Sir Philip Sidney composed a letter that circulated in manuscript. On the differences between these two approaches, see: Worden, *The Sound of Virtue*, pp. 112-14; Mears, pp. 645-9.

whatever is against one is against all' (p. 87), thus making it the right and duty of honest citizens to speak out. In *Dido*, Aeneas ruefully observes that were it not for the ill-advised policy of its leaders, Troy would have remained impregnable; he recalls that 'Priamus, impatient of delay, / Enforc'd a wide breach in that rampir'd wall / Which thousand battering-rams could never pierce' (2.1.173-5). Stubbs turns to the printing press to prevent England's leaders from making a similar mistake. He describes Anjou as an 'odd fellow, by birth a Frenchman, by profession a Papist, an atheist by conversation' whose aim is to usurp the queen's power whilst encouraging 'rebellious Papists' to take up arms against the state; observing that 'the French do account as fair virtues all foul lies, treasons, poisonings, massacres, and turning of realms upside down', Stubbs suggests that the evil intentions he attributes to Anjou are precisely those that one might expect of a 'foreign Frenchman' (pp. 80-1, 92).²⁶

Stubbs also uses the metaphor of the Trojan horse to emphasize the gravity of England's predicament; he explains that over the course of the treatise he 'will enter into the parts of this practice and gauge the very belly of this great horse of hidden mischiefs and falsehood meant to us' (p. 5) – a statement that implies he has greater access to the truth of Anjou's intentions than those who hurl accusations in the rash manner of Laocoon.²⁷ Like the Trojan horse that enabled the Greeks to take a city that was otherwise impervious to assault – 'O had it never enter'd, Troy had stood!' (2.1.172), laments Marlowe's Aeneas – Stubbs argues that the Duke of Anjou will work to undermine the security of Protestant England in the combined interests of Catholicism, the Guise, and Mary Queen of Scots, and that he will do so just as soon as the deceitful enterprise of his proposed marriage is successful in raising him to a suitable position of political influence:

And can it be safe that a stranger and Frenchman should as owner possess our Queen, the chief officer in England, our most precious rich treasure, our Elizabeth,

²⁶ On Stubbs' description of Anjou's foreignness, see: Worden, *The Sound of Virtue*, pp. 99-100.

²⁷ Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. by Frederick Ahl and ed. by Elaine Fantham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2.46-52. Marlowe's Aeneas recalls that 'one Laocoon, / Breaking a spear upon his hollow breast, / Was with two winged serpents stung to death' (2.1.164-6).

Jonah, and ship of good speed, the royal ship of our aid, the highest tower, the strongest hold and castle in the land? (p. 37)

Like the nation she governs, Elizabeth is figured as a discrete unit (a 'ship' or a 'tower') that would find itself in serious danger should Anjou's efforts at infiltration – his 'very French Popish wooing' (p. 80) – be allowed to succeed. These efforts are not seen to be independently motivated but orchestrated by a cluster of evil personages (the most prominent being Henri III and Catherine de Medici) whose designs look to the installation of Mary Queen of Scots on the English throne. Stubbs describes Mary as 'the most hidden and pestilent adversary creature that lives'; she is the 'shot anchor of all Papists' and 'the only loadstone that should draw traitors together' (pp. 78-9). Just as the Greeks constructed a wooden horse to reclaim Helen, so are Anjou's efforts to marry Elizabeth seen by Stubbs to be related to Mary's dangerous presence on English soil. The Anjou match is thus associated with a complex conspiracy that strikes at the heart of English and Protestant anxieties.²⁸

In his account of this conspiracy, ships and walls are the key metaphors used for Elizabeth and for England. That such tropes were ubiquitous at a time of marked political unrest is demonstrated by a speech given to the Parliament of 1584-85 by Sir Walter Mildmay, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Justifying the high cost of raising England's navy to a position of 'better strength and better readiness' than ever before, Mildmay explains that the nation's ships have been 'justly termed the wall of England'. He also claims that the queen has spent a significant amount of her personal income ('and never a whit upon vain expenses for pleasure or delight, as other princes use') on turning the realm's natural geographical advantage into a militarized barrier against the growing threat of Catholic powers abroad.²⁹

Likewise, Stubbs observes in *The Gaping Gulf* that 'the naturally bridling bands of the sea, wherewith God hath compassed us about' (p. 88) help to protect the nation from

²⁸ MacCaffrey, p. 67; Worden, *The Sound of Virtue*, p. 107.

²⁹ Neale, *Elizabeth I and her Parliaments*, 55.

foreign military powers, dangerous ideologies, and the unwanted amorous attentions of a 'stranger and Frenchman' who is eager to marry the queen. However, it is also made clear that these defences cease to be effective when those on English soil give aid to the enemy through foolishness or treachery:

And though this ship fraught with England's bane were already under crossed sail with the freshest gale of wind in her stern that can blow in the sky for our best port, yet had he counterpuffs and counterbluffs enough to keep him aloof and to send him back again into the deeps, if he had none but only French mariners and only French tackles. But, alas, this ship of unhappy load hath among us and of ourselves (I would, not in the prince's court) those who with all their might and main help to hale it in, and, as though the blustering winds of our enemy's malice and the broad sails of our sins were not sufficient to give it a speedy passage hither, our own men walk on this shore and lay to their shoulders with fastened lines and cables to draw it in. (p. 4)

Here it is the Duke of Anjou rather than Elizabeth who is figured as a ship – in this case a ship that is hostile to England and so must be prevented from crossing the protective 'bands of the sea'. By criticizing those who give aid to 'this ship fraught with England's bane', Stubbs shows that there is more to national resilience than naval strength and coastal defences. Attacking those who counsel the queen to marry, he argues that it is imperative that all English citizens ('our own men') remain resolute in opposing the practical and ideological threat represented by the Duke of Anjou ('this ship of unhappy load').

In the year Anjou died, the importance of national unity was emphasized once again by the Bond of Association (1584). This was orchestrated by William Cecil, Lord Burghley and Sir Francis Walsingham as a counter-measure to ward off a concerted Catholic effort to install Mary Queen of Scots in Elizabeth's place – a conspiracy that would involve an army sent by Philip II along with English recusants spurred into action by the likes of Allen and Persons, perhaps with support from James VI should he decide that a Catholic alliance better served his aspirations to the English throne.³⁰ The stated purposes

³⁰ To dissuade James VI from taking such a course, the Bond stipulated that as Mary's heir he could not legally benefit from any intrigue that was designed to benefit his mother. This point was dropped in the Act for Surety (See: Doran and Kewes, 'The Earlier Elizabethan Succession Question

of the Bond (and of the related Oath of Association) were twofold: to spell out the penalties for plotting to kill or replace the queen; and to attach to all signatories the responsibility for the apprehension and punishment of plotters (and those who might benefit, whether involved or not).³¹ That the Bond was designed to eliminate the danger posed by those within the realm liable to give aid to foreign or Catholic conspiracy is demonstrated most clearly by the act subsequently passed by the Parliament of 1584-85 (27 Eliz. c. 1) which, with a few modifications, made it law. The Act for the Surety of the Queen's Person describes the 'sundry wicked plots and means [that] have of late been devised and laid, as well in foreign parts beyond the seas as also within this realm'.³²

As this example demonstrates – along with that of Mildmay's speech to the same Parliament – the metaphors used in *Dido* should not be seen as relating solely to the marriage negotiations of 1579-81 but to the common language of political discussion. In *The Gaping Gulf*, Stubbs deploys the metaphor of a hostile ship to argue that foreign beliefs and ideas (that is, Catholicism) endanger 'the very foundations of our commonweal' (p. 4). But such usage can also be found in later polemic, in works across the confessional spectrum.

The few years preceding the Armada witnessed a flurry of claims and counter-claims, from denunciations of Catholic conspiracy in Burghley's *The Execution of Justice* (1583) to secret histories alleging that Elizabeth was under the sway of malevolent favourites and counsellors.³³ In Allen's *Admonition to the Nobility and People of England* (1588), England's vulnerability to foreign invasion – which Allen himself supported – is

Revisited', pp. 34-6). Also, as it turned out, most English Catholics remained loyal to Elizabeth in 1588 (Houlston, p. 48); see Preedy, p. 25, for how 'anxieties about the loyalties of Elizabeth I's Catholic subject' might be reflected in Aeneas' oath-breaking (Preedy dates the play to 1585-6).

³¹ David Cressy, 'Binding the Nation: The Bonds of Association, 1584 and 1696', in *Tudor Rule and Revolution: Essays for G. R. Elton from his American Friends*, ed. by DeLloyd J. Guth and John W. McKenna (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982), pp. 271-34. See also: Patrick Collinson, 'The Monarchical Republic of Queen Elizabeth I', pp. 48-51; Lake, *Bad Queen Bess? Libels, Secret Histories, and the Politics of Publicity in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 155-62.

³² G.W. Prothero (ed.), *Select Statutes and Other Constitutional Documents Illustrative of the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), pp. 80-1.

³³ Doran and Kewes, pp. 34-6.

partly explained by the iniquitous influence of the queen's closest favourite, Robert Dudley, a privy councillor who had become Earl of Leicester in 1564 and had been appointed to the position of Lord Steward of the Household in 1587. Leicester's puritan leanings and influence upon the queen – not least as a keen advocate of Mary Queen of Scots' execution – made him a natural target for Catholic polemic, as in the notorious libel known today as *Leicester's Commonwealth* (1584). A counterclaim to Burghley's charge of Catholic treachery published the year before, *Leicester's Commonwealth* paints Leicester as an unparalleled Machiavellian schemer who manipulates and deludes the queen for his own selfish ends.

Just as this portrait was itself derived from an earlier libel against Burghley and Sir Nicholas Bacon, *The Treatise of Treasons* (1572), so too does Allen's *Admonition* draw on the standard tropes of the early modern conspiracy theory as applied in *Leicester's Commonwealth*.³⁴ As Peter Lake has shown, in the wake of the Anjou match's failure – just as *The Treatise* followed the collapse of a marriage enterprise between Mary Queen of Scots and Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk – 'some Catholics [tried] to explain that failure [i.e. the Anjou match]' by reproducing in *Leicester's Commonwealth* 'precisely the same account of the Elizabethan regime as that contained in *The Treatise*, only now with Leicester not Cecil as the villain of the piece'; for Allen, building his argument from *Leicester's Commonwealth*, it was not even necessary to change the villain's name.³⁵ The difference, however, is that in the libels of 1572 and 1584, Elizabeth is portrayed as a blameless victim, whereas Allen does all that he can to tarnish the queen's reputation to justify her overthrow. Spreading the blame, Leicester is described as 'an amorous minion advanced to high office, degree, and excessive wealth [to] become [Elizabeth's] chief leader in all her wicked and unwonted course of regiment [and] her instrument of the destruction of the nobility' (p. 18). In this view, though Leicester is at fault, he is merely

³⁴ Lake, "The Monarchical Republic of Elizabeth I", pp. 92-3.

³⁵ Lake, "The Monarchical Republic of Elizabeth I", p. 103.

the 'instrument' of Elizabeth's schemes of 'destruction'. With Leicester thus figured as Elizabeth's right-hand man, Marlowe's portrayal of a queen and suitor weakening the realm and showing scant regard for the nobility (evident from the short shrift given to Iarbas) might well have recalled Allen's extreme account of the dangers created by favouritism, not least when Leicester is said to have 'overruled the chamber, court counsel, parliament, ports, forts, seas, ships, borders, men, munition, and all the country' (p. 18).

The point is not that Marlowe would expect theatregoers to make a direct connection to Allen's *Admonition*, since most copies were burnt after the Armada's defeat (though Marlowe himself might have known of the tract due to it being obtained by one of Walsingham's spies).³⁶ Rather, I wish to argue that many in Marlowe's audience would have recognized in the play the familiar shape of almost any conspiracy theory from Elizabeth's reign – whether it be in regard to Aeneas' wooing of Dido, the providential duty of Aeneas to seek Rome, or Troy's fall to the Greeks. At the time of the Armada, Marlowe's reason for choosing the Dido story would have been all too apparent, since these stories were frequently used to address moments of national and/or religious crisis. Indeed, Stubbs was by no means the first to use the metaphor of the Trojan horse when discussing England's predicament, as Lake explains:

[The author of *The Treatise of Treasons*] compared Cecil and Bacon (just as [Thomas] Norton had compared papist apologists for the pope's bull) to Sinon, the crafty Greek, who, with Ulysses, had undermined proud Troy through the ruse of the wooden horse. According to *The Treatise*, Cecil and Bacon were now undermining the new Troy of Elizabethan England with their Trojan horse of religious innovation and alleged popish conspiracy.³⁷

Especially relevant given England's Trojan myth and the imperial precedent that it was thought to set for Elizabeth, the story of Troy's fall was thus a common trope alerting the reader to a perceived conspiracy or crisis.

³⁶ Thomas M. McCoog, *The Society of Jesus in Ireland, Scotland, and England, 1541-1588: 'Our way of proceeding?'* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 248.

³⁷ Lake, "The Monarchical Republic of Elizabeth I", p. 93; see pp. 93-4.

For this reason, it was topically astute that Marlowe should choose to pick up the story in 1588, since it had been used to describe much the same kind of situation many times in the past. Furthermore, the sexual dimension of Aeneas' stay at Carthage made the story of Dido just as appropriate: in Allen's *Admonition*, Elizabeth is accused of a 'shameful incontinency' that has brought 'danger [to] the whole realm' (p. 20); 'with the foresaid person [i.e. Leicester] and diverse others' – including 'the younger sort of the nobility' – she is said to have 'abused her body against God's laws, to the disgrace of princely majesty and the whole nation's reproach, by unspeakable and incredible variety of lust, which modesty suffereth not to be remembered' (p. 19). This would be bad enough, but Allen claims that the queen's sexual appetites are the cause of her refusal to marry or name a successor: 'though the principal peers of the realm and others of high authority [...] made humble suit and supplication to her [to] marry and procure (if it were God's pleasure) lawful heirs', we are told that Elizabeth 'mockingly answered that she would die a maiden queen' for the reason that 'chaste and lawful marriage' would serve 'as to a bridle of her licentiousness' (p. 20); likewise, it is claimed that Elizabeth forced parliament to agree that 'none should so much as be named for her successor during her life, saving the natural, that is to say, bastard-born child of her own body' (p. 20).³⁸

Thus described, Elizabeth's 'incontinency' has led directly to England's precarious position both spiritually and in terms of military defence; the problem, simply, is that the queen refuses any action that 'might be prejudicial to her private and present peace, which she ever prefereth before the public' (pp. 20-21) – a conflict between 'private' and 'public' that bears close relation to the tension explored in *Dido*. However, the principal charge against Elizabeth is the 'inhuman cruelty' that was shown when she 'barbarously,

³⁸ Offering another perspective on the Anjou match, Allen points to the personal cost of Elizabeth's refusal to marry. He explains how 'the late noble brother of France' was by the 'bait and [...] deceitful suggestion' of marriage 'driven into those dangerous actions and dishonourable affairs of heretics and rebels, to his great dishonour and likely shortening of his days' (p. 21). We are also told that Elizabeth 'promised marriage to some of the nobility at home, making many of them in single life to the danger of their souls and decay of their families' (p. 21), which brings to mind the complaint of Maharbal in Gager's *Dido*.

unnaturally against the law of nations [...] murdered the lady Mary' (p. 27), which, when seen among Elizabeth's many crimes against God and her country, is enough, Allen argues, to justify her removal:

All which her open enormities, and other her secret wickedness hidden from us [...] may put all faithful and reasonable men out of doubt of the justice of the apostolic sentence and censure against her, being well assured that if any case may fall in which a prince may justly be forsaken or resisted by his subjects, or if any crime in the world either in life, regiment, or religion can deserve deposition of a king, that here all causes together do concur. (p. 28)

Regarding the extent of Elizabeth's bad influence, Allen concludes that 'no realm [has] ever so far fallen from religion, public honesty, order and sincerity as ours hath done in her unhappy usurped government' (p. 28), and it is said on this basis that opposition to Elizabeth is justified as well as likely to succeed: Allen reassures the reader that 'the Catholic forces are strong enough [with] more expert captains than the enemy hath good soldiers, all resolute to die' (p. 58). In Allen's *Admonition*, then, we find that it is the actions of the queen and her favourite that have caused the nation to come under attack and to be unprepared to defend itself. Similarities with the Dido story lie in the relationship between Elizabeth and Leicester (and Elizabeth's alleged sexual habits more generally), the disgruntlement and disenfranchisement felt by the nobility, and the poor state of England's 'ports, forts, seas, ships, borders, men, [and] munition' – that is, everything that will be necessary to ward off the impending attack of the Spanish navy.

Meanwhile, in the opposing confessional camp, Renniger describes the importance of England's coastal perimeter in terms that also go beyond the merely practical. In his two-part treatise, written partly as a response to the Babington Plot, he associates ships and walls with the ideological as well as military threats that necessitate two kinds of English defence: first there is 'the inner wall of England, which is true faith to God, unfeigned fidelity to our prince, and mutual love and concord amongst ourselves'; second there is 'the outward wall by sea, which is the shipping, navigation, and furniture thereof,

wherewith her majesty hath fortified our country' (sig. A3^v).³⁹ Renniger outlines these metaphorical and literal barriers in the first of the treatise's two parts, titled *An Exhortation to True Love, Loyalty, and Fidelity to her Majesty*, the purpose of which is to outline how it can be possible that Englishmen 'shall not need to fear the invasions of foreign enemies' (sig. E7^r). Such security cannot be relied upon, Renniger argues, but requires a positive commitment to the notion of a Protestant community under the caring protection of Elizabeth:

The inner wall of England is made of lively stones (as Peter calleth Christians) closely couched to Christ the corner stone [...] and in the body politic and civil building, of the same lively stones are laid and linked together with hearty fidelity to their prince. (sig. E6^r)

These three positive aspects of English citizenship (piety, loyalty, neighbourliness) are said to be of incalculable importance, such that 'if we will truly consider of the inward wall of England, these be the towers, bulwarks, and munitions thereof: true faith to God, loyalty to our prince, and mutual love amongst ourselves, and with all and without the which, all worldly munitions and fortifications are nothing' (sigs. E6^{r-v}).

The problem, however, is that there are some 'loose and sagging stones, which lie in the midst of the wall and deceive and weaken the building of it, and make rifts and rents in it by infidelity to God, disloyalty to the prince, and malicious hate of true subjects to her majesty' (sig. E6^v) – this being the cause of England's parlous existence and the key factor in explaining how recent conspiracies were able to progress as far as they did. For this reason, though Renniger may celebrate the good fortune of England's geography – being 'environed with seas' is seen to guard 'against invasions by land' (sig. E7^r) – he emphasizes the danger that is posed by 'those that make breaches in these walls by a lingering hope and looking after invasions of foreign forces [and] have such evil dispositions in them [to] not only make breaches in these walls but seek to betray (as much as in them is) their own

³⁹ Quotations are taken from Michael Renniger, *A Treatise containing Two Parts: An Exhortation to True Love, Loyalty, and Fidelity to her Majesty, and A Treatise against Treasons, Rebellions, and such Disloyalties* (London: Thomas Dawson, 1587).

country to foreign enemies' (sigs. E8^v-F1^r). The complete antithesis of the active citizen that Renniger commends – that is, one who shows 'true faith', 'loyalty', and 'mutual love' – these 'loose and sagging stones' are to be treated with contempt as well as to be punished as severely as possible:

Would God such monsters in nature that are ready to betray their own countries were so far from us that we might not hear the fame of them, much less that we should need to fear them. But the greatest danger is when they are in the bosom and bowels of country, which secretly gnaw in them and are ready to eat through them. (sigs. F1^{r-v})

In this description of the 'monsters' living within England's walls, Renniger makes clear that should it come about, the country's demise will have been the result of sabotage. Both the 'inner wall of [...] true faith' and the 'outer wall by sea' (which includes the ships that Mildmay attributes to the generosity of the queen's personal spending) would be sufficient to withstand any assault were it not for those who lend assistance to 'foreign enemies' – much like those whom Stubbs describes walking on the shoreline ready 'with fastened lines and cables to draw it [i.e. treachery] in'. As we shall see, *Dido* speaks directly to this problem whereby man-made as well as natural defences are rendered useless by treachery and by foolish leaders (at Troy and Carthage) who fail to perceive the threats at hand.

These spiritual and defensive walls are not Renniger's only point of coincidence with the content of Marlowe's play. The writer also refers to the myth that 'the Trojans under Brute first entered the land [...] and by the River of Thames built a city, which in remembrance of their own country they called Troynovant' (sig. F5^v) – the event that lies on the horizon of Aeneas' departure from Carthage. Secondly, when stressing the role of providence, Renniger employs the familiar image of the ship of state (citing Arnobius of Sicca as his source):

My ship may sail, but it is God [...] which strengtheneth both the master and mariners of the ship, which sendeth prosperous winds and gales, and conducteth the ship in her court, that she may fetch the right haven. (sig. E7^v)

Lastly, in the second part of Renniger's work, titled *A Treatise against Treasons, Rebellions, and such Disloyalties*, in which the writer attempts to 'bring forth the ugly monster of treason' and thereby explain the ultimate cause of England's distress (sig. H4^r), there is a notable reference to that classical overreacher most famously associated with Marlowe's style: Icarus. Renniger includes this reference in the tradition of poets who issued 'grave lessons under feigned devices [...] of Icarus' (sig. Q1^v), the lesson in this case being that each and every one of the plots against England can be traced back ultimately to Rome:

Under a feigned device [the poets] carry us to a fruitful and wise warning: to content ourselves with our states and callings, and with that moderate course that God's providence hath appointed us, neither making ourselves more abject neither mounting above the possibilities by God's providence allotted to us. They that get them wings and fall a-mounting, leaving their set course, and forgetting their weakness, as they follow Icarus in folly, so they shall follow him in his fall. Daedalus of Rome maketh wings for Icarus his son, and he beginneth with them to mount out of the compass of his course, and his plots and practices are like wings set on with wax, which will melt before the sun of God's providence, and suddenly he is plunged and overwhelmed in the troublesome seas of this world. (sigs. Q1^v-Q2^r)

Here, as well stressing papal malevolence, Renniger encourages his readers to take heart: the Catholic 'plots and practices' are to be recognized as 'folly' due to the schemers' overconfidence in failing to recognize their 'weakness' (i.e. their confessional mistake).

In so doing, this passage strengthens the sense of collective Protestant resolve against the challenges that face the country. Despite their concerns, Renniger expects his readers to stick hardily to the middle path (by not 'leaving their set course') and to rally behind the determined leadership of their queen:

She travaileth in continual dangers for us. Her sacred person, sweet life, and royal estate is continually subject to such imminent dangers and peril for us. In her they seek the spoil and massacre of us, the [...] ruin of our country, to make it a prey and booty for strangers and enemies. (sig. T2^r)

For Renniger, the threat-from-within that leads to 'imminent dangers and peril' is not Elizabeth, of course, but a shadowy group of 'malcontents, mislikers, and murmurers against the prince and state' (sig. G2^v), whereas Allen claims that the cause of 'danger [to] the whole realm' has been the queen herself (acting in cahoots with her 'amorous

minion’). In Marlowe’s play, the causes of political crisis are also presented from multiple perspectives, as is the behaviour of the two protagonists – an effect that is natural to the Dido story given its history of conflicting interpretations, but that Marlowe accentuates by a variety of means such as the inclusion of the Jupiter/Ganymede frame.

Though *Dido* is sensitive to the controversy surrounding royal marriage, we must therefore acknowledge how it echoes the political arguments of 1588 when the political nation was exercised by the prickly issue of the succession – a question that was shaped anew in the wake of Mary Queen of Scots’ execution – and by the threats of Catholic conspiracy and invasion that arose from it. Allen’s *Admonition* and Renniger’s *Treatise* are illustrative of the contradictory accounts that were given of the Elizabethan regime and of the prospects that England would survive. In the following analysis, I show that *Dido* resonates with both of these accounts, thereby raising the Armada as a plausible topical context for the play’s political meaning. Indeed, in the wake of the Armada’s defeat, James Aske’s *Elizabetha Triumphans* complimented Elizabeth on behaving ‘most Dido-like’ (p. 25) – a reference that refers not to Dido’s lovesick demise but to her excellent female leadership in the founding of Carthage. Similarly, on one of the medals struck to commemorate the Armada, there is the Virgilian motto mentioned above: *dux femina facti*.

What is striking about Marlowe’s *Dido* is that it represents the same positive example of a female monarch but at the point when her achievements are under threat. Describing the contemporary ‘iconographical scene’, Heather James observes that ‘Elizabeth could be represented as a second Dido, strictly associated with the heroic and chaste founder of Carthage, uncompromised by the subsequent disaster that forms the most widely read and affecting scenes of Vergil’s *Aeneid*’.⁴⁰ Why Marlowe should choose to depart from this convention (as did Gager – unmentioned by James) is left for the audience to consider, as is the question of how the play’s elusive characterization of Aeneas should affect our interpretation of the character in light of England’s Trojan paradigm (as

⁴⁰ James, pp. 20-21.

illustrated by Renniger's brief reference to the founding of Troynovant and by Massys' image of Aeneas setting sail).

Significantly, the simultaneous debunking and perpetuation of the Brutus myth had as much to do with confessional politics as it did with historical method; as Laura Ashe points out, 'in the context of post-Reformation England, the British myth was appropriated, fought over, and derided in the cause of both Catholic and Protestant ideologies'.⁴¹ Similarly, in Marlowe's handling of the myth, the multiple dramatic functions that Aeneas is made to serve (as leader, enemy, and citizen) – much like the difficulty of reconciling Dido's heroic past with her neglect of duty – reflect the real-life situation where the same individuals were often described in wildly contrasting ways, with the image of Elizabeth as 'maiden queen' at once venerated and disparaged, and the mythic tale of Britain's foundation at once endorsed and discredited.

Marlowe's Aeneas

Marlowe's interest in the symbolic function of the shoreline is demonstrated by a sequence that is not to be found in *The Aeneid*. After arriving at Carthage, the Trojan Sergestus remarks to Iarbas that 'the barbarous sort do threat our ships, / And will not let us lodge upon the sands; / In multitudes they swarm unto the shore, / And from the first earth interdict our feet' (1.2.34-7). By introducing this description of popular discontent at the arrival of foreign ships, Marlowe appropriates the common figurative association that was seen to exist between the collapse of state security and the penetration of physical boundaries. Yet, as in contemporary England, not all agree that the foreign ships should be prevented from landing upon 'the shore'. Just as Stubbs finds there are those at the centre of the Elizabethan state who favour the Anjou match (and 'help to hale it in'), and in Renniger's text there are those who 'not only make breaches in these walls but seek to

⁴¹ Laura Ashe, 'Holinshed and Mythical History', in *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed's Chronicles*, ed. by Felicity Heal, Ian W. Archer, and Paulina Kewes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 153-69 (p. 158). On Troy's ideological significance for Elizabethans, see: James, pp. 13-22.

betray [...] their own country', so in the play are the Trojans welcomed to Carthage by characters such as Iarbas – a central figure at the court of 'Queen Dido':

Myself will see they shall not trouble ye.
Your men and you shall banquet in our Court,
And every Trojan be as welcome here
As Jupiter to silly Baucis' house. (1.2.38-41)

The play considers only briefly this conflict between the nobles' code of hospitality and the people's robust xenophobia. With ironic reference to current events, Marlowe denies the people of Carthage effective representation onstage; their actions are merely reported with disapproval, and though their concerns are entirely valid (as anyone familiar with *The Aeneid* would know), it is only members of Dido's court who have the power and remit to deliberate on the question of whether or not the Trojan ships should land.

In presenting this disjunction between elite and popular opinion, whilst diverging from his classical source, Marlowe follows (perhaps indirectly) the example set by Gager. In the Latin play, the Trojans complain to Dido that 'your people are denying us the hospitality of your shore' (1.2), to which Dido responds with the promise of 'unfettered access' (1.2).⁴² By providing the audience with this glimpse (but only a glimpse) of popular concern for the integrity of Carthage's coastal perimeters, Marlowe's *Dido* – like Gager's – exploits the anxieties of its audience by showing that state security will be compromised when poor decisions are taken by those at the heart of a government that the people have no power to influence. That is not to suggest a republican vein to Marlowe's play; after all, referring to the defenders of Carthage as 'the barbarous sort' is hardly a ringing endorsement of those involved – and it is likely, in any case, that sympathies towards such a group would be in short supply at a performance by the Children of the Chapel Royal (as

⁴² This correspondence between Gager and Marlowe, unaccounted for by Virgil's *Aeneid* and topically suggestive in its similarity with Stubbs' *The Gaping Gulf*, raises the interesting possibility that Marlowe was somehow familiar with the Gager play – a point that would lend greater credence to the allegorical 'Anjou' interpretations of Stump and Williams. It is known that Gager was a friend of George Peele, with whom Gager corresponded and collaborated professionally in the mid-1580s (J. W. Binns, 'Gager, William (1555–1622)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10277>> [accessed 04 Jan 2016]).

opposed to a performance at Marlowe's more usual theatrical venues in Southwark). But those of 'the barbarous sort' do have a point. Given the play's more sophisticated audience (or at least the presence of one that would fancy itself as such), the scene might be interpreted, therefore, as reflecting on the need for all members of society to uphold their part of the bargain in keeping England safe – that is, along the lines of the Bond of Association and as the 'lively stones' (not 'loose and sagging stones') in the walls described by Renniger.

Like others before him, Marlowe thus uses the metaphor of the hostile ship to illustrate the disastrous effects that follow when influential figures behave foolishly. By showing that the people ('the barbarous sort') are compelled to act in a way that displeases their social superiors – who choose rather to welcome the Trojans with unsuspecting hospitality – this episode in Marlowe's play reflects the contested nature of political debate: the Trojans' arrival is shown to divide the opinion of Carthage, with those excluded from the process of deciding state policy feeling the threat to the commonweal most keenly – and, of course, it was in the interests of this unrepresented body of public opinion that Stubbs claimed to have written *The Gaping Gulf*. But just as the Anjou match was itself a manifestation of wider concerns to do with the difference in religion, so the arrival of the Trojan ships in Marlowe's play should be seen as relating to more than the negotiations for royal marriage.

By using metaphors that were an important part of political discourse throughout the period, Marlowe's representation of the story of Aeneas' arrival at Carthage does not encourage the audience to consider a single event in isolation. On the contrary, this episode is designed to reveal the systemic problems of political society that produce crisis after crisis, from the Ridolfi Plot of 1571 to the Spanish Armada of 1588; it suggests that all such crises share a common cause in the failure of the political system to forestall the foolishness or selfishness of those in power. Consequently, Marlowe's Aeneas should not be seen as the recreation of a specific personality but as a vehicle for the expression of

more deep-rooted, structural concerns about the nature of government – these concerns being reignited as each new crisis loomed.

According to *Leicester's Commonwealth*, England's problems stem from 'the excessive favour' that has allowed a favourite to usurp political control of the nation. It may be tempting, therefore, to read Aeneas as a coded version of Leicester, just as reading Renniger might encourage the same character – or perhaps Iarbas – to be seen as an allegorized version of the Catholic nobility. Are the Greeks a mirror of Catholic Spain? If so, how can Aeneas be a Protestant victim one moment and a Catholic suitor (or Machiavellian schemer) the next? The answer, simply, is that Marlowe's play resists – and, indeed, confounds – such attempts to read characters allegorically, which it does by shifting the relationship structures so that no single character is presented in the same light consistently. That is to say, *Dido* does not recreate individuals so much as it recreates the conspiracy theory genre, doing so in such a way that conspirator and victim are often one and the same.

Moreover, though it may be tempting to interpret Marlowe's Aeneas as a direct allegorical representation of the Duke of Anjou, it is important to recognize that Anjou was himself understood in relation to a more general character 'type': the treacherous usurper whose actions are atheistic and ambitious. As Lake has shown, this definition was applied throughout the 1570s and 1580s by both Catholic and Protestant polemicists as a means of undermining the reputation of key individuals and groups – whether it be prominent counsellors such as Burghley or a marginalized group such as the English Catholics.⁴³ Applicable to various circumstances and causes, this character profile became the standard description of an individual whose motives or schemes were seen to be inimical to the shared values of the English community – such values being defined, of course, by the persons writing. Thus, when the audience of Marlowe's play is told that the arrival of

⁴³ Lake, "The Monarchical Republic of Elizabeth I"; Lake, 'The politics of "popularity" and the public sphere'.

the Trojan ships has been resisted by 'the barbarous sort', Aeneas can be seen as another example of this type: he is a foreigner who threatens the state's defences in the manner of the Trojan horse.

Yet this is not the only representational function that Marlowe assigns to the character. By framing the story of the Trojans' arrival with a lengthy scene showing Jupiter to be forgetful of his providential duty – being distracted from this duty by his amorous pleasures with Ganymede – Marlowe is also able to present Aeneas as a helpless citizen who suffers due to the king of the gods' careless attitude. Third, Aeneas is shown to be a culpable member of Troy's aristocracy at the time of the city's fall to the Greeks. Accounts that focus on the play's relationship to the Anjou match tend to assess the character as only a threat to be repelled, yet Marlowe creates a version of Aeneas that can be viewed from multiple perspectives. He does this by associating the character with each of the three main figures that were used in the common story of treacherous usurpation: foreign enemy, helpless citizen, and foolish leader. Not only do interpretations that consider the play as an allegorically specific rehearsal of the Anjou marriage negotiations fail to account for the more general application of Aeneas' character (by arguing that the character can be only representative of the 'foreign Frenchman'); they also fail to recognize these different perspectives from which the character can be seen.

In the play's opening scene, Venus complains that as a consequence of Jupiter's inattentive behaviour, 'Aeneas wanders on the seas, / And rests a prey to every billow's pride' (1.1.52-3). Though 'the barbarous sort' will later consider him to be a threat to the security of Carthage, at this point – from the perspective of a goddess who is also his mother – Aeneas is no more than a helpless citizen whose wellbeing has been affected by irresponsible leadership at the divine level. Venus' explanation of the Trojans' ordeal centres on the improper conduct of 'False Jupiter' (1.1.78), who spends his time 'toying' and 'playing' with a 'female wanton boy' (1.1.51-2) when he should be ensuring the safety of the Trojan refugees.

But whilst Venus shows sympathy for the human characters that face adverse conditions at sea, Marlowe invites the audience to view its characters and situations from multiple points of view. He does this by establishing a figurative connection between the neglect of duty shown by Jupiter and the folly shown by the Trojans (Aeneas included) during their previous conflict with the Greeks:

Poor Troy must now be sack'd upon the sea,
 And Neptune's waves be envious men of war;
 Epeus' horse, to Aetna's hill transform'd,
 Prepared stands to wrack their wooden walls,
 And Aeolus, like Agamemnon, sounds
 The surges, his fierce soliders, to the spoil. (1.1.64-9)

By describing the sea voyage in these terms, Marlowe introduces a new perspective from which the audience may interpret the political significance of the episode.⁴⁴ He also demonstrates the interchangeable function of political metaphors by associating the Trojans' ships with the 'walls' of the destroyed city they have left behind. Though Aeneas is still presented here as a victim of Jupiter's dalliance with Ganymede, the language of the Trojan War – which encapsulates the idea of a state beset by trouble – draws attention to the fact that Jupiter is not the only character who is guilty of foolish or negligent behaviour: the audience is reminded that the charge of political irresponsibility applies equally to the Trojans themselves. William Leigh Godshalk writes that 'the first scene may be viewed as a thematic microcosm of the play's entire action', observing that 'like Jupiter, Aeneas will succumb to an illegitimate love which will keep him from his duty, the founding of Rome'.⁴⁵ It is certainly the case that Jupiter's neglect of duty anticipates this later action of the play, but the play's first scene also encourages the audience to remember that the Trojan leaders failed once before, the citizens of Troy having been exposed to danger by the most famous of illegitimate loves – between Paris and Helen,

⁴⁴ For a discussion of 'seaborne Troy', see: Lisa Hopkins, 'Englishmen Abroad: Mobility and Nationhood in *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and *Edward II*', *English* (2010), 1-25 (p. 8). Gill questions the poetic accomplishment of this figurative description of the Trojan ships (p. 145).

⁴⁵ William Leigh Godshalk, 'Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*', *ELH*, 38:1 (1971), 1-18 (p. 4).

'that ticing strumpet' (2.1.300) – as well as by their leaders' foolish disregard for the threat represented by an oversized wooden horse.

Having employed the metaphor of the hostile ship to describe the Trojans' arrival at Carthage, Marlowe uses the story of the Trojan War to exploit the symbolic function of walls – a usage for which Virgil's *Aeneid* provides a useful precedent.⁴⁶ As well as highlighting the Greeks' strategy of deception (2.1.143-63), this episode draws attention to the disastrous effects of imprudent leadership, for unlike 'the barbarous sort' on the shores of Carthage – who recognize a threat when they see one – Aeneas explains that he and other members of Troy's aristocracy helped to haul the wooden horse within the city walls (2.1.169-71). Just as the 'Carthaginian peers' (2.1.122) are blameworthy for giving aid to the Trojans, the play thus shows that the destruction of Troy was caused by the folly of its leaders:

By this, the camp was come unto the walls
And through the breach did march into the streets,
Where, meeting with the rest, 'Kill, kill!' they cried. (2.1.188-90)

In the description of slaughter that follows these lines, Marlowe does not simply replicate the source material but alters it so that the Greeks' destruction of Troy is reminiscent of contemporary violence in Europe (2.1.190-9). By invoking such recent atrocities as the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre (1572), Marlowe suggests that the political themes of the play are as relevant to the sixteenth century as they are to the classical past. But whilst political tracts try to persuade their readers of a particular interpretation to be applied to current events, *Dido* does not differentiate so straightforwardly between right and wrong – between the good side and the bad. Though Marlowe's play is sensitive to the political resonance of familiar stories and tropes – such as the shoreline, the ship, and the story of Troy's fall to the Greeks – its purposes are less didactic than the treatises of Stubbs, Allen, and Renniger. As a playwright, Marlowe is more concerned with showing that political events cannot be understood as easily as the one-sided accounts by Protestant and

⁴⁶ Godshalk, pp. 16-17.

Catholic polemicists would have their readers believe. Having represented Aeneas as a threat to Carthage but also as a helpless citizen who suffers as a consequence of Jupiter's neglect, the play presents the fall of Troy as an example of crisis that contains no clear instruction about the moral value of the two sides in conflict.

This kind of moral ambivalence can also be found in Marlowe's representation of Aeneas' stay at Carthage, during which time the Trojan leader is reminded of his own political responsibilities. Having established that Troy's imperial project requires the complete abandonment of women – a point from *The Aeneid* that is emphasized for its cruelty (2.1.265-88) – Marlowe makes clear that the romantic interests of the Trojan leader are at odds with the providential demands of his office. Though he appreciates the strength of the arguments made by Hermes and his fellow Trojans – which are summed up by his observation that 'destiny doth call me from the shore' (4.3.2) – Aeneas remains reluctant to leave Dido for 'fruitful Italy' (4.3.4), lamenting that 'Dido casts her eyes, like anchors, out, / To stay my fleet from loosing forth the bay' (4.3.25-6).

Here Marlowe uses a familiar trope of the ship of state to represent the play's central conflict between desire and duty. Virgil's *Aeneid* suggests this usage, of course, but the figurative connection between 'eyes' and 'anchors' is Marlowe's invention; so too are the practical measures that Dido takes to prevent Aeneas from being able to 'steal away' (4.4.3) – the removal of 'his oars, his tackling, and his sails' (4.4.109):

Now let him hang my favours on his masts,
And see if those will serve instead of sails;
For tackling, let him take chains of gold
Which I bestow'd upon his followers;
Instead of oars, let him use his hands,
And swim to Italy. (4.4.159-64)

These lines illustrate the debilitating effect of the Trojan leader's romantic love. It is clear that the 'favours' he has received from Dido, like the 'chains of gold' she has 'bestow'd upon his followers', are no substitute for the 'sails' and the 'tackling' of the Trojan ships – in terms of their impracticality, but also in relation to the different modes of lifestyle that

these two sets of items represent. The metaphor of the ship of state – as employed by Stubbs and Renniger – is thus used by Marlowe to emphasize the Virgilian contrast between Carthage’s luxuriant ease and the dangerous labours that define the Trojans’ imperial narrative (1.1.82-108). Though the conflict between desire and duty is to be expected in a play that is based upon the first four books of *The Aeneid*, this aspect of Aeneas’ career does not fit well with topical interpretations that associate the Trojan leader with the Duke of Anjou, not least because it elicits sympathy for a character that is supposedly just a malevolent schemer aiming to usurp the political control of Carthage.⁴⁷

It is only when Marlowe turns to the failings of Dido’s leadership that these topical interpretations become plausible. Demonstrating that a lovesick monarch can compromise the security of her realm through the choice of an unsuitable partner, Marlowe once again uses the image of Trojan ships – this time, supplying them with a representational function that serves to illustrate the queen’s unwillingness to put Carthage before her private romantic attachment:

I’ll frame me wings of wax like Icarus,
And o’er his ships will soar unto the sun
That they may melt and I fall in his arms

(5.1.243-5)

Here again, however, the Anjou reading falls apart, since Dido’s relationship with Aeneas has more in common with the discourse of favouritism than it does with marriage politics. Not only does Marlowe take the dramaturgical decision to enlarge the significance of Ganymede – the archetypal favourite – but he also includes a number of extra scenes involving Cupid (disguised as Ascanius) that parody courtly love (3.1.20-80; 4.5.1-37); these involve a difference in age and status that is much like the difference between a monarch and a minion.

⁴⁷ For information about the political significance of verse translations of *The Aeneid*, see: Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, ‘What is my Nation? Language, Verse, and Politics in Tudor Translations of Virgil’s *Aeneid*’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature, 1485-1603*, ed. by Mike Pincombe and Cathy Shrank (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 389-403.

Rather than encourage the audience to interpret Aeneas as an allegorical representation of Anjou – though Anjou was himself considerably younger than Elizabeth – these aspects of the play draw attention to the kinds of argument made against the Earl of Leicester, who, as we have seen, was central to the accusations made against Elizabeth in Allen's *Admonition*: he is described as 'an amorous minion' whom Elizabeth has raised from 'worse than nought only to serve her filthy lust' (p. 18). Similarly, in *Leicester's Commonwealth*, the unknown author describes 'the excessive favour' that was shown to Dudley as Elizabeth's principal favourite; Leicester is credited with an 'aspiring spirit' and 'outrageous ambition' (pp. 187, 75).⁴⁸

These descriptions are echoed in *Dido*, most obviously by Iarbas' complaint that his status as a prominent member of the court (but also as a rival suitor) has been affected by the favours shown to Aeneas, 'who ne'er will cease to soar till he be slain' (3.3.85). By resolving to take vengeance against Aeneas rather than the queen – 'this Trojan's end will be thy envy's aim' (3.3.73) – his deliberation on the matter reflects the rhetorical procedures of contemporaneous polemic (Allen's *Admonition* excepted), which would often focus its attack upon non-regal personalities so as to avoid direct blame of the monarch. Nevertheless, the implication is clear that the monarch has behaved irresponsibly and contrary to the expectations of her office. Indeed, whereas in *Leicester's Commonwealth* the vice of favouritism is described as 'the specialist rock of all other whereat kings and princes do make their shipwracks' (p. 188), in *Dido* it is apparent that the queen has given so much to Aeneas that she is unable even to set sail:

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? (5.1.266-9)

⁴⁸ Quotations are taken from D.C. Peck (ed.), *Leicester's Commonwealth: The Copy of a Letter Written by a Master of Art of Cambridge (1584) and Related Documents* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985). See: Simon Adams, 'Favourites and Factions at the Elizabethan Court', in *The Tudor Monarchy*, ed. by John Guy (London and New York: Arnold, 1997), pp. 253-74 (pp. 257-8).

In this instance, Aeneas and the Trojan ships are representative of Dido's negligent leadership. But though he is criticized by Iarbas for being a malevolent usurper, these sentiments also show that the Trojan leader is an object of sincere affection: Dido wishes to 'live a private life with him' (5.1.198). As the Trojan ships depart Carthage, *Dido* thus creates the simultaneous impression that both of the play's principal characters are the tragic victims of their positions in society – especially in the case of Dido, who is encouraged to marry Aeneas by Anna, who secretly loves Iarbas (3.1.55-78). In addition to making clear that the understanding of political duty proscribes the indulgence of personal interest, *Dido* demonstrates how cruel (and hypocritical) it is to expect a political leader to suppress his or her private wishes to meet the extreme demands that are implicit in the legal distinction between natural and political bodies.

As we have seen, Dido is not the only character to experience the contradictory pulls of desire and duty; the same conflict is felt by Aeneas and – with notably less remorse – by Jupiter, in the opening scene with Ganymede that sets the precedent for later examples of 'dandling' (1.1.0SD). Illustrating the dangers of favouritism, Dido tells Cupid (disguised as Ascanius) to 'sit in my lap, and let me hear thee sing' (3.1.25), unaware of the (mild) assassination plot to 'wound Queen Dido's heart' (2.1.333). Eventually, of course, Cupid's 'arrow head' proves to be the cause of Dido's death (2.1.326), but since the effects of desire are highlighted elsewhere in relation to men (Jupiter, Aeneas, Iarbas) as well as women (Anna), the consequence of Venus' scheming is not necessarily a comment on the suitability of female monarchs to rule with appropriate control of emotion.

The topic was addressed frequently in political writing of the period, most infamously by John Knox's *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), and by John Aylmer's *An Harbour for Faithful and True Subjects* (1559), which refutes Knox's argument and employs the commonplace image of the ship of state when reminding Englishmen of their duty to help England 'run not upon the rocks and

make ship wrack'.⁴⁹ But Marlowe's drama – and that of the early modern period more generally – tended to avoid the issue despite its obvious relevance to the rule of Elizabeth, the recent rule of Mary Queen of Scots, and the arguments made for the Spanish Infanta as a possible successor to Elizabeth.

However, in choosing the story of Dido, it might be thought that Marlowe (and Nashe) were braver than their peers in following the vein of political discussion on the topic of female monarchy – and, indeed, the play's focus on a female monarch stands out within the small canon of Marlowe's writing, so much so that Thomas Merriam has cited its sympathetic portrayal of Dido as corroborating evidence to his logometric analysis of the play's dual authorship; Merriam writes that the 'theme of unrequited love from a distinctly feminine viewpoint is developed in the second part of *Dido* and is unique as a major subject of a Marlowe attributed play', the implication being that the interest in the female experience was held more by Nashe than Marlowe.⁵⁰

But to concentrate on Dido's gender is to overlook a thematic concern that is evident throughout Marlowe's plays: from Calyphas' antipathy towards the martial lifestyle in the second part of *Tamburlaine* to the distraction of *les mignons* for Henry III in *The Massacre at Paris*, Marlowe consistently explores the irreconcilability of private and public interests. On the same topic, the Epilogue to Gager's *Dido* concludes that Aeneas' 'personal obligations' (with respect to Dido) are made void by the damage that they will do to the 'greater good' of Rome. Yet, as we have seen, Hanno suggests that no monarch should be content to see his or her 'wishes' overruled by committee: 'if I were minded to become king on such a principle, let me die', he says.

Marlowe's *Dido* reaches much the same conclusion; it, too, looks at the tragic potential in the expectation that monarchs should place the commonweal before their

⁴⁹ John Aylmer, *An Harbour for Faithful and True Subjects* (London: John Day, 1559), sig. B1^r. On the issue of female rule, see: Natalie Mears, *Queenship and Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Sharon L. Jansen, *Debating Women, Politics, and Power in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁵⁰ Merriam, 'Marlowe and Nashe', p. 428.

'private life'. In doing so, the play interrogates the expectation of self-denial and public duty that is to be found in a wide range of political writings that address royal behaviour – an expectation that is summed up best by the commonplace that 'the Kingdom is not made for the King, but the King for the Kingdom', and is clear too from Allen's disparaging remark that Elizabeth always places 'her private and present peace [...] before the public'.⁵¹ But whilst Marlowe may have chosen also to address the private/public conflict in relation to male characters – in other plays but also in *Dido* itself – this does not make the fact of Dido's gender immaterial, especially given the Virgilian inscription on the Armada medal. Admittedly, the play shows that all characters are affected by love, so it cannot be said that Dido is any less qualified for the crown simply on account of her sex. Instead, the play leaves open the question of Dido's competence: the mention of her alternative name, 'Eliza', encourages the audience to view the play in terms of Elizabeth's reign, but the lesson, if there is one, remains elusive – a question that is posed for the audience in line with the playwright's emerging preference for ambiguity.

The Political Significance of *Dido*

Whilst the period's polemical writers employed a variety of tropes to explicate one particular circumstance from one particular point of view – as demonstrated by Stubbs' one-sided account of the Anjou match – Marlowe applies them to a variety of situations and characters: the hostile ship is used in reference to the Trojans' arrival at Carthage, but walls are associated with the Trojans themselves. Complicating matters further, the ship that carries Aeneas is intended to provoke a contradictory response from the play's audience: though a symbol of danger in relation to the Carthaginian shoreline (hence the robust resistance mounted by 'the barbarous sort'), it is also shown to represent the national interests of 'Poor Troy'. Whilst Stubbs uses these two naval metaphors

⁵¹ Sir John Fortescue, quoted in George L. Mosse, 'Change and Continuity in the Tudor Constitution', *Speculum*, 22:1 (1947), 18-28 (p. 20).

independently – Anjou’s ‘ship of unhappy load’ being altogether different from the ‘the royal ship of our aid’ that is representative of the English queen – in *Dido* they operate simultaneously in relation to the same fleet. Marlowe thus chooses to interweave the common stories and tropes of political discussion in a way that argues on both sides of the question, making it possible for the audience to discern the fortunes of the English state in multiple configurations: just as Aeneas represents a dangerous usurper to the state governed by Dido, so Dido is a representation of the erotic pleasures that distract the military leader Aeneas from fulfilling his political duties in founding a new Troy – the latter association being particularly relevant given the Tudors’ self-association with the myth of Brutus.

Favouritism is also evoked by Marlowe’s introduction of the Jupiter/Ganymede episode, with the ‘dandling’ that opens the play setting the tone for similar tableaux featuring Dido and Cupid. On this basis, the accusations against Leicester – both in *Leicester’s Commonwealth* and Allen’s *Admonition* – provide a useful background for explaining how the queen’s romantic interests were thought to connect to the security of the realm. Certainly, in Dido’s wish to ‘live a private life with him [i.e. Aeneas]’ and in her eventual suicide, there is no concern shown for ‘the public’ (to use Allen’s term for the health of the nation). At the same time, the worrying ease with which Cupid is able to ‘wound Queen Dido’s heart’ can be said to reflect the precariousness of Elizabeth’s position as the principal target of Catholic assassination plots, ‘continually subject [to] imminent dangers and peril’ (in Renniger’s words). In this respect, as well as seeming to echo the charges of negligent leadership, Marlowe also stresses the full extent of the monarch’s vulnerability as the centre-point of conspiracy. The images of ships and walls that Marlowe accentuates in his retelling of Virgil evoke the state of emergency that Allen and Renniger both identify – albeit with different loyalties and different accounts of where the blame ought to lie. As Renniger assures his readers, the walls of England *can* be safe – Englishmen should ‘not need to fear the invasions of foreign enemies’ – but only if the

whole nation unites and is not let down by some 'loose and sagging stones'; whilst 'Christ the corner stone' can be relied upon, Renniger suggests, there are others who, either through treasonous intent or foolish complacency, may bring disaster upon the country. Turning from polemic to the stage, this worst-case scenario is much the same as that described by Marlowe's Aeneas, with his account of Troy's fall – and of the Trojans' foolishness for trusting the Greeks' gift – being summed up pathetically by the wailing cry, 'O had it never enter'd, Troy had stood!'

Yet these examples do more than just show that disastrous effects follow from poor decision-making or neglect at the heart of government. Though Dido compromises the security of her body politic in the interests of romance, her reasons for doing so are treated sympathetically. Likewise, in the case of Aeneas, the tragedy of Marlowe's play is that the Trojan leader cannot pursue a life of his own choosing but is rather constrained by the cruel and arbitrary expectations that are held by Jupiter – who decides without good reason that 'first in blood must his good fortune bud' (1.1.86) – as well as by his fellow Trojans, who seem to believe that suffering and self-deprivation are better signs of good leadership than the provision of a safe and comfortable place to live:

This is no life for men-at-arms to live,
Where dalliance doth consume a soldier's strength,
And wanton motion of alluring eyes
Effeminate our minds inur'd to war. (4.3.33-6)

By figuring the difference between the private wishes and the responsibilities of the Trojan leader as the conflict between sexual desire and martial duty (see 4.3.46) – between 'effeminate' or 'wanton' behaviour and the more masculine exercise of 'a soldier's strength' – Marlowe's play draws attention to the structural weakness of a political system that requires one person (or just a few people) to act impersonally, serving the collectively-defined interests of the state through the restraint of personal will.

Though Aeneas tries to reconcile his personal will with the requirements of his office by promising to 'lead an host against the hateful Greeks' (4.4.91) and replace the

'petty walls' of Carthage with 'a statelier Troy / Than that which grim Atrides overthrew' (5.1.2-4), he is 'rebuk'd' by Hermes for 'neglecting Italy' (5.1.96-7). It is apparently not enough that Aeneas should find a way to meet his responsibilities whilst satisfying the private interests of his 'heart' (5.1.103). The play thus shows that the Trojan leader is held to a standard of behaviour that even the gods fail to meet. By using the opening scenes of *Dido* to present Aeneas as the victim of Jupiter's whim – just as Dido is the victim of Venus' instructions for Cupid – Marlowe complicates the ostensibly straightforward moral lesson of Virgil's *Aeneid*. That is not to say that Marlowe champions desire, or that he opposes the ultimate correctness of letting duty take precedence over love, but his representation of the Trojan leader is at least sensitive to the character's own suffering as a consequence of Jupiter's neglect.

In this regard, as well as exploiting current fears of conspiracy and invasion, Marlowe tests the contemporary modes of argument that distinguish the personal inclinations of the monarch from the public responsibilities attending the office. In these arguments, the definition of what constitutes political responsibility is not within the control of the particular monarch but is shaped to suit the agenda of the person speaking or writing. In Scotland, the consequence of a monarch resisting this definition had been demonstrated to the fullest degree by the overthrow of Mary Queen of Scots in 1567. In this chapter, we have seen already that Mary's eventual execution at the time of *Dido's* composition lent further topical relevance to Marlowe's dramatic purposes.⁵² In the next chapter, I look in more detail at the arguments that were used to justify Mary's removal from the Scottish throne, most notably in Buchanan's *De Iure Regni apud Scotos* (pub. in 1579), but Buchanan's argument can also illuminate *Dido*.⁵³

⁵² For Marlowe's interest in Scotland, see: Hopkins, *Drama and the Succession*, pp. 19-20.

⁵³ Roger A. Mason, *Kingship and the Commonwealth: Political Thought in Renaissance and Reformation Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998), p. 191. For a discussion of resistance theory in England, see: Gerald Bowler, "An Axe or an Act": The Parliament of 1572 and Resistance Theory in Early Elizabethan England', *Canadian Journal of History*, 29 (1984), 349-59.

Defending the theory of popular sovereignty, *De Iure Regni* shows that monarchs are expected to subordinate their personal desires – ‘their own arbitrary wills’ – to a public duty serving the interests of the ‘the people’ from whom their ‘authority’ is ultimately derived (p. 35), whereas Marlowe’s *Dido* sympathizes with the ruler who is subject to such demands (containing as they do, in Allen’s *Admonition*, the implicit threat of deposition). Marlowe does this by showing that it is only natural for tension to arise between a monarch’s personal inclinations and public duty. Furthermore, given the selfish aims of Anna and Iarbas as well as the meddling intervention of the gods, *Dido* can be seen to question the hypocrisy and the cruelty of those demands. The play does so, however, in a manner that is never biased; *Dido* does not take sides or replicate the partisan language of either Catholic or Protestant polemic, but extrapolates from its stories and tropes (e.g. Dido and Aeneas, ships and walls) to produce a non-judgemental portrayal of what the monarch’s experience must be like.

We have seen that Elizabeth was complimented by Renniger and criticized by Allen, and in much the same way the actions of Dido and Aeneas can be praised or condemned by the audience, yet both characters are always expected by others to give up their personal desires for the country’s good, which Marlowe reveals to be little more than a euphemism for other people’s wishes. By interweaving the stories and tropes of contemporary political discussion – and by making it possible to view Dido and Aeneas from a range of often-conflicting perspectives – Marlowe thereby lifts the story above the immediate concerns of 1587-88 to present a more general picture of how political life works. It is a world in which individuals look after their own interests whilst demanding that the monarch behave according to a prescribed code of behaviour, and also a world of suspicion in which one person’s foreign enemy is another’s helpless citizen and yet another’s foolish leader.

Chapter Three

'Take compassion of my state': The Politics of Counsel in *Edward II*

Recent work on *Edward II* (1592) has identified the play's interest in political issues such as deposition and royal succession.¹ It is still the case, however, that many studies are concerned primarily with the representation of homosexuality.² This is understandable given Marlowe's sensitive portrayal of the king's relationship with his favourites – and it is true that scholarship in this area has taken great strides since the time when the play was seen to result from 'the fascination exercised by a psychological aberration'.³ But the focus on Edward II's intimacy with Gaveston (Spencer Junior receives far less attention) has meant that readings tend to limit their discussion to the play's first two acts (Gaveston does not appear after 2.6) and to the penultimate scene featuring the supposedly symbolic execution carried out by Lightborn. Though Marlowe addresses a number of significant political topics in these early and late parts of the play, understanding the full importance

¹ Examples include, chronologically: Mark Thornton Burnett, 'Edward II and Elizabethan Politics', in *Marlowe, History, and Sexuality New Critical Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Paul Whitfield White (New York: AMS Press, 1998), pp. 91-107; Ronald Knowles, 'The Political Contexts of Deposition and Election in *Edward II*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 14 (2001), 105-21; Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 185-202; Hopkins, *Drama and the Succession to the Crown*, pp. 19-36; Preedy, *Marlowe's Literary Scepticism*; Kewes, 'Marlowe, History, and Politics'.

² Examples include (in chronological order): Claude J. Summers, 'Sex, Politics, and Self-Realization in *Edward II*', in *'A Poet and a filthy Play-maker': New Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Kenneth Friedenreich, Constance Brown Kuriyama, and Roma Gill (New York: AMS Press, 1988), pp. 221-40; Fred B. Tromly, *Playing with Desire: Christopher Marlowe and the Art of Tantalization* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 113-32; Mario DiGangi, 'Marlowe, Queer Studies, and Renaissance Homoeroticism', in *Marlowe, History, and Sexuality*, ed. by Paul Whitfield White (New York: AMS Press, 1998), pp. 195-213; David Stymeist, 'Status, Sodomy, and the Theater in Marlowe's *Edward II*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 44:2 (2004), 233-53; Marie Rutkoski, 'Breeching the Boy in Marlowe's *Edward II*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 46:2 (2006), 281-304;. Homosexuality is also the major theme of the 1991 film adaptation directed by Derek Jarman. See: Thomas Cartelli, 'Queer *Edward II*: Postmodern Sexualities and the Early Modern Subject', in *Marlowe, History, and Sexuality*, ed. by Paul Whitfield White (New York: AMS Press, 1998), pp. 213-23; Lawrence Normand, 'Edward II, Derek Jarman, and the State of England', in *Constructing Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by J.A. Downie and J.T. Parnell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 177-93.

³ Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 139-142 (p. 141).

of *Edward II* requires a more comprehensive study than a narrow concern with the king's homosexuality allows.

In this respect, I suggest, attention ought to be given to how Marlowe's engagement with homosexuality can illuminate the play's broader themes and effects. Exemplifying precisely this approach, Thomas Cartelli suggests that Marlowe 'presents a decidedly direct and demystified portrayal of power politics at work, showing political positions to be little more than transparent extensions of the personal desires and ambitions that motivate them'.⁴ Cartelli supports this reading with a discussion centring on Edward's private affections; he notes the 'modern' appeal of a play that examines 'the life and loves [...] of a recognizably (if not exclusively) homosexual monarch'.⁵ But, drawing on the early modern discourse of the four elements and four humours, Cartelli goes on to show that Edward is not the only character whose 'political positions' are determined by impulses that are 'personal' more than public.⁶

This insight is especially valuable because it marks Edward's affections – and the character's prioritization of them at the expense of kingly duty – not as unusual or unnatural, but as simply the most conspicuous example of a tendency towards selfishness that is shared by the majority of the play's characters. Edward II, of course, shows scant regard for 'the country's cause' (4.1.3), and espouses absolutism and the divine right of kings – these are his 'political positions' – for no other reason than to maintain the controversial company of his favourites. But it soon becomes clear that other characters in the play are equally at fault for selecting arguments that serve their personal desires more than the national interest – a fault that is found in the behaviour of the king's 'smooth dissembling flatterers' and 'rebellious' barons alike (3.1.169; 3.2.20).

⁴ Cartelli, '*Edward II*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Patrick Cheney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 158-73 (p. 158).

⁵ Cartelli, '*Edward II*', p. 158.

⁶ Cartelli makes the same point in '*Queer Edward II*': 'Marlowe, in *Edward II*, effectively obviates the homosexual behavior as one among many material practices that are motivated by irregular blends of affection, compulsion, and opportunism and that operate beyond the reach of moral or idealist categories' (p. 217).

This chapter looks to interrogate the various ways that Marlowe engages this culture of selfish argument. It aims to place *Edward II* within the political context of the early 1590s, thus providing some suggestion why the playwright might have chosen to dramatize this particular story at the time he did. It also looks at how *Edward II* expands upon the major themes relating to monarchy that are present in his earlier plays. For when this development is traced, it becomes possible to see Marlowe's mediaeval history play as his most complete statement about the hardships of wearing a crown. It is useful to examine Marlowe's engagement with the selfish, often hypocritical, strategies of political argument because an interest in dishonest rhetoric is manifest in all sections of the play – not just in those that deal directly with the king's sexuality.

Indeed, *Edward II* touches on a range of contemporary concerns of which favouritism (and the attendant charge of sodomy) is only one: arguments for resistance, ideas of counsel, competing forms of succession, the role of the nobility, and the overlap of domestic and papal jurisdictions are all raised during the course of the play. What unites these issues is the dishonesty of the characters that discuss them. In each case, Marlowe shows that many of his characters pursue private interest, and simply dress their arguments to create the illusion of patriotic concern. One purpose of this chapter is to explain how *Edward II* communicates such hypocrisy and deception to the audience, and for this reason I focus on a salient feature of Marlowe's dramaturgy: the appropriation of the language of counsel, and its strategic deployment to expose his characters' true motivations and, by extension, the motives of those operating in the world of late Elizabethan politics.

To do so, I compare Marlowe's play with some of the most conspicuous assertions of hidden malevolence that were made against Elizabeth's counsellors in Catholic polemic. As we saw in the previous chapter, accusations against malevolent counsellors and favourites had been a staple of the 1580s, with Cardinal William Allen and Robert Persons countering the claims of Catholic conspiracy levelled by William Cecil, Lord Burghley and

by ‘men of business’ such as Thomas Norton. In 1588, Allen and Persons’ confidence in a Spanish victory came to nought, thereby deflating the anti-Burghley, anti-Leicester – and, in Allen’s no-holds-barred *Admonition* (1588), anti-Elizabeth – libel campaign. But things did not stay quiet for long and efforts were renewed by the prospect of a second Armada in 1592, the year of *Edward II*.⁷

As Victor Houlston points out, ‘Persons’ chief writing objective during the period after the [first] Armada [...] was to defend the innocence of the priestly vocation’, asserting at all times – both in his own writings and those he guided to the press – that ‘priests would be involved purely in pastoral ministry, not in political subversion’; his reasons for doing so lay in the 1591 proclamation (composed by Burghley) ‘Establishing Commissions against Seminary Priests and Jesuits’, which arose from Burghley’s suspicion that ‘the failure of the 1588 Armada did not spell the end of the Spanish threat’.⁸ Together with Richard Verstegan, a fellow exile residing in Antwerp, Persons mounted what Houlston describes as a ‘concerted propaganda campaign’ to assert that priests and Jesuits were in no way connected to conspiracy or intrigue and that the real villain was Burghley himself. Never mind that Burghley’s suspicions were correct – ‘Persons [...] was seldom free of involvement in some or other short-term plan for the “liberation” of England’ – the ‘print war’ that Persons and Verstegan waged was effective at least in terms of agitating its target.⁹ Burghley had been the target of Catholic libels before, in *The Treatise of Treasons* (1572), and now he was again.

By attending closely to the initial treatise in this campaign, Verstegan’s *A Declaration of the True Causes of the Great Troubles* (1592), I will show that *Edward II* resonates with anti-Burghley sentiment – although not in such a way as to form a direct allegory of Burghley’s alleged influence. Burghley was the subject of several works

⁷ Victor Houlston, *Catholic Resistance in Elizabethan England: Robert Persons’s Jesuit Polemic, 1580-1610* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2007), p. 47.

⁸ Houlston, pp. 49, 53, 49-51.

⁹ Houlston, pp. 77, 49.

published in short succession: in his later *Advertisement* (1592), Verstegan went on to lay the groundwork for Persons' satire known today as *Philopater* (1592), much as the anonymous *Newes from Spain and Holland* (1593) served as a teaser for Persons' *A Conference about the Next Succession* (1594/5) – the tract that signalled 'a shift in emphasis from armed intervention to the possibility of a Catholic succession'.¹⁰ I focus, however, on Verstegan's *Declaration* due to its significance as the first of the renewed attacks on Burghley and the fact that it proved to be 'a strategic success of unforeseen magnitude': clearly rankled, Burghley wrote to Antwerp to enquire after the pamphlet's author, and revealed the full strength of his grievance by trying to set the record straight; meanwhile, Francis Bacon (Burghley's protégé) felt compelled to refute Verstegan's allegations in his 'Certain Observations' (1592).¹¹

As my analysis of *Edward II* will further demonstrate, it has also been shown that 'the *Declaration* made a lively contribution to the English literary scene of the early 1590s'.¹² By reading Marlowe's play in the light of this polemical tract, I am thus able to show how the playwright sought to interrogate the rhetorical means by which influential figures were criticized and shamed in public discourse.

Given the prominence of the king's deposition in Marlowe's play, I shall turn then to contemporary arguments in favour of resistance – specifically, those put forward in George Buchanan's *De Iure Regni apud Scotos* (published in 1579) – to draw out the topical commentary implicit in Marlowe's rehearsal of Edward II's violent demise. It would be wrong, of course, to assume that all Catholics were of one mind, and the mid-1590s to early 1600s witnessed increased tensions between English Catholics at home and Jesuit Hispanophiles abroad such as Persons, who tried to dictate terms on which candidate for the succession ought to be favoured and how the post-Elizabethan church should be

¹⁰ Houlston, p. 55. On James VI's reply to Persons' *Conference*, see: Lake, 'The King (the Queen) and the Jesuit: James Stuart's *True Law of Free Monarchies* in Context/s', *Transactions of the RHS*, 14 (2004), 243-60.

¹¹ Houlston, p. 53.

¹² Houlston, p. 58.

organized. Pertinent to my analysis of *Edward II* is the criticism that William Clarke – one of the Appellants in the so-called Archpriest controversy, an intra-Catholic feud unfolding at the turn of the century – levelled against Persons' *Conference*, the aforementioned succession tract favouring election (and, implicitly, the claim of the Spanish Infanta).¹³ In his *Reply unto a Certain Libel* (1603), Clarke writes (notionally addressing Persons) that 'when I perused it, me thought I was reading all the while your master in that art Buchanan, the Scot, his book *De iure regni apud Scotos*: unto whom you are very much beholden'; Clarke's point is that both works serve to 'set up the people against their sovereigns'.¹⁴

This comment reveals the enduring – and strange – relevance of Buchanan's justification for the 1567 removal of Mary Queen of Scots in favour of James VI. That Clarke should choose to compare Persons' elective model for succession with Buchanan's theory of elective monarchy for Scotland also illustrates the ever-contingent quality of political argument: where Catholics had previously supported Mary's hereditary claim, Persons was now, in Clarke's view, putting forward precisely the same position as those who removed England's best-placed Catholic claimant from the Scottish throne – and, of course, the shift in Persons' constitutional point of view was caused precisely by the execution of that same claimant in 1587 and the fact that Mary's death put James in pole position. This strangely reconfigured political reality involving much the same cast of players, along with Clarke's choice of Buchanan as a point of comparison to embarrass Persons, reminds us once again of the full extent to which Mary's flight from Scotland, her presence in England, and her eventual execution cast a shadow over the politics of the Elizabethan succession, with arguments and preferred candidates always changing in the light of each new development.

¹³ Peter Lake and Michael Questier, 'Taking it to the Street? The Archpriest Controversy and the Issue of the Succession', in *Doubtful and Dangerous: The Question of Succession in Late Elizabethan England*, ed. by Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), pp. 71-91.

¹⁴ Quoted in Lake and Questier, p. 78.

What the arguments of Buchanan and Persons do have in common, I suggest, is an emphasis on the monarch's social function and the consequent agency of his/her subjects in possessing the right to choose and direct the person in office – a right, in Clarke's view, that places 'sovereigns' at the mercy of 'the people'. With reference to *De Iure Regni*, I suggest that by using images of enclosure, Marlowe's *Edward II* takes these ideas to their natural conclusion, with the king's claim that 'the headstrong barons shall not limit me' disproved in the most extreme way possible (2.3.261). Rather than put forward a specific context that frames the entirety of the play's meaning, I thus propose that *Edward II* reflects upon various longstanding strategies and patterns of debate, the 'print war' of 1591-92 being Marlowe's point of entry but by no means his sole focus. Indeed, the brilliance of Marlowe's play lies not with its ties to any one particular circumstance but in the unique, often witty way that the playwright addresses complex concerns. Favouritism, counsel, the legitimacy of resistance, royal succession, noble disenfranchisement, papal influence and/or interference – in *Edward II*, these issues are explored in ways that highlight Marlowe's pessimistic conclusions about the realities of political life and the limits that were placed upon the Renaissance monarch.

Influencing the Monarch

Throughout its history, criticism on *Edward II* has been occupied with questions about the king's attachment to Gaveston.¹⁵ Political readings have tended to focus on how Marlowe connects this subject to the outbreak of 'civil broils' (4.4.6), with some arguing that the play was designed to function as a case-specific allegory. Marlowe's mediaeval king has been variously identified as the analogue of Elizabeth I (with Gaveston as Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester), James VI of Scotland (with Gaveston as Esmé Stewart, Duke of Lennox),

¹⁵ On favouritism in early modern drama, see: Blair Worden, 'Favourites on the English Stage', in *The World of the Favourite*, ed. by J.H. Elliott and L.W.B. Brockliss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 159-81; Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*.

and Henri III of France (with Gaveston and Spencer Junior as *les mignons*).¹⁶ These readings have much to recommend them, as do those that draw our attention to Elizabeth's other favourites such as Sir Walter Raleigh.¹⁷ Given the ubiquity of the Edward II story, in contemporary historical narratives but also as a point of reference in anti-favourite polemic, Marlowe must have expected theatregoers to connect moments in the play with recent episodes of political discord – and, as Paulina Kewes points out, several of Marlowe's departures from his source material would suggest his intention for them to do so: the change from Gaveston's well born origins to match those of Burghley and Cecil, anachronistic references to excommunication, and a reference to Normandy only shortly after the arrival there of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, to assist the Huguenots, would all invite the 'thrill of recognition' and sense in audience members of 'being in-the-know'.¹⁸

Connections of this kind might thus have lent the play greater commercial appeal. But a close reading of *Edward II* does not support the claim for sustained allegory. Rather than limit the play's application to a single example, Marlowe encourages multiple identifications that operate intermittently. When we consider Marlowe's departures from his source material, we find no evidence that he shaped the Edward II story to create a narrative that runs consistently parallel to one specific episode. Instead, we find a play that speaks to several contexts simultaneously, and can thus transcend the specifics of a single application to an English, Scottish, or French context to make a much broader comment – unlike George Peele's *Troublesome Reign of King John* (1589-90) or Robert Greene's *James IV* (c. 1590), which refer explicitly to Henri III and James VI respectively – on 'the common condition of monarchy in these states'.¹⁹

¹⁶ See, respectively: Perry, pp. 185-202; Lawrence Normand, "'What Passions Call You These?": *Edward II* and *James VI*', in *Christopher Marlowe and English Renaissance Culture*, ed. by Darryll Grantley and Peter Roberts (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), pp. 172-97; and Richard Hillman, *Shakespeare, Marlowe and the Politics of France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 73.

¹⁷ Susan Doran, 'Elizabeth and Her Favourites: The Case of Sir Walter Raleigh', in *Elizabeth I and the 'Sovereign Arts': Essays in Literature, History, and Culture*, ed. by Donald Stump and others (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2011), pp. 157-74 (pp. 161-2).

¹⁸ Kewes, 'Marlowe, History, and Politics', pp. 138-54 (pp. 138-44).

¹⁹ Kewes, 'Marlowe, History, and Politics', pp. 143-4.

Moreover, *Edward II* does not just speak to the subject of favouritism. As well as being aware of the limitations of reading for case-specific allegory – an approach that dampens the play’s multiple resonances – it is important to remember that Marlowe addresses a number of themes beyond the king’s relationship with Gaveston. ‘Civil broils’ may be sparked most immediately by Gaveston’s presence on English soil, but the play explores a range of explosive political issues with a topical significance of their own.

We might look, for instance, at how those who are disadvantaged by Edward’s misrule turn to arguments favouring rebellion whilst those who benefit, such as Gaveston and Spencer Junior, oppose the legitimacy of such action on absolutist grounds. Alternatively, we might look at how Mortimer Junior’s installation of Edward III reflects upon the practice of contemporary polemicists in their choosing to advocate forms of succession that suit the claims of their favoured candidates. We might look at how the marginalization of the barons (the traditional elite) is associated with the rise of educated professionals (akin to Marlowe) whose status is derived ‘from Oxford, not from heraldry’ (2.2.243); or, turning from questions of social mobility to the play’s confessional dimension, we might look at the how the mockery and mistreatment of the Bishop of Coventry (and the subsequent involvement of the Archbishop of Canterbury in plots against the king) play to contemporary anti-Catholic prejudice and fears of Catholic conspiracy within England.²⁰

When these aspects of the play are considered collectively, a core theme emerges. For in each case Marlowe exposes the point at issue – from the legitimacy of resistance to the matter of papal interference – as a dispute centring on the politics of influence: resistance is championed by those who lose the ear of the king (and opposed by those who gain it); Prince Edward is forced to accede to the throne by those who hope to control him; the barons are disgruntled to lose a position of power traditionally guaranteed by the

²⁰ For a further topical reading, see: Marcie Bianco, ‘To Sodomize a Nation: *Edward II*, Ireland, and the Threat of Penetration’, *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 16 (2007), 11.1-21 <URL: <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/si-16/bianedii.htm>> [accessed 25 November 2013].

feudal system; for members of the clergy, Gaveston represents a challenge to papal authority and his removal is justified on those grounds. Of course, many of these arguments are associated with the same group: though they may not agree on all aspects of the rebellion, it is the English barons who respond angrily to the promotion of favourites and professional 'men of business'; it is the barons who justify their opposition to the king on the grounds that their advice goes unheeded, and who force the accession of Prince Edward following the deposition of his father. Moreover, hinting at the confessional resonance of the 'barons' for a sixteenth-century audience, these actions are mostly carried out with papal support, as embodied by Canterbury.

But it is important that we distinguish the separate arguments that are used to justify the barons' behaviour, for it shows that Marlowe shaped *Edward II* to reflect the broad spectrum of political rhetoric. When Mortimer Junior suggests that the barons may 'lawfully revolt' or 'depose [Edward] and elect another king' (1.2.73; 1.4.55), the language is specific to resistance theory and contractual ideas of monarchy. Likewise, when Canterbury threatens to 'discharge these lords / Of duty and allegiance due to thee [i.e. Edward]' (1.4.61-2), he evokes the context of excommunication in contemporary Europe – a statement of papal power that would bring to mind the excommunication of Elizabeth in 1570. In each case, the character's arguments reflect standard usage, and are presented by Marlowe in such a way as to highlight how statements of opinion were chosen strategically to ensure personal advantage.

In this section of the chapter, I focus on how Marlowe uses the language of counsel to explore the operations of such dishonest rhetoric. Of course, counsel was itself a major subject of debate in the sixteenth century. As John Guy has pointed out, "counsel" ranked high among the paradigms and traditions which informed public discourse and shaped political institutions [of] the age'.²¹ But it is especially useful as a focus because in

²¹ John Guy, 'The Rhetoric of Counsel in Early Modern England', in *Tudor Political Culture*, ed. by Dale Hoak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 292-310 (p. 292).

Marlowe's handling, expressions of counsel intersect with the discussion of many other political topics. Indeed, Marlowe lends these expressions a vital dramaturgical purpose. By considering how the playwright engages the subject of counsel – by including, for instance, the figure of *parrhesia* and other standard claims – we can see that its language is designed to trace the 'political positions' articulated by the play's characters to how much these characters hold sway over the monarch. Put simply, Marlowe uses the language of counsel to mark his characters' relative proximity to power. For instance, Edward II's favourites (and Baldock) do not present their counsel as coercive but as mere suggestions that do nothing to limit the monarch's prerogative. It is a position that reflects their satisfaction with the *status quo* and the need to counter opposing arguments such as the barons' claim that the monarch is contractually bound to heed the advice of those best qualified to provide it.

As Marlowe emphasizes (and as we shall see in the context of Catholic polemic), it is a standard move in discourse about counsel to suggest that other groups are motivated by self-interest. For the favourites, the barons would have their selfish wishes imposed upon the king, whilst they defer to his expert judgement. For the barons, the favourites simply flatter the monarch into following their wishes at the expense of doing what is right; the barons say they believe that counsellors should be prepared to offer robust advice and compel the monarch to follow it. To suggest, then, that counsel represents a major concern in *Edward II* is not to depart radically from the earlier focus on Edward's relationships with Gaveston and Spencer Junior but to place these relationships in context – as examples, pejoratively speaking, of the flattery and favouritism *against* which anyone who is out of power defines himself. Indeed, when viewed through the wider lens of political rhetoric, the generally-identified focus on favouritism and flattery (defined as the antithesis of counsel) becomes part of a more general exploration of who should advise the monarch and who should not, whether the monarch is bound to follow the advice that is given, and what should happen if he/she chooses to ignore it. The complication,

matching the ambiguity of Marlowe's earlier drama, is that all these positions on counsel are exposed in the course of the play as expressions of self-interest, thus leaving the audience with no positive recommendations about how monarchy should work.

At this point, we should note that in debates about the monarch's authority, all sides supported the idea of counsel. That is to say, Marlowe's contemporaries did not necessarily understand counsel to be at odds with the idea of the monarch as an unrestricted agent determining both policy and statute. As Jacqueline Rose has noted, the question of whether or not it was mandatory that the monarch should follow counsel was part of a wider disagreement about the monarch's position relative to the law, with absolutists set apart from those favouring a limited or contractual conception of monarchy; but that monarchs should at least hear counsel (if not always act upon it) was a basic conviction held by those on all sides of the constitutional debate.²² We should not assume, therefore, 'that a strong rhetoric of counsel implies a theory of mixed polity, that every plea to hear advice was an eruption of the classical republicanism bubbling away beneath the monarchist crust of Elizabeth's government'.²³ True, some argued that coercion and/or rebellion became justified when a monarch rebuffed honest advice or fell under the sway of evil counsellors, who were generally identified as such on the basis of their confessional difference. But, taken independently, an appreciation for counsel was not a mark of radicalism.

Indeed, for many conformist defenders of the Elizabethan regime, it did not curtail the exercise of the monarch's rule but enhanced it; as Rose points out, counsel 'channelled and assisted, it did not impugn, sovereignty'.²⁴ Indeed, during the decade in which *Edward II* was written and first performed, it has been suggested that the discussion of the monarch's prerogative shifted towards a more 'imperial' conception of Elizabeth's powers

²² Jacqueline Rose, 'Kingship and Counsel in Early Modern England', *The Historical Journal*, 54:1 (2011), 47-71.

²³ Rose, p. 58.

²⁴ Rose, p. 53.

relative to those of the privy council and parliament; that this shift was not seen to invalidate counsel shows that it could function perfectly well within a framework that ‘precluded challenges to royal authority’ – that is, if counsellors were willing to accept ‘an absolutist mode of thinking [...] which denied that any *coercive* restrictions could be *enforced* on monarchs who defied law’.²⁵

At the same time, however, it is important to recognize that the queen’s closest counsellors were among those who insisted on the ‘imperial’ conception of counsel, which notionally meant limiting their own powers of influence but in service to the greater function of closing down the access of other groups that might wish to exert pressure. As Peter Lake explains, if we are to understand the decisions taken at ‘the centre’, we must consider ‘the view from the periphery’ and the desire of those in power to keep things as they are; seen in this light, Lake observes that the so-called ‘monarchical republic’ did not so much involve a widening of political participation to all and sundry but vested power ‘in the hands of a male Protestant elite, excluding Catholics from the central decision-making processes’.²⁶ Elizabeth’s second, ‘imperial’ reign might be seen, therefore, not as the reflection of a true and all-pervasive shift in theories of counsel and monarchical prerogative, but as a reaction to the strong force of alternative, non-formalized modes of counsel that made up an ever-widening public sphere – with many voices from ‘outside’, amplified by the printing press, telling the queen how she should act and what the consequences will be should she do otherwise.

It has been shown, for instance, that for all the concern with shutting down discussion of Elizabeth’s successor, the topic was still addressed in a multitude of private and public settings; as Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes explain, ‘as far as the succession is

²⁵ Rose, p. 52. See: John Guy, ‘The 1590s: The Second Reign of Elizabeth I?’, in *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. by John Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 1-19 (pp. 11-13).

²⁶ Lake, “The Monarchical Republic of Elizabeth I”, pp. 89-91.

concerned, there was no “second reign of Elizabeth I”.²⁷ Likewise, Curtis Perry claims that it is ‘[no coincidence that] interest in the Edward II story peaks during the periods when English observers were most likely to be concerned with the expansion of royal prerogative and with related shifts in constitutional balance’, before noting that ‘the forceful-sounding articulations of prerogative that Guy points toward are in many cases responding to strains of Catholic or Calvinist resistance theory’.²⁸ In Marlowe’s play, Edward II’s assertions of absolute prerogative are shown to be wholly ineffective attempts to fight the elective tide, but the play also shows what can happen when coercive ideas of counsel are taken too far. It might be argued, then, that Marlowe stages the clash between two different conceptions of counsel.

As mentioned above, various candidates have been proposed for readings of *Edward II* as an allegorical play about favouritism. On this point, however, Perry explains that ‘the end of Elizabeth’s reign is not a period dominated by a figure like a Leicester (who died in 1588) or a [George Villiers, 1st Duke of] Buckingham: there is no single figure commonly imagined as an all-powerful favorite holding the queen in thrall’.²⁹ Instead, Perry observes, there was ‘paranoia about the political domination of a corrupt court [which] focused predominantly, in this period, on the idea of a *regnum Cecilianum* and on the image of Lord Burghley and his son Robert Cecil as upstart traitors hostile to tradition and degree’ – a point of comparison that is supported by the fact that Verstegan’s *Declaration* compares Burghley with the Spencers and Gaveston.³⁰ Understandably, Perry finds this comparison to be rather weak since ‘nobody really thought of either Burghley or Cecil as intimate affective favorites of the queen along the lines of Gaveston’.³¹ But whilst concrete associations between characters and real-life individuals might not hold, Marlowe’s play resonates with the events of 1592 when seen in the context of counsel –

²⁷ Doran and Kewes, ‘Introduction’, p. 7.

²⁸ Perry, pp. 188, 190.

²⁹ Perry, p. 188.

³⁰ Perry, p. 188.

³¹ Perry, p. 190.

with characters outside the king's confidence arguing for greater representation, and those within trying to bolster the claims of royal impunity that will leave their positions of privilege unchallenged.

Edward II does not align counsel exclusively with theories of contractual monarchy or resistance. Instead, it asks questions about who is best qualified to advise Edward, whether the king is bound to follow such advice, and what should happen if he chooses not to do so; there is always the possibility that counsel works best when it is part of a governmental system that places the monarch above the law and beyond threats of excommunication and rebellion. By investigating these questions, Marlowe engages up-to-the-minute debate. Given their position of influence, it made little sense for members of the Protestant elite to argue for elective monarchy – as their confessional counterparts had done elsewhere, in Scotland in the 1560s and in France in the 1580s; instead, they emphasized the unassailable rights of the queen, which also entailed a model of counsel that could claim no 'coactive' influence.³² At the same time, those on the 'periphery' (e.g. Catholics such as Persons and Verstegan) took to the printing press to target the queen's advisors and, by implication, the queen herself, denouncing their claims of piety, national loyalty, and concern for the English commonweal as part of an atheistic, 'politic' disguise of self-interest. In *Edward II*, Marlowe interrogates this proposition, expounded in works such as Verstegan's *Declaration*. But he also considers the Protestant counterclaim that such accusations were themselves designed to satisfy the personal interests of the power-hungry and seditious, and questions the practicality of Edward II's out-dated absolutist assumptions.

Edward II's own position helps to explain why some other characters in the play offer counsel but remain staunchly opposed to the idea of limiting the king's behaviour by

³² On the way that absolutism and the divine right of kings were used strategically to oppose Catholic arguments, see: Rose, pp. 52-3 (p. 52); and John Guy, 'Monarchy and Counsel', in *The Sixteenth Century, 1485-1603*, ed. by Patrick Collinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 113-42 (pp. 136-7). On the distinction between absolutism and divine right, see: Glenn Burgess, 'The Divine Right of Kings Reconsidered', *English Historical Review*, 107:425 (1992), 837-61.

religious and/or military means. Echoing arguments in defence of the queen's *imperium*, presented by Protestant conformists such as John Bridges and Thomas Bilson, those around Edward advise him to teach the nobles 'obedience' (3.1.23). Of course, the crucial factor here is that Gaveston, Spencer Junior, and Baldock have no reason whatsoever to support a more contractual understanding of the monarch's relationship to his subjects. They do not use the figure of *parrhesia* – 'my lord, pardon my speech' (3.1.15) – to excuse an imminent challenge to royal authority, as Peter Wentworth's famous use of the figure implied.³³ Instead, they use it to remind the king of his ultimate power of judgement, the implication being that he should deal severely with those who do not show similar levels of deference: the king is told by Spencer Junior that he should 'strike off [the barons'] heads, and let them preach on poles' (3.1.20). Having disclosed his 'hope' for advancement as the king's new 'companion' (2.1.11; 2.1.13), it is obviously in Spencer Junior's interests to argue against the limitation of monarchy and to recommend 'such lessons' as the convenient execution of his rivals (3.1.21) – a lesson from which the English might 'learn obedience to their lawful king' (3.1.23), thereby securing Spencer Junior's position of power and influence. Likewise, having earlier disclosed his 'hypocrisy' to the audience (2.1.45), Baldock flatters Edward by complimenting his 'haught resolve' in opposing the barons' expectation that he should be 'awed and governed like a child' (3.1.28; 3.1.31). With the audience ironically aware of Baldock's true motivation, this statement of outrage on the king's behalf is recognizable as the product of convenience, not of conviction.

As it happens, Baldock is correct in alleging that the barons do expect to hold the king under 'controlment' (1.4.389). Their opposition to favouritism does not centre on the

³³ See: David Colclough, *Freedom of Speech in Early Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 54-5; Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric*, pp. 241-2.

'wanton' dimension of Edward's relationships but reflects their dismay at being placed further from the seat of privilege and power in court (1.4.401).³⁴

Thy court is naked, being bereft of those
That makes a king seem glorious to the world –
I mean the peers whom thou shouldst dearly love;
Libels are cast against thee in the street,
Ballads and rhymes made of thy overthrow. (2.2.173-7)

As Mortimer Junior's complaint makes clear, the king's relationship with Gaveston leads to rebellion – and, ultimately, to Edward's 'overthrow' – because it obstructs the 'love' that is traditionally shown to the 'peers'. It also prompts the barons to claim that their counsel may be enforced where it concerns the commonweal, with the reference to 'libels', 'ballads', and 'rhymes' here suggesting a groundswell of popular support in contrast to Spencer Junior's dismissive reference to 'the rest' (3.1.21). Thus, when viewing the competition between the favourites and the barons, it is possible for the audience to sympathize with both sides: the favourites voice the orthodox position articulated by the Elizabethan regime to guard against the terror of rebellion; but the term 'favourite' was hardly a byword for integrity. In contrast, the barons appeal repeatedly to 'the country's good', referring to foreign threats, Gaveston's lavish spending, and the popular support they enjoy; but their credibility is undercut by an emphasis on the selfish motives that jostle with their claims of patriotism.³⁵

In this regard, as in the two *Tamburlaine* plays (1587) and *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1588), Marlowe highlights a problem without offering any solution to it – an effect of the play that is accentuated by the lack of any consistent indications about whom the audience should support. For in its exploration of questions about counsel, *Edward II* does not establish a stable opposition between good and evil, right and wrong. Unlike many contemporary plays that signal their attitude on particular issues (e.g. the question of the

³⁴ Christopher Wessmann notes that 'critical opinion is divided over the relative importance of Edward's sexual predilections in engendering the nobles' ire' ('Marlowe's *Edward II* as "Actaeonesque History"', *Connotations*, 9:1 (1999/2000), 1-33 (p. 30n28)).

³⁵ Preedy, pp. 138-9.

queen's marriage) by aligning opposing positions with 'good' and 'bad' characters, in *Edward II* the audience is presented with a range of positions, some more persuasive than others, voiced by characters who alternate between seeming to care for England's safety and seeming to care for themselves.³⁶ Likewise, in the representation of Edward II – though Marlowe may ultimately elicit sympathy for the king's plight – there are frequent reversals between showing the character as a victim (of his desires and the unrealistic demands of the barons) and showing him as a tyrant not to be pitied.

That Marlowe intended to frustrate attempts to read *Edward II* as a straightforward moral example can be seen from how he uses arguments related to counsel. We have seen that the language of counsel is deployed throughout the play to show that statements of opinion are often shaped by self-interest – or, at the very least, are designed to suit the circumstances of the speaker. But as well as undercutting his characters' claims to be providing the king with the best possible advice, Marlowe probes the accusations that these characters level against their rivals, as they charge others with the label of self-interest in the attempt to displace them from positions of power and influence. The playwright thus engages with a key strategy of political debate, which is the identification of a scapegoat – the one person who can be said to have caused all of England's problems, if not Europe's, and whose presence near to the monarch is supposedly the reason why rebellion is necessary.

In Marlowe's play, it is this rhetorical strategy that allows the barons to describe their resistance as an act of self-defence. But given the slippage in the barons' objectives – from at first simply wanting to remove the king's favourites, to the advocacy of wholesale rebellion, deposition, and the election of Prince Edward – it is a strategy that is shown to disguise deeper motives. Indeed, the targeting of a scapegoat can be seen to reflect the tendency that was shown by Catholic polemicists in laying blame against persons near to the queen rather than the queen herself. For whereas attacks on Elizabeth might have

³⁶ On the subject of civil war, the classic example is *Thomas of Woodstock*.

been counterproductive – forging a sense of loyalty against a greater enemy abroad – polemic against evil counsel could garner support as well as allow its authors to maintain a fictional loyalty to the queen.

When writing *Edward II*, Marlowe might have drawn examples of this polemical strategy from many sources. But it is conspicuous that he composed the play when Catholic attacks on the supposedly evil counsel of William Cecil, Lord Burghley were numerous, and when concerns about recusant disloyalty were high – a context that might explain why the barons' actions are shown to escalate from a position of apparent loyalty. Indeed, it is noticeable that the first half of *Edward II* presents different kinds of counsel – broadly defined as humanist-classical, feudal-baronial, and ecclesiastical – in a way that matches the orientation of 1590s Catholic polemic. In contemporary polemic it was often argued that the favourite or evil counsellor – by virtue of his selfish motivations – was singly responsible for England's precarious political situation and religious error, which is precisely the claim that is made of Marlowe's Gaveston. *Verstegan's Declaration* is thus ripe for comparison with Marlowe's text because it encapsulates the interrelationship of seemingly disparate subjects of debate, and addresses the contentious issue of who should advise the monarch and who should not.

Scapegoating the Counsellor in *Verstegan's Declaration*

Verstegan's Declaration has been read alongside Marlowe's *Edward II* once before, by Curtis C. Breight in his *Surveillance, Militarism and Drama in the Elizabethan Era* (1986). I re-tread the same ground for two reasons. First, I do so because the charges contained within *Verstegan's* tract illuminate the wide-ranging topical concerns of Marlowe's play. *Edward II* does not refer to *Verstegan* directly, nor is there any strong evidence that this particular tract influenced Marlowe's mode of dramatization more than the many similar polemical interventions in the confessional war of words. I claim, rather, that Marlowe responded to a body of arguments that circulated in many forms and through many voices

in the period leading up to the play's first performance in late 1592. Indeed, it is the multi-vocal nature of this polemical discourse that Marlowe explores in showing how contrasting and competing arguments bear upon the private happiness of the monarch – whose private happiness is, in fact, one of the main points of contestation.

I suggest, therefore, that the topicality of Marlowe's drama is more complex than a simple one-to-one reading might allow, which leads to my second reason for revisiting Bright's thesis. By highlighting the limited and selective basis from which Bright's argument proceeds, I seek to illustrate (and challenge) the tendency among literary scholars to look for hidden messages and allegorical correspondences in the works of Marlowe and contemporary playwrights. Despite the rebuttals of David Bevington and many others discussed in my introduction, it is still common to find accounts that claim to have discovered the secret code that reveals the playwright's true intent – as seen most recently in the republican reading of Patrick Cheney.

In Bright's case, the correspondence of text and context is taken as evidence that Marlowe designed *Edward II* to engage directly and exclusively with the accusations made against Burghley by his Catholic opponents living in exile. Alongside the allegorical readings that focus on notable favourites in England, Scotland, and France, Bright argues that the play entirely supports the Hispanophile position:

I hypothesize that [*Edward II*] is political allegory in which Gaveston and the Spencers stand for Burghley and, by analogy, King Edward for Queen Elizabeth. I arrived at this speculation because [*Edward II*] appears at the precise historical juncture when Catholic exiles, responding to Burghley's 1591 proclamations, accuse Burghley of being a Gaveston/Spencer-style destroyer of England.³⁷

Bright goes on to argue that *Edward II* presents a 'coded endorsement of the Catholic exile position', though this seems to be based on Bright's decision to ignore the second half of the play where the main mouthpiece for that position is exposed as a Machiavellian

³⁷ Curtis C. Bright, *Surveillance, Militarism and Drama in the Elizabethan Era* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 134.

schemer.³⁸ I would suggest, by contrast, that the interrelationship of text and context might be seen as a more fluid exchange. Perry, for instance, usefully describes ‘the ways in which key texts and stories stay alive in the culture’s political imagination, helping to shape perception of current events while simultaneously being recast in response to them’.³⁹ This model of interpretation is responsive to the complex interplay of real and historical/fictional examples in the political discussions of the sixteenth century: in Perry’s view, not only are political figures such as Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester understood in relation to fictional and historical examples (such as Ganymede or Piers Gaveston), a point that when taken on its own reveals much about the influence of literature and history upon the process of interpreting current events; it is also the case that these figures – by taking up the attributes of their ‘type’ – come to represent ‘constitutional concerns that run far deeper than the facts of any individual career’.⁴⁰ Such an account of the ‘political imagination’ can be seen to complement Bevington’s argument: for Bevington, as we have seen, drama of the Tudor period represents ‘ideas and platforms rather than personalities’; for Perry, those personalities (real as well as fictional) become the recognizable vehicles for the expression of such ideas and platforms.⁴¹

Certainly, in the months before the play’s first London performance in late 1592, responding to the 1591 proclamation, Catholic libels transferred the anti-Leicester rhetoric of the preceding decade back to Burghley, who had been targeted earlier (as mentioned above) in *The Treatise of Treasons*. In Verstegan’s *Declaration* (dated 26th March 1592), Burghley is described as a ‘Serpent’ and ‘sly Sycophant’ who has caused problems for the whole of Europe by reaching a position of power and influence far beyond his birthright (p. 8).⁴² This situation does seem to be mirrored by the confessional

³⁸ Breight, p. 136.

³⁹ Perry, 24.

⁴⁰ Perry, 24.

⁴¹ Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, p. 25.

⁴² Quotations are taken from Richard Verstegan, *A Declaration of the True Causes of the Great Troubles* (Antwerp: 1592).

alignments presented in *Edward II*, but the promise of an exact match is frustrated: though compared to ‘the Spencers’ and ‘Gaveston’ (p. 68), Burghley is not presented as foreign or as an amorous claim on the monarch’s attention. Indeed, an earlier Latin tract by Thomas Stapleton refers to Burghley’s ‘declining age’ and reminds the reader that England is his ‘fatherland’.⁴³

In *Edward II*, by contrast, Gaveston is presented very clearly as a youthful Frenchman, likened by Isabella to ‘Ganymede’ (1.4.180) – a reference that calls to mind the ‘dandling’ in *Dido* (1.1.0SD). As Thomas H. Clancy points out in *Papist Pamphleteers*, Burghley’s Catholic opponents ‘used the story of Gaveston as a warning [...] in 1592 attacks on him. But in general he was not considered as an example of the “favourite” type’.⁴⁴ Bright cites this passage from Clancy, as well as Clancy’s note recording Burghley’s interest in ‘the story of Gaveston and the reign of Edward II’, but he does little to account for the sensible objection that Burghley’s contemporaries did not see him as a ‘favourite’.⁴⁵ Instead, Bright argues that the ‘central conflict of [*Edward II*] revolves not around the issue of sexuality’.⁴⁶ This is a point on which I agree, as the preceding sections of this chapter demonstrate, but it must be admitted that Marlowe does at least accentuate the sexual nature of the Edward-Gaveston relationship, if only for reasons of his literary taste and the opportunity it provides for classical allusion; though the cause of the barons’ unhappiness may lie predominantly elsewhere, as Bright correctly identifies, the sexual characterization of Gaveston cannot be said to support one-to-one identification with Burghley.

Why, then, does Marlowe do so much to emphasize the amorous dimension of Edward’s relationships when he could present Gaveston and Spencer Junior as evil, selfish counsellors to evoke anti-Burghley rhetoric more straightforwardly? The answer, surely,

⁴³ Stapleton is quoted in Houlston, pp. 51-2.

⁴⁴ Thomas H. Clancy, *Papist Pamphleteers: The Allen-Persons Party and the Political Thought of the Counter-Reformation in England, 1572-1615* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1964), p. 25.

⁴⁵ Bright, pp. 135, 283n18; Clancy, p. 205n34.

⁴⁶ Bright, pp. 136-7.

is that *Edward II* was not intended as a case-specific allegory, and that Bright is looking for the wrong kinds of connection when he reads the play alongside Catholic responses to the 1591 proclamation. *Edward II* does not share the perspective of *A Declaration*; what makes Verstegan's text illuminating is the way that it illustrates how contemporary polemic could associate a range of political and religious threats with just one counsellor – as if every issue is interrelated to such an extent that one man's malevolence can cause great trauma to the whole continent. It is this idea that Marlowe's play engages when the actions of Gaveston are related to the wider problems affecting England, and when his alleged misdemeanours are used to defend the nobles' rebellion and thereby distract attention from their selfish concern for prosperity and their place within England's social hierarchy. For this reason, rather than view *Edward II* as a faithful rehearsal of Catholic claims against Burghley, we should look at how these claims are tested onstage – which first calls for an overview of the political portrait that Verstegan paints of Burghley in his *Declaration*.

Verstegan's main purpose in writing *A Declaration* is to persuade 'the indifferent reader' that Catholics do not want to see the destruction of England for its own sake but respond only to the outrageous provocations of Burghley (p. 1). In the longer term, the aim of the text was to discredit the claims of non-Catholic candidates for the succession – hence Verstegan's criticism that Burghley 'intendeth to match his grandchild with the Lady Arbella, and so to put in for a kingdom if not for the monarchy of Albion' (p. 70) – and, in the short-term, the text was meant to put forward the case for toleration or at least greater sympathy from Catholic-leaning moderates towards the experience of those disadvantaged by the 1591 proclamation. To this end, Verstegan argues that a false impression of the Catholic mission has led to the undue persecution of many seminary priests and Jesuits, and attributes the spread of misinformation about Catholics and their subsequent persecution to the '*Cecilian* government' (p. 58). It is claimed that Burghley's efforts to smear the reputation of Catholics have everything to do with his personal

advancement (and that of his son) and nothing to do with sincere concern for the English commonweal.

But that is not to say England is free from danger: Verstegan points out that England is endangered by the false accusations and hostile gestures made by Burghley in the supposed interests of England – that his scaremongering, far from warning honest Englishmen of a genuine Catholic threat, has been the very cause of that threat. Moreover, it is claimed that Burghley nurtures a state of fear so that it will cover his own

Machiavellian enterprise:

The present estate, that the realm of England is in a few years come unto, and the sundry adversities sustained by the inhabitants of the same, are such, and so many, as the lamentable and general cries and complaints of the oppressed multitude, can declare them to exceed all those of all ages past, in the memory of man. And yet of the redress of these calamities, so little hope is given, that nought else, but the terrors of far greater troubles, are daily sounded in the ears of the afflicted people: which can be to no other end, than to induce them to bear such further extreme misery, and poverty [...]. (p. 3)

By explaining why Burghley would want to perpetuate ‘the terrors of far greater troubles’, Verstegan is able to show that the recent response to an alleged Catholic conspiracy is not designed to protect England at all but instead has to do with Burghley’s own ambitions. If Burghley really cared about ending the Catholic threat – ‘the avoidance of such great dangers’ – Verstegan claims that he would choose a more effective course of action, ‘by giving that king [i.e. Philip II] satisfaction of the manifest injuries done unto him’ and by removing the ‘sundry adversities sustained by the inhabitants of [England]’. But to target seminary priests and Jesuits, however much this may seem to be in the national interest, shows that Burghley holds no concern whatsoever for improving the lives of Englishmen (p. 3).

In support of this claim, Verstegan points to the apparent indifference shown by the Elizabethan regime in response to the supposed threat of ‘Spanish invasion’. By outlining the ease with which the ‘great dangers’ to England might have been avoided, and by showing that the steps that Burghley has taken rather increase England’s vulnerability,

Verstegan is able to highlight the true cause of the otherwise needless 'persecuting and killing of a few poor priests and Jesuits within the realm, that there do secretly practise their priestly functions'; uncovering a quite different conspiracy to the one that Burghley alleges, he explains how those 'directly seeking the lives and goods of Catholics, for their conscience and religion, laboreth by all means possible, to make the cause of their sufferance to [seem] to be for treason' (p. 4). It is under this 'pretext', Verstegan argues, that Burghley issued the 'proclamation published in London in November last' – a proclamation that brings into effect 'more exquisite means of inquisition [...] to bring [Catholics] unto the slaughter, than were ever used before' (pp. 3-4).

The purposes of this argument are twofold. First, by emphasizing the true motivation of the 'late proclamation' and by refuting its claim to act on 'treason', Verstegan reverses the understanding whereby Catholics are persecutors and Protestants victims. This Catholic 'slaughter' is not, we are told, carried out as a matter of religious conviction but arises from Burghley's own ambition and his need to set England at enmity with the rest of Europe:

For it is he, that neither of conscience, nor any other cause, but merely for his own ambition, hath wrought the mutation and change of religion, whereof such wonderful inconveniences have followed. (p. 66)

Having realized that the 'exterior show of devotion' could not secure 'his entrance into high dignity', we are told that Burghley 'sinisterly persuaded the Queen that she could not stand permanent in her crown and kingdom, unless she did condescend unto the alteration of religion' (p. 9). This 'mutation' and 'change' was not based, therefore, on any sincere religious conviction: when establishing England's 'new' religion, Burghley 'neither followed the doctrine of the Lutherans of Germany, nor that of the Calvinists of *Geneva*, but prescribed a composition of his own invention' (p. 10).⁴⁷ This makes clear that the dangers

⁴⁷ Verstegan explains that 'the name of this new profession was borrowed from Germany, for the professors would be called Protestants [...] but the chiefest substance of doctrine, was taken from Geneva, whereunto the compositor, added of himself, an Ecclesiastical superiority to the Queen,

that are facing England originate within the realm itself: Burghley is 'the beginner, prosecutor, and continuer of the ruin of England, and the disturbance almost of every Christian region' (p. 10).

Secondly, Verstegan defends the behaviour of Catholics abroad, particularly Philip II of Spain. It suggests that Philip's actions against England, besides being motivated by genuine faith, result from the prolonged provocation that was caused by a far greater enemy to England than himself. To make it clear that Philip has been a victim, driven after 20 years of mistreatment to the military action of 1588, Verstegan begins by recounting the events when Mary I of England 'resigned her soul unto God, and her body to nature', to be replaced on the throne by 'the lady Elizabeth her sister, a Princess young and beautiful, and abundantly adorned with the gifts of nature, and princely education' (p. 7).

Strategically choosing to compliment the reigning English monarch, Verstegan explains that at this time the 'king of Spain, albeit he had been married unto the deceased queen, yet did he never seek to possess himself of the crown, nor to appropriate unto him, any cities, castles, ports or other places within the realm, nor in any sort to oppugn the entrance of the new queen' (p. 7). In this view, Philip's interests were benign and Europe was peaceful when Elizabeth took to the throne in 1558, and it is only the rise of Burghley that has caused the turmoil of present day:

Thus stood the realm of England shortly after this Queen's coming to the crown, in perfect peace and amity with all the countries next adjoining, and those also, neither in civil broils among themselves, nor in dissension with their neighbours abroad. The Moors of *Granada*, lived in obedience to the king of Spain, the names of *Huguenots* and *Gheuses*, were in France and Flanders utterly unknown and unheard, and in Scotland was no contention for government. (p. 8)

Here it is argued that Burghley disrupted an otherwise stable situation in Europe. Just 'as the Serpent, being subtler than all the beasts of the field, did sometime seduce the first woman and queen of the world, to break the commandment of God', so we are told that Burghley, 'a sly Sycophant', encouraged Elizabeth 'to break the unity of God's Church' and

which John Calvin whose doctrine they like nearest to follow, doth term to be Antichristian in any temporal prince' [the marginal note reads: 'much more in a woman'] (p. 11).

to 'prosecute such violent attempts against other princes, the old allies of her predecessors [that] herself and realm [were] brought unto these present fears' (p. 8).

This rhetorical strategy provides an important context for how we should interpret *Edward II's* exploration of targeted blame or scapegoating. For the accusations that Verstegan makes against Burghley anticipate the claims that are made by Marlowe's barons, with the perceived interrelationship of all political and religious issues allowing Verstegan to argue that all of Europe's evil were 'directly caused by one man' in just the same way that Gaveston stands for all of England's problems in Marlowe (p. 69).

Verstegan writes:

It is he that hath been the causer of all the inconveniences troubles, and dangers, that the realm hath already past, or doth presently sustain, or hereafter may suffer, being now brought into such a labyrinth of calamities, as never the same, nor any other can be remembered to have been brought unto. (p. 67)

As 'the causer of the most enormous evils', Burghley is 'far more noisome and pernicious to the realm, than ever were the Spencers, Peter of Gaveston, or any other that ever abused either prince or people' (p. 68); we are told, unsurprisingly, that all of Burghley's schemes are 'practiced out of Machiavel' (p. 53). In short, Verstegan argues that Burghley exemplifies more than any other person in Europe the dangers that are represented by a selfish counsellor and the need for monarchs to be watchful of those around them. But how should this influence our interpretation of Marlowe's play? Since we find similar accusations used so prominently, we may conclude that *Edward II* was designed to reflect the political landscape of the 1590s, thus placing it within the context of Catholic tracts against the '*regnum Cecilianum*'.

But whilst Marlowe may have been responding, at least in part, to the circulation of Catholic conspiracy theories, this does not mean that Marlowe's intentions were necessarily partisan or pointed. In the following section, I shall rather argue that Marlowe's dramatic instincts were drawn to the potential in revealing that nothing really changes in the world of political argument, with accusations transferred from one target to

another just as quickly as the barons transfer their hatred from Gaveston to Spencer Junior. In Breight's reading, it is claimed that *Edward II* amounts to 'subversive political allegory discernible as giving aid and comfort to the Catholic enemy'.⁴⁸ But rather than take sides in such a decidedly straightforward manner – which is something that the second half of the play would seem to disprove quite conclusively – Marlowe's drama can be seen to reflect on a polarized culture of debate and to explore what this culture means for the wellbeing of the monarch who lives and works at the heart of it. Verstegan's *Declaration* helps us to recognize this because it exemplifies the view that 'one man' may be identified as the sole cause of political and religious crisis. By choosing the same examples as Verstegan ('the *Spencers* [and] *Peter of Gaveston*') but focusing on the romantic dimension of their relationship to Edward, Marlowe is also able to explore how this argument can run contrary to the personal wishes of the monarch.

Scapegoating in *Edward II*

By reading *Edward II* alongside Verstegan's *Declaration*, it becomes clear that the subject of favouritism should not be viewed in isolation but as one part of a network of interrelated concerns, with the smearing of Gaveston's reputation reflective of contemporary polemical strategy. Verstegan's description of the state of Europe is testament to the connected view of sixteenth-century political and religious issues, and when Marlowe's play is seen to arise from this worldview, the king's relationships become part of a more tangled web of political meaning. Even if it were possible to associate Edward and Gaveston (and Spencer Junior) with a particular monarch and a particular favourite, we should not view the play exclusively as a comment on the sexual dimension of royal indiscretion but look at how Marlowe explores this relationship within the complex world of Renaissance politics; the play must be seen to comment, like *Tamburlaine* and *Dido*, on the wider trends of debate, addressing issues such as religious

⁴⁸ Breight, p. 114.

conspiracy, the threat of invasion, the succession question, and the changing role of the nobility – all in addition to its focus on the strategies of accusation and blame.

In his 1592 pamphlet, Verstegan considers four main points in detail: (1) ‘matters of faith and religion, wherein there was never such great and wonderful confusion’; (2) the threat of ‘exterior enemies, whereof the realm had never so many nor none so puissant’; (3) ‘the sundry competitors for the crown, and the uncertainty of the successor’; (4) ‘the overthrow of the nobility, and the general oppression of the people’ (p. 39). To show how Marlowe’s play engages such varied concerns, I will consider each of these topics in turn. In so doing, I will make clear that *Edward II* is not concerned exclusively with the king’s ‘wanton humour’ but addresses many of the most important political and religious questions of its day.

To argue for the importance of other issues besides favouritism is not, of course, to downplay its importance as a theme that is central to Marlowe’s dramatic output, not only in *Edward II* but also in *Dido* and *The Massacre*. Bright objects to the relevance of the king’s sexuality because it goes against the allegorical reading he proposes, but there is much to be said for interpreting Marlowe’s focus on favouritism as part of his wider reflection on the politics of the early 1590s. Favouritism holds thematic importance in *Edward II* because it is connected to other concerns, but it is also important because it draws attention to the conflict between desire and duty. Ultimately, this opposition rests on the geographical distinction that Marlowe accentuates between home and abroad. Before he is sure of his place in the king’s affections, Gaveston demonstrates a realistic awareness of the need ‘to speak men fair’ (1.1.41) – a Machiavellian stratagem that is in keeping with his plan, outlined just a few lines later, to ‘draw the pliant king which I please’ through the provision of ‘Italian masques by night, / Sweet speeches, comedies, and pleasing shows’ (1.1.52; 1.1.54-5). This stylistic preference goes against the self-styled Englishness of the nobles, who object to the expensive continental fashions – including a ‘short Italian hood cloak’ – that are chosen by the king and his French favourite (1.4.406-

18). Marlowe redefines the conflict between private affection and public duty as the conflict between two kinds of decision-making, one that is swayed by the promise of luxury and eroticism, the other determined by cold-headed pragmatism.

Having opened the play with Gaveston's soliloquy (1.1.1-24) and the description of his planned entertainments (1.1.50-71), both of which feature references and a use of language that evoke Ovidian pleasure, Marlowe primes the audience to register the peers' complaints from a hostile perspective. This effect is strengthened by the fact that Gaveston remains onstage when the nobles arrive and try to persuade the king to expel him:

Here comes the king and the nobles
From the parliament. I'll stand aside. (1.1.71-2)

Like the Vice figure of mediaeval drama, Gaveston takes the audience into his confidence, with the effect of complicity heightened by his humorous asides punning on the name of Mortimer (1.1.80; 1.1.89). Marlowe thus creates a scene that argues *in utramque partem*: the peers make ostensibly sensible demands, based as they are on conceptions of counselled kingship traditional to England and strengthened by the 'Italian' associations of Gaveston, but they are unforgiving of Edward's natural disposition: Mortimer Senior tells the king, 'if you love us, my lord, hate Gaveston' (1.1.79), and similar expressions continue to be made throughout the first half of the play. In contrast, Edward's sincere statements in defence of a sovereign's right to personal fulfilment are matched only by his near-tyrannical outbursts of royal prerogative:

Beseems it thee to contradict thy king?
Frownst thou thereat, aspiring Lancaster?
The sword shall plane the furrows of thy brows
And hew these knees that now are grown so stiff.
I will have Gaveston, and you shall know
What danger 'tis to stand against your king. (1.1.91-6)

In the stand-off, Edward is concerned with private pleasure, and rests his case on divine right; the peers are concerned for the commonweal, and draw their arguments from the contractual understanding of popular sovereignty. This leaves the audience to decide

between two competing claims – and the tragedy, as in *Dido*, is that the two opposing points of view cannot be reconciled.

In the remaining parts of the play, Marlowe continues to explore the issue of favouritism and the ways that it can damage state security. The fact that Edward chooses a new favourite immediately after the death of Gaveston highlights, at once, not only the character's individual tendency towards favouritism but also the recurring nature of the 'constitutional concerns' that are associated with personal monarchy: it shows that removing one favourite is not enough to remove the potential for future disturbances. But Marlowe also argues against the grain of anti-favourite discourse: not only do some of the nobles, who present themselves as the traditional counsellors of the monarch, act ultimately in their own interests as opposed to those of the country, but Edward's favourites demonstrate a clear affection for the king and a tendency to offer sound advice – a feature that is also to be found in *The Massacre* (19.67-94). Rather than present favouritism as something wholly evil, Marlowe is careful to balance its associations with dangerous ambition against the impression that the favourites' affections are sincere, albeit expressed with the arrogant disdain of youth. This ambiguous effect is produced to greatest effect in Gaveston's opening soliloquy:

What greater bliss can hap to Gaveston
Than live and be the favourite of a king? (1.1.4-5)

We may interpret these lines in contrasting ways – as evidence of either the character's selfish ambition or selfless devotion – but Gaveston goes on to claim that he welcomes the 'sight of London' for no other reason than 'it harbours him I hold so dear' (1.1.10). By accentuating this romantic dimension to Edward's relationships, Marlowe does not take the approach of Catholic polemic. For whereas Verstegan chooses these examples to make his argument against Burghley as persuasive as possible, Marlowe is interested in the tensions that arise when incompatible definitions of kingship collide. What Marlowe's focus on favouritism establishes, then, is a clear distinction between the private wishes of

the king and the public duties that are ascribed to his position: romantic, foreign, Ovidian values versus a plain-speaking, domestic concern for the commonweal.

To see how other, similar points of tension arise in *Edward II*, I turn now to the four major issues identified by Verstegan's *Declaration*:

(1) *Matters of faith and religion*

When Marlowe composed *Edward II*, the overlap of domestic and papal jurisdictions was a matter of some moment. Indeed, the prevention of Catholic plots to replace Elizabeth was central to the aims of the 1591 proclamation discussed above. *Edward II* reflects these anxieties in the way that it treats the arguments for resistance put forward by the nobles – arguments that are more distinctly aligned with Catholic circumstances than Protestant. For though the first major brand of resistance theory arose out of Protestant discontent with unaccommodating or oppressive regimes – as typified by the Monarchomach treatises of France and Scotland – the defence of divine right (and the associated preference for the Stoic endurance of tyranny) was also modified to accept resistance in cases where Catholic monarchs were unseated or Catholic subjects persecuted by Protestant rulers.⁴⁹ *Edward II* presents a similar situation. Protestantism did not exist at the time when the play is set, but the mocking persecution of the Bishop of Coventry (1.1.174-205), coupled with the emphasis laid on the Archbishop of Canterbury's relationship to the 'Pope' and support of the nobles' cause (1.2.32-45), establishes a clear opposition between those who disrespect and abuse Catholic authority and those who defend it. Indeed, since the nobles' opposition to Gaveston is aligned so decisively with Catholicism, there is something to be said for Breight's description of the play as 'a field of

⁴⁹ See, respectively: Robert M. Kingdon, 'Calvinism and Resistance Theory, 1550-1580', in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1700*, ed. by J.H. Burns with Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 193-218; J.H.M. Salmon, 'Catholic Resistance Theory, Ultramontaniam, and the Royalist Response, 1580-1620', in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1700*, ed. by J.H. Burns with Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 219-53.

contestation between an anti-Catholic monarch aligned with successive favourites and a baronial opposition leagued with the Roman Catholic Church',⁵⁰

In the opening act, Marlowe lends repeated emphasis to the Catholic identity of Gaveston's targets. His abuse of the Bishop of Coventry, which sparks the nobles' fury (1.2.1-8), prompts Kent to advise his 'brother [to] lay not violent hands on him / For he'll complain unto the see of Rome' (1.1.188-9) – a warning that is dismissed scornfully by Gaveston:

Let him complain unto the see of hell;
I'll be revenged on him for my exile. (1.1.190-1)

Together, Edward and Gaveston exult in the degradation of a religious figure that proved 'the only cause' of their separation (1.1.178): Edward instructs Gaveston to 'spare his life, but seize upon his goods' – to become 'lord bishop and receive his rents' (1.1.192-3; see 1.1.200-1); Gaveston decides that the Bishop will go 'to prison, and there die in bolts', joking that the deprivations of 'prison may beseem his holiness' (1.1.196; 1.1.205).

Establishing the play's central opposition, this treatment horrifies the English nobles:

WARWICK: 'Tis true, the bishop is in the Tower,
And goods and body given to Gaveston.
LANCASTER: What! Will they tyrannize upon the Church?
Ah, wicked king! Accursed Gaveston! (1.2.1-4)

Here the accusation of tyranny is configured precisely as abuse directed at 'the Church', and the Catholic identity of this 'Church' is emphasized by the subsequent arrival of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who instructs the Chaplain to 'certify the Pope' of all that has happened (1.2.38). A notable parallel to this incident can be found in Verstegan's *Declaration*: adding to the many charges against Burghley, the author explains that 'all the old bishops and clergy he thrust into prison, and there consumed them, and forced the others in exile to end the rest of their days; and to supply their places, he shuffled together the very riff raff and refuse of the world' (p. 10). By presenting a very similar occurrence, it may be argued that Marlowe's play reflects one of the main accusations against Elizabeth's

⁵⁰ Bright, p. 142.

key counsellor. But in doing so, can it be said that the play is 'giving aid and comfort to the Catholic enemy'?

On the subject of this religious dimension to *Edward II*, Bright claims that Marlowe displays pro-Catholic credentials: the suggestion that a contemporary audience would have looked favourably on scenes staging the abuse of Catholic characters – even when recent proclamations had announced the immediate threat of Catholic conspiracy – is said to be 'equivalent to calling all the spectators a mindless and bloodthirsty mob'.⁵¹ But rather than take this either/or approach to interpretation, assuming that the play *must* be pro-Protestant or pro-Catholic, it is important to recognize the ambivalence of Marlowe's representational style. For whilst the play may cater to the bias of his audience by presenting the comic mistreatment of Coventry, it does so by placing that mistreatment in the hands of a foreign favourite and a king with tyrannical tendencies – and the expressions of resistance theory that this provokes are marked by a similar refusal either to endorse or condemn:

LANCASTER: My lord, will you take arms against the king?
 CANTERBURY: What need I? God himself is up in arms
 When violence is offered to the Church.
 MORTIMER JR.: Then will you join with us that be his peers
 To banish or behead that Gaveston?
 CANTURBURY: What else, my lords? (1.2.39-44)

There is much to recommend this argument for resistance: it is not proposed that anyone should 'lift [their] swords against the king' but only 'lift Gaveston from hence' (1.2.61-2; see 2.4.33-4), and the provocation is made perfectly clear.⁵² But the resolve with which the barons promise to act, coupled with their hostility to the idea that the king should 'frolic with his minion' (1.2.67), signals the limit of Edward's sovereign power and the frustration of his personal desires.

⁵¹ Bright, p. 143.

⁵² Whilst Marlowe mostly aligns the barons with Catholicism, his audience would likely have been most familiar with Protestant strains of resistance theory as mediated through prose histories such as *A Mirror for Magistrates*; see: Scott Lucas, "Let none such office take, save he that can for right his prince forsake": *A Mirror for Magistrates*, Resistance Theory and the Elizabethan Monarchical Republic', in *The Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England: Essays in Response to Patrick Collinson*, ed. by John F. McDiarmid (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 91-107.

In this respect, as well as reflecting a distasteful appetite for anti-Catholic violence, this episode speaks to real concerns about the influence of Catholics abroad, and about the danger that Catholics at home would choose to obey a foreign religious power in preference to the monarch. This poses a question that is strikingly topical: does the king's closest confidant, Gaveston, represent the greatest threat to English security, or are his accusers in fact more dangerous because they appoint themselves sufficient to determine what is right for 'the king', 'the Church', and 'the realm' (1.2.32)? By choosing one of the key examples that was used in resistance arguments – along with Richard II, later dramatized by Shakespeare – Marlowe brings the implications of political thought to life for his audience to weigh the pros and cons.

(2) *Exterior enemies*

In his *Declaration*, Verstegan observes that Burghley's influence has created a great number of foreign threats (see pp. 45-51). In *Edward II*, Marlowe also emphasizes the dangers that face 'London' by situating the city within a broad European context (1.1.10): within the first 60 lines of the play, a dangerous favourite arrives 'out of France' (1.1.43), references are made to wars fought 'against the Scot' (1.1.33), and the promise of 'Italian masques' foreshadows the destructive power of Machiavellian policy (1.1.54). Moreover, as the play progresses, a greater sense of England's strategic weakness emerges:

LANCASTER: Look for rebellion, look to be deposed.
 Thy garrisons are beaten out of France,
 And, lame and poor, lie groaning at the gates;
 The wild O'Neil, with swarms of Irish kerns,
 Lives uncontrolled within the English pale;
 Unto the walls of York the Scots make road
 And unresisted drave away rich spoils.

MORTIMER JR.: The haughty Dane commands the narrow seas,
 While in the harbour ride they ships unrigged. (2.2.160-8)

For causing these problems (for others, see 3.1.62-5), Gaveston and Spencer Junior are identified as 'the ruin of the realm' (1.2.32). But it may be argued that the nobles' objection to them, and the swiftness of their recourse to foreign religious and political powers, represent an equally destructive influence on English security, producing a situation

‘where subjects brave their king’ (3.1.86), thus throwing into doubt the claim of Catholic bias. Undercutting the apparent legitimacy of their previous calls to rebellion, Marlowe signals this shift in the nobles’ motivation through the characterization of Kent, who realizes (belatedly – see 2.3.1-12) that the faction to which he has switched, led by Mortimer Junior, in fact represents the greatest of all threats to England (see 4.2.73-120):

Edward, alas, my heart relents for thee.
Proud traitor Mortimer, why dost thou chase
Thy lawful king, thy sovereign, with thy sword? (4.6.2-4)

Once again, Marlowe presents both sides of the question: from highlighting the effect of the favourite on England’s security within Europe, those who initially claim to defend ‘the realm’ finish the play either supporting – or doing nothing to oppose – the rise of a Machiavellian tyrant from within.

The exception to this rule is Kent, whose shifting allegiance reflects the difficulty of deciding which groups in the play ought to be championed. The absence of a stable framework – discussed most recently by David Bevington but implicit in the established discussion of the seesaw effect of the play – means that Kent believes that different characters are honest and correct at different points, thus vacillating on the question of whether or not there are circumstances when a monarch may be deposed lawfully.⁵³ In other plays, the ‘Kent’ character might stand for a particular cause; in the anonymous *Thomas of Woodstock* (before 1595), for instance, the eponymous hero holds fast to the conviction that while Richard II may be ‘wounded with a wanton humour, / Lulled and secured by flattering sycophants’ (1.1.143-45), his duty as subject remains to uphold the monarch’s position:⁵⁴

⁵³ David Bevington, ‘Christopher Marlowe: The Late Years’, in *Placing the Plays of Christopher Marlowe: Fresh Cultural Contexts*, ed. by Sara Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 209-22 (p. 216). For the first account of the play’s seesaw effect, see: Sara Munson Deats, ‘Marlowe’s Fearful Symmetry in *Edward II*’, in *A Poet and a filthy Play-maker: New Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Kenneth Friedenreich, Constance Brown Kuriyama, and Roma Gill (New York: AMS Press, 1988), pp. 241-62.

⁵⁴ Quotations are taken from Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (eds), *Thomas of Woodstock; or King Richard the Second, Part One* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002). For information about authorship and the play’s date of composition, see Corbin and Sedge’s introduction, pp. 4-8.

I wish his grace all good, high Heaven can tell,
 But there's a fault in some, alack the day.
 His youth is led by flatterers much astray.
 But he's our king, and God's great deputy,
 And if ye hunt to have me second ye
 In any rash attempt against his state,
 Afore my God, I'll ne'er consent unto it.
 I ever yet was just and true to him
 And so will still remain [...]

(4.2.143-51)

In Marlowe's handling, by contrast, the equally honest efforts of Kent only serve to highlight the difficulties in choosing the right side. The character's wavering shows that it is more than possible to identify with different groups at different times, which is an uncertainty that prevents the audience from taking any specific lesson from the story of Edward II's demise regarding the appropriate response to royal misgovernment. Furthermore, in showing that the ultimate cause of Edward's usurpation comes from *within* the realm, Marlowe challenges the easy assumption – set up in the early parts of the play – that enemies come primarily from abroad.

(3) *The sundry competitors for the crown/uncertainty of the successor*

In Verstegan's *Declaration*, we find that Burghley's malign influence has heightened interest in the question of Elizabeth's successor; Verstegan describes 'the great confusion, of so many competitors to the crown, both within, and without the realm, which must needs prognosticate such slaughter and cruel murders, as never were in that (nor in any other) country for such quarrel' (p. 51). On this subject, *Edward II* reflects developments in the debate about where the origins of monarchical authority lie. Realizing that his subjects 'pass not for [his] frowns as late they did, / But seek to make a new-elected king', Edward is afflicted by 'strange despairing thoughts' and 'endless torments' (5.1.77-80).

Demonstrating the link with the succession even further, the stage direction (printed in the 1594 edition) stipulating that '*the King rageth*' follows a reference to the demand from 'parliament' that Edward 'resign' his crown (5.1.84-5; see 5.1.70) – a dramatic manifestation of the clash between the logic of hereditary succession/divine right and elective forms of monarchy:

I'll not resign, but whilst I live, be king!
 Traitors, be gone, and join you with Mortimer.
 Elect, conspire, install, do what you will;
 Their blood and yours shall seal these treacheries. (5.1.86-9)

The pathos that is generated by the obvious fact that Edward cannot keep this promise stands as evidence of a major shift in the balance of power. It prompts Leicester to advise the king to 'call them again [...] and speak them fair, / For if they go [without the crown], the prince shall lose his right' (5.1.91-2). This emphasis on the contingency of royal authority cuts both ways: whilst it points to the requirement that monarchs must serve the best interests of their people, it also draws the audience's attention to the potential for chaos that is caused by a lack of clarity about the proper order of succession – a reason for increased anxiety in the later years of Elizabeth's reign, as recent scholarship has shown. Though Persons' *Conference* was published the year after *Edward II* was written and first performed, it illustrates nonetheless a shift in Catholic thinking towards elective monarchy (as a means of avoiding James VI as the likeliest successor), and this, too, can be seen as a context that informs the helplessness of Edward II – 'elect, conspire, install, do what you will' – in feeling that the crucial decision is no longer his to make.

(4) *The overthrow of the nobility/general oppression of the people*

Verstegan's fourth point connects the declining influence of the nobility with the 'oppression of the people' more generally – the link between these groups being a rhetorical convenience more than it reflects any genuine commonality of experience or equivalence in suffering. We are told that Burghley has done his best 'to hazard the shedding of the best blood of the nobility and people for the only establishing of his own house and posterity: to make the ruinated families of the one, and the dead bodies of the other, the steps to mount unto his intended height' (pp. 69-70). Much the same objection is made in *Edward II*, with sympathetic links between the barons and the 'multitude' creating the impression that Edward and his favourites fail to understand the needs and wishes of an otherwise united England. To evoke this sense of shared grievance that isolates the

king, Marlowe shows Gaveston to be amused by the prospect of reducing the barons' standing and causing deprivation more widely:

Farewell base stooping to the lordly peers;
My knee shall bow to none but to the king.
As for the multitude, they are but sparks
Raked up in embers of their poverty. (1.1.18-21)

Though his confidence may prove misplaced, as the ironic reference to Caesar suggests (1.1.170-3), Gaveston's arrogant disregard for hierarchy challenges the accepted order and disrupts the stable system of English rank. With Gaveston having been given a ludicrous array of new titles (1.1.153-8), the nobles resent the fact

that one so basely born
Should by his sovereign's favour grow so pert
And riot it with the treasure of the realm
While soldiers mutiny for want of pay. (1.4.402-5)

There is, therefore, some justification for Bright's claim that the play's 'central conflict [...] revolves not around the issue of sexuality [...] but around the "upstart" Gaveston's displacement of the traditional nobility from positions of power and prestige under the king' – a point that Bright supports with reference to the observation of Mortimer Junior:⁵⁵

Uncle, his wanton humour grieves not me,
But this I scorn – that one so basely born
Should by his sovereign's favour grow so pert
And riot it with the treasure of the realm
While soldiers mutiny for want of pay. (1.4.401-5)

Bright is also correct in noting that 'a constant exile theme is Burghley's displacement and indeed destruction of the old nobility'.⁵⁶ Like the 'sly Sycophant' described by Verstegan, Gaveston is described as a 'sly inveigling Frenchman' (1.2.57), Spencer Junior as 'a putrifying branch / That deads the royal vine' (3.1.162-3).

But the play's most complete Machiavel is neither of these characters, thus pointing to the hypocrisy – or naivety – of the nobles in distancing themselves from

⁵⁵ Bright, pp. 136-7.

⁵⁶ Bright, p. 137.

Gaveston's 'French' and 'Italian' associations. Additionally, the play shows that the agreement between the nobility and the people falls apart, demonstrated by Mortimer Junior's remark – following the king's removal – that 'the commons now begin to pity him [i.e. Edward]' (5.4.2). In his application of *A Declaration* to Marlowe's play, Breight does not mention this change in popular sympathy; instead, he focuses only on the relevance of Verstegan's discussion of 'the nobility'. In doing so, he fails to acknowledge a key piece of evidence that would suggest Marlowe did not design his play to support the barons' cause without qualification but rather to pull his audience in one direction and then another – an effect that is achieved through the references to the 'multitude'/'commons' and through the characterization of the honest Kent, creating the see-saw effect mentioned above.

Thus, in *Edward II*, we find that Marlowe continues to argue *in utramque partem*, stressing the ambiguities and hypocrisies of political debate where contemporary polemicists found clear-cut distinctions between good and evil. That the play pulls the audience in these opposite directions would seem to highlight its difference from the exemplary formula of Marlowe's source material, and yet this may have been where the playwright found his inspiration for a more challenging, non-didactic structure. In Holinshed's *Chronicles*, there is no doubt that Edward II is at fault; compromised by a lack of 'judgement', we are told that he failed to 'make choice of sage and discreet counsellors [but received] those into his favour that abused the same to their private gain and advantage'; but references to the baronry 'going about by force to wrest [Edward] to follow their wills' strike a discordant note in the context of contemporary absolutist discourse, and it is this discordance that Marlowe amplifies in his representation of the rebellion's aftermath in the second part of *Edward II*.⁵⁷

To appreciate Marlowe's engagement with the nobles' argument for resistance, and what this means for the king, we must consider how the peers articulate their

⁵⁷ Raphael Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, 3 vols. (London, 1987), Vol. III, p. 342.

opposition and how this unravels following the apparent success of their mission. Do they, as Holinshed suggests, descend into precisely the same kind of tyranny that they opposed in Edward? Building on a sense of English tradition – Mortimer Junior refers, for example, to the ‘tattered ensign of my ancestors’ (2.3.21) – the nobles make clear that their military efforts are directed against not Edward but the favourites that mislead him, as can be seen from an instruction given by Lancaster:

None be so hardy as to touch the king,
But neither spare you Gaveston nor his friends. (2.3.27-8)

As the play progresses, however, Mortimer Junior’s motivation transforms radically, in line with Holinshed, to become emblematic of Machiavellian hubris (see 5.2.1-14; 5.2.52; 5.4.46-66; 5.6.11-14; 5.6.58-65). By highlighting in the character of Mortimer Junior the corrupting influence of power, Marlowe cannot be said to endorse the nobles’ recourse to violence; instead, he prompts us to ask whether the Stoic endurance of the king’s poor leadership would have been better than a civil war that leads eventually to a far more active (or ‘strong’) form of tyranny. Moreover, the play prompts us to consider what the competing definitions of kingship mean for the person who is subject to the demands placed upon him by the people:

But what are kings when regiment is gone
But perfect shadows in a sunshine day?
My nobles rule, I bear the name of king;
I wear the crown, but am controlled by them. (5.1.26-9)

This account of kingly rule anticipates the portrayal of Charles IX in *The Massacre*, and reflects the idea that the king can do nothing of his own accord. For next to the figure of Mortimer Junior, triumphing in absolute power – ‘I seal, I cancel, I do what I will’ (5.4.49) – there is the figure of Edward II ‘in a vault up to the knees in water’ (5.5.2).

In his reading of *Edward II* as ‘political allegory susceptible to contemporary pro-Catholic interpretation’, Bright does not accept that the king’s downfall and death are treated sympathetically; instead, he concludes that ‘the torture and murder of the king should be viewed as a recommendation to do likewise to Elizabeth once Burghley is

eliminated'.⁵⁸ But the idea that Marlowe uses the story of Edward II to endorse a one-sided view of Catholic grievance – let alone promote regicide – is undermined by the emphasis put upon Mortimer Junior's function as a usurping tyrant.⁵⁹ At times, the nobles appeal to 'the country's cause' in a valid and effective way. But they are also exposed as self-interested, most especially in the example of 'proud Mortimer'. Marlowe thus makes clear that whilst Edward may fail in his duty, he is held to a standard that others cannot keep. As Perry explains, 'this dark symmetry is one key reason for the story's centrality to so many of the period's political debates: it can be used to bolster contradictory, competing constitutional positions since it is at once illustrative of the crying need for limits on kings and of the unruliness of those who would impose them'.⁶⁰

The story is equally suited to Marlowe's interest in the strategies of argument: it allows the playwright to explore how those on opposing sides were able to describe and defend their 'constitutional positions' in the most persuasive way possible. In *Edward II*, we find a variety of strategies adopted by characters when debating issues such as favouritism, papal authority, national security, the succession, political expedience, and noble privilege. In each case, Marlowe does not choose sides but allows the play to argue *in utramque partem*, highlighting the flaw in political organization but also the lack of any sensible remedy.

'Compassion' for the King

Edward II reflects an up-to-the-minute position in the complaints voiced by the play's barons and clergy. Marlowe lends some support to their allegations but also exposes their hypocrisy, highlighting their selfish aims as much as those of Edward II's favourites. In doing so, given the sympathy that accrues for Edward in the second half of the play,

⁵⁸ Bright, p. 144.

⁵⁹ This might explain why Bright only mentions these aspects of Mortimer Junior's character in the notes (see Bright, p. 284).

⁶⁰ Perry, p. 187.

Marlowe makes a general point about the frustration of the monarch's private happiness in the interests of a public duty that is defined along wholly subjective lines. As in *Dido*, where Marlowe refuses to make a statement on the relative values of desire and duty, here the tragedy is that they come into conflict in the first place – and it is a tragedy made worse by the fact that duty in this case is complicated by baronial self-interest. Since many of the barons appeal to an idea of 'England's good' that lacks any conviction – that is to say, it is used simply as a rhetorical formula of self-justification – the audience may be tempted to provide the 'compassion' that the inept king claims to be his due.

Such sympathy for Edward II is encouraged, moreover, by an ending that raises as many questions as it answers. Edward III appears to be the ideal king: he has sought the advice of another group of barons and, by choosing to punish Isabella, upholds the law. But where do these new barons come from? Given Marlowe's foregoing emphasis on the corrupt self-interest of most characters, how realistic is the vision of perfect rule?⁶¹ In a manner that recalls the final passage of *De Republica Anglorum*, where Sir Thomas Smith explains that he has not described a commonwealth 'such as never was nor never shall be' – that is to say, a utopia – but simply described 'England [as it] standeth and is governed at this day', there is in Marlowe's play a contrast between the idealization of the final tableau and the gritty realism of the action that precedes it.⁶²

There is, of course, no question that Edward III enjoyed an excellent reputation among Elizabethans; indeed, in a period that was so preoccupied with the succession, his long reign would doubtless have recommended him highly. But given the recognisability of the turmoil under Edward II – which, as we have seen, was designed to evoke the 1590s in numerous respects – and given the miraculous nature of Edward III's assumption of the crown, the possibility of a similar improvement might have seemed remote. At the very

⁶¹ Perry writes as follows: 'the very vagueness of this solution – who are these new peers? – is a conspicuously evasive gesture, a way of arriving at the kind of formal closure required by dramatic narrative without actually resolving the problem' (p. 201).

⁶² Sir Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, p. 144.

least, Marlowe leaves his audience wondering how a similar transformation of the present times (for Smith, 'this day') might be brought about.

Moreover, at the play's conclusion, questions about counsel still remain unanswered. Whose advice should Edward II have sought? Was he bound by that advice? Was rebellion justified by Edward's misbehaviour? By providing no answers to these questions, *Edward II* points to a lack of consensus about the nature of the monarch's authority: is the monarch above the law or not? It also suggests that answers to these questions, when given, will also depend on the situation and the relative position of the person who provides them. For those running the Elizabethan regime, attitudes to rebellion depended on where that rebellion was taking place; and, when it came to the succession, arguments were changed to suit the circumstances. This encourages the audience to feel some sympathy for Edward II, for it is shown that both sides – those who argue in favour of resistance and those who oppose it – choose their arguments to satisfy selfish aims: the barons support rebellion because they are out of power; the favourites (and Baldock) support passive obedience because they want to keep hold of power. When it is viewed in this light, the death of Edward II becomes symptomatic of a world where political positions are determined by personal advantage. Indeed, numerous accounts of *Edward II* describe its symmetry, and the process by which the sympathy of the audience is transferred from the barons to the king. When this process occurs, it strengthens the impression that the king's hopes for personal satisfaction will be thwarted by the demands that are placed upon him.

This is a familiar enough theme in sixteenth-century drama, particularly in plays that are concerned with English history. But *Edward II* makes the point so insistently, often using the image of enclosure, and in relation to so many different topics of debate, that it becomes more than just a hackneyed expression used by the monarch in a moment of self-reflection; it comes to define the ethos of the political world that Edward – and by

extension, the play's audience – inhabits, revealing as much about the selfishness of those who persecute the king to satisfy their own interests by securing 'controlment'.

This point is demonstrated most clearly, of course, by the staging of Edward II's death, in which the grim realities and awful pressures of kingship become clear. As we have seen, Edward's character is marked by a staunch antipathy to counsel. Embracing the all-or-nothing rhetoric of the Marlovian protagonist, as typified by the promise 'in spite of them / I'll have my will' (1.1.76-7; see 1.1.136-7), he appeals numerous times to an absolutist conception of monarchy that rejects the proposition that kings should be influenced by their subjects:

I cannot brook these haughty menaces;
Am I king and must be overruled? (1.1.133-4)

Rebels! Will they appoint their sovereign
His sports, his pleasures, and his company? (3.2.174-5)

Once more, Marlowe presents his audience with a double-sided view of contemporary affairs. For as well as being counter-balanced by the Machiavellian tendencies of Mortimer Junior, these expressions of outrage do more than just expose the absolutist leanings of the king's political philosophy: by presenting Edward as out of touch with those he commands, his questions left unanswered, they reflect upon a conception of sovereignty that fails to account for the monarch's private happiness. Lending little support to Breight's thesis that Marlowe shared the Hispanophile perspective on Burghley, *Edward II* shows that many around the king are concerned most of all with gaining power and influence for themselves, hence Mortimer Junior's decision to 'elect' Prince Edward and then control him. In this way, the play elicits strong sympathy for a king who would give up everything for 'some nook or corner' with Gaveston. Rather than support one cause or another, Marlowe thus argues *in utramque partem*; he does not prefer a particular side in the conflict but exposes (in Cartelli's language) the 'personal desires and ambitions' that compel characters to adopt a range of self-serving 'political positions', and in doing so

highlights the fundamental unfairness of a political system where the king is held to a standard that others fail to meet.⁶³

If we are to appreciate how this emphasis affects the play's topical meaning, it is important that we attend to the multiple applications of rebellion in the late sixteenth century. Rather than identify Marlowe's version of Edward II straightforwardly with Protestantism – either as a Protestant monarch deserving of censure (as Bright would have it) or as one who is unfairly maligned by self-serving Catholic conspirators – it is important to note that Catholic monarchs in Europe were also subject to arguments in favour of resistance. Indeed, Catholic arguments for resistance in the 1580s and 90s were often echoes of those that were voiced by Marian exiles and Scottish 'Monarchomachs' and, contemporaneously, by Huguenots and Dutch Protestants.

When attention is paid to how Marlowe explores this line of argument, especially in the second half of *Edward II*, it seems likely that the symmetry of contemporary polemic was uppermost in his mind. As Chloe Kathleen Preedy points out, Mortimer Junior's acquisition of power does not speak exclusively to the context of 'Catholic deceit' but also evokes Puritan and Protestant behaviour: this can be seen from the character's ironic self-description as a 'bashful Puritan' and from his use of a 'pointed' letter that recalls the equivocation surrounding Mary Queen of Scots' execution.⁶⁴ It might even be suggested that in this part of the play, where rebellion gives way to the subject of minority rule, the character of Mortimer Junior evokes distinctly Protestant protectors. After all, the Catholic clergy have vanished by this point – and, historically, the most notable example of post-rebellion minority rule was to be found north of the border. Even likelier is that the audience would have viewed the presence of two kings onstage (Edward II and Edward III) in the context of pre-1587 England, when the presence of two queens (Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots) was seen by many to necessitate the execution of a captive and

⁶³ Cartelli, *Edward II*, p. 158.

⁶⁴ Preedy, pp. 55-61.

deposed ruler. Either way, Marlowe brings into view the context of monarchical rule in Scotland – and, thereby, the contractual theories of monarchy that were used to justify Mary's deposition of 1567. In this regard, *Edward II's* engagement with ideas about rebellion should not be seen purely as Marlowe's critique of Hispanophile strategies of self-justification, for it also highlights the extreme consequences for monarchs who are subject to *Protestant* theories of contractual or popular sovereignty.

For this reason, if we are to recognize the multiple topical stresses of *Edward II*, it is necessary that we place the king's degrading treatment within a wider context of English and European debate. In recent memory, the consequences of resisting counsel, however dubious or contested, had been shown to the fullest by the example of Mary Queen of Scots. The interest that was generated by Mary's deposition and her subsequent move to England (where she was soon imprisoned) is clear from the evidence of English parliamentary debates but also from materials more widely available to the reading public. Of interest primarily because her presence on English soil was thought to undermine the security of the Elizabethan state, Mary also functioned as a notable case study in the need for monarchs to follow counsel. Indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, one seemingly out-dated Scottish Monarchomach treatise (composed in 1567) was published at precisely the time when Elizabeth's inclinations towards marriage were opposed by a number of outspoken English Protestants. Though operating in different arenas and drawing upon different conceptions of counsel, Sir Philip Sidney and John Stubbs both argued for the importance of the monarch's duty to preserve England and the Protestant cause from harm.

In this context, it is easy to see how the writings of Buchanan offered a useful precedent. In a work that addresses the subject of Mary's deposition in detail, *De Iure Regni apud Scotos*, Buchanan defends the theory of popular sovereignty, making clear that monarchs are expected to subordinate their private desires – 'their own arbitrary wills' – to a public role serving the interests of 'the people' from whom their 'authority' is

ultimately derived (p. 35).⁶⁵ In *Dido*, as we have seen, Marlowe sympathizes with the ruler who is subject to such demands (containing as they do the implicit threat of deposition) by showing that it is only natural for tension to arise between a monarch's personal inclinations and public duty. It is instructive, therefore, to read Marlowe's dramatic output as part of an ongoing debate about the origins and extent of royal 'authority', with *Edward II* revealing Marlowe's continued interest in the subject several years after the first performance of *Dido*.

In Buchanan's text, which is presented in dialogic form, the role of interlocutor is given to a fictionalized version of Thomas Maitland, who in the probable year of the work's composition was yet to join the queen's party. Socratic dialogue delineates the process by which an erroneous position is overturned through close examination; accordingly, it is Maitland's function in the dialogue to express concerns about the office of the monarch as Buchanan describes it. He complains that 'you have reduced it to subjection and robbed it of all distinction and, by confining it behind bars, made what was the highest office in the world so contemptible that no one in his right mind would want it' (p. 37). As the metaphor of imprisonment suggests, Buchanan's contractual theory of monarchy is criticized for being detrimental to the majesty and freedom of rulers. Maitland claims that 'you restrict them to a kind of close confinement, and casting them, as it were, into the prison of the laws, you do not even allow them free speech' (p. 35).⁶⁶ Of course, *De Iure*

⁶⁵ In the introduction to his translation, Mason uses the evidence of Thomas Maitland's return from Paris (in 1567) and change of political allegiance (circa. 1569) to show that the dialogue was written most likely in 1567 (p. xxix). The clearest summary of the argument of *De Iure Regni* can be found in Mason, *Kingship and Commonweal*: 'Buchanan expounded a theory of popular sovereignty whose central premise was that kings were appointed by the people to perform on their behalf a set of well-defined functions. It followed that if they failed to carry out their duties satisfactorily, thereby breaking the contract entered into by the terms of their coronation oath, the people had the right to depose them in favour of someone more able to fulfil the duties of the royal office. Monarchy, in short, was an elective form of government and kings were accountable to those who elected them' (p. 191). Useful information, particularly on the topic of Maitland's satire about the ambitions to the throne of James Stewart, 1st Earl of Moray, can be found in W.S. McKechnie, 'Thomas Maitland', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 4:15 (1907), 274-93.

⁶⁶ Mason writes that 'evidently, for Buchanan, so prone are ordinary rulers to succumb to worldly temptation that under no circumstances can they be left unrestrained by the law. This prompts Maitland to suggest, not unreasonably, that Buchanan has reduced the king to little more than a

Regni is designed to answer these concerns. Having established that ‘kings are created, not for themselves, but for the people’ (p. 23) – a commonplace assertion, as pointed out in my introduction – Buchanan explains that it is the purpose of the law to see that the duties of the monarch are performed impartially, their creation having been the pragmatic response to a situation in which ‘the lust of kings served in place of law and men who wielded unlimited and uncontrolled power showed no self-restraint but gave free rein to favouritism, hatred and self-interest’ (p. 35).

This explanation of the origins of the law serves Buchanan’s political purpose. By making a clear distinction between the office of the monarch and the personal capacity of the officeholder, Buchanan is able to justify the removal of a lawfully appointed ruler (i.e. Mary) on the grounds that a monarch becomes a tyrant when his or her behaviour fails to meet the demands of the office. He explains that laws were created in Scotland to help monarchs meet these demands, or else facilitate their removal. Whilst Maitland complains that such laws place the monarch in a position of unacceptable ‘confinement’, Buchanan argues that they are nothing but a realistic response to the conditions of an imperfect society; after all, ‘[the king] is not only a king but a human being as well, erring in many things through ignorance’ (p. 33). Though the ‘ideal king [could] be granted such complete freedom that laws would be unnecessary’, Buchanan observes that it is usually the case that the monarch’s position is held by ‘one of the ordinary people, who is not greatly superior to others or is perhaps inferior to some of them’ (p. 59).

Such arguments are highly effective so far as protecting the security of Scotland goes. But there is one aspect of the concerns raised by Maitland that Buchanan leaves unanswered: that is the unlikelihood that any prospective monarch will be willing, or able, to meet the demands of a position that requires the complete denial of self-interest. In *Edward II*, Marlowe explores this question by taking the logic of popular sovereignty to its

cipher with no clear legislative, judicial or governmental function’ (*A Dialogue on the Law of Kingship*, p. liv).

extreme. As the play progresses, we realize that the king has been placed within the same 'close confinement' as described by Maitland. But whereas Maitland worries about the potential for the king's position to become trivialized, 'robbed [...] of all distinction', and about what this means for royal autonomy ('free speech'), Marlowe's king is not even allowed to breath; his killer, Lightborn, instructs his accomplices to 'lay the table down, and stamp on it' (5.6.111).

In the excitement to read Edward's murder as an act that 'figuratively joins homoeroticism with violent rape', scholars have tended to ignore the symbolic importance that this instruction carries.⁶⁷ But the fact that it *is* important should not surprise us, for in the published text of the play – if not during the original performance – the killer's use of the 'table' and/or 'featherbed' receives more emphasis than the 'red hot' spit, a stage property that goes unmentioned at the time of the murder (5.5.30-4). The suffocation of Edward is no less significant, nor is it less poetically resonant, than the act of penetration that is more usually discussed in literary criticism; it is, in fact, the literal counterpart to a metaphor that is used repeatedly throughout the play, as the king finds himself enclosed within a series of suffocating spaces. First, he is contained by 'England's bounds', then threatened at Neath Abbey by the 'fell invasion / Of such as have [his] majesty in chase' (4.6.62; 4.7.3-4), before he finally experiences cruel mistreatment at 'Killingworth Castle' (5.1.2) – 'pent and mewed [...] in a prison' (5.1.18) – and at Berkeley, kept 'within a dungeon' (5.3.19). Edward's suffocation beneath the featherbed is merely the final step in a process that goes on throughout the play.

⁶⁷ Stymeist, pp. 245-6 (p. 246). For readings that attribute phallic symbolism to the 'spit' requested by Lightborn, thus connecting the manner of the king's execution to his homosexuality, see: Gregory W. Bredbeck, *Sodomy and Interpretation: Marlowe to Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. pp. 76-7; DiGangi, pp. 208 (identifying Mortimer as the 'sodomite'); Stymeist, pp. 245-6; and Summers, pp. 235-6. However, the assumption that Marlowe intended Edward's death to be staged in this way remains a matter of dispute; the lack of textual evidence from the first quarto is outlined in Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 47-8. See also: Normand, 'Edward II', pp. 190-1; Shepherd, 'A Bit of Ruff: Criticism, Fantasy, Marlowe', in *Constructing Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by J.A. Downie and J.T. Parnell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 102-15 (p. 114); Forker's note at 5.3.33 on the influence of Holinshed.

In Edward's self-pitying remark that 'the griefs of private men are soon allayed, / But not of kings' (5.1.8-9), the torments of his confinement are associated directly with the burden of kingship – a point that is reinforced by Edward's sympathetic brother:

O, miserable is that commonweal, where lords
Keep courts and kings are locked in prison! (5.3.63-4)

For Kent, this degrading treatment is symptomatic of England's current political system. Much of this has to do, in Kent's eyes, with the Machiavellian tyranny that is introduced to England by Mortimer Junior, whom Kent denounces at the cost of his life: 'base traitor, I defy thee' (5.4.87). But Kent's lament is equally congruent with his earlier defence of royal prerogative (see 1.1.106-17). It is clear, therefore, that the play intervenes in the debate about the limits of authority for monarch and subject alike. It is also notable that Marlowe should have chosen to dramatize a story that ends in exactly the same location that Maitland – or, more precisely, Buchanan's version of Maitland – uses metaphorically to illustrate his concerns about the theory espoused by Buchanan. That is not to say Marlowe alludes to *De Iure Regni* specifically but that *Edward II* identifies similar concerns about the nature of kingship and does so by employing the same trope. For whilst Marlowe may highlight many of the legitimate charges against Edward II, he also encourages the audience to recognize the unique hardships of wearing the crown: when Edward informs the Abbot, 'O hadst thou ever been a king, thy heart / Pierced deeply with sense of my distress, / Could not but take compassion of my state' (4.7.9-11), it is a lesson that speaks directly to the audience. Indeed, once Edward has been 'reduced [...] to subjection' – to use Maitland's phrase – we find that even his killer is prompted to wonder 'what eyes can refrain from shedding tears / To see a king in this most piteous state' (5.5.49-50).

The coincidence of the 'prison' metaphor in Marlowe and Buchanan suggests a common appreciation that 'limited' monarchy, along with the 'coercive' form of counsel it entails, may stifle the independence of the monarch to an excessive degree. Buchanan, of course, does not intend for this point of criticism to stick; it is hoped that Maitland's

complaint will be revealed as uninformed scaremongering – as a wildly exaggerated account of the ‘Monarchomach’ theory. But for Marlowe, writing for the public stage and with no positive agenda or party line, the image of the ‘prison’ can serve a more ambiguous, less reassuring purpose: Edward’s prior behaviour may have warranted some form of ‘controlment’ but in highlighting the selfish motives of Edward’s captors – of Mortimer Junior and Isabella, in particular – Marlowe draws our attention to the slippery ground on which any distinction between private and public rests. Contrary to Buchanan, who reassures Maitland of his sincere commitment to the national interest, Marlowe’s barons are exposed as ‘rebellious’ hypocrites who hold Edward to a definition of ‘the country’s cause’ that hides their own concerns behind the veil of patriotism. Throughout the play, characters espouse different views of counsel that serve to justify, or condemn, various kinds of action – as shown in the debate about rebellion *versus* passive obedience – with emphases laid on their effects for England and for the king’s standing. But Marlowe constructs *Edward II* to show that his characters’ ‘political positions’ are informed most significantly by a selfish regard for personal advantage and the politics of influence. In this respect, Marlowe uses the metaphor of the ‘prison’ or ‘dungeon’ in a way that undermines the moral certitude of Buchanan’s self-justification in the aftermath of the Scottish rebellion.

But if the king’s incarceration at Berkeley stands for the ‘coercive’ understanding of counsel and the effects of a contractual understanding of monarchical duty, that is not to say Marlowe ascribes all of the blame to those who argue for the legitimacy of active resistance and tyrannicide. Most of the plays’ characters are occupied in the pursuit and preservation of influence, and the barons’ recourse to violence is merely a function of their relative distance from power – in contrast to Edward’s favourites, who recommend passive obedience by dint of their security in the king’s affections and their wish to please him. In many ways, Gaveston and Spencer Junior are just as concerned with gaining ‘controlment’. Indeed, whilst the concluding episode of torture and execution may be

interpreted as the ultimate frustration of the king's personal inclinations – and has been seen, historically, as a kind of metaphoric punishment for Edward's sexual orientation and/or his neglect of kingly responsibility – these inclinations may not be all they seem.

At the very beginning of the play, Gaveston plans to 'draw the pliant king which way I please', and when we recognize this as flattery – a form of persuasion designed to con Edward into thinking he follows his own desires – it becomes possible for us to appreciate the subtle balance of the play in presenting two different kinds of counsel. This is one dimension of the seesaw effect of *Edward II* that has gone unnoticed, and shows that in all situations – even when he speaks to those who favour absolutism – Marlowe's mediaeval king is expected to satisfy the interests of those around him. As an audience, we might conclude that a view of 'pleasing shows' trumps being 'up to the knees in water'. But in terms of their sincerity and true motivation, both strategies of influence render Edward as the object of contest – fought over by rival parties concerned less with the king's wellbeing, or that of England, than with their own power and prosperity.

To return to *De Iure Regni* and the unanswered observation that 'no one in his right mind would want [the position of king]', this portrayal of ruthless competition raises the possibility that Marlowe held a similar view to Buchanan's Maitland – the only exception being that in the world of Marlovian drama, *Edward II* especially, 'no one [is] in his right mind'. Many of Marlowe's characters are driven, of course, by the 'thirst of reign' made famous by the writer's first protagonist (*Tamburlaine*, Part One, 2.7.12), but whilst Tamburlaine is ennobled by the pursuit of power and glory, in *Edward II* the pursuit is exposed as a sordid exercise involving deceit, cruelty, and selfishness.

Chapter Four

The Argument of Necessity in *The Massacre at Paris*

Combining the assassination of high-level targets with mob violence, the circumstances of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre (1572) remained as murky in Marlowe's lifetime as they were scandalous. Who was to blame for instigating the 'furious outrages', and the question of whether or not the Massacre was surpassed – even justified – by the behaviour of its victims' Huguenot co-religionists, remained a matter of dispute when Marlowe came to write his final play.¹ Particularly unclear to Marlowe's contemporaries was the role that had been played by the then French king, Charles IX. Indeed, even in Huguenot accounts, there is no consensus on the subject of the king's culpability. Whilst some blame his advisors – notably, Catherine de' Medici and Henri, Duc de Guise – in *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos* (1579) we are told that the king 'follow[s] the example of Caligula'; he is 'a prince [...] so invigorated by the slaughter of his untried subjects that he kills many thousands in a single day and is never gorged with blood' (p. 109).²

There is something Marlovian about this appetite for bloodshed – indeed, the anonymous author even goes so far as to describe Caligula as 'the Phaethon of the world' (p. 109) – but *The Massacre at Paris* (1593) does not support an interpretation of Charles as the overreaching tyrant.³ In Marlowe's handling, far from relishing the prospect of

¹ The quotation is taken from the title of François Hotman's *A True and Plain Report of the Furious Outrages of France* (1574); extracts from this are quoted in Thomas and Tydeman (eds), *Christopher Marlowe: The Plays and Their Sources*, pp. 261-73.

² Quotations are taken from George Garnett (ed. and trans.), *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos: or, concerning the legitimate power of a prince over the people, and of the people over a prince* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). To appreciate the variety within Huguenot accounts of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre (and of Charles IX's involvement in its planning), see: Thomas and Tydeman (eds), pp. 261-77.

³ As critics have long recognized, this honour goes to Marlowe's Duke of Guise: Julia Briggs, 'Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*: A Reconsideration', *Review of English Studies*, 34 (1983), 257-78 (p. 272); Rick Bowers, 'The *Massacre at Paris*: Marlowe's Messy Consensus Narrative', in *Marlowe, History, and Sexuality: New Critical Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Paul Whitfield White (New

'slaughter', Charles is concerned with the moral implications of confessional violence. He is afraid that '[the Massacre] will be noted through the world / An action bloody and tyrannical' (4.5-6) – that he will be seen to have broken a promise to safeguard his Huguenot subjects, who 'justly challenge their protection' (4.8). He also demonstrates some scepticism about the need for such drastic 'action' in the first place, lamenting 'that noble men, / Only corrupted in religion [...] Should for their conscience taste such ruthless ends' (4.9-12).

I focus in this chapter on the argument that is used by some characters to answer these concerns: Marlowe's version of Henri II, Duc d'Anjou (later Henri III of France) tells Charles that whilst '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' (4.13-16). This argument is notable because it plays upon a difference that was perceived to exist between Machiavellianism and Reason of State – the latter being a newly fashionable, albeit controversial, theory holding that virtuous monarchs must do whatever is necessary to maintain their position of power. Niccolò Machiavelli recommended much the same approach, but his writings (not to mention his surname) carried connotations of immoral aspiration and cunning, whereas Reason of State was claimed by its advocates to be distinct from Machiavellianism because it made clear that unsavoury methods are only justified when used *unselfishly* – that is, in the interests of the state, to preserve order and reduce the likelihood of widespread suffering among the people. Of course, for the monarch, stable government undoubtedly brought some personal benefits, too; but Reason of State dictated that any individual motive should be of secondary importance to the wider good. The growing acceptance of Reason of State in the late sixteenth century thus marks an important development in the

understanding that a monarch, or any political leader, may need the licence to operate unlawfully for the benefit and protection of society.⁴

In *The Massacre*, Reason of State is evoked by Marlowe at a crucial point in the narrative; its logic is used to explain the evidence of a perplexing change in Charles IX's behaviour – from pursuing a policy of reconciliation, embodied in the Peace of Saint-Germain-en-Laye (1570), to sanctioning murder and thereby abandoning the 'safety of [his] word' (4.7). In arguing for the necessity and the moral legitimacy of the 1572 Massacre, Anjou presents a case that is consistent with the Reason of State position that monarchs must be prepared to mix piety with pragmatism, and Charles is shown to accept the advice at face value: 'what you determine, I will ratify' (4.25). But, with typical irony, Marlowe complicates matters by making clear to the audience that Anjou uses the language of Reason of State dishonestly – that he is, in fact, a Machiavel. One of many charges made against Machiavelli was that by appealing fraudulently to 'the public good', his followers might excuse their 'murders and massacres' under the pretence of a 'laudable' expediency – their actions serving, in the words of Innocent Gentillet, as 'the shortest way of justice, which would otherwise have been too long' (p. 228).⁵

What the scene dramatizes, then, is the difficulty of telling truth from falsehood: the advice that persuades Charles can be recognized as the language of Reason of State but it is also the dishonest defence of the Machiavellian villain, and whilst Charles may trust the honesty of his brother's motives, the audience is aware that Anjou's real aim is to reassure the 'gentle King' and to encourage his weak-minded acquiescence in the build-up to the slaughter (2.67). Marlowe thus shows how familiarity with Reason of State can

⁴ On the early development, see: Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), I: *The Renaissance*, pp. 248-54; Peter Burke, 'Tacitism, Scepticism, and Reason of State', in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1700*, ed. by J.H. Burns with Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 479-90; Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572-1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 31-64.

⁵ Quotations from Innocent Gentillet's *Discours [...] Contre Nicolas Machiavel Florentin* (1576) are taken from the first English translation of 1577: Simon Patericke, *A Discourse upon the Means of Well Governing* (London: Adam Islip, 1602).

assist the interpretation of history: the language used by Anjou is in keeping with his Machiavellian character, but because Reason of State relies on the same language, it also explains how Charles IX is led to a disastrous error of judgement. Though the advice that Charles receives may be spurious – having less to do with the ‘country’s good’ than with the evil designs of Anjou, Catherine of Medici, and the Duke of Guise (4.19) – the complex dramatic effect that it produces should prompt us to reconsider Marlowe’s interest in the moral and practical issues surrounding contemporary theories of statecraft.

It should also be taken as evidence of what Marlowe expected from his audience: that theatregoers would be suitably informed to appreciate that the language associated with Machiavellian hypocrisy might be believed in some circumstances, and that it is this confusion that leads Charles IX into error. Contrary to some other reports, *The Massacre* presents Charles as a peacemaker who is misled by those around him, as shown later in the play by his remorse for ‘the late night’s work [made] in Paris amongst the Huguenots’ (11.32-3). The effect of the scene thus rests on the pathos that is generated by the spectacle of the king mistakenly trusting his advisors. If the audience believes that he is swayed by an argument that *he thinks* is grounded in Machiavellianism, a sympathetic response cannot be guaranteed. It must be concluded, therefore, that the scene was designed to function ironically, with everyone aware of Anjou’s dishonesty but Charles.

In turn, this conclusion suggests that there is much to be gained from reading Marlowe’s account of French history for lessons about dramaturgy. For as well as prompting us to re-evaluate the play’s political meaning – its attitude to an ongoing crisis of confessional conflict in Europe – focusing on its reference to Reason of State to explain the king’s behaviour offers an insight into how Marlowe could turn the arguments of current political theory to the purposes of dramatic art, using the language of politics to generate certain kinds of theatrical effect. As we shall see, the careful employment of such language reveals Marlowe’s play to be a sensitive and topically astute exploration of the demise facing traditional codes of princely conduct.

The Massacre at Paris and Reason of State

The last of Marlowe's plays, *The Massacre at Paris* was first performed in late January 1593 at the Rose Theatre in London. Less clear are the circumstances that brought about its publication: printed in octavo format, the text of the first edition is significantly shorter than the Elizabethan average and it is evidently corrupt in the instances where lines are repeated or borrowed from other plays; there is also the frustrating absence of a publication date on the title page, as per the unhelpful custom of the printer Edward Allde.⁶ Despite these flaws in the textual record, *The Massacre* is an invaluable witness to how the political and religious upheavals of France were viewed from an English perspective.

The play is also notable for describing recent events without the cloak of allegory; this places it in the company of later plays on France by Michael Drayton and Thomas Dekker (1598-9) as well as other topical plays such as George Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar* (1588-9) and Thomas Heywood's *1-2 If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* (1605) – an account of Elizabeth's reign that was entered in the Stationers' Register less than eighteen months after the queen's death.⁷ Despite the lengthy plague closures of the early 1590s, *The Massacre* was a success for Lord Strange's Men and later for the Admiral's Men, running to 11 London performances within the first four months of available playing time (to September 1594) and a combined yield of £17 10s.⁸

⁶ Introduction to Oliver (ed.), pp. xvii-lxi. For information about the play's first performance and publication, see: R. Carter Hailey, 'The Publication Date of Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*, with a Note on the Collier Leaf', *Marlowe Studies: An Annual*, 1 (2011), 25-40; Wiggins, 'Marlowe's Chronology and Canon', pp. 9-10.

⁷ On topical drama in the period, see: Kewes, 'Contemporary Europe in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Drama'. The plays by Drayton and Dekker (*1-3 Civil Wars of France*) and by Dekker alone (*First Introduction of the Civil Wars of France*) are now lost. Heywood's play comprises two parts: the first was entered in the Stationers' Register on 5 July 1605; the second was entered on 14 September 1605 (Edward Arber (ed.), *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554-1640 A.D.*, 5 vols (London: privately printed, 1875-1894), III (1876), pp. 126, 129).

⁸ R.A. Foakes (ed.), *Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 20, 22-24.

The Massacre's success is understandable given the topicality of its subject matter: covering an especially bloody period in the history of the French Wars – from Henri III of Navarre's marriage to Marguerite de Valois (18th August 1572) to the assassination of Henri III of France, Navarre's predecessor on the French throne (2nd August 1589) – the play stages events that were at the heart of European debate. The 1572 Massacre and the assassination of the Duc de Guise (23rd December 1588) were used to bolster the arguments of confessional polemic, and the matter of England's support for one of the play's characters – Navarre/Henri IV of France – was to be discussed in Parliament less than a month after *The Massacre* was first performed.

My aim in this chapter is to explore how the play contributed to these current debates – to consider its response to the prevalent attitudes regarding the confessional and moral implications of contemporary conflict, and to suggest some ways that it might have changed them. In a later section, I shall read the play as a comment on English foreign policy in the context of the 1593 Parliament. But first I shall turn to the theory of Reason of State and explain how Marlowe uses the *language* of this theory – its argument of necessity – to challenge the assumption that actions such as murder and deceit must always warrant the same level of condemnation. As well as helping us to estimate the relative praiseworthiness that Marlowe sought to assign to his characters, focusing on this aspect of the play's dramaturgy helps to show how the playwright probed the notion that even the most virtuous of monarchs must sometimes be forced to compromise for the sake of expediency.

We are familiar enough with the relative Machiavellianism of Marlowe's characters, but evidence of the playwright's engagement with the theory of Reason of State has not been discussed in detail.⁹ As a result, it is difficult for us to approach the

⁹ Martin Dzelzainis delivered a paper titled 'Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*: Inside the "Royal Cabinet"' to the Early Modern Literature Graduate Seminar at Merton College, Oxford on 31st January 2012. A more detailed examination of Marlowe's interest in Reason of State (discussed

question of how *The Massacre* might have been received by its original audience.

Previously disregarded as a 'nasty piece' of Protestant propaganda, more recently the play has been seen as an ambiguous text designed to highlight the capacity for evil on both sides of the confessional divide.¹⁰

Since the 1983 publication of an article by Julia Briggs, it has been accepted that Marlowe highlights the bad behaviour of Protestant and Catholic alike – that he shows Henry III, presented as a Protestant convert, to be just as reprehensible as the dastardly Duke of Guise, a noted Machiavel.¹¹ Both characters are certainly responsible for notorious acts of violence: Guise orders 'the massacre' of 1572 with the declaration that 'there shall not a Huguenot breathe in France' (5.56; 5.50), whilst Henry III gives the order that 'the Guise shall die' (19.94), thus prompting the murders of the Duke and the Cardinal that took place historically in 1588 (scenes 21-22). In Briggs' account of the play, 'it is not suggested that Marlowe saw the massacre and the murders as strictly comparable, as some of his contemporaries did, [only that] his dramatic treatment of them aimed to bring out their resemblances'.¹² But recent critics have argued more strongly. For Rick Bowers, 'Catholic murderousness shades into Protestant murderousness. And the new murderers exhibit the same mindless violence and grotesque glee as the Guisians did in their killings of the [...] various, terrified Parisian Huguenots' – their behaviour thus perpetuating 'a vicious cycle of violence'.¹³ Likewise, Gillian Woods has suggested that 'the play's analogous structure (whereby Protestant deaths in the first half are replaced by Catholic deaths in the second) erases any ethical difference between the two factions'.¹⁴ In the view of these critics, Marlowe uses *The Massacre* to remind his audience that morally dubious

below) can be found in Graham Hammill, 'Time for Marlowe', *ELH*, 75:2 (2008), 291-314. See also: Kewes, 'Marlowe, History, and Politics', pp. 147-52.

¹⁰ Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea*, p. 22.

¹¹ Deats, 'Dido, Queen of Carthage and *The Massacre at Paris*', p. 200.

¹² Briggs, p. 269.

¹³ Bowers, p. 137.

¹⁴ Gillian Woods, 'Marlowe and Religion', in *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, ed. by Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 222-31 (p. 226).

tactics are employed by Protestants as well as Catholics in the effort to secure power, with characters on both sides shown to operate with scant concern for the suffering they cause.

But is it right to say that Protestants are presented by Marlowe as being as cruel as Catholics? Can the moral uncertainties that attend certain kinds of political action be taken as nothing else but evidence of a character's selfish disregard for the 'country's good'? Such claims rest, of course, on the assumption that only evil characters employ unsavoury tactics. When we account for the advent of a more open acknowledgement of Reason of State as the most effective style of government, it becomes difficult to conclude that Marlowe's intention was not to do something more than highlight the equivalence of Protestant and Catholic guilt. In his essay on the relationship between the sovereign and the 'multitude' in Marlowe's oeuvre, Graham Hammill suggests that in the playwright's view 'extralegal violence [...] is a necessary, not incidental, component of sovereignty – part of its broader political logic'.¹⁵ Pointing to the developments in absolutist theory, particularly its '[increasing] focus on the necessity of the sovereign to act outside of the law in order to preserve the stability of the state', Hammill reads *The Massacre* as an exercise in showing what happens when a political idea is taken from its hypothetical context and implemented in a real-life scenario.

The argument here is not that Marlowe opposes the political system he portrays, only that he 'reveals what absolutist political thought obscures, calling out and making explicit [its] logic of violence' – this being the idea that the sovereign should 'use any means available' in preventing 'the potential unity of the multitude' as an oppositional or disruptive force.¹⁶ In this view, Marlowe stages the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre to illustrate the extreme measures that are available to any sovereign whose rule is threatened by a potentially rebellious group of disaffected subjects: *The Massacre* does not showcase a typically *Catholic* atrocity, nor is the play's cumulative effect – its presentation

¹⁵ Hammill, p. 292.

¹⁶ Hammill, pp. 292, 296-7.

of murders carried out against Catholics as well as Protestants – designed to operate as a tally against the claims of confessional superiority made by both sides, revealing both to be at fault; it is, rather, an effort on Marlowe's part to address much broader questions about 'the grounding of sovereign power in its decisions against the multitude'.¹⁷

In line with this description of Marlowe's political interests, Hammill is alert to the influence from writers such as Machiavelli, Jean Bodin, John Stubbs, and Reason of State theorist Giovanni Botero. Hammill is thus able to observe, when discussing the scene in which Charles IX decides to sanction the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, that 'Marlowe casts this decision in the tradition of "reason of state" political thought'; he notes that the Duke of Anjou, though impressed by the king's 'commendable' instinct for 'pity', is aware that 'such pity obscures appropriate enmity'.¹⁸ But just as other critics group different kinds of behaviour under a 'Machiavellian' banner, Hammill does the same thing with Reason of State, confusing it with other strands of political theory and then interpreting the play as if each character exemplifies the same concept of sovereignty. For instance, it is claimed after a reference to Bodin that 'Marlowe uses the Guise to represent a kind of sovereignty that is grounded in and emerges out of extralegal action'.¹⁹ As we shall see later in this section, the audience would not have recognized the character in these terms. Guise's Machiavellian credentials were established by the Prologue to Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1589), and since the popular idea of Machiavellianism evoked the villainous pursuit of power, it is likely that most theatregoers saw Guise's behaviour as both criminal and harmful to order – illustrating the *need* for Reason of State more than its application. Put simply, Guise is the villain that makes 'extralegal action' necessary. By not distinguishing the criminality of Guise from the arguments put to Charles IX, we overlook one of the key dramatic effects that Marlowe creates in the play, and thereby misunderstand the deception that leads to the Massacre.

¹⁷ Hammill, p. 309.

¹⁸ Hammill, p. 307.

¹⁹ Hammill, p. 305.

Hammill's focus on the domestic aspect of relations between the 'sovereign' and the 'multitude' also leads to a distorted reading. For as well as exploring attitudes to state control, Marlowe signals the international dimension of his subject matter, using references to Elizabeth I (in Scenes 18 and 24) to show where the interests of Protestant England intersect with those of the embattled Huguenot leader. In Hammill's assessment, the play's ending functions as a 'cautionary tale' to Elizabeth, warning her against the example set by Henry III in his plans to 'fire accursed Rome' (24.61). Hammill supports this interpretation by 'noting that the play ends with Henri's message to Elizabeth and not with her decision', yet that 'decision' lies, of course, beyond the world of the play; its absence does not imply a disapproving stance on Marlowe's part – nor does it even have to work in the style of Marlowe's characteristic ambiguity – but shows that the effort to persuade is directed outwards to a real-life English audience.²⁰ It should be noted that the French Wars are not presented by Marlowe merely as a detached example of what might befall England, meaning only to influence Elizabeth's rule at home; instead, they are used to emphasize England's involvement on the European stage, with Navarre/Henri IV outlining his plan to work 'with the Queen of England [...] To beat the papal monarch from our lands' (18.15-16). Marlowe creates a drama in which the fictional reaches out to the real, and appreciating the precise difference between Machiavellianism and Reason of State is crucial to our understanding of its message.

Major works advancing the theory of Reason of State were published in the late 1580s. No longer was the monarch to be held exclusively by the rigid codes of acceptable conduct that were part of classical and Christian tradition. Such expectations had come under pressure following the growth in Tacitism that was stimulated by the rediscovery and publication of *The Annals* (1515). Tied to this growth in Tacitism, works by Machiavelli had helped to foster a more realistic understanding of politics that questioned the sense of making decisions in line with moral values. But whereas Tacitus and

²⁰ Hammill, p. 308.

Machiavelli remained open to the charge of immorality – however much this charge was undeserved – Reason of State was offered as an alternative that could teach monarchs how to keep hold of their position *and* meet the expectations of princely virtue. Two key expressions of this theory, both published in 1589, are those by Botero and Justus Lipsius. At the outset of *Ragion di Stato*, Botero explains that he has found the practice of expedient statecraft to be ‘a constant subject of discussion and [...] the opinions of Niccolò Machiavelli and Cornelius Tacitus frequently quoted’ in ‘the courts of kings and great princes, in Italy and beyond the Alps’ (p. xiii).

Such evidence points to the ubiquity of conversation regarding the difficulty of matching piety with pragmatism. For Botero, writing his treatise whilst employed in Rome by Cardinal [Carlo] Borromeo, the aims of the Counter-Reformation are central.²¹ Though concerned with the maintenance of power – explaining at the outset that ‘State is a stable rule over a people and Reason of State is the knowledge of the means by which such a dominion may be founded, preserved and extended’ (p. 3) – Botero does not dispense with religious imperatives: as well as receiving practical advice, we are told that ‘the prince must prostrate himself in all humility before the Divine Majesty and acknowledge that from Him proceed the power of a ruler and the obedience of his subjects’ (p. 63). As suggested by its dedication to Wolf Dietrich von Raitenau, the Bishop *and* Prince of Salzburg – who visited Rome and probably met Botero in the summer of 1587 – *Ragion di Stato* is sensitive to the discrete demands of the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘temporal’; its aim is to show that these demands can be reconciled, and it does this by adapting the system of political pragmatism described by Tacitus and Machiavelli – what Botero calls their ‘barbarous mode of government’ – to the service of a non-selfish, pious rule (pp. xiii-xiv).²²

²¹ Botero’s confessional loyalty, and the claim of Catholic superiority, are clear from his observation that ‘we see Catholics everywhere persecuted by heretics, in Scotland, England, France, Flanders and many parts of Germany, a sign indeed of the truth of the Catholic Faith, which makes men obedient to their ruler, binding their consciences and making them lovers of peace and enemies of uproar and scandal’ (p. 67).

²² For more information on the dedicatee and his visit to Rome, see the notes in Botero, pp. xiii, xv.

Lipsius' attitude to Machiavelli is equally instructive. Mixing praise with criticism, in *Politicorum sive Civilis Doctrinae Libri Sex [Politica]* he tells the reader that 'the Italian reprobate must not be so categorically condemned', asking 'whose hand is not flogging the poor man these days?' (p. 511).²³ This expression of sympathy points to the Machiavellian heritage of Lipsius' own position that clear-cut distinctions between good and bad behaviour do not reflect the actual conditions of power and the need for monarchs to do what is sometimes necessary – bribery, deception, murder – at the expense of what is always good. For Lipsius, political order depends upon and therefore justifies the use of unsavoury tactics; leaders cannot be successful unless they are prepared to employ some of the 'same means' as their opponents – '*to play the fox, when dealing with a fox*' (p. 507). Quoting Tacitus, Lipsius explains that 'we want the Prince to be high and noble-minded: but still, *it belongs to educated behaviour to mix the honourable and the useful*' (p. 509).

By emphasizing that princely virtue remains desirable – even if it must be part of a 'mix' – this explanation protects the author from the charge of wanting to corrupt Europe's leaders, and shows that Reason of State simply works within the bounds of what is possible:

Who will condemn me for this, or why does it mean I depart from Virtue? Wine does not stop being wine when it is mixed with a little water, nor does Prudence stop being Prudence when it is mixed with a little drop of deceit. (p. 509)

As suggested by its employment of Machiavellian and Tacitean *sententiae*, Lipsius' code of statecraft shares common ground with earlier attempts to understand and systematize the business of ruling the state. It is important to recognize, however, that the influence does not extend to motive. Though not deserving of total moral censure, and to be appreciated for his practical insights, Machiavelli is seen by Lipsius to have forgotten the prince's duty to the commonweal: where he might have 'directed his Prince on the straight path towards that great temple of Virtue and Honour', Lipsius tells us that 'all too often, [...]

²³ Quotations are taken from Justus Lipsius, *Politica: Six Books of Politics or Political Instruction*, ed. and trans. by Jan Waszink (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004).

while he intently follows the footsteps of advantage, he wanders from this royal road' (p. 231). By contrast, Lipsius presents himself as a pragmatist who balances the best of intentions with an '*educated*' grasp of what needs to be done: he makes clear that the methods Machiavelli describes are acceptable 'so long as [they are used] moderately and with good aims' (p. 509); they should not be used recklessly or to advance personal ambition but 'at the right time and place' in the selfless service of '*the common good*' (pp. 511, 509). These provisos imply that motive should be the main determinant when it comes to judging the morality of a monarch's behaviour. Lipsius describes his statecraft as '*honourable and praiseworthy cunning*' (p. 511); its moral dimension, he suggests, is what makes the theory of Reason of State 'different and obviously new' (p. 231).

Assuming, of course, that professional playwrights were on the lookout for things 'different and obviously new', it should be no great surprise that Marlowe incorporates the language of Reason of State within *The Massacre*. Supporting Botero's reference to Reason of State as 'a constant subject of discussion', there is evidence that Lipsius' work generated strong interest among readers, translators, and publishers. Correspondence praising Lipsius' achievement, coupled with the swift publication of Latin editions throughout Europe, points to an engagement with *Politica* at sophisticated levels.²⁴ Expectations of a more widespread appetite for the text are suggested by the first English translation, published in 1594: in his preface, the translator William Jones refers to 'the same having been attempted by two or three' – and, for a sign that matters of statecraft proved to be popular, it may be noted that Jones went on to translate Francesco Guicciardini the following year.²⁵ Further evidence of interest is provided by John Stradling's 1595 translation of Lipsius' *De Constantia*: having been recommended *Politica* as an 'excellent

²⁴ Jan Waszink, introduction to Lipsius, *Politica*, pp. 114-27. On *Politica*'s reception in England, Waszink notes that an octavo edition was printed in 1590 by John Wolfe, meaning that copies were available (in Latin) before the first English translation of 1594 by William Jones (pp. 196-7).

²⁵ William Jones (trans.), *Six Books of Politics or Civil Doctrine* (London: William Ponsonby, 1594), sig. A3^r; Jones (trans.), *Two Discourses of Master Frances Guicciardin* [sic] (London: William Ponsonby, 1595).

book' by his friend James Thomas, Stradling explains that he was planning to produce a translation of this work until he found 'that the same book was Englished' already.²⁶ These examples support the view that when Marlowe composed *The Massacre*, Reason of State was a fascination for English readers, so much so that professionals in the book trade were clamouring to publish its major expressions. That Marlowe took inspiration from this trend in the print market speaks to his commercial savvy, and also affirms his recognition of the artistic potential in political language.

But how should the presence of this language affect our interpretation of the play's meaning? My suggestion is that Marlowe designed *The Massacre* to function as a complex interrogation of the circumstances that justify a leader's decision to deviate from the path of princely virtue. That is to say, when trying to judge the relative praiseworthiness of the play's characters, we should pay attention not only to *what* these characters do but also, perhaps especially, *why* they do it. We have seen already that Reason of State illuminates the question of how to view Charles IX when he sanctions the slaughter of the Huguenots, but the theory is equally relevant to many of the play's other characters. When we account for Marlowe's engagement with Reason of State, it becomes clear that Henry III's role in ordering the assassination of the Duke of Guise – and the presentation of this murder as an act of newfound Protestant loyalty – was not designed to elicit straightforward moral censure, thus placing Henry on a par with his Catholic enemy, but that it functions rather as a realistic illustration of the decisions that must be made in extraordinary circumstances. Marlowe's interest in Reason of State can also explain his play's attitude to Henry of Navarre, whose actions in the play have hitherto received a good deal of criticism for failing to match the piety of his speech. Whilst admitting that 'the play's obvious tendency' is to present Navarre as a more praiseworthy individual than the Duke of Guise, Briggs claims that 'it is tempting to interpret him as yet another political operator,

²⁶ John Stradling (trans.), *Two Books of Constancy* (London: Richard Jones, 1595), sig. A2^{r-v}. It is unclear whether or not Stradling is counted among the 'two or three' failed translators of *Politica* mentioned by Jones.

exploiting religious fervour to bring him one step nearer the crown' – a temptation that many have since found irresistible.²⁷ But the prevailing belief that Marlowe paints the Huguenot leader as a calculating religious hypocrite – in a play that crucially *preceded* Henri's notorious conversion to Catholicism – fails to account for the argument of necessity that proved persuasive to those living in a time of crisis.

When viewed in the context of contemporary political thought, Navarre's alertness to 'opportunity' does not identify the character as a Machiavel but stands as evidence of a realistic approach to statecraft in the turbulent world of French politics (13.31). Navarre is certainly presented as an astute 'political operator': at one point, he decides to 'steal from France' and 'speedily [...] muster up an army secretly' (13.32; 13.37). But it should be noted that the character still believes in the moral legitimacy of his 'enterprise' (13.39). Despite the calculated behaviour that sits alongside his more conventional expressions of Protestant piety, there is little reason to doubt the sincerity of Navarre's commitment to his 'country's good' (16.11) – notwithstanding the moment where he runs offstage, leaving his fellow Huguenots to face 'the poniard's point' (9.79).

With the exception of this awkwardly staged exit (which, in any case, may have been mangled in transmission), Marlowe does all that he can to establish that Navarre's actions are reasonable, unselfish, and virtuous. Indeed, such is Marlowe's enthusiasm to protect his character from the taint of being labelled a usurper that he forgets – or decides to forget – the existence of François, Duke of Alençon; this allows Marlowe to present Navarre as claiming to be the heir by 'just succession' (13.35), when in reality, as Catherine of Medici mentions one scene later, at this point in history it was François – referred to by the nickname 'Monsieur' (14.64) – who was next in line to 'wear the diadem' (14.64). A positive response is also encouraged by the character's identification with those around him. In contrast to the selfish and/or Catholic interests pursued by 'the

²⁷ Briggs, pp. 272-3. The view of the play as arguing *in utramque partem*, thereby criticizing Huguenots in equal measure, is challenged by Hillman, *Shakespeare, Marlowe and the Politics of France*, pp. 76-7.

Guise, the Pope, and King of Spain' (16.4) – two of whom are foreigners, with Guise acting as their French agent – Navarre is shown to speak the reassuring language of community: 'these *our* wars', '*our* true religion', '*our* quarrel'; '*their* strange inventions', '*our* God' (16.2-11). With no asides or soliloquies to counter the evidence of his concern for the commonweal, these expressions do not support the assertion that Navarre was intended to be read as the play's most Machiavellian character – the most devious and cunning, and the most willing to deviate from traditional codes of conduct. Instead, Marlowe's portrayal of Navarre seems to underscore the idea that the most effective style of statecraft is built upon a mixture of piety and pragmatism.

That is not to say that *The Massacre* celebrates Reason of State without reservation. As a comparative study of several leaders in recent French history – taking in the monarchs Charles IX, Henri III, and Henri IV (also King of Navarre) as well as influential figures in the religious power struggle (Gaspard de Coligny, Catherine de' Medici, and Henri, Duc de Guise) – the play reflects upon a range of different approaches to statecraft, highlighting their flaws as well as their benefits. By depicting the short period of Anjou's elected reign in Poland (which overlapped historically with the beginning of his reign in France), it also encourages the audience to consider alternative forms of succession. *The Massacre* might thus be described as a distillation of contemporary political ideas. In the figure of Navarre, Marlowe presents Reason of State as a compromise explained by the circumstances of civil war. Through the representation of other characters, meanwhile, the downsides of the theory are made clear: the pitfalls of its logic are highlighted by Charles IX's well-intentioned error, and the similarities with Machiavellianism are emphasized, as we shall see, by the Duke of Anjou's transformation into Henry III.

But despite the acknowledgment of problems associated with Reason of State, there is no suggestion that Navarre takes the wrong approach. Marlowe places the character in a world where Christian morality plays little part in the business of state

control, and so whilst Navarre's trust in providence may be a sign of Protestant zeal, the actions that decide his success are those that arise from a dispassionate sense of 'opportunity'; it is this sense, not his faith, that prompts Navarre to leave France 'secretly', and to wait for the perfect moment before offering to assist Henry III in the fight 'against the Guisians and their complices' (20.11; see 20.1-13), and the same conclusion can be drawn from the scenes that dramatize events before and after the Battle of Coutras (20th October 1587). For Navarre, there is a divine explanation for his victory against the royal army:

Thus God, we see, doth ever guide the right,
To make his glory great upon the earth. (18.3-4)

But the scenes leading up to the battle suggest otherwise. Unlike Navarre, who gives the sensible instruction to 'let us away with speed / And place ourselves in order for the fight' (16.44-45), Henry III and his supporters are shown to make inadequate preparations: Henry is distracted by his 'lovely minions' (17.11) – promoting 'sweet Joyeux' to 'general' (17.1) – whilst the taunting of the Duke of Guise, after he has been cuckolded by another 'dear minion' (17.13), leads to the threat of violence and the need for an intervention between the two parties to 'make them friends' (17.30; 17.45). Adding to the sense of disunity, there is also the indication that each individual works for himself: Navarre claims of Guise that 'so he be safe, he cares not what becomes / Of King or country – no, not for them both' (16.42-3). The Huguenot leader is thus presented positively, distinguished from his opponents in his faith and fellowship but also his ability to take the right practical steps to ensure victory against the king's 'mighty army' (16.28).

To appreciate the implied values of *The Massacre* – in which similar tactics are used by different characters for different aims – requires us, then, to consider the circumstances that were thought to excuse Reason of State. To do this, it is important that we first attend to the culture of moralized objection. Throughout the sixteenth century, in the tumult of religious warfare, some rulers and their counsellors had come to accept the

value of what is now termed *Realpolitik*, but we must not discount the ethical disquiet that was caused by this acceptance. In the early and middle part of the century, northern humanists spoke out strongly against the idea that ‘the less edifying aspects of prevailing political practice ought to be acknowledged and even recommended’ in the interests of *maintaining the state* – this being the central concern of Machiavelli’s *Il Principe* (1513).²⁸ Before the eventual publication of Machiavelli’s work in 1532, Desiderius Erasmus, in *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516), and the English diplomat Thomas Elyot were alike in arguing that a leader’s first responsibility is to uphold justice. Unconvinced by the suggestion that dubious practices become morally acceptable when they are proven useful in protecting the ‘realm’ and ‘religion’, these men paved the way for the later refutations of Machiavelli that came from across Europe and the confessional spectrum, in works by Reginald Pole, Roger Ascham, Innocent Gentillet, and Pedro de Ribadeneira.²⁹

In the wake of these attacks, Reason of State also met with criticism: notwithstanding its claim to serve the commonweal, the theory was condemned for recommending forms of behaviour too challenging to the providential scheme of punishment and reward.³⁰ In the preface to his *History of the World* (1614), Sir Walter Raleigh promises to explain ‘by what plots, by what forswearings, betrayings, oppressions, imprisonments, tortures, poisonings, and under what *reasons of state*, and politic subtlety, have [...] kings, both strangers, and of our own nation, pulled the vengeance of God upon themselves’.³¹ The context of this reference does not imply a positive judgement but rather connects Reason of State and its adherents to a set of ‘politic’ practices – ‘forswearings’, ‘betrayings’, and so on – that warrant the unmistakable ‘vengeance of God’.

²⁸ Skinner, *Foundations*, I, p. 250.

²⁹ Skinner, *Foundations*, I, pp. 249-51.

³⁰ Burke, p. 481; illustrating the unease caused by the work, *Politica* was placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* in 1590, leading Lipsius to revise the text for later editions (see Waszink, pp. 173-87).

³¹ Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* (London: Walter Burre, 1614), sig. C2^r (my emphasis). The original spelling of ‘politic’ is ‘politique’, which draws our attention to the pejorative associations of the name given to religious moderates in France.

But whilst some treated Reason of State as if it were equivalent to the doctrine of Machiavelli, challenging it likewise with the twin accusations of atheism (denial of providence) and the promotion of ruthless practices, more pragmatic observers welcomed the theory as the only alternative to moral bankruptcy and the destruction of Europe through selfish competition.³² In particular, despite the vociferous denunciations of ‘politic’ statecraft, events in France and the Low Countries had encouraged many to take a more nuanced perspective on the ethical dilemmas of leadership. As Quentin Skinner explains, with ‘the impact of the religious wars, it came to seem less and less realistic to insist that the maintenance of justice must always be given precedence over the preservation of the commonwealth’.³³ In France, not only were expedient strategies of statecraft afforded greater acceptance – by figures such as Michel de Montaigne, who wrote of the need for ‘lawful vice’ – but a willingness to accept compromise appeared elsewhere in the argument for religious toleration as the most practical solution to conflict: spurred by the outbreak of violence in 1562, the *politique* position was articulated by Catholics such as the Chancellor Michel de l’Hôpital, Étienne Pasquier, and Jean Bodin, and by Huguenots such as Gentillet and his fellow pamphleteer, Philippe du Plessis Mornay.³⁴

When coupled with expressions of Reason of State from elsewhere in Europe – most notably, from Italy and the Low Countries – these concessions suggest that when *The Massacre* was first performed in the 1590s, there was a wide recognition that the ethics of political life could not be reduced to the dichotomy of Christian morality versus ‘evil’ Machiavellianism. It is unfortunate, therefore, that in the effort to save *The Massacre* from its reputation as an embarrassing piece of ‘crude Protestant propaganda’, modern theatre

³² Burke, p. 481; Skinner, *Foundations*, I, pp. 248-54.

³³ Skinner, *Foundations*, I, p. 253.

³⁴ Michel de Montaigne, ‘Of the Useful and the Honourable’, quoted in Skinner, p. 250. On the *politique* position, see: Skinner, *Foundations*, II: *The Age of Reformation*, pp. 249-54; Parmelee, *Good News from France*, pp. 98-110.

scholars have relied on precisely this distinction, thus replacing one form of reductive interpretation with another.³⁵

However, the mistake is understandable. When viewed from a modern perspective, Machiavelli's proposals in *Il Principe* are almost identical to those made by Reason of State theorists, so it would be easy to take the criticism of Machiavelli's ideas as an attack on all kinds of political expediency. But perceptions of Machiavellianism in the sixteenth century were not the same as they are today. To appreciate the meaning of *The Massacre* – and gauge the reaction of its audience – we must focus on Machiavelli's reputation at the time, noting that his detractors ignored the caveat, found in *Il Principe*, that 'a prince [...] should not deviate from what is good, if that is possible' and looked instead to the subsequent claim that 'he should know how to do evil, if that is necessary' (pp. 57-8). Machiavelli's works enjoyed a wide readership; there was, in fact, a considerable appetite for print and manuscript in a variety of languages.³⁶ Yet, as Jan Waszink explains, the evidence of their reception shows that the prevailing view was largely based in caricature:

Although the author repeatedly stresses that the prince must of course be truly virtuous wherever possible, the subsequent reception of the work almost completely overlooked this qualification and concentrated on the 'wicked' aspect of Machiavelli's utterances.³⁷

As Waszink suggests, Machiavelli's code of statecraft required that illegal acts be carried out only when circumstances made them unavoidable. But as far as most were concerned, Machiavelli promoted needless cruelty – and relished doing so. In Gentillet's *Discours [...] Contre Nicolas Machiavel Florentin* (1576), the claim that illegal acts might serve a useful purpose is dismissed as flagrant hypocrisy: we are told that some will 'cover their murders with another end; namely, the public good, saying that their murders and

³⁵ Briggs, p. 258.

³⁶ Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli: A Changing Interpretation, 1500-1700* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), pp. 52-3. See also: Alessandra Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

³⁷ Waszink, p. 99. In line with this summary, Waszink suggests that Reason of State 'should be considered against the background of Machiavellism [...] that is, the reception and reputation of *Il Principe*, rather than [...] Machiavelli's thought itself and in its entirety' (p. 43).

massacres are done to shun a greater evil' – and thus 'establish peace' – but when 'their mask [is] taken from them, murder will always be found murder'. In Gentillet's assessment, Machiavelli's argument is a 'pretext or show' designed to hoodwink the moral observer (p. 228). Where Machiavellianism and Reason of State were seen to differ, therefore, lay in their arguments of necessity and the extent to which these arguments were seen as honest. The dictum that 'a prince [...] should not deviate from what is good, if that is possible' was taken to be part of Machiavelli's pretence of a 'laudable' purpose, whereas for Reason of State theorists such as Lipsius and Botero – themselves critical of 'the Italian reprobate' – the same argument was part of a genuine attempt to underpin effective statecraft with morality.

This context is relevant to *The Massacre*, particularly the scene involving Charles IX, because it helps us to discuss the play without confusing terms. Whilst many scholars writing post-Briggs have found that characters of all types – from the Duke of Guise to Navarre – fit within a broad category of the 'Machiavel', Hammill has described the same characters using the term 'Reason of State'. From a modern viewpoint, the moral guidelines of *Il Principe* might place its author in the company of Botero and Lipsius. But when Marlowe was writing, the theories were understood to be different: Machiavelli was seen to be a ruthless promoter of 'evil' – a cunning dissembler who feigns morality – whilst Reason of State writers were ever careful to emphasize their reluctance to recommend unsavoury measures. This perceived distinction is crucial to *The Massacre's* meaning: since the characters in the play are aligned with separate approaches to statecraft, we should not conflate Machiavellianism and Reason of State – or confuse one for the other – but look instead for how Marlowe uses the associations of the two theories to set out the balance of good versus bad.

To return to the example introduced at the start of this chapter, Marlowe clearly differentiates between Machiavellianism and Reason of State in the crucial scene where Charles IX is persuaded to sanction the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre. It is likely, in any

case, that Henri, Duc de Guise and Catherine de' Medici carried unfavourable reputations given the content of Huguenot news pamphlets, but even the most uninformed theatregoer would recognize that their fictional counterparts are established as conventional stage Machiavels: they threaten 'blood and cruelty' (1.25), plot to poison 'Queen Navarre' (2.20), and speak the language of dangerous ambition: 'aspiring wings', 'quenchless thirst', 'seditions', 'policy', and so on (2.43; 2.47; 2.56; 2.62).³⁸

By contrast, Charles is presented as a peacemaker. At the beginning of the play, the aim to bring about stability is reflected in his opening remarks to Navarre, who is now Charles' 'honourable brother' by virtue of the 'nuptial rites' recently performed (1.1; 1.4). The prospect of peace is predicated upon the establishment of ancestral ties and the consequent conflation of interests that is symbolized by the emotional and physical bond of marriage. Not only is the 'union and religious league' of the Houses of Valois and Bourbon 'knit' and 'join'd' by the minds and bodies of Margaret and Navarre, it is hoped that the example they set, along with the example that is set by the king's 'princely love', will mean that competition or hatred does not give rise to fresh discord between the 'progeny' of the two houses (1.3-8). If these efforts to 'bind' and 'link' are to be frustrated – and the 'difference in religion' exploited to their advantage – Guise and Catherine realize that drastic action is required (1.11; 1.14; 1.15), so as well as arranging the assassinations of Joan and Admiral Coligny, they try to persuade Charles that the interests of peace will be served best by violence. What Marlowe presents here, then, is the example of two Machiavels – aided by a third, the Duke of Anjou – persuading a naïve but virtuous king towards villainy, and doing so with the language of Reason of State.

³⁸ Elaine Kruse shifts from claiming that the character of Catherine of Medici is 'deliberately contrasted with Elizabeth, England's legitimate sovereign' to suggesting that 'the legend of Catherine, the wicked queen, could have worked to Elizabeth's detriment' – the point seeming to be that representing *any* female malevolence would function to Elizabeth's discredit. I would argue, however, that Catherine de Medici's fame as a 'real' individual would not lead to such a confusion ('The Woman in Black: The Image of Catherine de Medici from Marlowe to *Queen Margot*', in *High and Mighty Queens' of Early Modern England: Realities and Representations*, ed. by Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney, and Debra Barrett-Graves (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), pp. 223-37 (pp. 226-7)).

Given their previous statements, it is evident that the three conspirators change their style of argument. From outlining their personal ambition in private, they go on, in Charles' company, to emphasize the needs of France, reflecting the belief that Charles will only approve their 'order [...] set down for the massacre' if it can be justified as serving the national interest (4.27). In addition to the advice he receives from Anjou, Charles is told by Guise 'rather [...] to seek your country's good / Than pity or relieve these upstart heretics' (4.19-20), whilst his mother, Catherine, expresses the wish that 'these reasons may serve my princely son / To have some care for fear of enemies' (4.21-22). It may be too much to suggest that Marlowe refers here directly to 'reasons [*of State*]' but there is clearly a departure from straightforward malevolence in Guise's appeal to the 'country's good' and Catherine's pretence of motherly concern (she is later responsible for Charles' death). In fact, both characters are hypocrites operating in the style of Gentillet's Machiavel, 'saying that their murders and massacres are done to shun a greater evil'.

What matters, however, is that Charles IX takes their persuasions as a sincere expression of the Reason of State rationale. In making this mistake, the king is certainly too trusting – Guise claims to treat him 'as a child' (2.70) – but in the latter part of the sixteenth century, the advice that he follows had become commonplace. In *Ragion di Stato*, Botero explains that before the 1572 Massacre, 'the whole kingdom was divided into two powerful parties, the king retaining very little except the name' (p. 115); as well as anticipating the language and sentiment of the Guise soliloquy – 'for proof he barely bears the name; / I execute, and he sustains the blame' (2.71-2) – Botero's reminiscence implies that the action against the Huguenots was warranted as a means to reassert the sovereign's authority.³⁹ The difference, of course, is that Marlowe undercuts the same advice by placing it in the service of three aspiring tyrants. By presenting Charles as a monarch who is receptive to the moral defence of *Realpolitik* – and by showing how the

³⁹ Hammill quotes this passage from Botero but does not observe the similarity with Marlowe (p. 296).

argument of necessity might be abused – *The Massacre* thus speaks to an important trend in political discourse.

Furthermore, if recent research is correct in finding that the real-life decisions of Charles IX were indeed motivated by the theory of Reason of State, it might also be suggested that the play offers a shrewder interpretation of history than was previously thought.⁴⁰ It is known already that Marlowe's final play resulted from a careful consideration of French and English news pamphlets, Catholic as well as Protestant.⁴¹ What we may add is that *The Massacre* was also the result of an informed sensitivity to the moral ambiguities of statecraft and political theory, with the pragmatism shown by its characters not necessarily intended as evidence of their miscreant nature or contempt for the 'country's good'.

The 1593 Parliament

Sixteenth-century opinions on statecraft were more finely shaded than current readings of *The Massacre* allow. Though indebted to its Florentine cousin, Reason of State was thought to be distinct from Machiavellianism because it provided a moral framework within which acts of otherwise unscrupulous behaviour, such as the 'tortures' and 'poisonings' described by Raleigh, were redeemed on account of their utility to the common good; Machiavelli, it was thought, only recommended the same behaviour so far as it served selfish aspiration. It would be a mistake, therefore, to interpret the actions of the Duke of Guise as falling within the same category as those of Navarre or Charles IX. We have seen already that by failing to distinguish between the two theories, readers of *The Massacre* misjudge the relative praiseworthiness of the play's characters, grouping the virtuous with

⁴⁰ Arlette Jouanna, *The St Bartholomew's Day Massacre: The Mysteries of a Crime of State*, trans. by Joseph Bergin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 10-11 and Ch. 6.

⁴¹ On the subject of Marlowe's sources, see: Paul H. Kocher, 'François Hotman and Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*', *PMLA*, 56:2 (1941), 349-68; Kocher, 'Contemporary Pamphlet Backgrounds for Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris* (Part II)', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 8:3 (1947), 151-73; Thomas and Tydeman (eds), pp. 251-60; Voss, *Elizabethan News Pamphlets*, pp. 113-24.

the villainous on the basis that their actions are similar. But readers also miss how Anjou/Henry III is presented as shifting between the two kinds of statecraft.

In this section of the chapter, I will look at how Marlowe uses the character to compare the St Bartholomew Day's Massacre with the later assassinations of the Guise brothers, proposing that Anjou's transformation into 'Henry III' encourages the audience to view the events of 1588 as more pardonable than those of 1572. In doing so, I will read the play in the context of its first performance. By using Reason of State as a justificatory language in the defence of anti-League murders, it may be suggested that Marlowe designed *The Massacre* as a comment only on the circumstances of the 1593 Parliament and the decisions to be made about the direction of English foreign policy. This interpretation does not accord with the now popular idea that Marlowe eschewed Protestant bias to point out the evil of both sides in the conflict, nor does it fit with Marlowe's modern reputation as a danger to the establishment. Curtis C. Breight has argued, for instance, that 'Marlowe [...] was killed because he was perceived as misusing proscribed materials in his drama', exploiting Catholic League propaganda 'to pen subversive political allegory discernible as giving aid and comfort to the Catholic enemy'.⁴² In contrast, I will show that Marlowe's final play shares the sympathies of the English regime, with the representation of Navarre's behaviour meant not to undermine the righteousness of the Protestant cause but to show the kind of statecraft that is necessary in a world where virtue is not enough by itself.

As we saw in the previous section, Marlowe establishes a contrast between the good intentions of Charles IX and the selfish designs that drive the Duke of Guise and Catherine of Medici. Whilst Charles hopes that the association of the Houses of Valois and Bourbon will 'not dissolve till death dissolve [their] lives' (1.5), Catherine promises to 'dissolve [it] with blood and cruelty' (1.25). Guise also plans to exploit Catholic dissatisfaction with the king's policy of reconciliation; before the Massacre, he claims to

⁴² Breight, *Surveillance, Militarism and Drama*, p. 114.

have the support of 'thirty thousand able men' from 'monasteries, priories, abbeys, and halls', plus that of 'a thousand sturdy student Catholics' and 'five hundred fat Franciscan friars and priests' (2.78-82) – all this for a character who places so little value on 'religion' that he is 'asham'd, however that [he] seem[s], / To think a word of such a simple sound, / Of so great matter should be made the ground' (2.63-6). Guise and Catherine thus conform to the popular understanding of Machiavellianism that Marlowe himself perpetuates in the Prologue to *The Jew of Malta*.

If we are to discern, however, the shades of morality that lie between Charles and these crude stereotypes, we might look at how the earlier play also proposes the existence of a subtler form of Machiavellian behaviour. Delivered by the character 'Machevil' (Prologue, 1), the play's opening address played a key role in the development of an enduring dramatic type, and it connects the figure of Machiavelli with the French Wars of Religion, for we are told that Machiavelli's 'soul [had] flown beyond the Alps' and has only 'come from France' now that 'the Guise is dead', leaving for Malta (or the stage of the Rose Theatre in London) 'to view this land and frolic with his friends' (1-4). The character that Marlowe presents is consistent with Machiavelli's reputation as the promoter of 'evil' statecraft: he claims to be 'admired [...] of those that hate me most' (9), to 'count religion but a childish toy' (14), and to place little value on the claims of hereditary right, asking 'what right had Caesar to the empery?' (19). But there is also a satiric acknowledgement that Machiavelli's teachings are practised hypocritically by those who 'guard [him] from their tongues' (6): 'Machevil' explains that whilst 'some speak openly against [his] books, / Yet will they read [him], and thereby attain / To Peter's chair' (10-12).

In *The Massacre*, the Duke of Anjou is presented as precisely this kind of figure. If Guise and Catherine are portrayed as archetypes of the brazen Machiavel, raving about 'blood and cruelty', Anjou exemplifies a much colder form of villainy that is made more dangerous by its concealment. Whereas Guise and Catherine disclose their malicious plots to the audience in asides and soliloquies – and, indeed, Guise is apparently so transparent

that his enemies are able to gossip about his plan 'to murder all the Protestants' (1.30) – Anjou remains a mystery to audience and characters alike; to draw comparisons with *The Jew of Malta*, Marlowe uses the same dramaturgical technique – that is, withholding the inner life of one character while others are well documented – to present Anjou as the equivalent in *The Massacre* to Ferneze, the inscrutable Maltese Governor who triumphs over Barabas.

This feature of his portrayal is particularly clear from the character's false claim of innocence during the sequence of short scenes representing the Massacre. When faced by Navarre with the report of his crimes, Anjou responds 'Who, I? You are deceived; I rose but now' (9.75). Like the murders, this exchange is designed for comic effect, playing on the audience's privileged awareness of Anjou's deceit. But it also prompts us to consider Anjou's Machiavellian credentials relative to those of Guise, for Anjou speaks to Navarre after instructing his accomplice to wait outside: 'stay you here', he says. 'And when you see me in, then follow' (9.67-8). Anjou then takes the opportunity to deny involvement, before Guise enters in a style that makes his intentions plain: 'murder the Huguenots', he shouts, before killing Navarre's two schoolmasters (9.76).

In his famous soliloquy, Guise claims to have engineered events so that the king 'sustains the blame' (2.72). In this scene, however, it is the Duke of Anjou who turns events to his own advantage, having recognized more completely the benefits of operating in secret; earlier, he declares 'I am disguis'd and none knows who I am, / And therefore mean to murder all I meet' (5.5-6). If *The Massacre* focused only on the evils of Machiavellian statecraft, Anjou could thus be identified as the most accomplished practitioner and the play would function straightforwardly as an exposé of the ungodly behaviour to be countered by virtuous Christian monarchs – perhaps with an overarching sense that good will ultimately prevail. But Marlowe's view of history is based on a more realistic understanding of how things happen. By drawing attention to the politic manoeuvres of Anjou, the Duke of Guise, and Catherine of Medici – significantly, as they relate to Charles

IX's submissive role in the build-up to the Massacre – he demonstrates the need for leaders who are able to recognize and negate the Machiavellian tactics of others. It can be argued on this basis that Navarre's connection to *Realpolitik* is designed to function as a positive endorsement, suggesting that he holds precisely the skills required for a life on the French throne. For Marlowe is not concerned with defining *ideal* kingly behaviour but with showing how kings must behave in the present-day circumstances of war-torn Europe, and in this respect we may say that he engages with the same questions as Lipsius and other political thinkers who looked for a practical solution to Europe's problems.

In *Politica*, Lipsius argues passionately for religious toleration. In the circumstances of the late sixteenth century, he suggests that it is counter-productive to punish 'those who sin against Religion in private' (p. 395). 'Travel through Europe in your thoughts', he asks us. 'You will see that by those severe decisions, communities are destroyed rather than corrected' (p. 397). Whilst believing that those 'who err in public' should be punished strongly, 'so long as the troublemakers can be suppressed without major turmoil' (pp. 391-3) – itself a notable concession to the practicalities of governance – he finds no basis for the cruel punishment of those who 'infect no one' but 'sit peacefully at home, and keep silent' (p. 395).

In Marlowe's play, this point is illustrated by the Massacre scenes; it seems from the staging of these that the Huguenots are content to keep the matter of their religious difference behind closed doors – within 'their conscience' – for the locations in which they are killed are more domestic than public or political: the death of Seroune is preceded by a knock at the door, answered by his wife (8.1-4), whilst Ramus' death follows the invasion of his private study (9.1-2). The assassination of Coligny also takes place in a domestic setting: Guise commands that 'the Admiral, / Chief standard-bearer to the Lutherans, / Shall in the entrance of this massacre / Be murdered in his bed' (5.10-13). Additionally, many of the Massacre scenes emphasize the killers' presence in the 'street' or 'streets' – the location of ordinary experience (4.35; 4.51; 5.16; 5.54). Such details serve to

amplify the feeling of wreckage done to normality, and would appear to suggest that Marlowe wrote the play as a caution against the same behaviour that shocked Lipsius. The memory of events is enough to make Lipsius end one 'chapter with a prayer and sigh' (p. 397), and to refer elsewhere to his horror 'that Europe is being shaken by so many disturbances, that kings and kingdoms are burning with the flames of sedition' (p. 533). Marlowe's play may be designed to make a similar social comment.

Yet, as many critics have observed, Marlowe presents even the most brutal killings in a comic fashion, with one victim told to 'kiss this cross' in reference to a sword (5.28); the consensus is that the scenes' comic nature 'invites [the] audience to laugh at helpless Protestant victims', producing an experience that is 'joyfully unifying' for all involved.⁴³ Moreover, *The Massacre* does not conclude with the conventional call for an end to violence. In the final scene, Navarre stands over the body of Henry III, who, after being stabbed by the Friar, implores his successor to 'revenge [his] death' (24.95). Navarre promises that as soon as Henry's body has been 'honourably interr'd', he will set out to do just that – 'to revenge his death / As Rome and all those popish prelates there / Shall curse the time that e'er Navarre was king' (24.107-10). There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Navarre's speech; if anything, Marlowe heightens the character's confessional resolve to counter rumours of a potential (and soon to occur) real-life conversion. The question, rather, is whether or not Navarre's promise of vengeance displays an unsuitable lack of moderation at a time when compromise and toleration might be a more effective way to bring the conflict to a close.

Some recent scholarship has suggested that Marlowe used his plays to champion alternative forms of government.⁴⁴ In Hammill's view, *The Massacre* does not present such a clear message to the audience: rather than impress a particular judgement regarding the

⁴³ Briggs, p. 278 (see p. 259); Bowers, p. 136. This critical viewpoint recalls the description of *carnavalesque* violence in Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (London: Duckworth, 1975), pp. 178-181. For other comic moments in the Massacre scenes, see: 7.3-5; 8.7-14; 9.16-17; 9.28-37; and 9.79.

⁴⁴ Cheney, *Marlowe's Republican Authorship*.

legitimacy of state violence, the play demystifies arguments surrounding the issue and thereby encourages theatregoers to decide for themselves; Marlowe's aim is to hold up absolutism to the scrutiny of his audience, and he achieves this aim – in contrast to many advocates of absolutist theory – by showing how the 'general argument' reveals itself in the 'particular event'.⁴⁵ Certainly, as a case study of this kind, *The Massacre* provokes a contradictory response to the violence enacted onstage. Whilst the Duke of Anjou, the Duke of Guise, and Catherine of Medici are exposed as misappropriating the argument of necessity in the service of their own interests, the comedic nature of the murder scenes creates an atmosphere of shared Dionysian revelry that makes the audience complicit in the celebration of unreasoned, unjustified killing.

This effect is perhaps most discernible in the Petrus Ramus scene, which involves several jokes that seem to reveal Marlowe's delight in exposing such serious matters to ridicule. In one likely source text, Simon Goulart's *Mémoires de l'état de France sous Charles neuvième* (1576-7), it is stated that Ramus 'paid a large sum to save his life' (p. 277), whereas in *The Massacre* the fictional Ramus cannot pay due to his poverty as 'a scholar' (9.17).⁴⁶ When this satirical swipe at society's failure to reward learning is viewed alongside the panicked response of Taleus – as the murderers arrive, he plans to 'leap out at the window' (9.9) – it appears that Marlowe was as much concerned with exploiting the event's comic potential as with emphasizing the travesty of civilized behaviour described so evocatively by Goulart:

[Ramus] was murdered, and thrown down out of an upstairs window so that his entrails spilled out over the stones; then the entrails were dragged through the streets, and the body whipped by some students urged on by their masters, to the great disgrace of the very learning which Ramus had made his profession. (p. 277)

Why would Marlowe downplay the severity of this 'great disgrace' with comedy? Whether we interpret the play as a call for Protestant action or – like Hammill – as a 'cautionary

⁴⁵ Hammill, p. 297.

⁴⁶ Quoted from extracts reproduced in Thomas and Tydeman (eds), *Christopher Marlowe: The Plays and their Sources*, pp. 274-7.

tale' that highlights the suffering that will follow from further violence, it is still the case that by presenting the murders in comic fashion, Marlowe challenges the assumed religious bias of his audience.

In part, the surprising humour of the Massacre scenes may be attributed to the playwright's natural instinct for the provocative and daring. But it may also be seen as part of a more biting social commentary that Marlowe conveys dramatically through the visceral effect of laughter; put simply, theatregoers are faced with the awkward revelation that they *enjoy* witnessing the cruel treatment of their co-religionists. If this is how Marlowe uses the 'particular event' of the French Wars to reflect on methods of state rule, we might conclude that *The Massacre* was designed to remind its audience of the realities that political thought must address: in demonstrating that violence appeals to those of all confessional stripes, the play emphasizes the difficulty of finding a 'general argument' that will work in practice.

To appreciate Marlowe's own ideas in response to this question, particularly as they relate to English policy, we must look at how he sought to answer the claims of Catholic polemic – a function of his play that would seem to be advertised by its first printed title: '*THE MASSACRE AT PARIS: With the Death of the Duke of Guise*'. Along with Philip Henslowe's interchangeable references to 'the Guise' and 'the massacre', this title reminds us that the interest that was generated by Marlowe's play did not rest exclusively with the playwright's unflinching, albeit comic, recreation of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre but also arose from his focus on a more recent French history.⁴⁷ Henri, Duc de Guise was assassinated in December 1588, and the play's narrative is brought even more up-to-date in representing the 1589 assassination of Henri III and the rise of his Huguenot successor, Henri IV. Though the Massacre took place more than twenty years before the

⁴⁷ See the Revels edition of *Edward II*, ed. by Foakes, pp. 20, 22-24. Catherine Clifford and Wiggins suggest that these references reflect a change in title, from *The Tragedy of the Guise* to *The Massacre*, following the play's second performance on 19th June 1594 ('A Chronology of Marlowe's Life and Works', p. xxvii).

play's first performance, its reputation as the defining atrocity of the age – at least among Protestants – ensured that its memory persisted. But the assassinations of the late 1580s were no less significant: as well as being more recent, they had served as the pretext for 'another bout of civil war' that was thought to threaten England's security and the future of the Protestant cause in Europe – a situation that helps to explain why the assassination of Guise became 'the subject of more League pamphlets than any other'.⁴⁸

In dramatizing these key moments from the French Wars of Religion, Marlowe thus responded imaginatively to the events and preoccupations that exercised his London audience. It has been established that Marlowe's drama reacted to – and exploited the interest in – contemporary developments, whether it be the Ottoman-Safavid War in the two parts of *Tamburlaine* (1587) or conspiracy theories about anti-Catholic persecution in *Edward II* (1592), and *The Massacre* is no exception. But as well as reflecting on the concerns of the moment, Marlowe's final play carries an instructive purpose. Beyond entertainment, its non-didactic aim is to explore the extraordinary circumstances that call for the monarch to prioritize the demands of necessity at the expense of moral standing, and to question the audience's appetite for carnivalesque violence.

But when viewed in the context of the 1593 Parliament, it can also be noted that *The Massacre* performs a simpler function as *advice literature* – instructing the audience what to think on the subject of Henri IV's conflict with the Catholic League. Sympathetic to the aims of Elizabethan foreign policy, the play might prompt us to question how much Marlowe deserves the reputation of an outrageous radical who challenged the orthodoxies of his day. For contrary to Breight's assertions of a Cecilian assassination plot prompted by the unfavourable content of *Edward II* and *The Massacre*, Marlowe ended his career, as we

⁴⁸ David A. Bell, 'Unmasking a King: The Political Uses of Popular Literature under the French Catholic League, 1588-89', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 20:3 (1989), 371-86 (p. 373). For more information about anti-Henri III polemic, see: Keith Cameron, 'Satire, Dramatic Stereotyping and the Demonizing of Henry III', in *The Sixteenth-Century French Religious Book*, ed. by Andrew Pettegree, Paul Nelles, and Philip Conner (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 157-76; Lisa Ferraro Parmelee, *Good Newes from Fraunce: French Anti-League Propaganda in Late Elizabethan England*, p. 90; Alexander Wilkinson, "'Homicides Royaux": The Assassination of the Duc and Cardinal de Guise and the Radicalization of French Public Opinion', *French History* 18:2 (2004), 129-53.

shall see, by taking Burghley's establishment message to the wider audience of the commercial London theatre.

This audience was informed, of course, by a constant supply of gossip. But printed polemic also played a vital role in helping to mobilize and manipulate popular sentiment.⁴⁹ In polemical debate, as we saw in the previous chapter, accusations of tyranny and religious persecution were regularly met with counter-accusations of the same kind, thus creating an almost symmetrical system of blame. In *The Massacre*, Marlowe interrogates this strategy of persuasion in the context of the French Wars. By weighing the events of 1572 against those of the late 1580s – this is the dual focus advertised by the play's title – he reflects upon the position that the Massacre was surpassed in its cruelty, cynicism, and injustice by the more recent assassinations of Henri, Duc de Guise and Louis II, Cardinal of Guise.⁵⁰ It is significant that Marlowe chose to test this League argument – and, ultimately, disprove it – in a play that was staged for the first time in January 1593. With the assistance offered by the English to another of the League's enemies, Henri IV, to be debated in Parliament the following month, it is likely that pro-interventionists would have welcomed a play that could refute the Catholic claim of greater victimhood.

As its first title page suggests, *The Massacre* achieves the task by virtue of its comparative structure, which encourages the audience to judge between the two events – their justifications, their costs, and their benefits. It would make sense, in any case, to bring together episodes in the life of the Duc de Guise, a figure of significant interest. By charting his criminal behaviour in a narrative arc from the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre to his death in the style of Caesar – 'thus Caesar did go forth, and thus he died' (21.87) – Marlowe is able to tie the play's message to the expectations of his audience; Guise's death fulfils the convention that villains should receive punishment and thus

⁴⁹ Briggs disputes the accuracy of Kocher (pp. 261-3). Also, given Marlowe's upbringing in Canterbury, there is a possibility that he heard 'first-hand accounts of the atrocities' from Huguenot refugees, as William Urry suggests in *Christopher Marlowe and Canterbury* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), pp. 2-3.

⁵⁰ Briggs, p. 267.

serves as an implicit endorsement of Henry III's actions – though, of course, Marlowe complicates matters by painting Guise as the embodiment of noble defiance. But equally important in settling the debate – and a clear indication that Marlowe composed *The Massacre* with the intention to justify Guise's murder – is the remarkable transformation of character that is signalled by a change of name, as 'Anjou' becomes 'Henry III'.

In the Massacre scenes, Anjou is presented as an enthusiastic killer; he promises to 'slay as many [Huguenots] as [he] can come near' and soon lives up to his word (5.52). It goes without saying that such behaviour lacks justification in the terms of Reason of State: it is difficult to see how the indiscriminate slaughter of 'servants' (5.25), or the mocking of Protestant religious practice (7.6), can be viewed as preventative action designed to protect stable government. But the killings of the Guise brothers are a different matter. Party to the events in 1572 and 1588, Anjou/Henry III provides a clear point of comparison between the two, and in the latter case he argues that the murders are both necessary and proportionate. His justification – 'I slew the Guise, because I would be King' (21.137) – is based on the assertion that monarchs must guard against all threats to their authority, thereby reducing the chance of 'foreign wars and civil broils' (21.100). It also connects the health of the state with Henry's right to individual sovereignty (in contrast to Charles IX's over-dependence):

Nay, he [i.e. Guise] was King and countermanded me:
But now I will be King and rule myself. (21.140-1)

When we consider the advice of Lipsius, who holds that certain tactics become legitimate when used in the interests of the '*the common good*', the assassinations become an acceptable, even responsible, course of action designed to end France's violent troubles.

That Marlowe intends that the audience should take this reading is suggested by the confessional slant that he lends to the scene. For in contrast to the character's earlier involvement in the Massacre, Marlowe's Henry III makes a startling – and decidedly unhistorical – conversion from Catholicism. In addition to justifying the murder of Guise

on pragmatic grounds – ‘he meant to make me monk, / Or else to murder me and so be King’ (21.110-11) – he betrays a Protestant bias in the examples that he uses to illustrate Guise’s criminal behaviour; these appeal to an English context, with Guise said to have supported ‘the seminary at Rheims’ – the fountainhead of conspiracies such as the Babington Plot (1586) – and, in 1588, to have ‘caus[ed] the King of Spain’s huge fleet / To threaten England’ (21.102-5). Later, as Henry lies ‘stricken with a poison’d knife’ (24.74), he expresses the desire to challenge ‘the papal monarch’ and his ‘antichristian kingdom’ (24.59-60); he promises to ‘tear his triple crown / And fire accursed Rome about his ears’ (24.60-61) – and sends ‘word’ of this desire, as a ‘faithful friend’, to ‘the Queen of England [...] Whom God hath bless’d for hating papistry’ (24.55; 24.105; 24.68-9). As we have seen, the sentiment is then taken up in Navarre’s final speech, as he pledges to ‘revenge [Henry’s] death’ in the fight against ‘Rome and all those popish prelates there’.

It is difficult to guess what purpose this episode might have served if Marlowe had not been trying to establish a sense of pan-European commitment against the League. But it is clear, in any case, that Marlowe answers the charge of League polemic by structuring the play to compare 1572 with 1588, and by highlighting the reckless enjoyment of the Catholic killers compared to the cold-headed logic that informs the assassination of Guise – albeit that Henry starts to gloat with unsavoury relish: ‘boy, look where your father lies’, he says to Guise’s son (21.117). The overriding effect is to show that when faced with accusations of severity – ‘art thou king, and hast done this bloody deed?’ (21.121) – Henry III is justified in adverting to the argument of necessity.

So far, my suggestion has been that Marlowe uses Reason of State in *The Massacre* to examine the situations that excuse, or do not excuse, the monarch’s decision to deviate from the path of princely virtue. In taking up this exercise – and by selecting the French Wars for his subject matter – Marlowe was able to engage with issues of political theory, send a counterblast against the claims of Catholic League polemic, *and* satisfy the public’s desire to see well-known events presented onstage. That is to say, in *The Massacre* we find

a dramatist whose work can perform a propaganda function without sacrificing the subtlety of art or commercial success. But what can the play tell us about the immediate direction of English foreign policy? An informal Anglo-Huguenot alliance had been in existence since 1586, when Elizabeth loaned Navarre the sum of £30,000.⁵¹ To have simply made the case for continuing this assistance, Marlowe might have associated Navarre exclusively with a providential view of Protestant history, thus establishing a clear contrast with the godless Machiavellianism typified by the Duke of Guise and Catherine of Medici. But Marlowe does something quite different; by invoking Reason of State – and by highlighting Navarre’s responsiveness to ‘opportunity’ – he presents a more ambiguous view of the values at stake in England’s involvement with European conflict, complicating the play’s implied loyalties in a way that accepts, like Lipsius, the need for practicality as well as moral virtue.

A likely explanation for this approach emerges when we consider the stories surrounding Henri IV in the early 1590s. In his account of Elizabethan news pamphlets, Voss observes that in the period of *The Massacre’s* first performance ‘rumours about Navarre’s commitment to his Protestant faith swirled, and many suggested an imminent conversion to Catholicism’.⁵² Certainly, Marlowe attempts to downplay such concerns by presenting Navarre as a staunch champion of the Reformed mission; as we have seen already, Navarre trusts in providential justice and vows – in association ‘with the Queen of England’ – ‘to beat the papal monarch from our lands / And keep those relics from our countries’ coasts’ (18.15-17). By including a direct reference to Elizabeth – and by rhetorically connecting English and French interests in the plural of ‘lands’ and ‘countries’ – Marlowe delivers a clear message about the utility and urgency of assisting Henri IV, with the vehemence of Navarre’s anti-Catholic prejudice working to alleviate doubts about the Protestant credentials of his cause. But Marlowe does not rest his case exclusively on

⁵¹ Susan Doran, *Elizabeth I and Foreign Policy, 1558-1603* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 58.

⁵² Voss, p. 100.

the common ground of religion: by recommending Navarre as a 'political operator' as well as a good Protestant, the playwright immunizes his message against those who may balk at Navarre's pious depiction onstage – a safeguard that appears especially wise given the real-life Henri's eventual conversion in July 1593. By the time of *The Massacre's* second performance on 19th June 1594, it is more than likely that Navarre's promise of Protestant vengeance 'would have rung hollow', but his usefulness as an ally in the fight against 'the Guise, the Pope, and King of Spain' would still have been apparent.⁵³

Unlike Marlowe's earlier plays that question, rather than replicate, the arguments of debate, *The Massacre* can be thus seen as a direct and partisan intervention on the issue of Elizabeth's support for Henri IV. This point has been made most persuasively by Paulina Kewes, who explains that 'with Parliament due to assemble on 19 February 1593, less than three weeks after the premiere of *The Massacre* on or around 30 January, it was no secret that heading the agenda would be the fraught situation in France'.⁵⁴ By selecting the French Wars of Religion for the focus of a play, Marlowe displayed characteristic alertness to the commercial advantages of choosing topical subject matter, but his choice might have been influenced just as much by professional ties: Kewes notes that the '[push] for a large subsidy in support of Henri's offensive against the League' was led by William Cecil, Lord Burghley, 'Marlowe's government paymaster who only the previous year had extricated the playwright from an imbroglio on the Continent'.⁵⁵ In his speech for supply at the 1593 Parliament, Burghley listed the 'dangers' both 'great and imminent' that were posed by Philip II of Spain. Referring to Philip's 'commandment [of] all the best ports of Brittany', Burghley claimed with no little insistence that 'the danger hereof might appear so great as ought to induce England to spare no cost to withstand it'.⁵⁶ Where previous threats of Spanish aggression had led to calls for an Ottoman alliance – a subject explored,

⁵³ Kewes 'Marlowe, History, and Politics', p. 151.

⁵⁴ Kewes, 'Marlowe, History, and Politics', p. 148.

⁵⁵ Kewes, 'Marlowe, History, and Politics', p. 148.

⁵⁶ T.E. Hartley (ed.), *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I, Volume III: 1593-1601* (Leicester: University of Leicester Press, 1995), pp. 24-5.

of course, in the two parts of *Tamburlaine* – now the crucial point of engagement lay not in the Mediterranean but in mainland France, with English hopes resting on the success of Henri IV in securing the French throne.

Arguing to the same effect as Burghley, in a speech to Parliament on 7th March 1593, Sir Henry Unton made clear that the security of England's coast was bound up with 'the preservation of that brave and worthy king of our religion and therein most zealous', with emotive metaphors helping to establish a sense of shared purpose and risk:

His country is ours; his enemy's ours; we are both embarked in one ship and therefore must needs run one fortune together. His country is now the stage of Christendom wherein all nations our enemies seek to play their tragical parts.⁵⁷

In line with these sentiments, Marlowe portrays Navarre as a practical and pious leader who is worthy of English aid. With the play having been performed just over a month before Sir Henry Unton gave his speech, it is tempting to think that when France was described as 'the stage of Christendom', those listening would have recalled the recent appearance of French history on the London stage of the Rose Theatre – its visceral, full-blooded depiction of the 1572 Massacre perhaps lending the argument some greater persuasive power. Speculation aside, it may be observed that by showing Europe in such turmoil, Marlowe's play supports the tenor of English foreign policy: though it tries to maintain Navarre's image as a devout Protestant, its assertions to this effect are a gloss to the greater understanding that the need for results – the defeat of a common enemy – must trump the wish for religious agreement.

Conclusions

When we read *The Massacre* alongside the speeches of Burghley and his allies, we may decide that Marlowe addressed a political culture that increasingly recognized the need for pragmatism. But Marlowe's endorsement of such a view is not without complication. In *Politica*, Lipsius registers his own anxiety about the moral status of the argument for using

⁵⁷ Hartley (ed.), p. 56; also quoted in Kewes, 'Marlowe, History, and Politics', p. 151.

questionable tactics. Though he claims that the gravest forms of deceit (breach of faith and injustice) are permissible in 'very troubled and difficult cases', he admits that even the 'middle sort of deceit' (bribery and deception) is enough to make him 'stammer and sweat' when considering where this places the ruler in relation to 'divine law' (p. 531; p. 523). Though it is legitimate, even mandatory, for a monarch to deviate from time to time from the Christian ideals of princely virtue, Lipsius suggests, it does not make the monarch's decision to do so an easy or guilt-free exercise.

In *The Massacre*, Marlowe makes much the same point. His play insists upon the difference between Machiavellianism and Reason of State but also reflects the moral discomfiture that Lipsius describes. By situating the events of 1572 next to those of 1588, Marlowe encourages the audience to differentiate between acts of atrocity and expedience: the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre is conceived without reference to the commonweal, and serves to advance the Duke of Guise and Catherine of Medici at the expense of the 'gentle King'; by contrast, the assassinations ordered by Henry III are designed to restore order in the most efficient way possible – their method ensuring the 'safety of [the king's] person' while protecting him from 'all suspect' (19.82-4). The organization of the play thus suggests that monarchs must be prepared to suspend justice to combat evil designs. But the moral cost of such behaviour is made equally clear.

It can be recognized, first of all, in the compromise that involves Navarre as well as the audience accepting that a character who held a high degree of responsibility for the Massacre – Anjou – can later prove to be invaluable as an ally; responding to changed circumstances, with Guise suddenly at odds with Henry III, Navarre seizes the opportunity to make a tactical 'show [of] love unto the King of France, / Offering him aid against his enemies' (20.5-6) – a triumph of expediency over ideals. Likewise, the cost of pragmatism is shown by the feelings of remorse that are expressed by Charles IX. In *Politica*, Lipsius observes that a monarch must be prepared to accept some degree of 'guilt' (p. 525), and this idea would seem to be explored in the Massacre's aftermath. Lying on his deathbed,

poisoned by Catherine of Medici, Charles admits his culpability for the violence: 'I have deserv'd a scourge, I must confess' (13.9). The pathos of this statement derives from the audience's knowledge that the king's motives were benign and that he was misled to cruelty, on account of his naïve susceptibility, by the 'words' of his relatives and the Duke of Guise (2.70); the audience knows full well that the king was conned into 'sustain[ing] the blame' for an act that had nothing to do with the 'country's good'.

Since Charles' shame relates to an act of supreme Machiavellianism, his guilt is not identical to that which is taken on deliberately by the monarchs who use Reason of State to serve the commonweal. But the character's final moments highlight nevertheless the peculiar burdens of kingship. His earlier mistake also reminds us that Machiavellianism and Reason of State – though distinct – might be confused very easily, and rest upon forms of language that might be misapplied, just as the play draws attention to the greater tragedy that monarchs have no choice but to engage with the murky questions of moral compromise if they are to secure peace and the 'stable rule' described by Botero.

Despite the qualifications and concerns that it raises, and the apparent arbitrariness of the violent events that are staged, *The Massacre* still presents Reason of State as the best form of statecraft available to the Renaissance ruler. That is not to say that Marlowe offers an uncomplicated endorsement of the theory, for the argument of necessity is clearly shown to be susceptible to abuse – as demonstrated by Anjou's spurious advice to Charles. Doubts are also raised by the carnivalesque nature of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, and the implication that theatregoers are expected to *enjoy* the play's representation of brutality; these scenes suggest that whatever the organizing principle of government, domestic stability will be difficult to preserve against the people's natural appetite for violence. Reason of State is not proposed as the ideal solution to any such problem, nor is it presented as wholly good – a reservation that Marlowe shares with Lipsius. It is advanced, rather, as the most realistic way to govern effectively whilst retaining some degree of moral character.

Indeed, the idea that we should view *The Massacre* as a lesson in compromise is suggested by its final appeal to an English context. At the play's end, there is no individual that embodies perfect princely virtue – that is, without showing any tendency towards *Realpolitik* – so there is no indication that rulers might thrive purely on the basis of their piety and justice. Instead, the last action of the play centres on the bloody corpse of Henry III, carried from the stage as the new king – Henry IV – promises to ‘revenge his death’ (24.108). With Henry III's repeated references to ‘the Queen of England’ (24.68; 24.104), his death serves as more than just a stock reminder of the impermanence of earthly power – the ‘transitory pomp’ enjoyed by Marlowe's Edward II (5.1.108): it conveys an urgent message to the English audience, illustrating the ‘bloody practices’ that require Elizabeth and her countrymen to remain vigilant as well as proactive in ‘hating papistry’ (24.66; 24.69). Though it stops short of giving further instructions – the English Agent is only told to ‘send thy mistress word / What this detested Jacobin hath done’ (24.55-6) – the scene implies that Elizabeth should join the fight against ‘that wicked Church of Rome’ (24.65), taking Henri III's place in alliance with Navarre/Henri IV.

As we have seen, Navarre succeeds in *The Massacre* because he achieves the necessary ‘mix’ of piety and pragmatism, and it is on this basis that the play promotes him as a useful ally for England: as well as downplaying real-life concerns about Henri IV's confessional resolve, the play commends Navarre as a leader who is cunning enough to bring down the Catholic League and thereby improve the security of England's position. We thus find that the very character traits that were held up previously as evidence of Navarre's Machiavellianism – and of Marlowe's rejection of Protestant bias – are designed specifically to recommend the provision of English aid: references to ‘opportunity’ do not discredit the Protestant hero but show that he has the right qualities of leadership to make financial assistance worthwhile.

This reading speaks to the complexity of *The Massacre's* engagement with topical issues, encouraging us to dispense with critical models that frame the play as either ‘crude

Protestant propaganda', or – arguing *in utramque partem* – an exposé of evil on both sides of the confessional divide. It also provides us with the clearest indication of Marlowe's own ideas about monarchy and the extent to which traditional models of kingship are achievable in modern society. As we have seen, Marlowe negotiates between advocating assistance for Henri IV and reflecting more generally on Europe's sorry trend towards moral and religious vacuity. By complicating (but not discrediting) the moral position of the Huguenot leader, he points realistically to the value of committing resources in the fight against the League.

But whilst *The Massacre* may support the case for intervention that was made by Burghley and his parliamentary allies – and, indeed, the play's sympathies are aligned with many of the Huguenot pamphlets that Burghley brought into England – Marlowe does not sacrifice ambiguity for the reductive reasoning of propaganda, exploration for argument.⁵⁸ Instead, he creates a drama that satisfies both objectives, presenting the history of the French Wars in a way that identifies England's best course of action at the same time as it highlights the tragedy that moral and religious standards have given way to compromise – that Europe has fallen to such a low ebb that its ideals of virtuous behaviour are no longer achievable. It is, of course, this bleak aspect to Marlowe's social vision that recent critics have mistaken for evidence that *The Massacre* sets out to criticize Protestants and Catholics in equal measure, when its true concern is to reflect the horrors of Europe – where 'kings and kingdoms are burning with the flames of sedition' – and engage, like Lipsius and other political thinkers, with the question of how its leaders might find a solution.

⁵⁸ Kewes, 'Marlowe, History, and Politics', p. 149.

Conclusion

One of my central claims has been that Marlowe's plays cannot be read together as a coherent body of political writing and thought. I have shown, rather, that each play responded to a particular set of circumstances and/or patterns in political argument that inspired the playwright, provided the basis for certain kinds of dramatic effect, and promised – on account of their topical appeal – to be profitable when translated for the stage. In this respect, the claims of each chapter stand on their own, since each play (or plays, in the case of *Tamburlaine*) has been analysed in its relationship to the events and major concerns of its moment.

In the two parts of *Tamburlaine*, Marlowe was inspired primarily by the recently published account of Tamburlaine in George Whetstone's *The English Mirror*, but he shaped the adaptation of this source material in ways that spoke to current concerns about the progress of the Ottoman-Safavid War as well as reflecting on a more generalized, xenophobic sense of threat regarding the force of Islamic military might. The following year, in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, Marlowe (and his likely collaborator, Thomas Nashe) turned to the even more pressing concern of Catholic conspiracy and Spanish invasion, with the images of ships and walls serving as an appropriate reflection on the preparations made for the Armada and the good fortune of England's survival. *Dido* also explored the conflict between a monarch's public duty and private happiness – a tragic tension that was particularly relevant in 1588 owing to the discussion of Elizabeth's favourites, though the choice of the Dido story could also be seen to hark back to an earlier controversy regarding the Anjou match.

Four years later, Marlowe chose to address a similar theme of public versus private in his penultimate play, *Edward II*, though the topical reasons for his doing so

were, unsurprisingly, different: as well as capitalizing on the popularity of the history play genre, *Edward II* looks at how the king's desires conflict with definitions of kingly duty and accusations of improper influence (levelled first at Gaveston, later at Spencer Junior and Baldock) which call to mind the conspiracy claims of anti-Burghley polemic. But whilst this topical background may be different from that of 1588, *Edward II* is similar to *Dido* in drawing out the implications of political argument to suggest what the monarch's experience must be like – the resulting portrait being much dissimilar to the lofty image of Tamburlaine's imagination:

Is it not passing brave to be a king,
And ride in triumph through Persepolis! (2.5.53-4)

Lastly, in *The Massacre at Paris*, Marlowe dramatized the recent violence in France, covering the period from the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre (August 1572) to the assassination of Henri III (August 1589). In doing so, Marlowe engaged with cutting-edge political theory, challenged the accusations of anti-Huguenot polemic, and made the case for Elizabeth offering continued support to Henri IV in the defence of his throne. In each play, then, Marlowe's staging of monarchy reflected the crises and concerns that were facing particular monarchs at the moment he was writing, which supports the view of Christopher Morris that Elizabethans 'talked more of the monarch than of the monarchy, more of the sovereign than of sovereignty'.¹

As suggested by this reference to Morris, as well as re-evaluating the contexts that might inform our understanding of Marlowe's plays, I have taken the opportunity to re-visit some older scholarly work in the light of new developments. For example, with regard to the now-prevalent view that *The Massacre* is as critical of Huguenot behaviour as it is of Catholics, I have shown that the traditional disparagement of the play as Protestant propaganda is in some respects more accurate than the standard reading of today. By undertaking the first detailed analysis of *The Massacre* with reference to Reason of State, I

¹ Christopher Morris, *Political Thought in England*, pp. 1-2.

have shown that Marlowe does indeed compare the moral legitimacy of Huguenot and Catholic action but that his play finds in the Huguenots' favour – thereby endorsing Henri IV's call for assistance at the time of the 1593 Parliament. That being said, I have also found that Marlowe's appropriation of political theory is far more sophisticated and artful than older views admit. Likewise, with regard to *Tamburlaine*, I have shown that recent research on early modern ideas of the Near East brings new relevance to Eugene M. Waith's description of 'the Herculean hero' from 1964, and I have argued that bringing together these separate research strands can help to account for Marlowe's particular contribution to dramatic ambiguity – a point of interest that has held the attention of Marlowe scholars for decades.

Last of all, when looking at *Dido* and *Edward II*, I have taken issue with the tendency for political readings to be centred on the hope of making one-to-one connections – such as between Aeneas and the Duke of Anjou or between Gaveston and Lord Burghley – when playwrights, often for artistic as well as pragmatic reasons, tended towards intermittent allusion in preference to straightforward allegory. This was the argument of David Bevington's *Tudor Drama and Politics*, and it has since been developed by Curtis Perry. In my readings, I have challenged the allegorical interpretations of particular scholars (Donald Stump and Deanne Williams on *Dido*; Curtis C. Breight on *Edward II*) as a means to highlight the far more complex, artistically engaged quality of Marlowe's use of politics. Indeed, as well as confirming the view of Morris on the interest in monarchs rather than monarchy, my findings also support Claude J. Summers' point that as well as looking for what drama has to say about politics, we should consider how political ideas were put to the service of art.

For such analysis to be possible, it is necessary that the interpretation of Marlowe's plays should proceed from a sound understanding of the political and religious developments of the writer's lifetime, especially during the period of his literary career (1587-93) but also during his espionage work, which began sometime before Marlowe

received his M.A. and left Cambridge in 1587 (this job makes it more likely that Marlowe was able to read proscribed materials). In this respect, my interpretation of Marlowe's drama has benefitted enormously from strides taken in interdisciplinary historical/literary research over the last decade or so: from Jane Grogan's comprehensive re-evaluation of the early modern representation of Persia, to Perry's sensitive analysis of how the discourse of favouritism saw a complex interchange between the discussion of contemporary individuals (e.g. Leicester) and fictional/historical examples (e.g. Ganymede); from the work of Victor Houlston and Peter Lake, which shows that Catholic polemic warrants the attention of close textual analysis, to re-assessments of the late Elizabethan succession question that stress the pervasiveness of the concern in all aspects of political and religious life, as confirmed by the recent volume edited by Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes and to be shown in greater detail with respect to drama in Kewes' forthcoming monograph, *This Great Matter of Succession*. These works, amongst others, have enabled me to draw out the topical resonances within Marlowe's plays that might otherwise go unnoticed.

More specific to Marlowe, there has been a renewed concern with placing the writer in his moment and dispensing (as much as can be possible) with the pervasive myth of the radical overreacher. Since 2000, this movement has produced scholarship that reveals the sheer variety of the available contexts by which Marlowe's works might be analysed: from theatre architecture to scientific advances; from the classics to cartography. Given the relevance of these disparate contexts to Marlowe's output, it would be reductive for us still to interpret the plays according to the binary logic of 'power' and 'subversion' that characterized earlier discussions of the 1980s, and which survives to a large degree in the republican reading of Patrick Cheney.

Indeed, a major result of revisionism is the distrust now given to overarching historical models; as R. Malcolm Smuts puts it, revisionism has 'made it appreciably more difficult for literary scholars to find reliable large-scale historical paradigms that can safely

be “taken off the shelf” from the works of historians or historically oriented philosophers and used to frame discussions of specific texts’.² Accordingly, I have looked at each of Marlowe’s plays with reference to the specific conditions that produced them, drawing on various contexts and discourses as relevant, not according to some generalized claim about the nature of Marlowe’s intentions – as if the writer was always concerned with the same topics and held the same point of view.

But what general conclusions, if any, might we draw about Marlowe’s representation of monarchs and monarchy? Despite the different contexts that underpin them, it is noticeable that *Tamburlaine*, *Dido*, *Edward II*, and *The Massacre* each explore the contrast between desire and duty. In doing so, they reflect a range of interrelated concerns. Though *Tamburlaine*’s own conquests continue despite his grief for Zenocrate, his son, Calyphas, is shown to possess little interest in the martial lifestyle, looking instead to the satisfaction of his own pleasures. This lack of concern for perpetuating a father’s empire – another sign, as Simon Shepherd points out, that Marlowe’s second part of *Tamburlaine* turns its attention ‘from establishing rule to the problem of maintaining it and making a successor’ – recalls one of the major reasons why history writers turned to the Near East: to explain, in Thomas Newton’s words, ‘what the very and chief cause should be, of the subversion and ruin, from time to time, of all mighty kingdoms’.³ To answer this question, as well as choosing to translate an Italian history of the Saracens, Newton highlights the inevitable consequence of a monarch choosing to profit at the realm’s expense:

Therefore no man ought to marvel why those princes, which set more by their own private lucre and gain than by the public commodity of their realm, are many times but slenderly beloved of their subjects; and that all their officers under them, by their evil example, are more careful to enrich their own coffers than to further the common wealth of their country. Thus men’s hearts being diversely bent and their

² Smuts, ‘Introduction: Reflections on Interdisciplinary Frontiers’.

³ Shepherd, *Marlowe and the Politics of Elizabethan Theatre*, p. 152; Newton, *A Notable History of the Saracens*, sig. B1^r.

good will alleviated one from another, the commonwealth consequently goeth to wrack and confusion.⁴

In other texts, by writers responding to diverse situations with diverse agendas – from justifying Mary Queen of Scots' deposition (in Buchanan's *De Iure Regni*) to denouncing Elizabeth's affection for favourites – the same result is emphasized: when the ruler chooses 'her private and present peace [...] before the public' (to use the words of Allen's *Admonition*), the greater body of the nation always suffers. As illustrated by the outbreak of 'civil broils' in *Edward II*, as well as by Catherine of Medici's belief that she can rule France because the king's 'heaven is to delight himself' (14.46), Marlowe does little to counter this commonplace.

And yet, by always emphasizing the personal cost of the monarch's commitment to the common good – especially with respect to the relationships of Dido and Aeneas, and of Edward II and Gaveston – Marlowe draws attention to the undesirability of the crown when it is not, as it is for Tamburlaine and the Duke of Guise, the primary object of desire. Furthermore, the monarch's 'transitory pomp', as Edward II describes it, is shown to entail an almost absurd degree of unwonted danger. In *The Jew of Malta*, though not referring technically to a crown but to the governorship of Malta, Barabas asks himself 'what boots it thee, / Poor Barabas, to be the governor, / Whenas thy life shall be at their command?' (5.2.31-33). In similar fashion, the five plays discussed in this thesis explore the implications of political arguments that are designed, ultimately, to direct or else limit the monarch's behaviour. In each case, the monarch is shown to be the victim of Fortuna if not the active conspiracy of his/her subjects, and the only monarch who succeeds in ruling effectively (albeit with little promise of his sons succeeding likewise) is a king whose Near Eastern origins render him inimitable, just as the *Tamburlaine* plays proved to be for Marlowe's rivals.

⁴ Newton, sig. B3^v.

In his drama, Marlowe took the anxieties that were revealed in public discourse – from royal proclamations and confessional polemic to works that were ostensibly non-political, such as prose histories – and capitalized upon the expression of those anxieties by using their familiar stories and tropes to produce ambiguous, entertaining drama. As Summers made clear in the first monograph to address the writer's use of politics, there is throughout Marlowe's canon an interest in 'questions of power'. In the two parts of *Tamburlaine*, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, *Edward II*, and *The Massacre at Paris*, this interest is not generalized to the point of abstraction but rooted at all times in the experience and challenges of royal life in the 1580s and early 90s. Encouraged by the printing press, and exacerbated by the diverse agendas of various polemicists, the propriety of Elizabeth's conduct and the question of her security had increasingly become topics dealt with in the public domain. In Marlowe's handling, though the monarch's experience was likewise presented in a highly public arena, the expectation that a king or queen should prioritize the commonweal at his/her personal cost is reflected upon sympathetically. For all the bombast of Marlowe's protagonists – and the idea of Marlowe as a radical overreacher – careful analysis shows that a crown held little appeal for the playwright.

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