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The Jew of Malta

It is the fate of Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* to find himself forever lurking a few steps behind Shakespeare's Shylock. Barabas is Shylock's evil twin and nasty precursor – a rougher, meaner, and more starkly stereotypical stage Jew whose exorbitant antics bring into relief that glimmer of humanity that partly illuminates Shakespeare's achievement. Yet it is the task of criticism to try to encounter the play on its own terms, though ever attuned to the sequence of literary events that the play will set into motion. Readings of *The Jew* have approached the work from three basic angles: in relation to the formal development of English theatre and poetry (Eliot, Bevington, Cheney); as a key contribution to European representations of the Jews (Hunter, Greenblatt, Shapiro); and as an exploration of the larger Mediterranean cultural and political landscape in the English imagination (Bartels, Cartelli). This chapter takes the Jewish question as its central focus, but with an eye to the theatrical medium that displays that world for us. The play, I argue, stages different forms of fellowship – of social, religious, and economic association – that configure and reconfigure the different characters of the play in tendentious and fragile alliances.

The word 'fellowship', prominent, for example, in the New Testament but borrowed from the language of Greek social life, is a term that evokes forms of social affiliation that occur outside of or in dialogue with more official modes of civic participation such as citizenship. In a play so dominated by the survivalist egoism of its central character, the focus on fellowship may seem counter-intuitive – unless, that is, we think about social relations in terms of the liquid play of self-interests in tandem with the strange attractors of religious identity. By looking at intersecting circles of fellowship in the play, we may avoid simple oppositions between Self and Other in favour of a template of multiple memberships and shifting allegiances in a public sphere characterized by ethnic, religious, and economic fragmentation and by a complex layering of legal, political, and social institutions. These circles expand to include not only the different groups represented in the play, but

also those involved in the production and enjoyment of the drama itself, since the public theatre of Marlowe's day was a space in which new forms of fellowship, of social, sexual, and economic fraternization were emerging with striking vitality and punch, and on ground cleared both physically and symbolically by the reformed Church.

The Jews of Malta

Malta is a small island located off the coast of Sicily, which had some jurisdiction over it; Sicily in turn answered to Spain during the sixteenth century. The Turks had attempted to conquer Malta in 1565, heightening England's interests in helping to maintain Christian control of the strategically sensitive island. Although Malta was part of the dominions of Spain, it was under direct rule by the Knights of St John (also called the Knights Hospitaller and the Knights of Malta), a militant Catholic order with its roots in the Crusades.¹ In Marlowe's play, the rule of the Knights appears to co-exist with a secular system of magistracies, represented by the Governor Ferneze (presumably not himself a Knight of St John) and a 'senate-house', indicating some form of constitutional government inherited from Roman law. Marlowe adds to this scenario fealty to the Turks, whom he represents as having succeeded in their Maltese offensive.

Lodged within these overlapping and often conflicting Spanish, Turkish, Papal, and Maltese political orders sits still another institution with its own limited jurisdiction, namely the Jewish community that had existed in Malta since Roman times. Like other such communities in Christian Europe and the Mediterranean, the Jews of Malta functioned as a semi-autonomous, self-regulating body within the larger political order of Malta. Excluded from the official life of the city and subject to special taxation, the Jews of Malta nonetheless pursued their own forms of social and religious congregation. In Malta, the Jewish community bore the formal title *universitas judeorum* (university of the Jews) with *universitas* naming 'the whole', the corporate unity formed by a group of people living in a host state. When the Jews were expelled from Spain and its dominions in 1492, the Maltese community was also officially dissolved, although its inhabitants were offered the choice of conversion, which some took, often leading to intermarriage.² (We see echoes of this path in the romance and conversion of Barabas's daughter Abigail.) In Marlowe's Malta, the Jews have not yet been exiled (though they had been expelled from England much earlier, in 1289). Instead, they engage in trade and money-lending, and we also see them consulting among themselves concerning matters financial and political. A community apart, bound by their own peculiar laws and customs, they are also capable of interchange

with Christians on matters exegetical and sexual as well as economic, as seen in Barabas's offer of commentaries on Maccabees to young Mathias, Christian suitor to his daughter.

As Greenblatt has argued, Barabas, like Shylock after him, flourishes in the realm of pre-political association and exchange that make up what political theorists and social scientists call 'civil society' – the modes of informal affiliation and negotiation that shape the give and take of the stock market and the coffee house, the university and the brothel, the trade union and the country club.³ Excluded from *civic* life, Barabas, like Shylock after him, flourishes in the realm of *civil* society. Although both words pertain to the life of the city, and often function interchangeably, the *civic* refers more precisely to the political participation of citizens in the official rule of the polis, whereas the *civil* refers to those social, economic, and domestic associations, *civilian* rather than properly *civic*, that exist outside the operation of the political per se. It is within the civil space of economic and social exchange that Barabas engineers, manipulates, and falls out of different forms of private association with Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Grouped in their own communities and furthering their economic interests, the Jews became symbols of both *self-interest* and *special interests*, giving a recognizable face and a social body to the dynamic yet disintegrative effects of capitalism on the traditional fabric of communal life.

The identification of the Jews with the atomizing aspects of civil society, however, is not a purely secular phenomenon, but occurs as the result of a theological quandary. The Jews occupy a troubled place in Christian historiography and political thought. They represent the foundation, the 'Old Testament', of a Christianity seen to flow naturally from the promises and prophecies of the Israelites. The hermeneutic practice of 'typology', in which characters, stories, or images from the Old Testament are read as prefigurations of the great events of Jesus' life (e.g., Isaac = Christ), was an organizing principle not only of sermons and religious commentaries, but also of the visual arts and sacred theatre. Yet, if Judaism was simply a foundation designed to support the soaring edifice of the Church, why did the Jews continue to persist as a distinct religion and people? The problem with Judaism from the Christian perspective was its ongoing resistance to the universal invitation of Christianity, a resistance evidenced by the Jews' continued allegiance to such group-defining rites as circumcision and dietary laws.

Barabas, as Greenblatt first noted, is the consummate figure of civil society's uncivil core. Early in the play, Barabas disengages his ambitions from anything political, declaring of himself and his fellow Jews that 'we come not to be kings' (1.1.128). Proclaiming himself his own neighbour, he firmly

separates his destiny from that of Malta: '*Ego nihilmet sum semper proximus* [I am always nearest to myself], / Why, let 'em enter, let 'em take the town' (1.1.189–90). When Barabas is finally made Governor of Malta by the Turks at the end of the play, he negotiates the former governor's return to office as quickly as possible, in favour of the clearer and more comfortable good of financial gain. Moreover, even within the limited borders of the Jewish community itself, he refuses to cast in his lot with a common good. As he tells his fellow Jews on their way to the senate-house, 'If anything shall there concern our state, / Assure yourselves I'll look – [*Aside*] unto myself' (1.1.171–2). In Marlowe's Malta, the organized Jewish community is dysfunctional at best; separated from the larger body politic, the purely civil body residing within it is in turn subject to internal dissension and fragmentation.

Barabas's renunciation of political ambition in favour of economic gain reflects the actual position of the Jews in the state. When the Jews are called before the senate-house, an at least nominally representative body, they find no representation in it, no formal political place. When Ferneze first asks the Jews for aid, Barabas responds, 'Alas, my lord, we are no soldiers' (1.2.50). The Jews, he is telling us, are permanently and professionally *civilians*, exempt from military and political obligations by their status as resident aliens. The further interchange alternates among civil, civic, and theological definitions of membership and obligation:

Barabas: Are strangers with your tribute to be taxed?

2 Knight: Have strangers leave with us to get their wealth?

Then let them with us contribute.

Barabas: How! equally?

Ferneze: No, Jew, like infidels.

For through our sufferance of your hateful lives,

Who stand accursed in the sight of heaven,

These taxes and afflictions are befall'n. (JM 1.2.58–67)

Barabas links taxation to political membership – why, he asks, should non-citizens be taxed? The Second Knight counters that although the Jews are denied civic participation, they are nonetheless allowed to pursue their economic interests in the civil realm and thus owe some of their wealth to the state. Barabas protests against equal contributions – 'How? equally?' – a response that presumes equity among citizens and resident aliens with respect to taxation. Yet equality by definition pertains only to those included within a legally defined set (whether that of a specific community or of humanity itself), and Barabas will soon discover that the Jews, residing outside the field of formal citizenship, will be taxed quite a bit more than equally.

The grounds for such exclusion are theological, we are told. Because the Jews are 'accursèd in the sight of heaven', Ferneze argues, they must be taxed above and beyond the Christian citizens by the political body that suffers their existence. The scandal of the Jews' survival into the Christian era requires their political exclusion, while their consequent habitation of the purely economic domain of social life justifies their exorbitant taxation. Conversion, however, remains a solution during this phase of Jewish-Gentile relations (distinguishing it, for example, from the race-based Nuremberg laws of the Nazis). The articles read by Ferneze's Officer state that 'Secondly, he that denies to pay shall straight become a Christian' (1.2.72), implying that converted Jews will become naturalized citizens or subjects, cancelling their ties to Judaism in order to enter into the body politic. Political membership, here and throughout the Western tradition, occurs at a cost, requiring the renunciation of local, familial, tribal, or 'particular' allegiances in exchange for more general or universal ones.

The Jews of Malta, however, prefer to maintain their 'hateful lives' – their continued existence as Jews, as well as their economic livelihoods. In this scene and elsewhere in the play, the 'life' of the Jews is a code word for the particularism that they instantiate. Belying the typological pattern of Christian hermeneutics, the Jews have persisted as a religious group; surviving past their due date, an uncanny, even undead quality colours the weird vitality they embody in the Christian imagination. Survival, moreover, implies compromise and pragmatism, a less than strict adherence to heroic or moral codes. We might recall here, for example, the ethos of survival exemplified by Odysseus, who lives into middle age thanks to the deftness of his intuitions. In a different historical register, think as well of the moral and emotional 'gray zone' inhabited by survivors of the Holocaust, faced with the horror of impossible choices; for this generation, and even for their descendants, to live is not-to-have-died with the others.

Barabas derives his name from Barabbas, the Jewish prisoner who was released by the Roman authorities in place of Jesus at the behest of his Jewish accusers:

Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. And they had then a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?'

(Matt. 27: 15-17; cf. Mark 15, Luke 23, John 18)

In the scene before Pilate, the Jews choose to pardon Barabbas, not Jesus, forever marking the former as the one-who-did-not-die-in-the-place-of-Christ, the one who was not substituted for Jesus. To gain this life, however, is to

accrue a historical debt: when Pilate washes his hands, the Jews reply, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matt. 27: 25). Released by Pilate on behalf of the Jews, the survival of Barabbas at the expense of Jesus will be irrevocably linked to the formal exclusion of the Jews from political life, their subsequent identification with fiscal dealings and misdealings, and their pursuit of alternative forms of social organization and self-regulation within the commonwealths that host them.

In the trial scene of *The Jew of Malta*, Ferneze, washing his own hands of responsibility for the Jews, explicitly evokes the debt earned by the Jews in the court of Pilate:

If your first curse fall heavy on thy head,
And make thee poor and scorned of all the world,
'Tis not our fault, but thy inherent sin.

(JM 1.2.110-12)

When the Jews of Malta are asked to give up their wealth for the greater good of the state, Barabas refuses. As he declares to Abigail in the development of the scene, 'No, I will live; nor loathe I this my life' (1.2.267). *This my life*: the phrase names the particularized field of religious survival and economic livelihood that places the Jews both in and out of Malta, as a tolerated, semi-autonomous body of resident aliens carrying out economic functions for the larger civic order.

Marlowe fashioned Barabas out of the allegorical figure of the Vice, an archetype of villainy inherited from the stage devils of sacred drama and developed in the minimally secular morality plays of the sixteenth century.⁴ As Greenblatt and others have noted, Barabas loses rather than gains in individuality as the play progresses, falling back into his allegorical origins (Greenblatt, p. 150). His infamous autobiography of crimes ('As for myself, I walk abroad a' nights . . .' (2.3.177-201)) gathers together a poisonous bouquet of generalized anti-Jewish stereotypes interwoven with Machiavelian motifs of policy and self-interest. During this period, the writings of the Italian political theorist were seen as the embodiment of corrupt political pragmatism and devious atheism; Marlowe famously begins his play with a prologue speech by 'Machiavel', resolutely inserting the theological discourse of anti-Judaism into the frame of modern politics, a fusion continued here in Barabas's allegorical autobiography.⁵ The speech ends with Barabas's triumphant self-accounting: 'But mark how I am blessed for plaguing them; / I have as much coin as will buy the town' (2.3.202-3). The infinite riches of the biblical concept of blessing have been contracted to the little room of self-interest, which in turn becomes an echo-chamber that traps, redoubles, and caricatures the history of Jewish survival in and as civil society.

The new Jews: from Israel to Islam

Barabas delivers his mythic autobiography in the profane setting of the slave-market, where he will purchase his side-kick, the Turkish Ithamore. The speech functions as a down-payment in the relationship between the Jew and the Turk, who responds in kind with his own briefer but no less vivid accounting of Muslim crimes. Barabas represents his new association with Ithamore as a *fellowship*, an informal alliance based on mutual interests: 'make account of me / As of thy fellow; we are villains both: / Both circumcised, we hate Christians both' (2.3.225–7; emphasis added). Barabas founds their fellowship on the mark of circumcision borne by each partner in the new relationship. Circumcision, a sign of covenantal belonging for the Jewish community, becomes a means of linking the Jew to the Muslim, significantly expanding the kinds of pre-political association possible in Malta to include an alliance between members of two distinct non-Christian groups.

Circumcision is a key symbol in biblical typology. In Judaism, circumcision had functioned as a rite of civic initiation linking the members of the Abrahamic covenant to each other and to God. St Paul, in his efforts to build mixed congregations composed of both Jewish and Gentile Christians, transmuted the covenantal signature of circumcision into an interior symbol, a 'circumcision of the heart', that would no longer require a physical cut as the means of initiation.⁶ In the post-Pauline world of official Christianities, circumcision became a mark of Jewish obdurance. Moreover, by the time that Marlowe writes his play, the ranks of the circumcised have grown to include the Muslims, bearers of the world-view most immediately at odds with Christian moral and territorial claims. Represented first by the Arabs and then by the Turks, Islam dangerously combined the circumcised legal separatism of the Jews with the universal mission of the Christians. Islam, like Judaism, was a religion living not far away but close at hand, which, far from worshipping many gods, ascribed to monotheisms at least as strict as Christianity's own. Moreover, Judaism and Islam stem from the same Abrahamic lineage as Christianity; the three groups are, in the Muslim phrase, 'People of the Book', neighbouring religions organized around revealed Scriptures that share many of the same prophets and patriarchs. The knowledge of the Law epitomized by Jewish and Muslim monotheism meant that these groups had both more affinity with and more resistance to genuine Christian conversion than their pagan counterparts.⁷

Islam, the youngest of the three Abrahamic religions, came to represent to Christianity a kind of Judaism after the fact, a redoubling of Jewish intransigence to the Christian revelation. As such, Islam executes a second, even

crueLLer blow to Christianity's historical vision, since modern Judaism (from the Christian perspective) is a stubborn carry-over from an earlier moment, but Islam from its very inception administered its proselytizing mission in full knowledge of Christian teachings. The rapid expansion of Islam throughout the Levant, North Africa, the Far East, and the Balkans, however, presented the inverse of Judaism's dispersed, sequestered, and inward-looking communities. The third Revelation announced by Islam rejected Jewish particularism in favour of Christian universalism; like the rulers of European Christendom, the Arab and then Turkish powers used the theme of spiritual equality among the nations to support their missionary, imperial, and commercial projects.⁸ For Renaissance Christendom, Islam represented a double scandal, the catastrophic bastardization of both Christian universalism and Jewish particularism.

In *The Jew of Malta*, Marlowe exploits these linkages between Judaism and Islam. The name 'Ithamore', for example, is a variant of the biblical 'Ithamar', the youngest son of Aaron and hence part of the priestly line of the Levites, professional upholders of Jewish ritual law. Islamicizing '-mar' into '-more' (which sounds like 'Moor'), Marlowe signals the fellowship between Jewish and Islamic legalisms signed by circumcision. Ithamore's legal status as a slave also picks up a theme long associated with the Jews, the motif of enslavement to the law. According to Paul, the Jews under the law were like a child-heir, 'no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate; but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father' (Gal. 4: 1–3). In Paul's thinking, the law is a necessary but transitional stage in both the history of world religion and the spiritual development of each individual. Just as a child comes of age and leaves the slavish jurisdiction of his father, so Judaism (and later Islam) should leave behind its laws and enter into the freedom of Christian grace.

Ithamore is a slave who will be manumitted at the time set by his adoptive father, Barabas – he will be emancipated, however, not into Christian freedom but into further fellowship in villainy with the unconverted Jew. When Barabas disinherits Abigail on the occasion of her conversion to Christianity, he adopts Ithamore as his heir and proceeds to poison not only his daughter, but all the nuns with whom she now resides. Moving from Judaism to Christianity, Abigail is a positive instance of the proper typological progression from Old to New Testaments. The doubling of her conversions, like the doubling of her boyfriends, sours the sentimental seriousness of Abigail's turn to Christianity. Nonetheless, Abigail's civic ventures lay out the key exit strategies from Judaism – marriage and conversion – that demarcate the limited forms of openness that Christian commonwealths entertained in relation to their Jewish populations (Wettinger, p. 128).

For Barabas, in keeping with Jewish law on this matter, a Christian daughter is no longer alive for him. In her place, he adopts Ithamore: 'O trusty Ithamore, no servant, but my friend: / I here adopt thee for mine only heir, / All that I have is thine when I am dead, / And whilst I live use half; spend as myself' (3.5.39–43). They then proceed to poison the nunnery with a pot of rice. The adoption of Ithamore, a legal transfer of affect and property conducted in relation to a pot of soup, parodies the biblical story of Esau and Jacob, a favourite topic of typological interpretation. In Genesis, Esau is older brother to the younger Jacob, who will inherit the blessing of their father Isaac through a trick arranged by their mother Rebecca, who sends the younger twin to their blind father with a pot of lentils and a hairy disguise (Gen. 27). In the Jewish tradition, the story narrates the founding line of the twelve tribes of Israel (the name that Jacob will later receive), while Esau becomes a type of various neighbouring groups hostile to Israel. St Paul, on the other hand, takes this and other stories about younger brothers ascending over older brothers as an allegory of the supersession of Christianity over Judaism (e.g., Rom. 9: 10–13). Whereas for the Jews, Jacob is to Esau as Israel is to her enemies; for Paul, Jacob is to Esau as Christianity is to Judaism – a transvaluation and partial reversal of the story's original meaning.

In Marlowe's replay of the story from Genesis, Ithamore delivers the soup that will kill Abigail. He in effect assumes the role of Jacob, receiving the blessing of Barabas / Isaac in the place of the more legitimate sibling. In this allegory, the Muslims are the new Jews, inheriting in the place of the legitimate child (who has sensibly converted to Christianity). If Abigail has made the proper typological transition from Judaism to Christianity, Ithamore travels in the reverse direction, from the second-order Judaism of Islam to the inveterate Judaism that it mimics. The fellowship of Jew and Muslim represents the double negation of the positive conversion effected by Abigail, who becomes their sorry sacrifice.

As such, it is, like all of Barabas's alliances, a fellowship bound to fall apart. The legal formalism of the adoption indicates that their relationship remains one of merely civil association, and will never attain the pathos of a genuine blood tie, a national identity, or a new faith. If circumcision is the initial signature of fellowship for Ithamore and Barabas, it is soon devalued in Ithamore's dismissive remarks once he has fallen under the spell of the courtesan Bellamira. He mocks the Jew's dietary laws, and then links Barabas's poor hygiene to his circumcision: 'He never put on clean shirt since he was circumcised' (4.4.72). What before had bound the two together in mutual enmity against Christians has now been absorbed into a battery of anti-Jewish images that Ithamore glibly recites in his bid for inclusion in Malta's brothel culture. Ithamore closes the scene (and the door on Jewish

fellowship) with the cryptic saying, 'The meaning has a meaning. Come, let's in; / To undo a Jew is charity, not sin' (4.4.91–2). Ithamore has learned to speak the language of the Christians, who cynically use the language of typology to oil the economy while keeping their hands clean.

Rezoning

All of this takes place not in the margins of scriptural commentaries, but in the space of the new public theatre. Marlowe's stage would have consisted of the main platform, an inner stage at the back, and a gallery above, regions easily refigured throughout the drama to represent different locales in Malta (the houses of Barabas, the senate-house, the marketplace, the brothel). These rapid scenic remappings, the staple of Elizabethan theatre, are symbolic as well as pragmatic, since each shift rezones Malta's civil and religious sectors not only within the represented world of the play, but also ultimately in relation to the conditions of English theatre itself.

Act 1, scene 1 opens with Barabas 'in his counting house' – perhaps positioned towards the back of the main stage, more likely discovered in its inner stage. The enclosure effectively frames Barabas as a type of Avarice, identifying the Jew with the mercantile economy and with a long line of allegorical Vice figures (Lunney, pp. 107–8). Yet this narrow space soon opens outwards; Cheney imagines Barabas gesturing expansively to encompass the whole stage, 'thereby identifying the room of the counting-house with the room of the theatre' (p. 145). The sweep of the hand locates both Barabas and Marlowe at the crossroads of sacred and civil orders of representations.

Barabas will, however, soon lose this house. The appropriation of Barabas's property and its conversion to a nunnery recalls another familiar typological theme, the transformation of the Synagogue into the Church. For example, in Renaissance art the Virgin Mary is often depicted in front of a building in ruins, alluding to the decline of the Synagogue and its renovation as the Church, of which Mary herself was a favourite symbol.⁹ Like Mary, Abigail passes from the Old to the New Testament, a consummate figure of Judeo-Christian womanhood; and like Mary's ruins, her calling takes place in relation to a building that has undergone radical conversion. Shortly, Abigail will appear on the balcony of the new nunnery, habited as a nun, while her father frets beneath her window like a ghost of Passovers past. With the daughter above and the father below, the scene visually schematizes the positioning of superstructure over foundation, Church over Synagogue – the architecture of typology itself.

Yet Barabas has secreted some of his wealth in this typological edifice. Hidden 'close underneath the plank / That runs along the upper-chamber

floor' (1.2.297–8), the stash of jewels is an insurance plan, a pocket of movable property that will protect his household against the whims of the state and the Jews' uncertain claims to real estate, depositing the chance of Jewish survival in the crawl space of Christian history. Barabas will use the wealth, as Garrett Sullivan observes in this volume, to 'buy another house' – to cultivate another place where the identification of Jewish survival with civil society can continue to unfold. The *converso*, Abigail, is no Virgin Mary; Barabas remains true to his namesake Barabbas, refusing to die into history, and the theological rezoning of Malta remains incomplete.

The play's architecture of conversion and its discontents takes place on the stage of the public theatre. Mobilizing the iconography of the Judeo-Christian turn, the expropriation of Barabas's property has a more contemporary reference as well, namely to Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, including the urban and suburban monastic liberties on which many of London's public theatres now stood. The monastic holdings had always carried the special legal status of 'liberties', not subject to royal and municipal jurisdictions and governed by their own ecclesiastical courts that answered to Rome. When the Church's lands passed to the Crown, the tie with Rome was of course broken, but the lands remained legal 'liberties', free from municipal control. The liberties could thus be leased for various forms of unregulated economic and social activity, including brothels, taverns, and theatres. Blackfriars and Whitefriars, theatres built on liberties within the city of London, retained in their names a reference to their monastic origins.¹⁰

Like the Jewish community of Malta, the liberties of London isolate civil society as a set of phenomena separate from official civic life – a jurisdiction unto themselves, defined at least initially by religious law, and animated by the free flow of capital, where various forms of fellowship take root in a volatile microclimate potentially at odds with that of the commonwealth that houses it. Moreover, the evacuation of this space for use by the theatre is linked to a complex juridical, political, and theological operation, that of the dissolution of the monasteries. The public theatre is given a Protestant frame – the same frame that allows Marlowe to couch his corrosive representation of Christian hypocrisy under the neutralizing rubric of anti-Catholic satire. These Christians may be nasty, but after all, they are Spanish Catholics, not English Protestants; indeed, the theatrical space we are currently occupying exists thanks to the break with Rome. But – the public theatre is not a church; in fact, it may even be an anti-church, an underworld of carnal, criminal, and economic rather than genuinely spiritual congregation. In this, it shares something with the community of the Jews.

In *The Jew of Malta*, the architecture of the stage discovers within itself a series of real and symbolic transformations – of synagogue into nunnery, of

Catholic monastery holdings into Protestant royal property, and of the old monastic liberties into new theatrical ones. If the Jew is a figure of uncivil society, so too is the actor: each 'congregates', engaging in forms of affiliation and transaction, of dangerous fellowship, that exist with some degree of liberty in relation to the political jurisdictions of city and state. Cheney has noted the mounting equation between Barabas and theatre in the course of the play, culminating in his appearance as an actor-poet-musician in the house of Bellamira in Act 4 and his building of the final stage set in Act 5 (pp. 154–6). Designing and installing a trap for Calymath, Barabas meanwhile plans a bloody end for the Turkish troops in a 'monastery / Which standeth as an outhouse to the town' (5.4.36). Barabas's urban theatre of cruelty finds its suburban counterpart in the liberties just outside the city, the same region 'o'er the walls' of Malta where his body is thrown for a few moments of feigned death and mock resurrection (5.2.58; Mullaney, pp. 58–9).

While the Turkish soldiers are being cooked alive at their own banquet, Barabas hosts their leader Calymath along with Ferneze, Del Bosco, and the Knights of St John in his 'homely citadel'. This final feast is Barabas's literalization of the universal dream of the New Testament, where the sharing of food among Jewish and Gentile Christians is a key feature of the new fellowship in Christ (e.g., Gal. 2: 11–13). Barabas sets a table where Jews, Christians, and Muslims will eat together, abrogating the dietary laws that have kept both Jews and Muslims from the common table of the nations – but his plan, of course, is to drown the Turkish Selim in the soup pot in order to serve him to the Christian governor in exchange for a hefty tip. Moreover, his reward will be collected *from the citizens of Malta* (5.2.29) – from the very legal group that has excluded Barabas from its ranks based on his non-conversion.

The opposite will in fact occur: the bustling stage-engineer, 'very busy' on his 'dainty gallery', will be cooked in his own pot of soup, cursed by his own blessing, as he falls from the balcony into the inner stage below. This is the play's final rezoning. In a classic set of reversals, the bearer of bad soup is now stewed in his own cauldron, materializing the Hell's Mouth of sacred drama. The inner stage, once cast as the Jew's counting house, is now his coffin. This interior frame discloses our first and last visions of the Jew: from this box he issues, and to this box he shall return. Between these two tableaux, a series of typological remappings has occurred that reflect on the congregational space of the new public theatre. Insofar as Marlowe connects the libertine grounds of the theatre to the civil society of the Jews, the playwright begins to imagine a universe, or at least a *universitas*, a restricted sphere of limited autonomy engaged by a collectivity, in which social, artistic, and religious

experiment might take place in some degree of separation from state control and supervision. Marlowe's point is not that the artist, like the Jew, is the Other to the Self projected by a normative and exclusive political order, but rather, more generously and more broadly, that artists, like Jews, can recreate, reinhabit, and remap the civil spaces left over by the incomplete transformations and uncanny survivals of religious forms in modernity. As such, the play constitutes an invitation to think outside the box – the very box of traditional dramatic closure into which Barabas falls with such ferocious style – precisely by making its infinite space echo so deeply from within.

NOTES

1. Emily C. Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation, and Marlowe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 88–9.
2. Margaret Williams, *The Jews Among the Greeks and Romans: A Diasporan Sourcebook* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 27, 31; Godfrey Wettinger, *The Jews of Malta in the Late Middle Age* (Malta: Midsea Books, 1985), pp. 116–39.
3. Stephen Greenblatt, 'Marlowe, Marx, and Anti-Semitism' (1978), in Richard Wilson (ed.), *Christopher Marlowe* (Harlow: Longman, 1999), pp. 140–58.
4. On Marlowe and the morality tradition, see David Bevington, *From 'Mankinde' to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); Ruth Lunney, *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition: Innovation in the English Drama before 1595* (Manchester University Press, 2002).
5. On Marlowe and Machiavelli, see Cheney, *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood* (University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 136–56. On Machiavelli and the Renaissance political and literary imagination, see Wayne Rebhorn, *Foxes and Lions: Machiavelli's Confidence Men* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); and Victoria Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric: From the Counter-Reformation to Milton* (Princeton University Press, 1994).
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10. Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (University of Chicago Press, 1988).

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