Christopher Marlowe and Religion

HOPKINS, Lisa <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9512-0926>

Christopher Marlowe and Religion

Christopher Marlowe was born into circumstances which promised firmly for religious orthodoxy. The marriage of his parents and the baptisms and burials of their children are recorded in due form, and John Marlowe, unlike the father of Marlowe's exact contemporary Shakespeare, is not to be found being fined for non-attendance at church. The young Marlowe attended the King's School, Canterbury, in the very shadow of Canterbury Cathedral, where the Primate of England had his seat, and later attended Cambridge on the strength of a scholarship established by a former Archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker, which was expressly intended to be held by those proceeding to holy orders. Yet despite such auspicious-seeming beginnings, my very title of 'Christopher Marlowe and Religion' might well seem to be virtually an oxymoron, coupling two things which have nothing in common with each other, for to many of his contemporaries Marlowe was associated not with religion but, publicly and repeatedly, with irreligion. In this essay, I shall first suggest a possible reason why a man apparently initially destined for the church ended his life as a playwright and poet, then examine some of the various represenations of religion in his works, and finally attempt to trace some of the effect these had on his contemporaries.

During Marlowe's lifetime, the first English ship sailed for Virginia and Thomas Hariot, whom Marlowe may well have known, began the first recorded attempt to learn some of the language of the Native Americans and enter into their ways of thinking. All Marlowe's major works can be seen as responding in one way or another to this dramatic moment of change, because all are in effect first contact narratives. His two great poems, *Hero and Leander* and 'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love', both focus on love, capturing the moment when one person first fully registers and reaches out for the elusive subjectivity of

another. His plays are certainly more various, and yet they can, I think, be seen as united by this common element. In what may have been the earliest of them, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, we see the first encounter between the dying civilisation of Troy and the still-thriving one of Libya, and Marlowe's audience knew well that it would be from this fateful meeting, which furnishes Aeneas with ships and wherewithal to renew his voyage, that the Roman and ultimately, according to legend, the British empires would eventually be born. In *Tamburlaine the Great*, successive groups of people with conventional abilities and aspirations find themselves initially baffled and ultimately destroyed by a species of superman, who thinks and acts on an entirely different scale and is subject to few if any of the doubts and emotions that we generally consider as human. In *Doctor Faustus*, man meets devil; in *The Jew of Malta*, Christians, Jews and Muslims are forced by the confines of a tiny Mediterranean island into closer contact than any of them wishes; in *The Massacre at Paris*, Catholics and Huguenots encounter each other at increasingly close quarters in the charged context of a marriage between members of the two different persuasions; and in *Edward II* men who define themselves as normal, in both sexual and political terms, face men whom they define as absolutely and abhorrently abnormal.

In all these cases, the audience watches, wonders, and will almost invariably find something to respond to in both of the opposing parties. The barons may be right that Edward is politically irresponsible, but it is surely impossible to ignore the passion of his relationship with Gaveston, or to watch unmoved his suffering at the end. The prince of darkness is a gentleman; the demonised Muslim keeps his word and the despised Jewess is guided wholly by love; Tamburlaine is at least briefly humanised by his love for Zenocrate, and even the Guise may claim our understanding when he is shown as a cuckold. Though it might be a stretch to call Marlowe a balanced writer, he is at least one who knows how to create and use

a certain distance of viewpoint, and this is a point to which I shall return when considering the extent to which his work intervened in debates about religion.

First, though, what of my initial claim that all or any of this should be seen as in some sense conditioned by Virginia, Roanoke or Hariot? Here, external rather than internal evidence is needed, and it must be conceded at the beginning that is it external evidence of a not wholly reliable kind. Either very shortly before or very shortly after Marlowe's death, an erstwhile acquaintance of his named Richard Baines submitted a 'Note' to the authorities on 'the opinion of one Christopher Marly Concerning his Damnable Judgment of Religion, and scorn of gods word' in which he detailed several of Marlowe's supposedly heretical opinions. The first and second of these were 'That the Indians, and many authors of antiquity, have assuredly written of above 16 thousand years agone, wheras Adam is proved to have lived within six thousand years' and 'He affirmeth that Moses was but a juggler, and that one Heriots being Sir Walter Raleigh's man can do more than he'. This is a very suggestive collocation. For some, the discovery of America had in itself been enough to shake their faith, since it clearly revealed the existence of things not mentioned in the Bible; for Marlowe, the mechanism is more specific. Marlowe, according to Baines, knows Hariot, and he also has access to information about the beliefs of Indians which directly challenges Christian scripture; between them, Hariot's skills and the Indians' and ancients' traditions have fatally undermined whatever belief Marlowe may once have had in the teachings of the established church, so that 'one Richard Cholmley hath confessed that he was persuaded by Marlowe's reasons to become an atheist'.[1]

There are of course reasons why we might want to be sceptical about what Baines says, in that there was a history of bad blood between him and Marlowe and that Roy Kendall has

suggested that the 'Marlowe' whom Baines constructs is in fact a mirror-image of Baines himself rather than a testimony to independent and unbiased observation.[2] Nevertheless, it is worth noting that we do have independent evidence of the existence of actual Indians whom Marlowe could in fact have spoken to, for Hariot brought two, whom he named Manteo and Wanchese, back with him from Roanoke.[3] For Donne, 'the new philosophy' produced by geographical and scientific discourse 'calls all in doubt': in Marlowe's apparent response to the very different perspectives of 'Indians', we seem almost to catch a glimpse of that in process.

In a sense, it does not even matter whether Baines' account is true or not, for what was unquestionably the case is that Marlowe's contemporaries found it credible. With the possible exception of Machiavelli, no other sixteenth-century figure had so securely established a reputation for atheism as Marlowe did. Although atheism itself could be a slightly nebulous concept, being sometimes used as little better than a catch-all insult and one which many Protestants were, however perversely, particularly fond of applying to Catholics, the one thing that was certain was that Marlowe was its poster boy. It was the general impression that he didn't believe, or at least that he didn't believe as other men did. In this respect there is a certain appropriateness to the otherwise lamentable textual state of so many of his works: *Doctor Faustus* exists in two different versions; *The Massacre at Paris* and *The Jew of Malta* both show signs of having been garbled or damaged in transmission; *Hero and Leander* is probably unfinished; *Tamburlaine the Great* apparently had scenes removed by the printer; our understanding of *Dido, Queen of Carthage* is troubled by the difficult question of whether and if so what Thomas Nashe contributed to it; and even *Edward II*, which we can be reasonably confident exists in the form in which Marlowe wrote it, may have been inflected by the non-availability of Edward Alleyn, who had played the lead in

Marlowe's previous plays and whose absence may have led him to rethink his usual preference for a massively dominant central character. The fact that we cannot in any of these cases feel fully confident about Marlowe's original design can paradoxically be seen as having in some sense acted as a liberating factor in the cases of at least some of these works: thus Leah Marcus has argued that *Doctor Faustus* in particular owes at least some of its textual instability to the fact that successive productions of the play experimented with and updated it in ways which directly reflected on very specific religious controversies and on changes to the dominant theology of the Church of England.[4] The combination of the literal death of the author and of the innate power of the play seems in this respect to have proved a particularly enabling one, making the drama malleable and allowing it to continue to generate maximum charge. The negative concomitant of this is that it is never easy to be sure what exactly Marlowe is saying about religion, because his work may have been changed after his death and because his meanings may in any case have been so dangerous that they had to be mediated and disguised even in their original forms. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that all of his works in one form or other spoke to their original audiences about religion, and that they spoke loudly, powerfully, and potentially dangerously about it.

In both what may have been his first work, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, and what was probably his last, *Hero and Leander*, the focus is on classical mythology. Although this was no longer an active belief system, it was one which the Elizabethan education system made extremely familiar and one too whose image benefited from the prestige which accrued to virtually all aspects of classical civilisation. It is a recurrent presence in all Marlowe's works, but it is in *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and *Hero and Leander* that it is put under the closest scrutiny and pressure, and this is done in ways which make it possible to read implied strictures on classical religion as potentially applicable to Christian religion too, for the aspects on which

Marlowe homes in most closely are the idea of a father god and the relationship between religious belief and personal morality. *Dido, Queen of Carthage* opens with a very striking image of a god, Jupiter, who is defined primarily by his interactions with both an actual though unrelated child and his adult daughter. In the first part of the scene, we see Jupiter ruthlessly exploiting his position to buy the sexual favours of a young boy; in the second, we see him having to be nagged and badgered into taking an interest in the affairs of his daughter and her son, who is in distress and danger. Both spectacles are wholly unedifying and collectively present a picture of a deity governed solely by self-interest and consulting only his own inclinations and convenience. In the case of *Hero and Leander*, a crystal floor holds up the actions of the gods as in a mirror, and what it shows is them 'Committing heady riots, incests, rapes'.[5] These speak less of any concept of man made in the image of god and far more of one of gods made in the image of man, with all the inherent flaws and limitations implicit in the human condition, and the effect of the behaviour of these deities on their followers is predictably debilitating: belief in such beings has nothing ennobling or inspiring about it.

In these two cases, the subversive force of such representations is muted by the fact that no one among Marlowe's audience or readership was required to believe in the deities presented and referred to. The picture is very different when it comes to the play which probably followed *Dido, Tamburlaine the Great*. Here we meet representations of two religions, Islam and Christianity, the latter being dragged more or less kicking and screaming into the plot through a bit of chronological sleight-of-hand on Marlowe's part when he borrows material from a sequence of events which in fact took place well after the lifetime of the historical Tamburlaine. Marlowe's treatment of both is characteristically irreverent and provocative. The Christian king breaks the oath he swears by Christ and is killed as a result. The Muslim

Tamburlaine, by contrast, goes from strength to strength until he burns a copy of the Qu'ran, and dies. The text does not articulate a connection between these two events, but it is clearly possible for the audience to infer one, and to speculate on what it might mean. Perhaps the church was right after all and there is indeed an omnipotent, all-seeing God, only it is Allah? The suggestion that Islam, a religion feared and hated in Elizabethan England, might be the one true faith would have been virtually unthinkable to an Englishman of the late 1580s, and yet Marlowe might just have been the one man able and willing to think it. Perhaps, though, there is another possibility. In a production of the play at the Barbican Centre, London, in 2005, David Farr attracted considerable press attention when he changed the text so that Tamburlaine no longer burnt the Qu'ran but some unspecified holy books. In the face of media accusations that he was kow-towing to a misplaced notion of political correctness, Farr replied that actually he felt that Marlowe would have chosen to burn the Bible if he had thought that he could have got away with it, and that the Qu'ran had been chosen as a convenient substitute rather than as a way of making any kind of point about Islam.[6] The idea is an interesting one in its own right, and also entails the possiblity that if the Qu'ran might just as well be the Bible, then the god who seems to avenge its burning might just as well be the Christian one. But then it is also possible that Tamburlaine's death is not directly attributable to the book-burning at all: his sudden illness might be food poisoning, or illness of some other sort, as the attendant physician suggests when he attributes it to a humoral imbalance. As so often in Marlowe, we do not know what to think, but then we had already been forewarned by the Prologue, which exhorts the audience to 'judge [Tamburlaine's] fortunes as you please',[7] that we should be ready to expect more questions than answers.

We are given even less guidance in *Doctor Faustus*, the play which probably followed immediately after *Tamburlaine the Great*, because there we cannot even be sure which text

we ought to read. In this respect, what is generally recognised as Marlowe's greatest play is also his most baffling. But Goethe's view of it was 'How greatly is it all planned!', and that is absolutely right: however imprecise the detail, the overall shape of the story is clear, and what it shows us is a man who turns from God to the devil and finds that once he has stepped off the path of righteousness there is no way of getting back onto it and he is consequently condemned to eternal damnation. Once this overall architecture comes into focus, something unexpected and serendipitous happens, because the existence of the two different texts can in fact become a powerful metaphor for the existence of the two different confessions (and indeed of subdivisions within those confessions) which made it difficult if not impossible for serious thinkers of the late sixteenth century to be sure of where the path of righteousness actually lay. A particularly powerful example of this is a small but hugely significant difference between the A and B texts of the play. In the 1616 B text, the Good Angel tells Faustus that it is 'Never too late, if Faustus will repent' (II.ii.82). This would be the standard Lutheran position: repentance is possible if the person chooses it. In the 1604 A text, however, the Good Angel's words are 'Never too late, if Faustus can repent' (II. ii.84), suggesting the Calvinist position that it may be impossible to repent because God may have chosen to withhold from the individual the grace that would enable him or her to do so.[8] Our perplexity when forced to choose between these two texts mirrors that of Marlowe's contemporaries when forced to choose between at least two competing theologies. Moreover, the reference at the beginning of the play to 'Jerome's Bible' (A, I.i.38), present in both texts, reminds us that while the Bible may claim to be the work of God, it has been mediated and translated by man, and that it too may say different things in different versions. For all the deceptive simplicity of its architecture, this play too asks some very probing and, from a sixteenth-century point of view, some potentially very subversive questions about religion.

In my discussion of *Tamburlaine the Great*, I suggested that it might be possible to see the Bible and the Qu'ran as being in some sense interchangeable for Marlowe's purposes. Whether it is present in *Tamburlaine* or not, such a correspondence certainly seems to underlie *The Jew of Malta*, the play which seems most likely to have been written immediately after *Doctor Faustus*, for this offers what amounts to a systematic exploration of the three religions of the book, Christianity, Judaism and Islam, in ways which constantly stress the affinities between them, so that we may well be tempted to attach an ironic double meaning to the Christian Mathias' assurance to his mother that during his conversation with the Jewish Barabas 'my talk with him was / About the borrowing of a book or two',[9] given that Christianity shares the five books of the Pentateuch with Judaism. One might also note a suggestive possible interface between Richard Baines's observation that Marlowe's table talk included the observation that 'All the New Testament is filthily written' and T. S. Eliot's famous observation on *The Jew of Malta* that 'it has always been said that the end, even the last two acts, are unworthy of the first three'.[10] I concur with Eliot's assessment, except to my mind the change begins rather earlier, at III, i, and I want to suggest that this shift in *The Jew of Malta* might actually be designed to deliberately mirror that between the Old and New Testaments. The change in tone and texture between the two halves, assuming it is admitted to exist, can be seen as marked to a certain extent by an explicit reference to the New Testament when Jacomo says '*Virgo, salve*',[11] while the first half of the play is rich in allusions to the collective history of the Jewish people as told in the Old Testament: Barabas's exile from his house and his loss of wealth parallel the Jews' exile in Egypt, while a key figure from the Old Testament is recalled when Barabas twice refers to Abraham (I.i.105, II.i.14-15). Another Old Testament figure is evoked when the First Jew says 'Yet, brother Barabas, remember Job' (I.ii.183), and the long history of conflict between Jews and Philistines is glanced at when Barabas says to Abigail of Lodowick,

Provided that you keep your maidenhead,

Use him as if he were a [*Aside*] Philistine.

Dissemble, swear, protest, vow love to him;

He is not of the seed of Abraham.

(II.iii.232-5)

There are, though, also plenty of foreshadowings of worse times to come from the Jews. The First Knight says scornfully to Barabas, 'If your first curse fall heavy on thy head' (I.ii.110), where the change from plural 'your' to singular 'thou' makes it clear that, though on this occasion its force will be specially felt by Barabas, the curse in question is the collective one supposedly incurred by the Jews, and the Officer reminds us of the fate that befell many European Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance when he says 'he that denies to pay shall straight become a Christian' (I.ii.74-5). Indeed Barabas directly alludes to the disaster which befell Jerusalem when he speaks of the time when 'Titus and Vespasian conquered us' (II.iii.10). In the second half, by contrast, we see a 'resurrection' and the unchallenged triumph of Christianity, while Barabas could well be seen as inverting the iconography of St John the Evangelist, who was was supposed to have survived both being placed in a cauldron of boiling oil and drinking poisoned wine (hence his two symbols of a cauldron and of a dragon or snake emerging from a chalice) when he dispenses poison which does kill and himself dies in a cauldron. We might also note that the names of Mathias and Lodovico look uncannily like the evangelists Matthew and Luke, and that Barabas compares Abigail to a light shining in the East, like the light which guided the Magi to the infant Jesus, as if we were watching the emergence of a Christianity in a previously Jewish world. This all makes for a complex effect in which the future is in some sense already in the past, while the present is richly evocative of the past. The play develops this sense of blurred temporalities by slyly and repeatedly insisting that the divide between Jews and Christians is far narrower and more

permeable than either of the two sides in the play would wish to think; indeed the full name of the Order to which the Knights of the play belong was 'Knights Hospitaller of the Order of St John of Jerusalem', and arguably the most famous person ever to have landed on their island, St Paul, was in his own person an epitome of the continuity between Judaism and Christianity.

It is also notable that representatives of all three faiths in *Jew* are mutually intelligible and that each understands only too well the thought processes and motivations of the other two, so that the conflicts between them come across almost as sibling rivalry. It might be a fundamental tenet of domestic and foreign policy in virtually every European nation that Christianity was infinitely superior to Judaism or Islam, but Marlowe's play might well leave us wondering what there is to choose between them. Ironically, there is a far greater sense of difference between the opposing sides in *A Massacre at Paris*, though they represent different confessions rather than different faiths. Jews, Turks and knights of Malta may possess the basic common understanding of one another necessary to reach a *modus vivendi*, but Catholics and Huguenots seem locked in a conflict fuelled by genuine hate and doomed to end in annihilation for one side or the other. Something of the same animus also enters the language of *Edward II*, where Edward parrots virtually identical anti-Catholic rhetoric to that of Henry III in *Massacre*,[12] and treats the Bishop of Coventry with open contempt, though his motive on that occasion is personal rather than ideological. Here, too, we might well wonder whether there is a not a truer kind of piety to be found outside the church than in it, since there is real unselfishness in Edward's love for his son, and it might even be possible to see something Christ-like in his suffering during the final scenes of the play.

Marlowe, then, thinks the unthinkable right across his *oeuvre*, entering into the arena of religious debate in literature with trumpets blaring and asking louder and more dangerous questions than any writer before him. When it comes to the response he elicited, the picture is more complex. In personal terms, it is probably safe to say that, however unsure we may be about the precise mechanism at work, his stridency led more or less directly to his death. There is also a sense in which it is difficult to separate his literary effect from his personal effect. In 1641 the Canterbury writer Henry Oxinden noted that Simon Aldrich, a local clergyman who had studied at Cambridge rather later than Marlowe, had told him that

> Marlo who wrot Hero & Leander was an Atheist: & had writ a booke against the Scripture; how that it was al one man's making, & would haue printed it but could not be suffered. He was the son of a shomaker in Cant. He said hee was an excellent scoller & made excellent verses in Lattin & died aged about 30; he was stabd in the head with a dagger & dyed swearing.

Here we catch the same implicit scepticism which I have suggested underlies Faustus's reference to 'Jerome's Bible' - Scripture is not a document given by God but is 'al one man's making' - but it has obviously also caught Aldrich's attention that Marlowe 'was the son of a shomaker in Cant.', and whether the point is Marlowe's relatively lowly origins or his status as a local boy, his personal circumstances as well as his works are clearly of interest to Aldrich and to Oxinden too, not least because Aldrich clearly believes that because of censorship, not all of Marlowe's thought is to be found in his writings. Nor did Oxinden stop there: he further reported that

> Mr Ald. sayd that mr Fineux of Douer was an Atheist & that hee would go out at midnight into a wood, & fall down uppo*n* his knees & pray heartily that that Deuil would come, that he might see him (for hee did not beleiue that there was a Deuil) Mr Ald: sayd that hee was a verie good scholler, but would neuer haue aboue one booke

> at a time, & when hee was perfect in it, hee would sell it away & buy another: he learnd all *Marlo* by heart & diuers other bookes: *Marlo* made him an *Atheist*. This Fineaux was faine to make a speech uppo*n The foole hath said in his heart there is no God*, to get his degree. Fineaux would say as Galen sayd that ma*n* was of a more excellent composition then a beast, & thereby could speake; but affirmed that his soule dyed with his body, & as we remember nothing before wee were borne, so we shall remember nothing after wee are dead.[13]

'Mr Fineux of Dover' must be either Thomas Fineux, who had studied at Corpus Christi some time after Marlowe, or his brother John, and the presence of a personal connection in the shape of a shared college (not to mention the fact that Marlowe's mother came from Dover) means that once again it is impossible to distinguish between the man and his works: 'he learnd all *Marlo* by heart & diuers other bookes: *Marlo* made him an *Atheist*' - '*Marlo*' here refers equally to a set of books, which can be compared with 'other bookes', and to an (implicitly personal) entity with agency, as implied by the verb 'made'.

Intriguingly, both the last part of Fineux's credo, that 'as we remember nothing before wee were borne, so we shall remember nothing after wee are dead', and also the text assigned for his punishment, '*The foole hath said in his heart there is no God*', are echoed in a text which seems also to remember Marlowe, John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. Here the hero Giovanni, who has been compared to both Faustus and Tamburlaine,[14] is warned by his mentor the Friar that

> wits that presumed
> On wit too much, by striving how to prove
> There was no God, with foolish grounds of art,
> Discovered first the nearest way to hell,

And filled the world with devilish atheism.[15]

This could have provided a useful crib for Fineux for his prescribed disquisition on '*The foole hath said in his heart there is no God*', spelling out as it does the consequences of that position. Later, Giovanni assures his sister Annabella that if he could credit what theologians teach about the eventual destruction of the earth,

I could believe as well

There might be hell or heaven.

Annabella. That's most certain.

Giovanni. A dream, a dream; else in this other world

We should know one another.

Annabella. So we shall.

Giovanni. Have you heard so?

Annabella. For certain.

Giovanni. But d'ee think

That I shall see you there, you look on me;

May we kiss one another, prate or laugh,

As we do here?

Annabella. I know not that.

(V.v.34-41)

Ford, who was only seven when Marlowe died, could not have known him personally; this must, then, be one playwright's informed and considered response to the works of another, in much the same way as so many of Ford's plays rework and revisit *Othello* in ways which collectively offer what is in effect a critical reading of it. Ford too, though, remembers not only the work but the man.

A more purely literary response to Marlowe's plays can be identified in two very specific uses of him. First, as Dominic Green notes, 'On 1 February 1594, three days after Doctor Lopez was transferred to the Tower, *The Jew of Malta* was revived at the recently reopened Rose Theatre':[16] the alleged crimes of one Jew, accused of attempting to poison the queen, have clearly prompted recollection of the crimes of another, without any apparent need for the mediating figure of Marlowe himself. The second comes in a document which was found affixed to the wall of the Dutch Church in Broad Street on Saturday 5 May 1593, and which consequently became known as 'The Dutch Church Libel'. This too is a document that has some bearing on Marlowe's personal life, since it is a central component of the complex series of events which led up to his death, but its own interest is very much in his works, which it draws on repeatedly in stark warning to 'Ye strangers yt doe inhabite in this lande' of dire consequences if they do not return to their countries of origin. Among the accusations against the 'strangers' are that 'Your Machiavellian Marchant spoyles the state … / And like the Jewes, you eate us vp as bread', evoking *The Jew of Malta*, in which Machiavalli appears as a character; therefore, the doggerel goes on to insist,

> Weele cutte your throtes, in your temples praying
> Not paris massacre so much blood did spill
> As we will doe iust vengeance on you all
> In counterfeitinge religion for your flight.

There is an obvious allusion to *The Massacre at Paris* here, and *The Jew of Malta* too may once again be evoked in the reference to counterfeiting, since Barabas' advice to Abigail is that 'A counterfeit profession is better / Than unseen hypocrisy' (I.ii.294-5). Finally the whole document is signed 'per. Tamberlaine'. In both these cases, Marlowe's own sophisticated understanding of the intersections between religious and national identities has been reduced to crude parody, but the fact that it has been so is not entirely without its uses,

for it does serve to underline the extent to which early modern fear of cultural and religious difference was driven not simply by xenophobia but by fears about national security and prosperity.

The adopting of the persona of Tamburlaine at the end of the Dutch Church Libel is characteristic of the widespread interest in Marlowe's barnstorming hero. In the 1590s in particular, a number of dramatists offered varyingly pale imitations of the defiant rhetoric and exotic syllables so characteristic of the Tamburlaine plays,[17] and as late as 1629 R. M.'s *Micrologia* attested to the continuing popularity of the play by observing that when Bridewell inmates are made to clean the streets, 'as they passe, the people scoffing say, / "Holla, ye pampered jades of Asia!"'. Perhaps most intriguingly, Tamburlaine even entered the repertoire of names by which boys might be christened.[18] Although it was the style of Tamburlaine that was most frequently imitated, however, in many ways it was *Dido, Queen of Carthage* which had the most profound intellectual influence on other playwrights, often in unexpected and richly suggestive ways. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is a text which is clearly, as Marlowe himself seems to have been, fascinated by America, since it so obviously borrows from the account of the wreck of the Sea Venture off the coast of Bermuda while on its way to the fledgling English colony at Jamestown. It also revisits exactly the same territory as Marlowe had in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, for it too is steeped in memories of Virgil: Ferdinand's 'Most sure the goddess / On whom these airs attend!' directly echoes Aeneas' 'O dea certe',[19] and again a storm has blown some would-be colonisers off course (as Shakespeare's original audience would have been well aware, most of the Neapolitan characters in the play are of Spanish origin and are effectively colonising southern Italy, and the choice of the king of Tunis as Claribel's husband is no casual one but directly evokes Charles V's conquest of that city). Of particular interest is Caliban's reference to 'My dam's

god Setebos' (I.2.374), for this has something of the same sense of god as constructed by man rather than man as constructed by god as animates both Faustus' reference to Jerome's Bible and *Dido, Queen of Carthage*'s sustained insistence on the flaws and frailties of the deities it presents.

The second play in which I would like to propose an influence from *Dido* is *The Duchess of Malfi*, in which, as in *Dido*, a young widow seeks a second husband, and in which the story of the Trojan war is indeed directly recalled when Antonio says of French horsemen 'As out of the Grecian horse issued many famous princes, so, out of brave horsemanship arise the first sparks of growing resolution, that raise the mind to noble action' (I.i.142-3). At a number of points in *The Duchess of Malfi*, the language of *The Tempest* is found. The character names Ferdinand and Antonio are found in both plays, and the word 'tempest' itself recurs obsessively in the play. *The Tempest* is also echoed in the fact that it, like *The Duchess of Malfi*, focuses on the situation and legacy of the Aragonese in Italy, and the genesis of the Shakespeare play, in the shipwreck of *The Sea Venture* off the coast of Bermuda, is clearly gestured at in the Webster one when Bosola says 'I would sooner swim to the Bermudas on / Two politicians' rotten bladders' (III.ii.266-7).[20] (It is perhaps suggestive that the two plays of Shakespeare's in which the influence of *Dido* is most strongly and directly visible are *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Tempest*, in both of which there are definite supernatural powers at work.)[21] Looking at *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Tempest* through the lens of Marlowe brings into close focus the extent to which all three of these texts focus on issues which proved problematic for Renaissance believers. All involve or evoke the the discovery of new lands. All highlight the capriciousness of divine power - 'We are merely the stars' tennis balls, struck and banded / Which way please them' (V.iv.54-5) says Bosola in *The Duchess of Malfi* - and all invite us to be aware of the proliferation of competing and

mutually incompatible belief systems: what place has Prospero's apparent ability to raise the dead in a Christian universe, and what is the status of the Echo or of the apparent power of the stars in *The Duchess of Malfi*? All too invite or come close to inviting us to see the apparently divine as in fact man-made - Ariel's casual 'When I presented Ceres' (4.1.167) lays bare the device and shows us the machine behind the god, while the Cardinal in *The Duchess of Malfi* blatantly suborns the authority of the sacred for his own crudely secular purposes.

If the debt in these two plays is specifically to *Dido*, there is a more general aspect of Marlowe's dramaturgy which proved, I think, even more influential. One of the most intriguing aspects of Marlowe's treatment of religion is the extent to which he can say the right thing but nevertheless be generally received as meaning the wrong thing. On the face of it, the plays are choked with unimpeachably sound anti-Catholic rhetoric. The passage shared between *Massacre at Paris* and *Edward II*, to which I have already referred, is tub-thumping enough not to have been out of place in a play by the rabidly patriotic Queen's Men:

> I'll fire thy crazed buildings and enforce
> The papal towers to kiss the lowly ground,
> With slaughtered priests make Tiber's channel swell
>
> (*Edward II*, I.iv.100-3)

Equally, Barbara L. Parker has recently argued that 'anti-Catholic satire is the ... governing concept' of *Doctor Faustus*.[22] But Marlowe could never have written for the Queen's Men, and both he and his characters were persistently presented as irreligious. This suggests that there is an additional layer of complexity and irony at work, a veil which shimmers over the text and refracts and distorts its apparent meaning. Has Marlowe discovered the subtext, or is the phenomenon an effect of an ambiguity of the same sort as underlies the refusal to commit

of 'Applaud his fortunes as you please'? In fact I want to suggest that, counter-intuitive as this may seem in the case of so risk-taking a dramatist, it is the result of caution. What Marlowe was most powerfully aware of was religion's ability to stir up political trouble, and I suggest that in his own drama, iconoclast though he was, he did not in fact want to stir up trouble. In this respect if in no other the Baines Note is I think an unreliable guide. Baines implies that Marlowe incited young men such as Cholmley to atheism, but his plays conspicuously shy away from obvious opportunities to do just that. Paradoxically, the inclusion of loud anti-Catholicism is in fact tantamount to putting a silencer on a more dangerous and provocative strain which might otherwise have made itself audible, which is a doubt of the value of any religion at all. Marlowe's cultivation of ambiguity can thus be seen as akin to, and indeed perhaps a direct forerunner of, the quietism which caused Shakespeare to modulate the stridently anti-papal rhetoric of a play like *The Troublesome Reign of King John* into something more measured which is both less angry in itself and less likely to provoke anger in others. Indeed this is perhaps not the least striking example of Marlowe's influence on the tenor of discussion of religion in drama. The one dramatist of the period who was in his own person strongly identified with atheism does not use his plays to propound an atheist agenda; Greene showed himself an insensitive reader when he thought he detected an authorial voice 'daring God out of heaven with that atheist Tamburlan',[23] for if Tamburlaine is an atheist, it cannot be supposed that he gets away with it, any more than Marlowe's pupil Ford can reasonably be supposed to be endorsing incest through the mere fact of representing it. It would be truer to the case to see Marlowe as pioneering a mode of staging events without associating oneself with them, a creation of authorial distance which Shakespeare among others will seize on as a way of making drama an arena for debate rather than a seedbed for propaganda which might spill dangerously out of the fictional world of the stage into the real-life one of the London around it.

In this respect what is arguably Marlowe's most unsatisfactory play is also perhaps his most instructive and illuminating, for it is here that we catch the method most clearly at work. There is clearly something wrong with the text of *The Massacre at Paris*, and indeed in 1825 John Payne Collier announced that he had discovered a much longer version of a speech from the play. Unfortunately, Collier is known to have forged many of the Elizabethan documents he claimed to have discovered, but *The Massacre at Paris* certainly does read like a garbled and truncated text, and there is nothing inherently implausible in the 'Collier leaf'.[24] It is though also worth noting that despite the unsatisfactoriness of the text, which has led to its relative neglect, *A Massacre at Paris* is in some sense also one of the most personal of Marlowe's plays. Marlowe never met an Uzbekh warlord or a homosexual king of England and probably not a Maltese Jew either, but his childhood in Canterbury inevitably brought him into the proximity of a considerable number of Huguenot refugees who had fled across the channel, including Cardinal Odet de Coligny, the Admiral's brother, who is buried in Canterbury Cathedral. (This too is something Marlowe had in common with Shakespeare, who lodged with Huguenots in Silver Street and may be seen as applying something of Marlowe's method in his own carefully non-committal representations of French politics in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *All's Well that Ends Well*). There is, however, a surprising lack of heat in the portrait of the Guise: Marlowe may be, as I have argued elsewhere,[25] fascinated by fire, but he is being unusually careful to douse it here. Unlike Tamburlaine or even Faustus, the Guise unquestionably *is* an atheist: he unashamedly declares,

> My policy hath framed religion.
>
> Religion: *O Diabole!*
>
> Fie, I am ashamed, how ever that I seem,
>
> To think a word of such a simple sound

Of so great matter should be made the ground.

(ii.62-6)

He also cheerfully associates himself with the most notorious of the excesses stereotypically ascribed to Catholicism when he notes that Paris 'in one cloister keeps / Five hundred fat Franciscan friars and priests' (ii.81-2). Nevertheless the Guise is by no means the most repellent character in the play - Anjou is worse because he is a hypocrite, denying that he has participated in the massacre when the audience have seen him do so, while the queen mother murders her way through most of her immediate family - and the Guise is arguably a little redeemed by the fact that his response to the discovery of his wife's infidelity is not to kill her but to talk of his love for her: 'Is all my love forgot which held thee dear' (xv.27). He does also have pleasures to offer the audience, as is made clear when he speaks of how he contrives 'Matters of import aimed at by many, / Yet understood by none' (ii.51-2), for this knowledge sought by so many in vain is of course being offered freely to us. Finally Marlowe also takes the sting out of his representation of events by subtle but insistent reminders that this is, after all, happening a long way away: the Guise's dismissive 'There are a hundred Huguenots and more / Which in the woods do hold their synagogue' (xi.20-1) offers a fundamentally estranging perspective which prevents uf from equating Huguenots with Protestants and thus implicitly reminds us that the characters are, after all, all French after all, apart from Catherine de' Medici who is Italian (and thus arguably even worse), while the audience are lucky enough to be subjects of 'the Queen of England specially, / Whom God hath blessed for hating papistry' (xxiv.68-9).

In this too Marlowe was influential, for Shakespeare will use the same technique in *Richard III*, and other aspects of *The Massacre at Paris* seem also to have provided him with inspiration: scene xxi opens with three murderers in a way perhaps prefigures *Macbeth*, as

does the Guise's question to the third of those Murderers, 'Villain, why dost thou look so ghastly? Speak!' (xxi.59). The very short (only seven lines long) Scene Seven in which someone called Loreine is killed by 'Monsieur of Lorraine' may prefigure the Cinna the Poet scene in *Julius Caesar*, a play which certainly remembers the Guise's declaration that 'Yet Caesar shall go forth' (xxi.68), while Catherine's cruel remark to Henry III that 'Thou art a changeling, not my son' (xxi.149) may have been remembered by Shakespeare when he was creating Volumnia. These are all local hints, but their number emphasises the extent to which Shakespeare has a more general interest in Marlovian dramaturgy and its effects. They thus testify to the way that, moving well away from his safely orthodox background, Marlowe had by the time of his death created a distinctive, challenging dramatic voice, one which both asked questions itself and also prompted others to do so.

Notes

[1] See Lisa Hopkins, *A Christopher Marlowe Chronology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 135-6.

[2] See Roy Kendall, *Christopher Marlowe and Richard Baines: Journeys through the Elizabethan Underground* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003).

[3] See for instance Giles Milton, *Big Chief Elizabeth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2000), pp. 66-77.

[4] Leah Marcus, 'Ideological Difference: The Case of *Doctor Faustus*', in *Unediting the Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1996).

[5] Christopher Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*, in *The Collected Poems of Christopher Marlowe*, edited by Patrick Cheney and Brian J. Striar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), l. 144.

[6] David Farr, 'Tamburlaine wasn't censored', *The Guardian*, 25 November 2005. Online: http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/comment/story/0,16472,1650659,00.html

[7] Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great*, Part One, in *The Complete Plays*, edited by Mark Thornton Burnett (London: J. M. Dent, 1999), Prologue, 8.

[8] Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, in *The Complete Plays*, edited by Mark Thornton Burnett (London: J. M. Dent, 1999).

[9] Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, in *The Complete Plays*, edited by Mark Thornton Burnett (London: J. M. Dent, 1999), II.iii.159-60.

[10] T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920), p. 92.

[11] Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, in *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*, edited by Mark Thornton Burnett (London: J.M. Dent, 1999), III.iii.56. All further quotations from the play will be taken from this edition and reference will be given in the text.

[12] Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.100-1 and *The Massacre at Paris*, Scene twenty-four, 62-4, both in *The Complete Plays*, edited by Mark Thornton Burnett (London: J. M. Dent, 1999).

[13] Quoted in Mark Eccles, 'Marlowe in Kentish Tradition', *Notes and Queries* 169 (1935), 20-23, pp. 39-41, 58-61 and 134-5, pp. 40-1.

[14] Cyrus Hoy, '"Ignorance in Knowledge": Marlowe's Faustus and Ford's Giovanni', *Modern Philology* 57 (1960), pp. 145-54.

[15] John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, edited by Derek Roper (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), I.i.4-8.

[16] Dominic Green, *The Double Life of Doctor Lopez: Spies, Shakespeare and the Plot to Poison Elizabeth I* (London: Century, 2003), p. 244.

[17] See Peter Berek, '*Tamburlaine*'s Weak Sons: Imitation as Interpretation Before 1593', *Renaissance Drama* 13 (1982), pp. 55-82.

[18] Rick Bowers, 'Tamburlaine in Ludlow', *Notes and Queries* 243 (1998), pp. 361-3, p. 362.

[19] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, edited by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan (London: Thomas Nelson, 1999), I.2.423-4, and see Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, *Jonson, Shakespeare, and Early Modern Virgil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[20] See Lisa Hopkins, 'Antonios and Stewards', in *Drama and the Succession to the Crown, , 1561-1633* (Ashgate, 2011).

[21] On the presence of *Dido* in *Dream*, see Annaliese Connolly, 'Evalutating Virginity: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Iconography of Marriage', in *Goddesses and Queens: The Iconography of Elizabeth I*', edited by Annaliese Connolly and Lisa Hopkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 136-153.

[22] Barbara L. Parker, '"Cursèd Necromancy": Marlowe's *Faustus* as Anti-Catholic Satire', *Marlowe Studies* 1 (2011), pp. 59-77, p. 60.

[23] Robert Greene, *Perimedes the Blacksmith* (London: John Wolfe for Edward White, 1588), sig. A3r.

[24] For a recent discussion of the authenticity or otherwise of this, see R. Carter Hailey, 'The Publication Date of Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*, with a Note on the Collier Leaf', *Marlowe Studies* 1 (2011), pp. 25-40, pp. 34-6.

[25] Lisa Hopkins, 'Playing with Matches: Christopher Marlowe's Incendiary Imagination', *Marlowe Studies* 1 (2011), pp. 125-40.