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Demonization and Détente: Christian Identity and the Elizabethan Foreign Policy in *The Jew of Malta*

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Abstract

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Demonization, in Western literature, is most often enacted against so-called "Others" and/or religious minorities. *The Jew of Malta* challenges this tendency and exposes Christian hypocrisy against other faiths in the Renaissance period. One reason is the Catholic-Protestant opposition, which fractured Europe during the sixteenth century and provoked Elizabeth I to ally with the Ottoman Empire to enhance England's geopolitical position in the face of Spanish anxieties. Employing the New Historicist and constructivist frameworks, the discussion contextualizes the play historically to investigate how Marlow critiques Christian morality and the Elizabethan détente that masked political and economic capital. The religious rhetoric serves as an instrument of power. Both Ferneze and Elizabeth 1 manipulate it to justify their corrupt acts against their rivals. Friars deceive one another, and the nuns' chastity is also called into question. The study suggests the play as a diplomatic theatre, a space where identities are constructed and literature and global politics are mediated.

Keywords: demonization; Christian identity; Elizabethan foreign policy

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Introduction

England faced significant challenges regarding its Christian identity and foreign policy in relation to its rival states. Protestant and Catholic turmoil divided the Christian society into two sections. John Foxe's narrative presents this picture very clearly, stating that "such feare and distrust assaulted all men, that neighbour mistrusted neighbour, the maister the servaunt, the servaunt the maister, the husband the wife, the wife the husband, and almost every one the other" (Foxe and Townsend 169). Commenting on the situation, they assert that who can restrain himself from bitter tears to behold the "madding rage" of these spurious Catholics in murdering the innocent poor lambs of the glorious flock of Jesus Christ (Foxe and Townsend 325-26). Davis lends an even more direct incentive for inter-religious violence in 16th-century England. According to Davis, the biblical parody in *The Jew of Malta* reveals the inadequacy and absurdity of Christian ethics in the competitive world the characters live in (McAdam 50). Likewise, Marlowe's representation of the marginal allows him to satirize inwardly the inconsistencies of a Christian moral order that excluded and endangered him as well (McAdam 56). In this sense, the play stages a doubled demonization: it exposes how Christian actors demonize the Jew and Muslims while simultaneously performing internal demonizations among Christians themselves.

Dickason proffers a superior exegesis of the Greek verb daimonizomai, foregrounding victims' passivity in demonization rather than implying demonic proprietorship. By dissecting the verb's root and morphology, he elucidates that daimonizomenos, in its present participle, denotes "the continued state of one inhabited by a demon, or demonized" (Dickason 37). In other words, demonization pictures a demon controlling a somewhat passive human (Dickason). Unger concurs: demons occupy a human's corpus, seizing plenary volitional command at whim, effacing consciousness, so that "they can speak and act through him as their complete slave and tool" (Unger 102). In doing so, Kraft conceptualizes human beings as entities featuring a central spiritual core encircled by peripheral elements such as the mind, emotions, body, and will; within this model, demons exclusively infiltrate these outer domains (Kraft 67). Hobbes consistently presents the idea of human nature that rejects the existence of moral instincts and instead declares that people naturally harm others to satisfy their desires (Hobbes). To do so, the demonizers, in a very conscious manner, deny the moral status of their victims by portraying them as either evil characters who deserve vengeance and killing or simply as machines or animals (Giner-Sorolla, Leidner and Castano 169). The demonization of an enemy passes for a universal ethical obligation that identifies the outsider as constitutively evil and thus even encourages all kinds of intervention, including acts of aggression against him. Gradually, these demonized enemies are often seen by the parties involved as threats to the very existence of their communities, which in turn makes it easier to justify violent reprisals as legitimate. With its broad sense, the term "Christian" includes every person or group that sees Jesus Christ as the most important holy figure and is "part of the worldwide religion called "Christianity" (Badé 9). In this light, both supporters and critics agree on the continuing historical pattern of Christians being demonized throughout the Church's development (Badé 20).

Smith asserts that even familial relations were at stake due to the religious differences. In his view, the Elizabethan "agents were planted" (Smith 4) inside the prominent "Catholic households" (Smith 16) that generated a climate of paranoia and ultimately shattered familial loyalties. Certain English Catholics were even prepared to undergo formal "conversion to the Elizabethan Church"

(Questier 170) to evade financial sanctions. These families regarded limited church papistry as a means of recovering property from the Crown: as, indeed, a "form of estate management" (Questier 170-171). For instance, "members of the Family of Love" (Questier 171) were equally notorious for their willingness to attend Church of England services while secretly adhering to an invisible, separatist element. A comparable precedent is also present in the form of Catholic converts to Protestantism, who often spy on their old friends and colleagues and report them to the Elizabethan authorities (Questier 171). A suitable case can be that of the old priest George Elyot, who, after converting, revealed to the authorities not only the whereabouts of Edmund Campion in 1581 but also that of Eliot's former master, Thomas Rober (Hamilton). Furthermore, Miola points out the secular priest Alban Langdale, interpreting the Catholic recusants as those who interpreted the sacred space of the church through the lens of Protestant separatism. He argues that the "going and not going [to church] is not made a sign distinct between Catholicism and Protestantism, for Puritans will not go to the churches of Protestants" (Miola 363). The relationship between violence cloaked in the rhetoric of religion and the dissolution of the "household community" (Preedy 165-66) that Marlowe develops may be rooted in some consciousness of how some believers interpreted Deuteronomy and some awareness of the anxieties about the threat posed by the advance of religious schism during the Elizabethan period (Preedy). Deuteronomy may furnish direct impetus for interreligious violence. In his epistle to Walsingham (Elizabeth I's Principal Secretary), Cobham (English ambassador in Paris) recounts that "English Jesuits" and Her Majesty's rebels maliciously solicited the Bishop of Paris to surveil and apprehend John Gower (Scheffler) and (Cobham 1582). Cobham's subsequent missive elucidates this indictment that he, defying his priestly vocation, uttered interrogatory statements (already rebutted) and championed "sundry propositions" in colloquies, all antithetical to Catholic doctrine (Cobham 1582). The Elizabethan dread of covert Catholics within England, whom Protestant authorities deemed latent traitors, deteriorated the situation further (Questier 176). Similarly, More writes about the Catholics in the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* that, "when their hearts are once fired upon their blind affections, for they nothing ponder what is reasonably spoken to them" (More and McCutcheon). The cataclysmic division of the Church was such that it forced the Catholics and Protestants to face the painful possibility that their theological systems were nothing but fanciful creations that the huge ecclesiastical-state system was based on unreal principles (More and McCutcheon). Smith elaborates on this notion and propagates that "Give place, you of the Reformed Religion, and all you of the Catholic Religion, put yourselves in arms, and help us" (Smith 23).

The French context showcased an even a more dreary scenario. In the 1560s, in France, the Calvinist preachers supported the religious riots. The Jesuit leader William Allen incited English Catholics to rebel against their Protestant queen (Davis). But deemed vanquished in open confrontation, the Catholics devised alternative lethal stratagems to subjugate Protestants, especially Bishop Bonner and his confederates, and extended scant mercy to any, sparing "neither old nor lame nor blind" (Foxe and Townsend 140). Thus, in such a scenario, any virtuous man, besieged by adversaries, confronted two stark imperatives: either to alter his faith or to forfeit his existence. No other recourse was availed against those sanctimonious Catholics (Foxe and Townsend 257). Doyley quotes that "they spoil abbeys and churches for their pay" (Doyley 557). These perverse forms of religious conflicts produced various contentious debates during the Renaissance period.

Morgenthau elucidates détente by positing that if "you have tension and you either limit the tension or you eliminate it, and that is détente." (Morgenthau 16). Scholars trace the origins of such dynamics to how nation-states and empires, amid their divergences and convergences, alternately converge upon or diverge from one another in subtle or profound manners across eras (Morgenthau 16). These actors engage in interactions of this type because of the changing environments they are in, and for this reason, they keep different domestic and international imperatives. At any given time, rulers, parties, or nations might display confidence, inactivity, separation, fear, hope, dissatisfaction, or fragmentation (Morgenthau 16). Supporters define détente as a tactic where the players, who are unable to settle the underlying interest differences that trigger conflicts, go for collaboration in non-controversial areas like economics, technology, science, and culture. Ferneze's Malta and Elizabeth I's England pursue identical interests.

Pope Pius V excommunicated Elizabeth I in 1570 on charges of heresy and Catholic persecution in England, which curtailed England's commercial entry into Catholic European ports and cities. Consequently, Elizabeth I encountered internal pressures to circumvent Spanish and Venetian intermediaries and forge direct trade links with non-European powers (Brotton 3). Elizabeth I dispatched exploratory missions extending as far as China, surpassing all European rulers in broadening diplomatic connections, amplifying geopolitical sway, and cultivating trade prospects (Bajetta, Coatalen and Gibson 211). To trace these, scholars identify shared antipathy toward Catholicism as the foremost parallel. And Elizabeth I capitalized on this alignment to procure economic advantages and reinforce her domain's fiscal and defensive capabilities (Bauer 3). Her administration established ties with Russia's Tsar, Morocco's Sultan, the Ottoman Sultan, Persia's Shah, China's Ming Emperor, and the Mughal Emperor (Bauer 5). The most important among all are the Ottomans, who controlled the Mediterranean and frequently disrupted trade lanes. This rendered them commercial triumphs and a suitable playground for alliances (Quinn and Ryan 92). In such circumstances, Elizabeth I's indifference to Catholic piety and her diplomatic advantages in pursuing overseas partnerships exposed England to perils from Spain (Quinn and Ryan 4). Spain's ascendancy posed acute dangers to England due to its close location and Philip II's fervent Catholicism (Bajetta, Coatalen and Gibson 189). England's relationship with Spain and the Catholic states deteriorated during her rule.

The paper employs a blended methodological approach of New Historicism and Constructivist Policy Readings to analyze Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*. New Historicism acts as the base, as it places the play as a cultural text inside the broader context of late sixteenth-century political and ideological struggles. Greenblatt sees literature as not simply a self-contained artefact but as one where social energies are exchanged or contested (Greenblatt 6). Following Catherine Gallagher and Greenblatt's recent argument in *Practicing New Historicism*, the play can be deemed as both "a cultural product and a cultural producer" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 17). In this sense, the play both reflects and participates in the cultural debates of its time. Furthermore, as Louis Montrose has emphasized, New Historicism involves "the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (Montrose 20), meaning that the play and state correspondence must be read as interconnected discourses rather than as belonging to separate domains of art and politics.

Constructivist policy readings add to the historicism by putting into focus the performative and strategic dimensions of identity formation. Constructivism in international relations theory argues that

political actors do not simply possess identities that already exist but continuously formulate and negotiate identities in discourse and practice. Political scientist Alexander Wendt demonstrates that “anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt 391). Exploring this further, Wendt argues it is social interaction rather than binding identity that frames a political actor’s interests and that the true material consequence of social action exists through discourse. In this case, action on stage can also be read as a political performance. Through Ferneze's betrayal, the friars' shifting allegiance, and the nuns’ role, we see how Christian identity is not inherited but employed to strategize expedience. Likewise, as given by theorists Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, norms and rhetoric shape political actors' conduct as equally as material power does (Finnemore and Sikkink 891). With the integration of this materialist angle, this study argues that religious identity in both *The Jew of Malta* and Elizabeth I’s correspondence with Ottoman and Spanish powers emerges as a hybrid of ideological language and economic necessity. Along with that, historical records, letters, sermons, and diplomatic exchanges are also treated as a parallel archive of identity construction. Additionally, the performativity of political identity, which Constructivism so often tends not to make explicit, can be brought to the fore by the way Marlowe displays the changing of alliances. The fact that Ferneze swings between his moral beliefs and pragmatic diplomacy proves that the identity in *The Jew of Malta* is made not only discursively but also theatrically, that it is not only summoned to existence but also presented before the audience and performed using rhetoric. In this respect, Marlowe is pushing the limits of the constructivist hypothesis, which promotes political power as a staging that occurs as a consequence of spectacle display, and so discloses the position of negotiation and rewritten identity as the stage of diplomacy.

Through the combination of the two approaches, the methodology offers a double reading: one that decodes the play as a satirical critique of Christian hypocrisy, and the other that grounds the critique in the materiality of Elizabethan foreign policy. The strategy eventually shows how the construction of the religious "other" and the construction of a balance of power with rivals such as Spain, France, or the Ottoman Empire were not contradictory but strategic and reinforcing of each other. Therefore, the application of New Historicism alongside constructivist policy readings allows for better analysis of how Marlowe theatricizes the indeterminacy of Christian identity in the intersection of theatrical performance and political practice. The paper enriches our comprehension of early modern diplomacy by demonstrating how Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* dramatizes the use of religious rhetoric in Elizabethan England’s political diplomacy. The present study provides a new interdisciplinary perspective on Marlowe studies by uniting literary criticism with contemporary political philosophy. Marlowe has been criticized in the past primarily on the subject of religious satire or Machiavellian aesthetics, but this paper expands the debate to include the domain of diplomatic performance and policy discourse. Using both New Historicism and Constructivist Policy Theory, we argue that Marlowe connects Ferneze’s manipulative diplomacy with Elizabeth I’s changing détente towards Catholic Spain and the Muslim Ottoman Empire to reveal that Christian identity was a performance of power rather than a spiritual ideal. The comparison lies less in the specific allies chosen than in the shared logic of strategic reversals, where Christian rulers mask economic and political calculations with the language of religious duty. The analysis describes Marlowe as using religion as an instrument of diplomacy while simultaneously employing diplomacy as a moral veil. In doing so, he modifies both the political significance and the image of *The Jew of Malta* as a prototypical constructivist text

that is sensibly in line with current ideas of identity as being dependent on, strategic, and materially based. The paper also provides an alternative way of thinking of early modern drama as a cultural space where, at times, religion and international politics compete, and therefore, moral discourse is seen as an instrument of power.

Political Détente: Marlowe's Reflection on Elizabethan Diplomacy

Christopher Marlowe stages the predicaments confronting racial, political, and religious marginals while dismantling ecclesiastical duplicity. In *The Jew of Malta*, for example, the leading character Barabas compels spectators to recognize how Christian leader Ferneze manipulates "*scripture to confirm... [his]wrongs*" (Marlowe 1.2.113) (Roma Gill). Marlowe further launches a trenchant assessment of English selfhood, arguing that authorities compel subjects to embrace the Empire's austere doctrinal rigidity at home. But outside its boundaries, the nation recalibrates its ideological stance to advance imperial ambitions, as exemplified by Ferneze's Epicurean oscillations in strategies and partnerships driven by caprice (Hergert 65). Paralleling Ferneze's biblical citations to veil pragmatic coalitions, Elizabeth I invoked Protestant sanctity to validate her rapprochement with the Ottomans and diplomatic overtures toward Catholic France. Marlowe's lampooning illuminates the period's commodified ethos, stressing the imperative to reconstruct transcendent and devotional personas amid encroachments from rival worldviews. Analysts seeking to contextualize Marlowe's corpus, echoing *Tamburlaine*'s unyielding dynamism, perceptual acuity, avarice, and ferocity, should prioritize not his textual inspirations or the voracious authoritarianism of Tudor rule, but rather the rapacious impulses animating English traders, innovators, and voyagers who propelled mercantile and dramatic enterprises alike. Marlowe populates his narratives with protagonists who predominantly embody exiles or itinerants, ranging from Aeneas amid Carthage to Barabas within Malta, from Tamburlaine's ceaseless incursions to Faustus's infernal voyages. He leads the audience through an argument of societal dissection of government systems that not only interfere with but also change the national character of the church (Hergert 65-66).

The critics collectively declare that Marlowe treads a narrow path that leads to the heart of Christianity through the ironic characters of Ferneze and Barabas. However, if one wants to fully understand how far the assault goes, he or she can always refer to "Sanders' commentary" (McAdam 62). The playwrights of that time didn't only confront each other politically but also doctrinally; they contested the ground between "virtue and iniquity, and between God and the devil" (Hunter 228). Marlowe's use of Malta's image as a Christian fortress is merely a hidden motif that he employs for the acerbic subversions and reversals of the plot. In the play's scenario, the heroic struggle of "Crescent and Cross" (Hunter 228), with its idealistic rhetoric of honour and piety, is merely a facade, underneath which, on both sides, lies the reality of greed. The characters call this greed as "*the wind that bloweth all the world besides, / Desire of gold*" (Marlowe 3.5.3-4). It's a fact that the world is indeed a materialist place where global connections are aided by monetary transactions or lies. The narrative illustrates how Malta "buys its peace from the Turks" (Hunter 229).

Marlowe seizes every dramatic juncture to deploy his condemned Jewish figure as an instrument for afflicting and unmasking self-proclaimed Christians who exhibit scant benevolence. Through irony, he unveils the proposition that "*some Jews are wicked, as all Christians are*" (Marlowe 1.2.115), particularly in the initial sequence where authorities confiscate Barabas's assets to settle Ottoman demands. Here, the Governor's retort,

"*No, Jew; like infidels*" (Marlowe 1.2. 117) is extraordinarily like those used by "Peter the Venerable (in a letter to Louis VII)", designating Jews as "infidels" and compelling their fiscal support for the Second Crusade (Hunter 235). Marlowe's ambition to encapsulate transcendent concerns encompassing governmental and ecclesiastical duplicity alongside the expansionist agendas of hegemonic empires within a solitary dramatic framework potentially obstructed the work's recognition as a tragedy (Çakırlar 842). In essence, *The Jew of Malta* overtly constructs a cosmos bereft of ethical coherence (Bevington 67). Undeniably, Elizabethan spectators would interpret such manoeuvres as ethically bankrupt statecraft (Bevington 68).

Diplomatic Strategy and Christian Identity: The Case of Ferneze

Minshull contends that the prologue to the Jew delivers an unvarnished, albeit provocative, "exposition of Machiavelli's political code" (Minshull 40). Marlowe deliberately employs irony by casting Barabas as the quintessential schemer before spectators, but in the actual reality of the play, it is Ferneze whose authentic Machiavellian ethos prioritizes "politics and military matters" (Minshull 41). Ferneze is a true reflection of Machiavelli's supreme cunning when he promises to "*procure / great sums of money*" (Marlowe 5.2.88) as Barabas's compensation and guarantees his "*live... governor still*" (Marlowe 52.88-89) position uninterrupted (Bevington 83). Williams claims that the ruling culture (including religion) is often represented as "natural" or "eternal", but they actually support material and political interests (Williams 156). In particular situations, entities may display religious devotion not because of spiritual truth but for status, influence, and financial gain. In *The Jew of Malta*, the Christian characters, such as Ferneze or the friars, have the trick to employ religious language for their economic and political advantages. Beyond *Doctor Faustus*, this drama harbours Marlowe's most profound ironic architecture. Yet, akin to *Doctor Faustus*, scriptural satire in *The Jew of Malta* eschews the bolstering of conventional Christian ethics. Rather than unmasking the absurdity of forging a material over a transcendent selfhood, the narrative probes the poignant collapse in constructing an indispensable worldly society. Marlowe deliberately attributes to Ferneze the dissimulation that adherents of Christianity commonly link to Caiaphas, thereby raising enquiries into Ferneze's deliberate awareness of such pretence. Yet, Barabas exhibits shrewd intellect by masterfully inverting this rhetoric and thus exposing ecclesiastical duplicity with unequivocal sharpness. Barabas states:

"What? Bring you scripture to confirm your wrongs?

Preach me not out of my possessions

Some Jews are wicked, as all Christians are:" (Marlowe 1.2.112-13).

Figures in the drama initiate their actions in response to tangible expropriation. Paralleling the recusants under Elizabethan rule, Barabas suffers the Maltese authorities' seizure of his possessions and, crucially, his actual domicile at the narrative's outset. Ferneze rationalizes his confiscation of Barabas's holdings through appeals to religious disparities (Marlowe I. 2. 62-63), a manoeuvre that echoes both rhetorically and substantively the mechanisms in Marlowe's contemporary England, where nonconformists to the mandated Anglican church faced punitive levies and frequent forfeiture of estates, dwellings, and chattels (Preedy). This dispossession is an "attack on Barabas's identity as a successful merchant" (Bevington 70). Consequently, the protagonist rebuffs Christianity as the emblematic institutional force that imperils his fundamental 'Jewish' essence (Bevington 71).

In Malta, truth becomes meaningless, and it is fitting that Ferneze is placed in the above-

mentioned scene, not just in the "role of Caiaphas" (McAdam 61), as has already been pointed out, but also as "Pilate" (McAdam 61) when he pronounces, "*No, Barabas, to stain our hands with blood/ Is far from us and our profession*" (Marlowe 4.4.145-146). Ferneze later undermines this assertion by invoking an alternate fabrication of martial valour to legitimize his betrayal of Ottoman accords: "*Honour is bought with blood, and not with gold*" (Marlowe 2.2.56) and (McAdam 63). In Machiavellian terms, "those best at playing the fox have done better than the others" (Machiavelli 70), and Ferneze very cleverly adopts this strategy to disguise his intentions and deceive both Barabas and the Turks. Furthermore, it is important to note that "Calymath's men" (McAdam 68) are killed in a monastery. It seems that Marlowe feels pushed in this drama to question religion's validity and to reveal its possible destructiveness cruelly, as he does through the character of Faustus (McAdam 68).

Demonization Within Christian Ranks: Friars, Nuns, and Political Deception

In Marlowe's play, the Christian characters can be interpreted as the representatives of cultural hegemony. Their use of religious language is not meant to support divine truth but rather to justify material and political interests. The friars' changing loyalties and Ferneze's two-faced diplomacy illustrate the ideological role of religion as a means for the government and society to maintain control and power. The rivalry between the two friars, belonging to different churches, to influence Barabas to donate his money to their churches, symbolizes the church's material motives. Friars mutually denounce one another's ceremonial mandates as ludicrous. They deploy doctrinal platitudes to advance worldly gains. For instance, the first friar (Jacomo) implores, "*Oh, good Barabas come to our house*" (Marlowe 4.1.77). Friar Bernardine counters, "*Oh no, good Barabas come to our house*. *And Barabas you know"* (Marlowe 4.1.78-79). Similarly, the first friar declares, "*Oh Barabas, their laws are strict*" (Marlowe 4.1.83). The second retorts, "*They wear no shirts, and they go barefoot too*" (Marlowe 4.1.84) and (Çakırlar 248). Moreover, the nuns' commitments to poverty, chastity, and obedience are merely "works of supererogation" (Hunter 228), while the output they generate is one component of what Marlowe's time referred to as a "treasure" (Hunter). However, this is not the type of treasure that Barabas seeks. Hunter posits that nuns suspected integrity and the friars' libidinous inclinations make them vulnerable prey for Barabas (Hunter). It is suggested that Barabas rationalizes his subterfuge against Lodowick through allusions to the Christian's confessional otherness. He invokes, "*This offspring of Cain, this Jebusite That never tasted of the Passeover, Nor e're shall see the land of Canaan*" (Marlowe 2.3.210-14) (Questier 172). Here, Marlowe evidently takes satisfaction in depicting the debauched friars' and nuns' demise. He crafts Barabas's monologue to assault Christians and amplifies Ithamore's retort to heighten the effect (McAdam 67).

Of the Christians, Ferneze instigates Barabas's murderous rampage. He strips Barabas of his domestic sanctuary while Mathias forsakes kin obligations to his prejudiced mother. Even though Abigail, Barabas's daughter, has a different faith (Marlowe 2.3. 352–55), Mathias still goes after her and can soon be talked into fighting his co-religionist, Lodowick. The monks disrupt Barabas's life when they take Abigail from her father into the convent's religious community (Marlowe 3.4.22) for their own sexual gratification. Bevington urges interpreters to view Barabas's reflections through the lens of chronic oppression because he occupies a pivotal mercantile position in his theatrical milieu (Bevington 73). Menpes believes that "the two questions" he cites to the audience are not in any case rhetorical. The answers to them are obvious: "*Who hateth me but for my happiness?*" (Marlowe 1.1.111):

"*everyone, but certainly Christians*" (Marlowe 1.1.113-117). Ferneze's behaviour can be interpreted as a physical representation of the play's atmosphere, which is dominated by the forces of *The Jew of Malta* that aim to strip the Jew of his human qualities, both implicitly and explicitly (Menpes). However, as Questier states, this need not imply that Marlowe's play portrays the "triumph of Christianity"(Questier 177), particularly when analyzing the narrative's interplay among Judaism, Islam, and other rival creeds (Questier). Although Marlowe consistently points at Ferneze and his colleagues as "Christians", they are most likely proponents of Catholicism, a religious sect that the Elizabethan audience regarded as perilous and its believers as treacherous nonconformists. The possible gradual and tacit avoidance of Protestant characters could have been a means of protection against the power's censorship of the work that portrays fiery cases of doctrinal fraud and deceit. Furthermore, the religious personalities created or claimed by Marlowe's characters are quite often temporary reactions to the changing secular conditions of that era (Preedy).

Marlowe's condemnation of Christian hypocrisy stretches farther into the convent, where the nuns are the ones who play the role of deceivers and the morally corrupt. The conversation between Barabas and the nun is a clear example of this holiness inversion. When Barabas tries to buy the information regarding his daughter from the nun, the nun says, *"If you'll be ruled by me, you shall have your wish"* (Marlowe 4.1.4). The nun's willingness to help a rich client first of all is indicative of the fact that money comes before faith. Barabas's cynical thinking, "*The nuns are sinners, every one of them"* (Marlowe 4.1.36), amplifies Marlowe's judgement of the clergy as the corrupt economically and politically. The nuns' place of hiding becomes a location of exploitation that illustrates the universal corruption of Malta. Moreover, Ithamore's filthy remark, "*Tis a strange thing of the nuns, that they should never have children; yet they have the trick to make shift for one*" (Marlowe 4.1. 62–64), goes to the extent of mockery that deems the pretended chastity to be only a cover. Thus, the convent is a power symbol concealed in the virtue of its monks. Ferneze's Malta is home to mixed religious, political, and commercial entities, as is Elizabeth I's England. It is claimed that Marlowe, by communicating through sacred and profane discourse, creates a nihilistic world where faith, trade, and trickery are so mixed up that holiness itself is the greatest disguise.

Diplomatic Détente and the Shifting Policies

When Elizabeth first came to the throne in 1558, her relationship with Catholic Spain was a matter of urgent diplomacy. Spain's king, Philip II, was not merely the widower of her sister Mary I but also the most powerful Catholic monarch in Europe. At first, Elizabeth I sought peace and even entertained proposals of marriage with Philip as a way to stabilize England's vulnerable Protestant settlement. As the Spanish ambassador Count de Feria records her willingness to find a "convenient match" (Calendar of State Papers, Spanish 48). This early inclination to develop pleasant relations with Spain also shows her pragmatic diplomacy. She sought security and time to demonstrate a non-violent, likely alliance, but this effort did not go well. The political and religious tensions, particularly Elizabeth I's support of Protestant rebels in the Netherlands and the execution of Mary, the Queen of Scots, spoiled all the hopes of peace. Guzmán de Silva (1565), one of the Spanish ambassadors, complained, "The Queen shows fair words but her heart is not with us; she leans to the French and gives aid to rebels abroad" (CSP Spanish 543). By the 1580s, relations had collapsed entirely, culminating in the Spanish Armada of 1588. In both Elizabeth I's foreign policy and Marlowe's play, the language of alliance is a performance of duplicity, where diplomacy becomes theatre. In the play, Ferneze seeks help from the

Spanish; however, he almost paradoxically expresses "pleasure" as well, thereby voicing suspicions of treachery. His international relations are decidedly short-term, expedient, and double-edged. In his words:

"Thus have we gotten by our policy
Another day to breathe.
What shall we do with Spain and with the Turk?
Let us consult, for Spain is proud, and we must look
To have them both against us in the end" (Marlowe 4.4.78–82).

When dealing with Calymath, Ferneze masks his duplicity by invoking Spain to its Christian duty while secretly plotting, just like Elizabeth I, who invoked and tempted Spain by allying with Catholic France. Ferneze pretends loyalty to Spain's Christian cause, but he contrives to entrap both friend and foe. His sole concern is material gain and opportunity as an apolitical survival. In the final act, he expresses gratitude to both Spain and the Turks in quick succession, showing his readiness to flatter whichever side benefits him. FERNEZE:

"To keep my promise made to Spain and you,
I'll entertain you all with banquetting;
And, in the mean time, Calymath shall be safe" (Marlow, 5.3.9–11).

Ferneze momentarily turns to Spain while feigning accommodation with the Turks, only to betray his supposed Ottoman allies in the final act. The character of the duplicitous hero does not lie in the fact of his allegiance to one side but rather is revealed through his readiness to get on any side that secures the survival of the Maltese. This removes the disparity between Elizabeth I's diplomatic balancing act of opportunity dressed in the language of loyalty. Elizabeth I, for example, might foster the view that Spain is the most likely Christian ally against the Ottoman threat, but she would, in reality, allow relations with Spain to get worse and, at the same time, reach out to the Ottomans with a soft approach and occasionally align with France.

Elizabeth I's foreign relations with France serve as a powerful source of evidence for the performative nature of her diplomacy. To the end of the 1570s and throughout the 1580s, Elizabeth I kept the marriage talks with François, Duke of Anjou, alive not because she planned to marry him, but "to strengthen her diplomatic hand against Spain" (Doran 118). This political spectacle is comparable to Ferneze's survivors confrontation gestures towards Calymath, which will be discussed hereafter in detail. Elizabeth I and Ferneze are equally good at using the language of mutual alliance as a cover for their dishonest motives. Their dual alliances are what Greenblatt refers to as the "negotiation of authority" where power secures itself through the extravagance of theatrical self-display (Greenblatt 12). They demonstrate unity and the spirit of togetherness in a big way while at the same time cleverly pursuing their own interests in a less flagrant manner. Such a kind of duplicity reveals precarious balancing acts in Elizabethan diplomacy and betrayal followed by bloodshed in Marlowe's play. The play showcases that fake promises were deemed crucial for maintaining political strength in Renaissance England.

The Spanish fears forced Elizabeth I to employ shared monotheism "We, who worship the one and only true God… do utterly abhor the idolatry of the Pope of Rome, with all his errors and false worship" (Divines), to establish an unprecedented alliance with the powerful Ottoman Sultan Murad III. This reveals the instrumental use of religious identity in Renaissance diplomacy. Marlowe dramatizes Governor Ferneze in the same logic of expedient diplomacy that shaped Elizabeth I's foreign policy. Ferneze, seeing his political weakness and Malta's vulnerability, extends a hand of friendship and decides on an alliance with the Turks. In his words, "*Then shall they gain by yielding to the Turk*" (Marlowe

5.2.54). The Governor wholeheartedly receives the Ottoman leader in his territory, "*Welcome, great Calymath, unto thy friends*." (Marlowe 5.3.13). Ferneze's spectacle of such an extraordinary gesture is not aimless on his side, but instead, we can sense the hidden duplicity cloaked in his complimentary language. This also suggests that the Maltese, in times of trouble, prefer to rely on diplomatic efforts to avoid immediate confrontation, even if it is with their arch enemy or religious opponent. But according to Bartels, the text of the play somehow leaves us ambiguous in the sense of who, if anyone, is originally and authentically "Maltese by peopling the island" (Bartels 10) with multifarious groups and nationalities (Italians, 'Grecians, Turks, and Afric Moors', the Knights, and the Jews), which suggests that "to be of Malta" (Bartels) means, in effect, not to be originally Maltese. Ferneze bows because Ithamore, an Ottoman messenger, on behalf of the Turk Sultan, conveys the message that "*The Turks demand half tribute of your wealth,/ Or else the island must be yielded them*" (Marlowe 5.1.105–06). This stark ultimatum coerces Ferneze into "friendly" negotiations with the Turks. On another occasion, he asks Ferneze, "*How say you, Governor, will you yield or no*?" (Marlowe 5.1.115). These blunt queries and perils showcase the diplomatic corner into which Ferneze is pushed and compelled, thereby resultantly echoing Elizabeth I's delicate dance with Ottoman envoys. She was compelled to "yield" and negotiate with the Ottoman envoys for trade, maritime cooperation, and diplomatic recognition, although her true intentions were often disguised. Elizabeth I strategically deployed deferential rhetoric, including expressions of subservience when necessary (Woodhead 37), alongside whimsical phrasing to forge mercantile bonds with the Ottomans. She extolled the Sultan in her correspondence as the "Most Imperial and most invincible Emperor," acknowledging receipt of his missives from Constantinople and commending his gracious response to "the humble petitions of one William Harborne a subject of ours" (Miltimore) to come with "merchandizes both by sea & land, to the countries and territories subject to your government" (Miltimore). But it is more likely that the "success of English diplomacy in Constantinople" (Bauer) stemmed predominantly from their shared antagonism toward Spain's Philip II. England's strategic maritime positioning and formidable seafaring prowess further rendered it a compelling partner for collaborative ventures. This exchange inaugurated a seventeen-year affable epistolary dialogue between the monarchs, heralding one of history's most improbable coalitions (Woodhead 21).

Ferneze modifies his stance toward the Ottomans, enabling Christian forces to retain the seized Jewish riches in a wholly predictable manner. According to Çakırlar, this policy change comes after Del Bosco assures Ferneze that "*I'll write unto his Majesty for aid* [*in waging war upon the Turks, / And not depart until I see you free*" (Marlowe 2.2.40-41) (Çakırlar). Del Bosco regards the clash between Catholic Spain and the Ottoman Empire, the era's dominant contenders, as a shared mandate for Malta's Christian enclave to shield its adherents from Turkish aggression. Yet, Del Bosco also masks this principled facade with a desire to market his imprisoned adversaries as enslaved labourers in Malta. He capitalizes on anticipated revenues from these captive Turks. Preedy maintains that Ferneze's apprehensions of exogenous incursion from the Ottoman side mirror the Elizabethan authorities' recusancy measures against Catholics amid concerns of a secret support for invasion by the Spanish counterparts (Preedy 169). Ferneze infuses his discourse with doctrinal elements tailored for strategic utility. He repurposes reverence as governance through references to "public shame" (Marlowe I.2.90) and treats faith as a mechanism for perceptual governance. His eventual proclamation, "*Thus have we plotted, friend, to overthrow the Turks*" (Marlowe

5.2.37-38), illustrates the corruption of faith into "policy", an Elizabethan signifier redolent of Machiavellian subterfuge. As a Machiavellian, he takes the chance to challenge the Ottomans after “guaranteeing the support of the Spanish army” (Çakırlar). Like Elizabeth's letter to the Ottomans, Ferneze's orations mix sanctimony and pragmatism; both employ godly rhetoric to cover practical manoeuvring.

The Governor is highly dependent on circumstances. In the opinion of Preedy, “he is an opportunist”, knowing how to make the most out of the present moment, as when he switches his alliance from the Turks to the Spaniards” (Preedy 169), as well as knowing how to bide his time “as when he pretends to accept Barabas’ offer of reconciliation” (Preedy). Ferneze refuses to pay tribute to the Turks, declaring, *“Therefore we will not pay him tribute. Not we; / Nor be it said in Malta we are slaves”* (Marlowe 1.2. 57-58). Afterwards, the Maltese leader allies with Barabas, promising him both knighthood and military command, *“Barabas, now art thou become a knight, / And I will give thee title to my fort”* (Marlowe 5.2. 88-89). Yet, once the Jew has served his purpose, Ferneze betrays him: *“Now help me, Christians, let’s surprise him straight”* (Marlowe 5.5.60). Not only this, the governor even goes further and sets conditions for the Spanish as well. He proclaims, “*On this condition shall thy Turks be sold”* (Marlowe 2.2.97), “*Go officers and set them straight in show*” (Marlowe 2.2.98). Similarly, Elizabeth I’s courtship of the Duke of Anjou and her support for Protestant rebels in the Low Countries were quickly abandoned when they ceased to serve England’s interests. In both cases, Christian identity functions not as a principle but as a performance, deployed strategically to justify duplicity. In his last actions, Ferneze proclaims that:

"Now march away, and let due praise be given

Neither to fate nor fortune, but to Heaven." (Marlowe 5.5.122-123).

With the end of the scene he is directing, Marlowe breaks the moral disintegration that he was tracing throughout the play: Ferneze's "Christian victory" is not God's direct action, but is rather a result of trickery. The sounds of his last couplet ("fate," "fortune," "Heaven") are very much like those of a preacher, but in its brutal context, it reveals the weakness of Christian triumph. The performance of the good act is seen as taking over the good itself, and the moral play of Ferneze's Malta is thus synchronised with the moral play of Elizabethan diplomacy.

The present-day context offers a similar situation. Analysts see the implications of Barabas's claims as more pronounced when they consider the same problems occurring between states, religions, and cultures. Contemporary actors in ethnic, doctrinal, and societal clashes deploy comparable allegations, indictments, and protective tactics to secure superiority over adversaries. Marlowe thus unveils, through *The Jew of Malta's* dialogue nearly four and a half centuries past, in fact, the “unchanging hypocrisy of humanity” (Çakırlar 248). Additionally, Marlowe embeds socioeconomic motifs within England's contemporaneous geopolitical context, which provided a timely impetus for his thematic choices. During the play's composition, England confronted a belated recognition of exploitative imperatives and quests for untapped affluence. According to Çakırlar, Vasco da Gama's navigation of the “Cape of Good Hope” (Çakırlar 250) passage secured Portugal's dominion over the lucrative Eastern spice trade. Spanish vessels traversed oceans burdened with plunder from Cortés's subjugation of Aztec domains, while Marlowe's associate Raleigh pressed Elizabeth I to authorize parallel feats for England's enrichment. Çakırlar contends that, whereas *Tamburlaine* acquainted the English theatre with imperial vastness, *The Jew of Malta* was responding to the “infinite riches of expansion” (Çakırlar 250) that could enrich explorers and traders alike. Marlowe’s satire

thus exposes how political survival, whether on Malta's stage or in Elizabeth I's court, depended on the very hypocrisy that official rhetoric sought to conceal. Babb asserts that the plot of *The Jew of Malta* may carry different actions, but it ultimately "explores a single set of issues: religious hypocrisy and governmental expedience" (Babb 86) as they are prompted by sheer material lust.

Conclusion

In *The Jew of Malta*, Marlowe stages a world where religious identity is never fixed but always mediated through the pragmatic demands of politics, commerce, and survival. The moral and political performances in his play push forward the modern-day rhetorics of "holy wars" and "shared values" in global partnerships. Marlowe uncovers the fact that Christian rhetoric is nothing but a governing tool that can easily be bent to the will of its user, who might, in this case, be, for example, a ruler wanting to kill or rob. Thus, the Jew's demonization in Marlowe's drama is paralleled by Christians' internal demonization, whose own moral decay is the very reason they lose the ground of righteousness that they claim to occupy.

The present study, taking New Historicist and Constructivist Reading approaches to place the play in Elizabeth's troubled world of international politics, brings to the fore Marlowe as a playwright of diplomacy, one who exposes the moral fictions that are the foundation of empire and religion alike. He does not merely render satire for a religious polemic against Christianity but a satire against the morality of statecraft in a political landscape where opportunism is masqueraded as religious ideologies.

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