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MARLOWE AND THE DRAMA OF PROTESTANT SOCIETY

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At first glance my title may appear oxymoronic and inappropriate. Sex and protestantism seem unlikely bedfellows, as strangely heterogeneous as the yoking together of England and summer or Britain and Europe! It might also appear that I wish to import a Calvinist dampness into our proceedings in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria—some might assume Protestantism's relation with sex is in denying its place and propriety. I assure you I wish to bring no such spirit into our proceedings.

We have recognised, since Foucault, that sexuality is a human construct, a cultural artefact which changes with time. Because of its popular character, the collaborative circumstances of its agency, and the scope of its concerns, Renaissance drama is an important repository of information for our understanding of early modern sexualities. Yet, it must also be remembered that dramatic representations were not seeking to record the cultural meanings of sexuality in unmediated and authentic manners, as though anticipating the needs of current historians for an archive of information on gender and its effects. How the drama represented sexuality reflects many things, including generic choice, specific historic circumstances, ideological choices in a world culturally far less hegemonic than we have often imagined, and the desires of audiences to witness exaggerations and differences from the everyday in plays whose representations they selectively chose to subscribe to. Further, we should also recall that the Renaissance plays which most interest us are not necessarily the plays which seem to have most interested contemporary audiences and that many Renaissance plays, including some of the most popular, are lost to us.

Representations of sexualities in Renaissance drama are various, particularly dependent of the generic contexts in which sexuality is displayed. Sexuality can be presented in plays in symbolic manner, frequently representing an uncertainty of proper government (domestic or the state). Sexuality is often associated with uncontrolled emotionalism, the dominance of figures by sensual appetites, usually seen as effeminate, against the controlled reasonableness of patriarchal order. In other plays, sexuality seems suggestively displayed in

order to arouse, indicating sexual availability under the guise of warnings against excess. In others again, it functions as satirical bawdy, often directed at the authorities who were seeking to regulate sexual behaviour. In still others, it marks out a compelling attraction to the marvellous (think of Theridamas in *Tamburlaine*), or indicates dangerous dispositions (for example Mother Sawyer and the devil as the dog Tom in *The Witch of Edmonton*). Only rarely does sexuality direct us towards interior psychology, a means of delineating individual identity among a play's characters.

The type of sexuality I term Protestant, which I wish to explore with Marlowe, can be illustrated through considering the ending of a later play, Middleton's and Rowley's *The Changeling*. At the conclusion, in Alsemero's uncovering of the activities of DeFlores and Beatrice-Joanna, we witness the convergence of a number of concepts- predestination, moral corruption, death, and sexual appetite. The scene climaxes with a reversal of a wedding ceremony- a compact, already sexually consummated, which has diabolical possibilities. It neatly counters Alsemero's meeting and musings on Beatrice as the image of purity in the temple at the play's opening, operating to reveal her and DeFlores as images of tainted infection. Their types are instantly recognisable to any reader of *The Faerie Queene* or Renaissance moral tracts. Apparently a figure of religious integrity, Beatrice is actually a deceiver, a white devil whose image conceals her destructive nature. DeFlores is the seemingly dutiful servant who is actually traitorous. Both are threats to stability in more righteous individuals, the family and even the state. Their resistance to order and government and their refusal to accept their assigned places in society encourage their unrestrained sexual desires. Murder leads to sex and sex to murder. What is interesting with *The Changeling*, though, is that these revelations culminate in a final display of sex and death which complicates the reversal of Beatrice from pure virgin to sexually active murderess as much as it heightens the dramatic intensity of Beatrice and DeFlores uncovering.

Having been accused of infidelity by Alsemero, Beatrice-Joanna tries to defend herself by revealing her arrangement with DeFlores in the murder of her betrothed, Alonzo de Piracquo, so she could wed Alsemero. She was forced to 'kiss poison and strok a serpent', ostensibly for Alsemero. He is outraged and orders her into his closet as his prisoner. DeFlores arrives, is confronted and confesses to Alsemero, revealing Beatrice's infidelities:

Alsemero: It could not choose but follow, oh cunning devils!
 How should blind men know you from fair-fac'd saints?
 Take your prey to you, get you in to her, sir
 I'll be your pander now; rehearse again

Your scene of lust, that you may be perfect
 When you shall come to act it to the black audience
 Where howls and gnashings shall be music to you.
 Clip your adult'ress freely,

The imagery obviously connects illicit sex with damnation. What is less usual is that Beatrice and DeFlores take up Alsemero's offer to rehearse this performance, a play within a play, which they will offer to the assembly. Using the privacy of the closet, Beatrice and DeFlores combine sex with death, the consuming nature of their passion leads to actual self-consumption.

Alsemero attempts to explain to Beatrice's father and the brother of the murdered Piracquo his discovery. Piracquo's brother is in his own high state of consuming passion.

Piracquo: Give me a brother alive or dead:
 Alive, a wife with him, if dead, for both
 a recompense, for murder and adultery.
 Beatrice: Oh, Oh, Oh!
 Alsemero: Hark 'tis coming to you.
 De Flores: Nay, I'll along for company.
 Beatrice: Oh, Oh!
 Vermandero: What horrid sounds are these?

What horrid sounds are they? Given Alsemero's arrangements, the initial possibility must be that they are the sounds of Beatrice and De Flores fucking. These orgiastic sounds are the literal equation of that Renaissance literary commonplace, death and orgasm. In coming out of the privacy of the closet, DeFlores and Beatrice reveal themselves mortally wounded by self-inflicted stabbings, a source of amazement to the witnesses. As she bleeds on the stage, Beatrice implores her father to keep his distance or she shall defile him. (It is worth recalling that women were formally re-introduced to the Church of England after supposedly being made unclean through childbirth- a woman's blood was a sign of sin). Beatrice develops this infected blood imagery, claiming that she is bad blood being purged from her father for his better health. She then muses on her fate:

Beneath the stars, upon yon meteor
 Ever hung my fate, 'mongst things corruptible;
 I ne'er could pluck it from him: my loathing
 Was prophet to the rest, but ne'er believ'd;
 Mine honour fell with him, and now my life.

Alsemero, I am a stranger to your bed,
Your bed was cozen'd on the nuptial night,
For which you false bride died...

DeFlores: Yes, and the while I coupled with your mate
At barley-brake; now we are left in hell.

Vermandero: We are all there, it circumscribes here.

DeFlores: I lov'd this woman in spite of her heart;
Her love I earn'd out of Piracquo's murder
...and her honour's prize
Was my reward; I thank life for nothing
But that pleasure: it was so sweet to me
That I have drunk it up all, left none behind
For any man to pledge me....

Make haste Joanna, by that token to thee:
Canst not forget, so lately put in mind,
I would not go to leave thee far behind.

Beatrice: Forgive me Alsemero, all forgive;
'Tis time to die, when 'tis a shame to live.

Calvin speaks of theatres of the world where humanity may be stunned, dazzled and blinded by the world's allurements which falsely promise grace and sweetness, an argument echoed in Alsemero's condemnation of devils who appear fair-faced saints to blind men. *The Changeling* is a play which demonstrates that appearances are deceptive and the world unknowable, but it also indicates a fatalism about destiny which hints at inevitabilities in humanity's fallen condition. The 'meteor' Beatrice sees her fate hung on concludes a series of images which suggest DeFlores as Satan, the fallen star Lucifer. Yet, DeFlores appears as much a victim of his sexual passions as he does the satanic exploiter of Beatrice. His remark that we are all left in hell, recalls another commonplace identification of hell with a woman's genitalia. The men can present themselves as victims of Beatrice's deceptions. Yet, rather than attribute culpability to the female, *The Changeling* proposes an inescapable quality about sexuality. Beatrice and DeFlores self-consumption provides, in its own terrible manner, a proper consummation of their relation, a fulfilment of their ungovernable longings. This is what particularly complicates the ending of *The Changeling*—the bloodiness, the destructiveness, the physicality of DeFlores and Beatrice's sexuality is satisfying to them. Just as the horror of Dante's *Inferno* is the recognition that the

places inhabited by the damned are the fulfilment of their desires, passions which are *contra natura* but desires all the same, so the deaths of DeFlores and Beatrice enact the true consummation of their passion. They discover their identities in their sexuality but those identities are apparently wholly outside their control. Rather than subjectivity, their self-discoveries confirm them as destined victims of the Fall. "I can exact no more" announces Piracquo after the deaths, "Unless my soul were loose, and could o'ertake / These black fugitives that are fled from thence, / To take a second vengeance; but there are wraths / Deeper than mine, 'tis to be fear'd, about 'em". A world governed by "deeper wraths" works its just vengeance on fallen humanity. Certainly, *The Changeling* offers nothing in the way of a cosy moral message to guard against emotional excess.

The idea of a Protestant drama is one which we are becoming ever more familiar with after the important work of the late Margot Heinemann on Middleton or, more recently, Julia Gaspar on Dekker. It is not a drama of easily observed theology, of course; nor is it the logical development of the Protestant morality plays which found favour with the early English reformers. A supernatural organisation of the world which saw constant attempts by the forces of the Antichrist to challenge the godly and the majority of humanity necessarily damned, however, found cultural expression in plays which explore the implications of these conditions. The nature of Protestant tragedy is perhaps neatly summarised by Beatrice: "my loathing / Was prophet to the rest, but ne'er believ'd". Even those who count themselves among the godly may find themselves damned, their apparent revulsion against the illicit no more than an indication of the desires proper to their condition which they refuse to credit.

II

I do not have the space, nor frankly the inclination, to present a lengthy case for viewing Christopher Marlowe as a Protestant dramatist. The old charge of Marlowe being an atheist, which largely arises from statements made by Richard Baines and Thomas Kyd against him, or from the discovery of supposedly heretical books in Marlowe's rooms, is effectively libel based on innuendos. There is far too much which is coerced about all this supposed evidence, both in its Elizabethan origins and in its later interpretations by modern critics anxious to find an exciting subject for their biographies. Kyd's and Baines's charges occurred after Marlowe's death and there was apparently a wish by some of the authorities to discredit Marlowe. The English Church was pursuing heretical opinions (mostly extreme Protestant ones) and was no lover of the theatre in the 1590s. A chance to attack a popular but conveniently

deceased playwright may have seemed a good idea, but this is only speculation. We do know that Marlowe was involved in activities directed against Catholics and worked for the ultra-Protestant secret service. Whether from conviction or not is again a matter of speculation.

In many respects, however, the shadowy biography of Marlowe is not pressing when we turn to the question of Marlowe's authorship of the plays which bear his name. Certainly, he was behind them all at some stage but most, if not all, have been substantially altered in printed versions. I view Marlowe's drama as more accurately representing a collection of plays which reflect collaborative constructions not the product of a single author, even though Christopher Marlowe was the first agent in their creation. Looking at the plays, it is possible to see distinctive Protestant endeavours in their ideological visions. At least one of them, *The Massacre at Paris*, is a piece of pure Protestant propaganda.

The Changeling's suggestion that we are in hell, seems to echo Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. I would like to consider another Marlowe play, though, *Edward II*, which also reaches a dramatic culmination in a death which combines sex and violence. Like *The Changeling*, Marlowe's play is a study in deceptions intimately combined with sexuality, and like Middleton and Rowley's piece it offers no easy resolution to the dilemmas it poses. It, too, posits a determined pattern to events which are inescapable and it is a pattern which offers no ready solace to its audiences. Far more than *The Changeling*, *Edward II* demonstrates an unknowable world where all forms of relationships are insecure and uncertain, a drama which questions the audience's ability to determine what is lawful, moral, natural. Importantly, it represents its designs through sexuality.

The death of Edward is a reversal of the play's opening with its polarisation between Gaveston's promises of sensual excess as his means of maintaining Edward's affection and the barons disgust at Gaveston's rising position within the court. Our first encounter with Gaveston is suspicious. He makes it clear he uses a language of flattery and is a dissembler. He offers us a vision of how he:

May draw the pliant king which way I please:
 Music and poetry is his delight;
 Therefore I'll have Italian masques by night
 Sweet speeches, comedies and pleasing shows;
 And in the day, when he shall walk abroad;
 Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad;
 My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns,
 Shall with their goat-feet dance an antic hay;

Sometimes a lovely boy in Dian's shape
 With hair that gilds the water as it glides,
 Crownets of pear about his naked arms,
 And in his sportful hands an olive-tree,
 To hide those parts which men delight to see,
 Shall bathe him in a spring; and there, hard by,
 One like Actaeon, peeping through the grove
 Shall by the angry goddess be transform'd
 And running in the likeness of an hart,
 By yelping hounds pull'd down and seem to die:
 Such things as these best please his majesty.

The transformation of Diana into a boy is a sexual transformation and also a convolution of Elizabeth's adoption of Diana imagery to emphasise her chastity. Diana, as the virgin goddess of hunt, punishes Acteon for accidentally glimpsing her naked. In Gaveston's vision, the boyish Diana plays at titillating his viewers, and he translates an episode of pathos and human tragedy in Ovid into a voyeuristic fantasy of sex and death.

Gaveston's speech, with its echoes of Suetonius's descriptions of Tiberius's sexual adventures on Capri, appears to support two of the issues the barons bitterly denounce in his relationship with the king. First, that in their love of diversions and pageantry, Edward and Gaveston drain the exchequer. Second, that Gaveston promotes a foreign and decadent aesthetic in the English court. The barons' other, and most significant, accusation is that Gaveston is basely born and has no right to gain high office. In an exchange between the Mortimers after Gaveston, Edward and the nobles have been momentarily reconciled, it is proposed that it is not the sexual frolics between Edward and Gaveston which are troublesome. Mortimer Senior argues that the king is by nature "mild and calm" and should be allowed to dote on Gaveston as his minion, citing a number of classical precedents:

Then let his grace, whose youth is flexible,
 And promiseth as much as we can wish,
 Freely enjoy that vain light-headed earl,
 For ripper years will wean him from such toys.

The senior Mortimer marks out a socially acceptable way of viewing Gaveston and Edward's relation, one in which sexuality is not a corrupting influence but an amusement. Edward's actions, which might be viewed as revealing effeminate indecision and emotional dotage in other contexts, are ascribed to his youth. The promise of Edward which Mortimer indicates is ambiguous, but it suggests

Mortimer Senior does not view Gaveston's and Edward's relation to Elizabethan understanding, as unmanning, and, corrupting Edward.

Mortimer junior agrees that Edward's "wanton humour" is not troublesome. His dismay at Gaveston and Edward, he claims, is motivated by national needs mixed with a repulsion at Gaveston's importation of foreign courtly behaviour, particularly because Gaveston is of lowly origins. Mortimer's difficulty with Gaveston is a fear that the state's structures of power are being re-arranged. Gaveston's use of shows and foreign manners to gain control of the king is against a courtliness based on landed might and inherited privilege promoted by the nobles. Gaveston's imported courtliness is one Mortimer has no tolerance of:

I scorn, that one so basely born
Should by his sovereign's favours grow so pert,
And riot it with the treasure of the realm,
While soldiers mutiny for want of pay.
He wears a lord's revenue on his back,
And, Midas-like, he jets it in the court
With base outlandish cullions at his heels,
Whose proud fantastic liveries make such show
As if that Proteus, god of shapes, appear'd.
I have not seen a dapper Jack so brisk.
He wears a short Italian hooded cloak,
Larded with pearl, and in his Tuscan cap
A jewel of more value than the crown.
Whiles other walk below, the king and he
From out a window laugh at such as we,
And flout our train, and jest at our attire
Uncle, 'tis this that makes me impatient.

One of the principle preoccupations of Protestant drama was its representations of abroad. While a playwright such as Dekker argued for a pan-European Protestant movement, a more common characteristic of Protestant polemic at this time is distinguishing between a morally and religiously corrupted southern Europe and a godly England. As Patrick Collinson has demonstrated, the belief that God was English and that the English were an elect nation was a common theme in Elizabethan pulpit oratory. Despite some gesturing at Protestant universalism, the exclusive nature of the Calvinist covenant and principles of election tended to restrict the divine plan of salvation to the English in popular Protestant tracts.

Commentators have largely tended to interpret Renaissance drama as though the foreign merely stands in for England, a disguise in order to address

subjects it would be difficult politically to broach in an English setting. It is not clear that this was how contemporaries interpreted the foreign in plays. John Reynold's *God's Revenge Against Murder* which is a main source for *The Changeling* has various asides against Roman Catholic practices in his account of Alsemero and Beatrice which pointedly suggests that the corruptions exhibited are not surprising given the characters' religion. The courting of Beatrice in a church by Alsemero turns the temple into a stew, a: "sinfull custom... especially in Italy and Spaine, where, for the most part, men love their courtizans better then their God". George Whetstone's *The English Myrror* which was Marlowe's main source of information on Tamburlaine, is an unashamed piece of Protestant religio-nationalism, contrasting an England ostensibly free from the ravages of envy with foreign instances of destructive vices. Such contrasts can be mere conveniences in such texts, which devote their ennergies to detailed description of how wonderfully and excitingly vicious foreign things are-elaborations which clearly found favour with their readers given the number of editions of these texts and the widespread use of the convention. The exaggerated exoticism of foreign practices was popular and these accounts seem to have been enjoyed for their otherness. Similar conventions apply to the popular theatre but this appears rarely recognised critically. *The Jew of Malta* seem to provoke a bizarre ecumenicalism among many critics who consider 'the Christians' in the play, apparently so that an English audience can be somehow included in its moral culpabilities. In fact, *The Jew of Malta* quite clearly singles out the commonly imagined excesses and hypocrisies of Roman Catholic practices, with a predictable swipe at Spain, along with its depictions of Turk and Jew. *Doctor Faustus* is, in many respects, a travel play and shares similarities with imaginary voyage narratives. I doubt whether audiences imagined they were witnessing themselves.

As we have seen, the question of foreignness is important to *Edward II* and certainly helps illuminate the play's Protestant sympathies. The play opens with Gaveston dismissing a poor soldier to the hospitals he claims exist for such as him. Mortimer's anger that soldiers mutiny for lack of pay while Gaveston lives extravagantly re-directs our attention to this idea. The problem of former soldiers in the London of the early 1590s was an acute one it a period of high unemployment. There was the fear of them as masterless and often criminal but also scandal that they were so badly treated, particularly because most had fought in Protestant causes against Spain. At the same time, the late 1580s and early 1590s had produced huge tensions over immigration in London, where aliens were frequently blamed for economic difficulties and the apprentices constantly threatened violence against foreigners as a means of having the

authorities address their grievances. The London in which *Edward II* was first acted was going through one of its periodic bouts of xenophobia. It is worth recalling that Thomas Kyd was arrested on suspicion of writing a public libel against foreigners which had been signed Tamerlane. Thus, Gaveston's and Edward's desire for foreign manifestations of sensuality and their extravagances which leads to the reported economic wants in the country would not have been calculated to endear them to a London audience of the mid 1590s. Mortimer's defence of native plainness appears patriotic in this context.

Sexuality plays an important part in the construction of the foreign because illicit sexuality, particularly homosexuality, was commonly perceived as more prevalent in ungodly places. In law, sodomy was an unnatural practice punishable by death. Yet sodomy does not seem to have been viewed as widespread or culturally subversive when it was clearly only associated with a sexual act. As Bruce Smitt observes, in the forty-five years of Elizabeth's and James's reigns there are records of only six men being indicted only on the charge of sodomy in the home counties and only one conviction. In contrast, sodomy was a common accompanying charge for Roman Catholics or others arrested and condemned for anti-state activities. The Henrican convention of seeing sodomy in terms of heresy seems to have remained largely in place. In this context, sodomy was feared because it indicated the intrusion of diabolical treachery into the midst of the godly.

Importantly, therefore, sodomy does not appear to have been automatically equated with other forms of homosocial and even homosexual behaviour. Categories for defining sexualities were organised in importantly different ways from the modern. Where we commonly classify all forms of same-sex activities as registering sexual desires, this does not appear to have been the case with the early modern period. Sharing a bed with another man to gain privacy for study and conversation could be presented as indicating a healthy manly friendship. Ascham's well known account of reading through Cicero tract on friendship, *De Amicitia*, while in bed with a young man named John Witney is a telling example. As Alan Stewart has demonstrated, part of Ascham's strategy in relating this episode is to absolve him of complicity in the treason of his patron Thomas Seymour. Ascham develops a motif of seclusion from the world for master and pupil, their privacy signalling their innocence from worldly vice.

In contrast, where accusations of sodomy were made against those involved in political or religious treasons, the intimacies of the accused indicate his corruption of all social norms. It was felt to be necessary to display condemned traitors as thoroughly infectious to the state in every aspect of their life-styles. As

a result, sexual practices were readily equated with religious questions and, significantly, evidence of illicit sexual practice did not need to be actually proved among those found guilty of treachery or heresy. Establishing guilt in political actions confirmed illicit sexuality and allowed the popular imagination to develop an expectation of treachery being accompanied by sexual corruptions. The drama's representations of proscribed sexual practices as signifying ungodly activities against the state were well supported in pulpit and law court. Edward dies in the play through a terrible parody of sodomy. A red-hot spit is pushed up his rectum while he is pressed between a feather bed and a table, the actions being devised so that no marks will appear on his body. Given Edward's relation with Gaveston, there might be a temptation to witness this terrible death as having a type of biblical propriety about it, like Beatrice and DeFlores a consummation of unnatural desires. This is, however, to ignore the reversals which take place in the play. By Edward's death, the entire weight of illicit sexuality has shifted from the king and his minions to Mortimer and Isabella. In our discovery of Mortimer's and Isabella's rebellious adultery against husband, monarchy and state there is the revelation of their deceptiveness. The positions of honour, of loyalty, of social order they claimed to uphold at the play's start are revealed to have been false, part of their attempts to gain control and power of the realm. At the point of Edward's death, it is Mortimer and Isabella who have demonstrated themselves as the usurpers of the kingdom, the true abusers of social, political and moral orders.

It is, of course, Mortimer who commands the death of Edward and it is he who is ultimately responsible for the murderous act of sodomy against him. There is a wonderful and yet unsettling irony here. Mortimer does not know how Edward will die. His actions are done by the hired murderer Lightborn who reveals that his devious methods of killing people were learned in Naples, showing Mortimer as an importer of ugly foreign practices into the realm. When Mortimer asks him what his method in killing Edward will be, Lightborn refuses to divulge his trade secrets. Yet, Mortimer's unknown and grisly sodomy of Edward culminates his unnatural usurpations upon the kingdom. The ostensibly native patriot, fiercely desirous to maintain the status quo and dismissive of Gaveston's baseness and foreignness, becomes the figure, far more than any other in the play, who assumes a role above his station and does so through embracing both unnatural sex and foreignness. Although unplanned, the act of murderous ritualised sodomy against Edward is the logical conclusion of Mortimer's designs. Mortimer, the fiercest opponent of Gaveston is revealed as perpetrating the deceptions, corruptions and sodomies he claimed to be passionately opposing. Like Beatrice in *The Changeling*, his loathing is shown to be prophet to the rest.

Mortimer's position in seeking power would be untenable without Isabella. As the sister to the king of France, Isabella is a foreigner, though she appears to attempt reconciliation among the English in the early part of the play. She constantly claims accusations of infidelities made against her are false and the early scenes appear to support her eloquent testimony of love for Edward. By the play's conclusion, Isabella's word has been wholly discredited, considerable energy being expended in demonstrating her capacities for deception. In the last act, in the space of a hundred lines, Isabella offers a variety of different faces to different figures. She swears her affection for Mortimer and proposes he should do against Edward 'what thou wilt, and I myself will willingly subscribe', she then publicly grieves over Edward's condition, next she rejoices at the news of Edward's resignation of the crown, then she expresses her desire to have Edward dead, she then goes on to announce that she is labouring to ease Edward's grief and gain his freedom, and finally she states her sorrow at the news of Edward's resignation. In case the audience misses the duplicity in her protean dispositions, Mortimer and Edmund have asides which point out her dissembling. As Edmund the duped brother of Edward realises, 'Mortimer / and Isabel do kiss, while they conspire. / And yet she bearr a face of love'.

Isabella's capacity for deception creates an important link with Marlowe's most obvious Protestant play, the propagandist *The Massacre at Paris*. The central scenes of this play depict in bloody detail the St. Bartholmew's day massacre of Huguenot Protestants by the Catholic faction led by the Duke of Guise. Guise has been the character accorded most critical attention, but I would like to briefly consider the part of the Duke of Anjou, afterwards Henry III. We witness Anjou joyfully taking part in the Protestant murders, himself killing Ramus. Yet within a few lines he is protesting his innocence to Henry of Navarre: 'I have done what I have done to stay this broil'. By the play's end we apparently have another reversal. Henry, mortally wounded by a friar from the Guise faction, concludes his life with a strongly anti-papist speech addressed to Henry of Navarre and the English agent who will carry word to Elizabeth:

Navarre, give me thy hand: I here do swear,
To rinate that wicked Church of Rome,
That hatcheth up such bloody practices;
And here protest eternal love to thee,
And to the Queen of England specially,
What God hath bless'd for hating papistry.

Stirring language, but given Anjou's actions earlier in the play how far to be believed? It should be remembered that the closest Elizabeth came to marriage was with the brother of Henry III, François, who had become Duke of Anjou- a

marriage much opposed by more militant Protestant in England because of their fears of Catholic influence. The marriage arrangements had long been cancelled by the time of Marlowe's play, but his Protestantism appears to have held a particular mistrust of France and Isabella's capacity for deception fits a national characteristic exhibited in *The Massacre at Paris*.

Isabella's attempt to deceive through feigning love for Edward re-appears even in the play's closing moments as she attempts to save herself. Given this ability to assume false roles and present herself as dutiful wife when in fact adulterously involved with Mortimer, Edward's early dismissals of Isabella during the play must be open to reappraisal by its end. What seemed unwarranted and hostile rejections gain political credibility.

Edward the Second, therefore, is calculated to frustrate attempts to categorise it as a play about the ruler's need to keep a tight check on his appetites if proper balances in the nation's orders are to be maintained. Actions and language, and the gap between them reveal deception and counter-deceptions. Edward's passionate espousal of Gaveston as the man who 'loves me more than all the world' which at first appears based simply on emotional attraction increasingly takes on political overtones. Gaveston and his replacements Spencer and Baldock remain loyal to Edward, even though their loyalties have been in some way purchased. The appearance on the stage of Old Spencer marks a significant shift in the play. Old Spencer and his band of quintessential English soldiery –bowmen, pikes, brown bills and targetters– 'Sworn to defend King Edward' royal right 'undermines the barons' claims to represent the nation. Old Spencer's and his men's loyalties to Edward come from the king's advancement of his son. They are 'bound to your highness everlastingly / For favours done, in him, unto us all'. This is precisely the traditional organisation of power vested in the monarch's granting of licenses and favours which the barons claim exclusively for themselves. The play increasingly recasts Edward's actions so as to make them seem designs to assert his own power by re-figuring existing orders and less the consequences of uncontrollable emotions. Interesting, the social historian Mervyn James has shown that it was just such traditional constructions of duties and allegiances which were under pressure in late sixteenth-century England, while Alan Bray has recently shown how the rhetoric of friendship points to 'that network of influential patrons, of their clients and suitors and friends at court which were [the] subtle bonds of early modern society'. With the arrival of Old Spencer, Edward's faction becomes popularist, native and decisive in action while the Queen and the barons now appear usurpatious, self-seeking, and deceptive.

Sexuality in the play is, thus, intimately tied to political manoeuvring and the uncovering of deception against the nation. It indicates an important feature about Marlowe's drama of Protestant sexuality, its representations are organised to reveal social and political conditions, not psychologies. To view these depictions of sexualities as demonstrations of individual subjectivities is to miss their dramatic use, this organisation of sexuality does not propose the illusion of realism. To suggest Edward is fickle or has some pathological dependency on his minions because he seems to forget Gaveston immediately and transfers his affections to the younger Spencer is to seek for a psychological causation alien to these characters. They are emblematic figures, not in some simple and crude sense, rather in keeping with the idea that identity is linked to determined roles, partly socially formed, but also resulting from a belief that set patterns of actions are necessarily imposed on a fallen humanity by the justice of our creator.

It is crucial to the play's revelation of Mortimer that he is the source of murderous sodomy, but it is also important that he is unaware of the ritualised buggery he is responsible for. The action eschews attempts to imagine Mortimer as homophobic because of his own repressed homosexuality. Rather it demonstrates a fatalistic irony in his perpetration of what he ostensibly stands opposed to, a telling representation of Mortimer's unnatural rebellion against his sovereign. *Edward II* manoeuvres its audience initially to imagine deviance where it was not and then finally exposes it to be located among those who claim to seek to repress it.

We have to be careful, therefore, in assessing sexuality in the play. To call *Edward II* specifically misogynist because of its dealings with Isabella may be to accord Isabella a greater sense of realism than she possesses. As I have argued, Isabella's infidelities signal her deceptive and dangerous qualities as a foreigner in the English state subtly working for its overthrow. Her sexual unfaithfulness to Edward is the telling indication of her lack of loyalty and obedience, a sign of her treachery whose political manifestation is finally revealed. I do not read her actions as demonstrating the emotionally ungovernable woman of Renaissance domestic tragedy who, like Anne Frankford in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, is happy to jump into bed at the first seductive offer. Isabella's organised dissembling is much more careful and diabolical. The play, however, may be seen as sharing a widespread cultural misogyny in its proposal that a woman may be the most dangerous corrupter because the most able dissembler. Even in this context, though, I think Isabella foreignness is as significant as her gender. In a play where Gaveston, initially the apparent seducer of the state through his exotic enticements of Edward, dies more innocent of treachery than others, it is

dramatically balanced that Isabella, initially the apparent victim, should end the play's greatest criminal.

Through our critical desires to indicate continuities in early modern writing with our own cultural environment, we have too frequently allowed teleologies to exhibit themselves. While, of course, we recognise early modern differences, there is a frequent critical slippage in which current cultural frameworks are too readily used to make sense of Renaissance writing or other artefacts. The twentieth century has largely taken sexual desire as a point of departure for a discovery of personal identity and there has been a tendency to seek out earlier texts which offer some early stirrings of sexuality as subjectivity.

I have argued with *Edward II* that a different dramatic manifestation of sexuality is exhibited. *Edward II* is a difficult play because it resolves so little. The structure through which it reveals deceptions at all levels and among virtually all characters is carefully calculated to undermine an audience's capacity to interpret actions, leaving confusion- an insecurity with existing categories, including literary generic patterns, through which events are normally understood. The play certainly does not present cases of villains becoming heroes and heroes villains. In revealing Mortimer's and Isabella's usurpatious and illicit sex, Gaveston's manipulations of Edward's emotions may appear far less treacherous but they are not celebrated. Instead, the play seems concerned to demonstrate the capacity for deceit and corruption, one which I see tied to Protestant anxieties about deceptions both abroad and at home, and which also reflects the potentials for self-delusion apparent in a cultural framework which asserted predestination. In this respect, Marlowe's play seems interestingly linked to Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, another text where sexuality and Protestantism significantly figure together. Like Spenser, Marlowe's characters reveal a world filled with traps and deceits, which all seem to be constantly prey to. If *Edward II* has a message, it is clearly not to accept appearances and words at face value. But the play, like *The Changeling*, presents a dark vision of human ability to know, or control, self and the world. Mortimer's final speech proposes fate linked to a secular wheel of fortune. I would suggest the play hints at a determinism which stems from a Protestant version of struggle between the old foe and the godly and the deeper wraths which govern the world. In *The Changeling's* assertion that we are all in hell, there is, as we have seen, a proposal that sex confirms this fallen state. Alsemero sends Beatrice and DeFlores into his closet so they can rehearse their lust before they 'act it to the black audience', by which Alsemero means the damned. He then finds, in their unexpected performance, that he is part of that audience. As the audience of *Edward II* witness a ritual sodomy in the murder

of an English king in the mire of a dungeon and the apparent triumph of the two arch-deceivers, it is hard to resist the sense that England, too, has become hell.

TRAGEDY AND SHARED-GUILT: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO *OTHELLO* AND *EL PINTOR DE SU DESHONRA*

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The existence of a clear-cut definition of what we should understand by "tragedy" has traditionally convinced many readers and scholars of the inadequacy of considering Calderón's plays, especially his **dramas de honor**, as tragedies. "Honour" has been taken to be, up to the sixties, an especially inappropriate subject for a tragedy, and thus, by virtue of the confusion between *theme and meaning*, plays such as *El pintor de su deshonra* have been denied the status of tragedy. Following Alexander Parker in *La imaginación y el arte de Calderón*¹, when I speak of Calderón's concept of tragedy, I don't refer to "una serie de normas formales, sino a la perspicacia en cuanto a los problemas del sufrimiento y el mal que un gran dramaturgo aporta en su exploración de la experiencia humana"². Parker states the main structural elements that we can find in Calderón's **comedias** and, among others, he comments upon the unreality of the characters and the tragic components in the theme and the form. My point here is that, through an analysis of Calderón's *El pintor de su deshonra*³ and Shakespeare's well known tragedy *Othello*⁴, regardless of formal norms, we can find elements that invite us to admit that there is a coincidence between both plays. If, in *Othello*, being a tragedy according to the traditional standards, we discover a common element with Calderón's play, and this element is among those so relevant to the definition of tragedy as *guilt*, then we have both an unexpected similarity (a starting point for a fuller comparative study) and an interesting criterion for the study of both texts. Modern theory has already established that the tragic hero doesn't have to cause his own downfall: we accept the existence of a primal injustice "in the heart of the Universe" (as Parker put it); the sense of injustice that we can find in Calderonian tragedy has more to do with some sort of *shared-guilt* than with the classical focusing on the hero.

1 Parker, Alexander A. *La imaginación y el arte de Calderón*. Madrid: Cátedra, 1991.

2 Cf. A. Parker, p. 247.

3 Calderón, Pedro. *El pintor de su deshonra en Obras completas*. Vol. ii. Madrid: Aguilar, 1991.
All references to this edition.

4 Shakespeare, William, *Othello*. London: Penguin, 1968 (1st ed.). All references to this edition.