The Jew of Malta

Study Guide by Course Hero

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Book Basics

AUTHOR

Christopher Marlowe

FIRST PERFORMED

c. 1592

GENRE

Tragedy

ABOUT THE TITLE

The title, *The Jew of Malta*, refers descriptively to the protagonist, Barabas, who idolizes money, profit, and his daughter Abigail. Barabas's schemes and intrigues lead him steadily deeper into a net of treachery and deceit until he meets an agonizing, spectacular death.

In Context

Elizabethan Drama

Beginning in the first years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (ruled 1558–1603), drama became a highly popular entertainment in England. Like most things British, it was centered in London, which was then expanding to become a thriving metropolis. Starting in the 1570s, a series of playhouses were erected to the south of the Thames River. The price of admission was cheap, with standing room costing only one penny or so. At the time, disease, dissension, and social impropriety were closely associated with the stage and with public performances. As a result, theatrical companies and their activities were strictly regulated by the authorities.

Elizabethan dramatists had a number of sources to draw upon for their scripts. There was, for example, the native tradition in the vernacular (English language) of the mystery and morality plays, which dated from the 14th and 15th centuries. In this type of drama, the characters were often symbolic, representing such generalized figures as "everyman," "vice," or "courage." There were also school comedies, based on the ancient Roman plays of Plautus (c. 254–184 BCE) and Terence (c. 195–159 BCE). Loosely adapted, these skits occasionally coalesced around a more definite structure, producing such works as English playwright Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister* (c. 1553). Also from a classical source were the bloody revenge tragedies of the ancient Roman playwright Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE). His dramas offered suspense, melodrama, and violently exaggerated action on mythological subjects. Finally, a steady flow of dramatic subjects from continental sources had begun to arrive in England, especially from Italy.

The Dramatic Achievement of Christopher Marlowe

Much remains mysterious about Marlowe's life and early, violent death: Was he a secret agent for the government? In what ways exactly did he brag about his atheism and homosexuality? What were the precise circumstances of his death in a tavern brawl? But enough evidence exists from his half dozen plays to provide a fascinating portrait of his towering achievement in drama while he was still in his 20s.

In the first place, Marlowe conceived of heroes whose titanic ambitions and accomplishments went far beyond those of any other dramatic protagonists of his day. Tamburlaine, for example, succeeds in conquering much of the known world. Doctor Faustus parleys with supernatural powers to gain almost unlimited knowledge and the world's most beautiful woman. Barabas, the hero of *The Jew of Malta*, behaves thoroughly in this vein. There seem to be no limits to his avarice and to his scheming intrigues, either to cheat others financially, to injure them physically, or to kill them. Barabas's outlandish success in these endeavors, and his free-spirited boasting about that success, bring him incongruously close to comedy, where a hero's actions appeal irresistibly to the wish fulfillment and fantasy of all humanity.

Marlowe's second radical innovation in the drama of his day was to use standardized blank verse—unrhymed iambic pentameter (pattern of ten syllables where one short or unstressed syllable is followed by a long or stressed syllable)—as the norm for stage dialogue. Before Marlowe, playwrights had used a variety of rhythms, especially the long and awkward "fourteeners" (lines with seven stresses). It was Marlowe's genius to have realized that blank verse more nearly reproduced the rhythms of everyday speech. Going forward, other dramatists (including Shakespeare) occasionally varied their meter (usually to four-beat tetrameter lines) and more than occasionally employed prose for comic scenes involving "low" characters. But blank verse became the fallback format for all Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. The latter term refers to plays produced during the reign of Elizabeth's successor, King James I, who reigned from 1603 to 1625.

Anti-Semitism in Elizabethan Times

Marlowe's portrait of Barabas—as well as Shakespeare's depiction of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* (written 1596–97), produced barely five years later—are dramatic characterizations that reflect what we know of the social status of Jews in Elizabethan England.

By the time Marlowe wrote *The Jew of Malta*, Jews had been officially expelled from England for three centuries. A small population, however, remained behind after King Edward I expelled them in 1290. Not all of them were engaged in the occupation of money lending, as many people of the time claimed. Rodrigo Lopez, for example, was a Jew who served as physician to Queen Elizabeth before his execution in 1594. Some Jews were poor. All Jews, as nonbelievers in Christ as a messiah, were commonly despised. They were subject at all times to burdensome special taxation, and they were sometimes forced to choose between expulsion and conversion to Christianity. These realities are reflected in some of the conflicts and challenges facing Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*.

Marlowe seems to have been especially interested in the links between Jewishness and intrigue: witness the prominence in his play of the theme of policy. The word had two meanings in 16th-century England, one admirable and one not. On the one hand, it refers to a government's responsible plans to govern for the good of the people. On the other hand, it refers to an individual's plan to arrange events however necessary to achieve his own advantage. Barabas applies this selfish "policy" to his actions throughout the play. And it links closely to the 16th-century understanding of Machiavellianism. Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), the Florentine political philosopher, was notorious for his ruthless pragmatism and amoral cynicism. In the prologue to *The Jew of Malta*, the soul of Machiavelli appears as Machiavel to explain his "policy."

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Family and Education

Born in Canterbury, England, around February 26, 1564, Christopher Marlowe shares his birth year with playwright William Shakespeare and one of the forerunners of modern science, Galileo. While Marlowe's literary career was cut short by his death at age 29, works such as *Tamburlaine the Great* (written, c. 1587), *The Jew of Malta* (written, c. 1592), and *Doctor Faustus* (published 1604) firmly established him as one of the finest writing talents from the golden age of English literature that occurred during the Renaissance.

Marlowe was the eldest son of a shoemaker and was one of nine siblings. Despite the family's limited income, he received a first-rate education. After receiving a scholarship to attend the renowned King's School in Canterbury for his last two years of grammar school, he earned another scholarship to Corpus Christi College at Cambridge University. There he studied from 1580 to 1587, honing his skills in Latin translation and poetry and writing his first plays. He gained his bachelor of arts in 1584 and a master of arts (MA) three years later. Intriguingly, his MA was initially withheld based on a dangerous rumor.

Reportedly Marlowe had been absent from the university on occasion to study at the English Catholic seminary in Reims, France. Politics and religion were inseparable in English government, and the prevailing religion during Queen Elizabeth's reign (1558–1603) was Protestantism. Catholics were persecuted, and there were numerous Catholic plots to assassinate the queen. Study at the Catholic seminary would have implied Marlowe meant to enter the priesthood, disqualifying him from receiving his MA and placing him under suspicion of treason.

Nevertheless, his MA was awarded due to government intervention. The university received a letter from Queen Elizabeth's Privy Council stating that Marlowe had been employed "in matters touching the benefit of his country" and "had done Her Majesty good service, & deserved to be rewarded for his faithful dealing." The exact nature of that service remains unclear.

Literary Career

Marlowe's literary career spanned less than six years. In that short time, writing for the theater, he emerged as the first great author of blank verse and changed English drama forever. Blank verse is non-rhyming verse written in a rhythm of stressed and unstressed syllables. The most commonly chosen rhythm is iambic pentameter, which features 10 syllables to a line, with the stress on every other syllable. In poetry and prose, blank verse is intended to create a sense of grandeur by producing a formal rhythmic pattern with a musical flow. Marlowe's skillful use of blank verse in his two-part play *Tamburlaine the Great* transformed English poetry and brought a new level of maturity to Elizabethan theater. Authors such as Shakespeare would build on Marlowe's literary achievement, using blank verse throughout their plays. Marlowe himself authored seven plays, including one of the most acclaimed in the English language, *Doctor Faustus*.

Untimely Death

The events culminating in Marlowe's untimely death began with an accusation of atheism, meaning that he did not believe in the existence of God. Though some debate surrounds this claim, Marlowe may have belonged to a close circle of intellectuals—noblemen, courtiers, and commoners—who called themselves the Free-Thinkers. They formed an underground club, the School of Night, which met to discuss a wide range of subjects, many considered dangerous by the church and the Crown and therefore forbidden. A serious charge leveled at the Free-Thinkers was that of atheism, which the church considered heresy, or contrary to the church's beliefs. The penalty, if convicted, was to be burned at the stake.

Whether Marlowe truly subscribed to atheism or not remains open for debate. Multiple individuals accused him of it, although their motives were questionable. In particular Thomas Kyd, a fellow playwright, confirmed the accusation, but only under torture after his own arrest. Marlowe was arrested for atheism on May 20, 1593, but released with the provision that he report daily to the authorities. On May 27 a formal charge was presented in writing to the Privy Council. However, Marlowe was killed three days later—stabbed above the right eye—in what was described as a scuffle over a food bill as he ate and drank with three men: a high-ranking government agent and two others with links to espionage, or spying on a foreign government. What was at the heart of Marlowe's murder is still debated. Whether it was his alleged atheism or simply a falling out among friends, it ended Marlowe's life

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suddenly and tragically on May 30, 1593.

Marlowe left behind an impressive body of work surpassed in Elizabethan tragic drama solely by his contemporary William Shakespeare. However, with the exception of the two-part *Tamburlaine the Great*, published anonymously in 1590, Marlowe's works came into print only after his death.

Marlowe is regarded today as one of the greatest tragic playwrights of his times. Critics continue to speculate what this dramatist, born in the same year as William Shakespeare (1564) might have been capable of had he lived a full life. His memorable heroes—especially Tamburlaine, Faustus, and Barabas—are hallmarks of the fascination with outsized characters in the world of Elizabethan drama. Marlowe's influence on the young Shakespeare was indubitable.

Characters

Barabas

Barabas is an intensely theatrical and endlessly fascinating figure. He is full of contradictory qualities: greed, arrogance, spite, ingenuity, and guile. His resourcefulness is impressive, as he continually dreams up fresh schemes. On the other hand, Barabas's temperament and actions lie at the border between "policy" and lunacy, and some of his behavior suggests the profile of a paranoid criminal.

Abigail

Abigail is the moral center of gravity in the play. Despite her imperfections, she is able to stand up against her father's evil and to assert her sense of responsibility and integrity. Her death, at her father's murderous hands, marks the structural climax of the drama.

Ferneze

For much of the play, Ferneze is the target of Barabas's revenge. The Jew achieves the first stage of retribution against the governor by arranging for the death of Ferneze's son Lodowick at the hands of Lodowick's rival Mathias.

Lodowick

Lodowick, like his rival Mathias, is portrayed as impulsive and not particularly circumspect. Barabas finds it relatively easy to dupe him and to trick him into a fatal duel with Mathias.

Mathias

Mathias is Abigail's favored suitor, and her affection for him means that his death in a duel marks a key point in her character development. Like Lodowick, Mathias is hotheaded and an easy mark for Barabas's wiles.

Ithamore

As a character, Ithamore is somewhat indebted to the clever slaves in ancient Roman comedy, such as Pseudolus in Plautus's play of the same name. His loyalty to his master Barabas is skin-deep, since he turns out to be a thief, a hypocrite, and a blackmailer.

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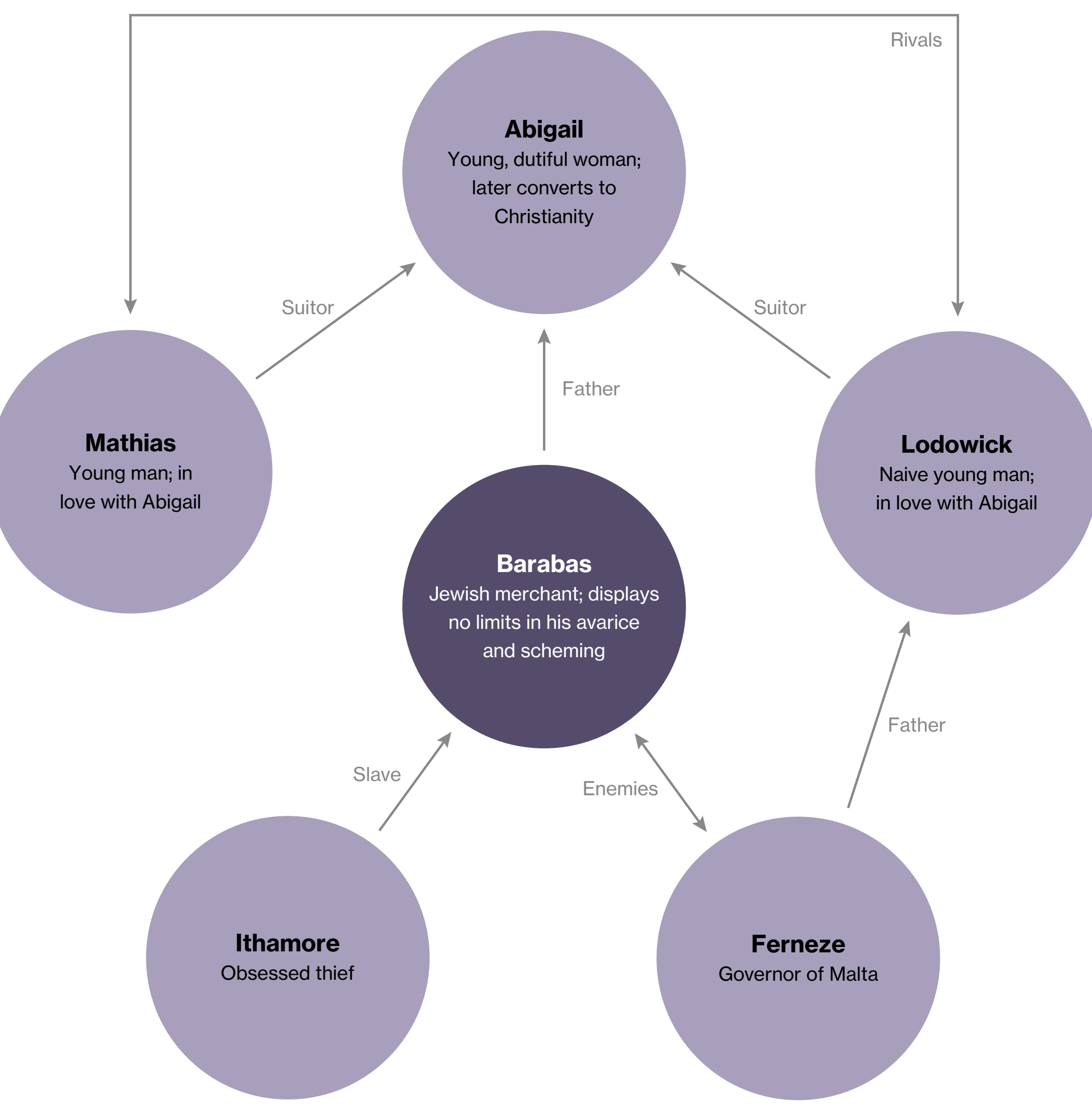
Character Map



- Main Character
- Other Major Character
- Minor Character

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Full Character List

Character	Description
Barabas	Barabas is the play's protagonist, the immensely wealthy "Jew of Malta." His name is borrowed directly from the New Testament, where Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, frees a criminal named Barabas, on the occasion of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus.
Abigail	Abigail is the daughter of Barabas. Arguably the most ethical character in a drama featuring scoundrels, Abigail dies midway through the story.
Ferneze	Ferneze is the Christian governor of Malta. Late in the play, he seems to join forces with Barabas against the Turks, but he proves to be the source of Barabas's own destruction.
Lodowick	Lodowick is the son of Ferneze, governor of Malta. A suitor of Barabas's daughter Abigail, Lodowick woos the girl, ostensibly for her beauty, but there are numerous hints that he is primarily attracted by the riches she will inherit from her father.
Mathias	Mathias is the son of Katherine, a high-status lady of Malta who strongly dislikes the Jews. Despite his mother's prejudice, however, he is attracted to Abigail and is willing to fight his rival Lodowick for her.
Ithamore	Ithamore is a Turkish slave purchased by Barabas. Proud of his villainy, Ithamore rivals his master in evil scheming.
Abbess	The Abbess is the nun superior in charge of the convent that is established at the site of Barabas's home on the orders of Ferneze.
Friar Barnardine	Friar Barnardine is one of two friars that play important roles in the ranks of Christians in the play. Beneath their piety, however, the friars are portrayed as greedy, quarrelsome, and potentially violent.
Bassoes	The Bassoes are high-ranking Turkish officials.
Bellamira	Bellamira is a courtesan. She seduces Ithamore, with an eye on the wealth of the Turkish slave's master. In the latter part of the play she becomes a blackmailer.
Martin del Bosco	Martin del Bosco is the vice admiral of the Spanish navy. He persuades Ferneze to resist the Turks.
Callapine	Callapine is a Turkish official who often serves as a spokesman for Calymath.
Calymath	Selim Calymath is the son of the Turkish sultan.
Friar Jacomo	Friar Jacomo is a colleague of Friar Barnardine, though he is attached to a different monastery.
First Jew	The first Jew is one of three Jews who visit Barabas to tell him that all Jews have been ordered by the Turks to gather in the senate-house.
Second Jew	The second Jew is one of three Jews who visit Barabas to tell him that all Jews have been ordered by the Turks to gather in the senate-house.
Third Jew	The third Jew is one of three Jews who visit Barabas to tell him that all Jews have been ordered by the Turks to gather in the senate-house.
Katherine	Katherine is the mother of Mathias and is prejudiced against Jews. She especially hates Barabas.
First knight	The first knight is one of the Maltese knights, a Christian military organization, who support Ferneze.

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Second knight	The second knight is one of the Maltese knights, a Christian military organization, who support Ferneze.
Machiavel	Machiavel is the speaker of the prologue. His character is based on the Florentine philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli.
First merchant	The first merchant is one of two merchants who visit Barabas to tell him of the success and whereabouts of his ships.
Second merchant	The second merchant is one of two merchants who visit Barabas to tell him of the success and whereabouts of his ships.
First officer	The first officer is one of two Maltese officers who serve Ferneze.
Second officer	The second officer is one of two Maltese officers who serve Ferneze.
Pilia-Borza	Pilia-Borza is a dishonest attendant of Bellamira.

Plot Summary

Prologue and Act 1

The soul of Machiavel (Machiavelli) speaks the prologue. He announces that the play will deal with greed and hypocrisy. In the first scene, the protagonist Barabas, the Jew of Malta, gloats about his immense riches. His complacency, however, is ruffled when a meeting is called at the senate-house. Ferneze, the governor, must find a way to pay a large tribute to the Ottoman Turks that is 10 years past due. His solution is to penalize the Jews of Malta, especially Barabas, who has his entire estate confiscated and must surrender his house for the establishment there of a nunnery. Outraged, Barabas vows vengeance. As it happens, he has a means at hand. Persuading his beloved daughter, Abigail, to feign conversion to Christianity, he tells her to join the nunnery, where she will have access to a large portion of his treasure squirreled away underneath the floorboards. Abigail complies.

Act 2

Abigail is true to her orders and flings down bags of the treasure before Barabas. Meanwhile, the Spanish vice admiral Martin del Bosco persuades Ferneze to defy the Turks, with Spain supporting Malta's resistance. Barabas busies himself with purchasing a new slave, the Turk Ithamore, with whom he holds a bragging contest about the criminal and violent deeds that both men have accomplished. Barabas artfully manipulates Abigail's two suitors, Lodowick and Mathias, determined to lead both to their ruin.

Act 3

Barabas's cunning plans reach fruition promptly. Incited by a forged challenge, Lodowick and Mathias engage in a mutually fatal duel. When Ithamore reports these doings to Abigail, she is shocked, for she truly loved Mathias. Now full of guilt and eager to repent, Abigail makes an authentic conversion to Christianity and rejoins the nunnery. Barabas is aghast at what he considers his daughter's betrayal. He resolves, with Ithamore's aid, to poison all the nuns, including Abigail. This plan too promptly succeeds, and Abigail dies with loyalty to Christianity on her lips.

Act 4

Barabas and Ithamore rejoice at their villainy, but Barabas becomes disconcerted by the hints of Friars Barnardine and Jacomo that the Christian priests know about the Jew's involvement in the deaths of Lodowick and Mathias. Barabas and Ithamore strangle the sleeping Friar Barnardine and then frame Friar Jacomo for the murder. Meanwhile, Bellamira seduces Ithamore, and both characters, joined by Pilia-Borza, blackmail Barabas for increasing amounts. To obtain revenge, Barabas disguises himself as a French musician and poisons Pilia-Borza, Bellamira, and Ithamore with a nosegay of flowers.

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Act 5 and Epilogue

Bellamira, Pilia-Borza, and Ithamore disclose Barabas's crimes to Ferneze, the Maltese governor, who arrests Barabas. Barabas, however, feigns death by drinking a sleeping potion and escapes. Bellamira, Pilia-Borza, and Ithamore die as a result of the poisoned flowers. Barabas strikes a deal with the Turkish leader, Calymath, who captures the city with Barabas's aid. Although he receives the governorship as a reward, Barabas is still dissatisfied. He decides to play the Turks and the Christians off against each other and conspires with Ferneze to overthrow the Turkish invaders in exchange for a huge amount of money. Barabas invites the Turkish host to an elaborate banquet and then oversees the construction of a huge contraption that will assure their slaughter. But Ferneze betrays Barabas at the last minute, sending him to a violent death. The Jew dies with curses on his lips. Ferneze regains the upper hand in Malta. In the epilogue, an actor begs the indulgence of the sovereign and the audience.

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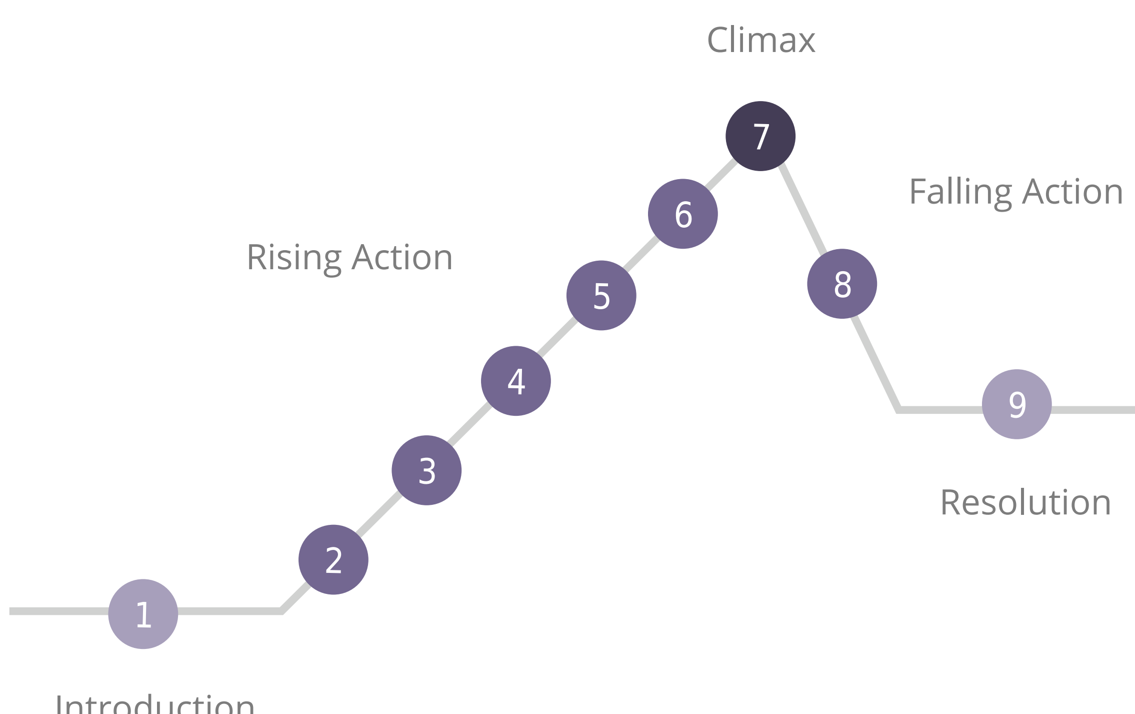
Plot Diagram



Introduction

1. Ferneze takes Barabas's wealth to pay the Turkish tribute.

Rising Action

2. Abigail joins the nunnery to rescue Barabas's fortune.

3. Martin del Bosco persuades Ferneze to resist the Turks.

4. Barabas engineers the deaths of Mathias and Lodowick.

5. Abigail converts to Christianity and joins the convent.

6. Barabas poisons all the nuns, including Abigail.

Climax

7. Barabas and Ithamore murder Friar Jacomo, framing a suspect.

Falling Action

8. Ferneze betrays Barabas, sending him to a gruesome death.

Resolution

9. Ferneze assumes his old position as Malta's governor.

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Timeline of Events

Around 1590

Barabas glories in his wealth. He hears of a fleet of galleys arrived in Malta from Turkey.

Later that day

Ferneze rules that the island's Jews must bear the brunt of paying the tribute to the Turks.

That night

Abigail pretends conversion to Christianity and then rescues Barabas's fortune.

The next day

The Spanish vice admiral del Bosco persuades Ferneze to resist the Turks.

The same day

Barabas buys the Turkish slave Ithamore and begins to manipulate Lodowick and Mathias.

The same day

Lodowick and Mathias fight a mutually fatal duel.

Immediately after

Informed of Mathias's death, the grieving Abigail converts to Christianity and joins the nunnery.

That night

Barabas poisons all the nuns, including Abigail.

Sometime later

Barabas and Ithamore murder Friar Barnardine and then frame Friar Jacomo for the crime.

Sometime later

Bellamira, Pilia-Borza, and Ithamore blackmail Barabas.

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Sometime later

Barabas and Ferneze conspire against the Turks.

Sometime later

Ferneze betrays Barabas and sends him to a gruesome death.

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Scene Summaries

Prologue

Summary

The prologue to the play consists of a speech by a ghost based on the Italian political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527). Machiavelli's treatise *The Prince* was a byword for cynicism and pragmatism. In the speech, which is in the nature of a caricature, Machiavel claims to have inhabited the soul of the French Duke of Guise, who is also now dead. Machiavel delivers a brief, boastful sketch of his beliefs. He then announces that he has come on stage to present the tragic story of the Jew of Malta.

Analysis

This speech, 35 lines long, sets the tone for Marlowe's play as a whole. Machiavel would have been easily recognized by the audience: a figure of deceit, irreligion, and scheming. His boast that he recently inhabited the soul of the Duke of Guise adds an outrageous embellishment for an English audience, since Guise, recently assassinated in 1588, was notorious as the French nobleman chiefly responsible for the massacre of French Protestants on St. Bartholomew's Day, 1572.

In his prologue, Machiavel introduces many of the play's most important themes, including hypocrisy, religion, and avarice. For example, he asserts about himself, "Admired I am of those that hate me most." He brazenly dismisses religious belief: "I count religion but a childish toy." Ignorance is the only sin Machiavel can conceive of. And of Barabas, he remarks: "Who smiles to see how full his bags are crammed, / Which money was not got without my means."

And perhaps most important, in his fanatical zeal and devilish delight in evil, Machiavel sets the tone for the melodrama, an emotional roller coaster, that follows.

Act 1, Scene 1

Summary

The scene opens with Barabas alone on stage. He is seated in his counting house, with "heaps of gold before him." The tableau is an iconic image symbolizing the protagonist's obsessive greed.

Barabas proclaims himself well satisfied with the 200 percent profit he has just made from a shipping venture. He extols the almost magical virtues of gold and jewels gathered from every part of the known world and all converging on his "little room." The only inconvenience is the labor he is forced to expend in "telling," or counting, his fortune.

After Barabas's prefatory speech, two merchants enter to inform him of the status of his fleets of vessels. Here again, Barabas is pleased with the progress of events, although he quizzes the merchants meticulously on the geographical location and lines of travel of the ships.

Then, in a second soliloquy, Barabas turns more reflective, musing on the destiny of the Jews. He says he would rather be a despised but wealthy Jew than a poor Christian who is the target of pity. Although the Jews may be a "scattered nation," they have accumulated more wealth than any Christian. Jews may not be kings, but it is as well to leave kingship and its perils to Christian rulers. Barabas says he will be content with his wealth and his only daughter, who is very dear to him.

Three Jews enter, saying that they must consult Barabas and seek his counsel on an urgent matter. Turkish warships have arrived in Malta. The Jews fear that the Turks have hostile intentions. They tell Barabas that a meeting has been called in the senate-house and that every Jew on the island must attend. Barabas shrugs off the matter. After the Jews depart, he muses that the Turks have arrived to collect their long-deferred tribute from the Maltese. Barabas will be wary and prudent, watching out to guard his own interests.

Analysis

The play's first scene focuses squarely on Barabas. Even at the beginning, Barabas is revealed as a multidimensional figure: avaricious, proud, self-willed, and fiercely intelligent. He is an

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admired councilor, an immensely wealthy magnate, and a doting father. He has made his fortune through trading, rather than money lending. He is copiously informed about many topics, including shipping routes, geography, and Maltese power politics.

The opening soliloquy, with its symbolic setting of a counting house, immediately establishes a picture of Barabas as a loner. He is self-sufficient and fiercely proud of his knowledge, initiative, and independence. Amassing riches is his chief goal in life, and he is outstandingly efficient at it. The glee with which he gloats over his "infinite riches" is unmistakable. The only drawback to his existence is the inconvenience of counting his wealth. With comic exaggeration, Barabas envisions a world in which counting one's fortune in bulk is feasible, in order to save time and wear and tear on the patience of magnates.

Barabas's brief dialogue with the merchants accomplishes several goals. It reveals the Jew of Malta as vigilant and meticulous. The dialogue also immerses readers further into Barabas's temperament and psychic momentum. He is a veritable dynamo of enterprise. The merchants are revealed as small operators compared to this colossus of trade.

In the soliloquy that follows the merchants' brief appearance, Barabas fleshes out his self-portrait by contrasting his status as a hated but wealthy Jew with the Christians whom he despises. Far better, he says, to belong to a hated race than to be a Christian in poverty—or even a Christian ruler. Barabas's pride in his Jewishness is plain, as is his sense of close kinship with other Jews scattered across the globe who have distinguished themselves in finance.

This air of complacency, however, is abruptly upset by the entrance of the three Jews in the latter part of the scene. The conflict posed by the arrival of Turkish warships does not unduly worry Barabas, although it is clear that troubled waters may lie ahead. True to his nature, he vows to be wary and take care of himself. The closing maxim, an allusion to the ancient Roman comic playwright Terence, is *ego mihimet semper proximus:* "I am first and last always my own keeper." The allusion is fittingly symmetrical with the appearance, at the opening of the scene, of Barabas alone in his counting house.

Act 1, Scene 2

Summary

The scene shifts to the senate-house of Malta, where an official meeting is presided over by the island's governor, a high-ranking man named Ferneze. Ambassadors from the Ottoman Empire of Turkey demand that Ferneze pay a tribute that dates back 10 years. The amount is so great that it exceeds the current ability of the Maltese to pay. Therefore, Ferneze pleads for, and is accorded, a one-month reprieve.

Ferneze's strategy then becomes apparent. The Maltese intend to cast the burden of payment upon the island's Jews. With brutal directness, the governor and his officers explain to Barabas that he and his fellow Jews have three choices: (a) each Jew shall pay half of his estate; (b) all Jews who deny to pay shall be forcibly converted to Christianity; (c) those who refuse conversion shall lose all they have.

To Barabas's consternation and disgust, three Jews capitulate to the governor's demands. Barabas himself is punished for his outspoken resistance and condemned to lose all his possessions. Despite his outspoken objections, the verdict holds firm, and Ferneze even orders Barabas's residence to be converted into a Christian nunnery.

Fulminating against Christian injustice, Barabas takes little consolation in the sympathy of his fellow Jews, who compare his sufferings to the tribulations of Job in the Old Testament.

The Jew of Malta's adored daughter, Abigail, enters, lamenting her father's lot. Barabas explains to her that he has fortified himself against disaster with a backup plan by burying a substantial portion of his riches underneath a plank in his house. Abigail, he says, must feign conversion to Christianity and pretend that she has a nun's vocation. In this way, she will be able to retrieve the buried riches. An abbess and two friars enter, and Abigail goes through with the plan, accompanied by Barabas's cynical but encouraging asides urging his daughter on. Abigail is accepted as a novice at the nunnery. At the conclusion of the scene, two young gentleman admirers of Abigail, Mathias and Lodowick, make their entrance and comment on the scene. They are both awestruck by Abigail's beauty.

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Analysis

This fast-moving scene contains a number of disparate threads. The initial conflict between Barabas and Ferneze highlights Christian prejudice against Jews and also the theme of religious hypocrisy. As Barabas remarks to Abigail later in the scene, "religion / Hides many mischiefs from suspicion."

In their treatment of the Jews, Ferneze and the Maltese officers are sharply insulting. Barabas and his compatriots are "infidels" who live "hateful lives" and "stand accursed in the sight of heaven" (lines 62–64). To their insults, the Maltese add sophistry, or distorted reasoning, when they tell Barabas that they single him out for especially confiscatory treatment in order to forestall the harsh treatment of many other Jews. After reproaching his fellow Jews for cowardice, Barabas reluctantly agrees to the Maltese terms. He utters the ironic invocation "*Corpo di Dio*" (literally, "body of God," a reference to the crucified Jesus Christ). But he is too late: the Maltese now insist on taking his entire estate, not just one-half. They even have the effrontery to quote scripture in order to justify their actions. Then they order the conversion of Barabas's residence into a nunnery.

Scripture, in fact, plays a complex, mercurial role in the scene. The Maltese misuse it to justify their extortion. The Jews, on the other hand, make a torturous comparison of Barabas's fate to Job's in the Old Testament. It was Job who suffered numerous excruciating afflictions when he is tested by God. Like Job, Barabas is brought to curse the day he was born. In fact, the dialogue between Barabas and the other Jews seems noticeably reminiscent of the conversation between Job and his "comforters" in the early chapters of the Book of Job. As the other Jews depart, Barabas dismisses them as "base slaves" and mutters that he is made "of finer mould."

Just at this point, the Barabas's daughter, Abigail, enters, full of lamentation for her father's fate. Barabas's cunning, though, has not forsaken him. In a striking irony of situation, or pointed reversal, he is about to turn the Maltese confiscation of his house on its head. Revealing that he has secreted a large portion of his fortune under a floorboard of his residence, he exhorts Abigail to feign conversion to Christianity and a vocation as a nun. Forced now to "sink or swim," Barabas justifies this strategic plan, or "policy," by arguing that "a counterfeit profession is better / Than unseen hypocrisy." Thus, in this message, Marlowe merges the themes of policy (or cunning pragmatism) and hypocrisy. Once she is admitted into the nunnery, Abigail will be able to extract the hidden riches, thus rescuing the family fortunes.

Fortuitously, an abbess and two friars now make their appearance. Their readiness to be duped by Abigail is semi-comic, as is Barabas's rapid sequence of asides and pseudo-execrations toward the end of the scene.

The closing action introduces yet another thread: the rivalry between two young men, Mathias and Lodowick, for Abigail's affections. Thus, the first act concludes on a note of suspense.

Act 2, Scene 1

Summary

This scene opens at night, outside the house of Barabas. The Jew enters with a light, praying that God will guide Abigail in her mission in the same manner that the ancient Israelites were guided through the Red Sea in their exodus from Egypt. Abigail enters on the upper level, handling bags of gold. At first, father and daughter do not see each other in the gloom. Then, however, Abigail begins to throw the bags of treasure down to her ecstatic father, who welcomes his riches with jubilant exclamations. Abigail warns Barabas that the nuns will awaken at midnight. After she departs, Barabas lyrically welcomes the dawn of a new day.

Analysis

This brief scene packs together a number of literary techniques and devices. Barabas opens the action with a simile, comparing himself to a raven, conventionally a symbol for death, illness, or evil. (Symmetrically, Barabas closes the scene with an invocation of the morning lark, which takes the place of the ill-starred raven.) Barabas next proceeds to a grandiloquent Biblical allusion, as he asks God to guide Abigail the way the Israelites were guided out of bondage (see Exodus 13:18–22).

In a touch of dramatic irony—in which the audience is aware of something of which the characters are oblivious—Abigail does not at first recognize her father in the dark. Her wish for his happiness, however, is soon fulfilled, and she begins to throw down the bags of gold, pearls, and jewels to him. Barabas

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almost faints with pleasure. His blended pleasure in his gold and his daughter, as critics have remarked, strongly resembles the satisfaction that Shylock takes in his gold and in his daughter Jessica in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice.* Barabas is so ebullient, in fact, that he breaks into Spanish twice. At line 39, before he recognizes Abigail he laments, *Bueno para todos mi ganado no era* ("my flock, or wealth, good for everyone else, is not good to me"). But soon afterward, Barabas closes the scene with the exclamation, *Hermoso placer de los dineros* ("Oh, the beautiful pleasures of money")—a line that the actor playing Barabas may have delivered in song!

The scene vividly illustrates the fine line between melodrama and comedy that is so characteristic of the play as a whole.

Act 2, Scene 2

Summary

This brief scene reverts to politics. The high-ranking Spanish naval officer Martin del Bosco has just arrived in Malta. His ship is laden with a cargo of slaves that he aims to sell. When Ferneze, the Maltese governor, tells del Bosco that he dare not purchase the slaves because of his tributary obligation to the Turks, the Spanish officer reassures him, asserting that the Spanish king retains title to the island of Malta and will support Maltese resistance to the Turks. Ferneze, newly confident, agrees with del Bosco's plan.

Analysis

The plot thickens, as the new Spanish arrival Martin del Bosco contributes a fresh dimension to the ethnic prejudices and hostilities that Marlowe exploits in the play. Instead of Christian versus Jew, there now emerges a Christian versus Muslim element, as the Spanish and the Maltese form an alliance against the Turks. By the end of the scene, Ferneze has exchanged diffidence for bombast, as he acclaims del Bosco as "Malta's general" and rhetorically threatens to send the Turk Calymath "bullets wrapped in smoke and fire" instead of the gold he seeks.

This scene's action is important for a couple of reasons. First, it establishes a three-cornered political tangle (Spain, Malta, and the Ottoman Empire). Second, it sets up Barabas's purchase of the Turkish slave Ithamore, who will prove to play a major role in the drama.

Act 2, Scene 3

Summary

This scene further develops various plot strands that have been introduced earlier in Act 2. The action takes place in the marketplace. After a brief preface by an officer, Barabas takes the stage and delivers a lengthy aside. He informs readers that he has purchased a new mansion, which is quite as handsome as the governor's residence. But his recovery from humiliation and privation is by no means complete, since he will pursue vengeance on Ferneze, the governor. Barabas boasts of the Jewish talent for hypocrisy and dissembling.

Lodowick, Ferneze's son, now enters the scene. He too is a target for Barabas's revenge, a payback which the Jew means to affect by playing on Lodowick's fancy for Abigail. Lodowick metaphorically refers to the girl as a diamond, a figure of speech that Barabas encourages in a series of puns and asides. Hypocritically, Barabas refers to the seizure of his house and its conversion to a nunnery as a deed that will help purge his sins—at the same time, muttering in an aside that he hopes to set the house on fire.

The two turn their attention to the marketplace and the slaves for sale there. After some banter, Barabas purchases Ithamore. Parting from Lodowick, he assures the young man that the diamond (Abigail) will be his; Lodowick has only to visit the Jew's house.

Mathias, who is Abigail's other young suitor (and the one that she prefers), enters with his mother Katherine. He immediately voices his suspicion about the closeness between Barabas and Lodowick. While Katherine busies herself with purchasing a slave, Barabas initiates a dialogue with Mathias, cautioning him not to let his anti-Semitic mother notice their conversation. Barabas tells Mathias to think of him as a father, and he conceals facts when Mathias asks him about his parley with Lodowick. Mathias also misleads his mother, saying that his colloquy with Barabas concerned borrowing a book. Haughtily, Katherine orders her son not to talk with Barabas, since he is "cast off from heaven."

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The other characters depart, leaving Barabas and Ithamore alone on stage. Barabas declares he will take his new slave into training, teaching him to foreswear such emotions as compassion, love, hope, fear, and pity. The two then begin a bragging contest, with each character boasting of the murders and other outrages he has accomplished.

Lodowick re-enters, inquiring about the "diamond" Barabas has promised him. Abigail then enters, bearing letters that she gives to Barabas. The Jew orders his daughter to entertain Lodowick courteously—provided that she retain her chastity. Privately, he tells her he would like the two to become betrothed. This disconcerts Abigail, whose true choice is Mathias, but Barabas insists on the stratagem as necessary to his plan of revenge.

After the young people exit, Barabas gloats at the progress of his plan. He intends, he says, to have both Lodowick and Mathias die. Fortuitously, Mathias soon enters, becoming enraged when Barabas, in a series of lies, tells him of Lodowick's importunate courtship of the girl. Drawing his sword, Mathias threatens to attack Lodowick, but Barabas restrains him. Abigail and Lodowick appear briefly, thus heightening Mathias's bitter hostility. Barabas then eggs on Lodowick still further by telling him (falsely) that Mathias has sworn to kill his rival.

Barabas assures Lodowick that the young man will have his "diamond" (meaning Abigail). He then speaks aside with Abigail, admonishing her that she must cooperate in duping Lodowick. Abigail seems uncomfortable with dissembling, but she accepts her father's commands, at least for the moment. Misleadingly, Barabas interprets his daughter's tears as simply the custom of Jewish maidens when they are betrothed. Lodowick now exits and is rapidly followed on stage by Mathias. Once again, Barabas plants the seeds of jealousy and hostility, claiming that it was only by his own intervention that Mathias escaped being stabbed by Lodowick.

Toward the end of the scene, Abigail questions Barabas about pitting the two young men against each other. She herself loves Mathias. Barabas is annoyed that she has not chosen a Jewish suitor and orders Ithamore to escort Abigail into the house. He then gives Ithamore a letter to deliver to Mathias, purporting to contain a challenge from Lodowick. As the scene ends, Barabas declares himself pleased with Ithamore's zealous compliance in duplicity.

Analysis

As the scene opens, Barabas boasts of his powers of dissimulation, and the chief action in this part of the play—the duping of Lodowick and Mathias—leaves no doubt of his talents. He has already made a substantial comeback since his humiliation in Act 1, and he intends to go much further, seeking the ruin of both Ferneze and Lodowick, the governor's son. Almost incidentally, the death of Mathias will also be part of Barabas's wholesale revenge. By the time Marlowe wrote *The Jew of Malta*, the "revenge tragedy" was a readily recognizable and hugely popular sub-genre of Elizabethan drama—perhaps most clearly typified in Thomas Kyd's play *The Spanish Tragedy* (1576).

Among the leading techniques in this scene are asides, allusions, irony, puns, and catalogs. The quasi-comic tone continues. Barabas and Ithamore, for example, vie for bragging rights in their gruesome recitals of murders, insults, and grievous injuries. Barabas also highlights the semi-comic tone in his cunning manipulation of the two young rivals in love, Lodowick and Mathias, who alternate with each other on stage in almost ballet-like movements.

Barabas employs verbal irony—a device in which what is said strikingly contrasts with what is really meant—when he refers to Lodowick as "one that I love for his good father's sake." A few lines later, he puns twice: once on the word "foil" and once on the word "pointed." Barabas also alludes to Jewish history in ancient Roman times when he refers to the emperors Vespasian and Titus, who conquered Jerusalem in the year 70 CE. Finally, asides are ubiquitous throughout the scene, as Barabas cloaks his real intentions.

The dialogue and action of the scene suggest two new aspects of the father-daughter relationship between Barabas and Abigail. First, Barabas's indiscriminate resolution to do away with both his daughter's suitors—despite the fact that Abigail declares her love for Mathias—indicates that revenge and mayhem are higher priorities for him than his daughter's happiness. (Of course, he may also be motivated by the fact that Mathias is not Jewish and that his mother is actively anti-Jewish). Second, Abigail's newly expressed discomfort with dissimulation suggests that there may be limits to Barabas's ability to manipulate her.

At the end of the scene, Barabas's threefold use of the word "cunningly" and "cunning" as he sets Mathias and Lodowick

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against each other is notable. Deceit has become his singular objective.

Act 3, Scene 1

Summary

The opening scene of this act introduces two new characters: Bellamira and Pilia-Borza. The former, a courtesan, complains of the decline in business owing to the siege of Malta. One of her remaining customers, Pilia-Borza, slings a bag of silver at her: he has stolen it from Barabas's counting house. Ithamore enters, waxing eloquent to himself over Bellamira's beauty while the other characters slip away. Ithamore says that he has delivered Lodowick's fabricated challenge to Mathias.

Analysis

Several new twists in the plot mark this scene. Surprisingly, Barabas's counting house proves vulnerable to theft, while Ithamore is charmed by Bellamira's beauty. Pilia-Borza, whose name is a corruption of an Italian term for "pickpocket," uses prose for the first time in the play when he recounts his pilfering of the bag of silver.

Act 3, Scene 2

Summary

With remarkable rapidity, Barabas settles his score with Lodowick and Mathias. The two young men, goaded into a duel by the Jew's false challenge, slay each other in a sword fight. In a macabre touch, Barabas eggs them on, then promptly disappears. Ferneze and Katherine enter, stunned to see the dead bodies of their sons. At first, both parents consider suicide, but they then decide to investigate the cause of their children's enmity.

Analysis

The scene is fast-paced. Cynical and venomous as ever, Barabas savors the pleasure of seeing his evil plan carried to fruition, as both young men slay each other. The Jew's glee is juxtaposed with the extravagant grief of Ferneze and Katherine, although the reader's sympathy for them is necessarily tempered by the hypocrisy and hostility of which both are capable. Ferneze's decision to seek the cause of the disaster ends the scene on a suspenseful note.

Act 3, Scene 3

Summary

Ithamore's glee at the destruction of Mathias and Lodowick has no bounds, as he acclaims his new employer's mastery of "policy." He tells Abigail of the young men's duel, about how he and her father arranged it, and of the deadly outcome. For her part, Abigail recoils with horror and shock. She dispatches Ithamore to fetch one of the friars. Before he departs, the slave slyly questions if the friars and the nuns disport themselves sexually with one another.

In a brief soliloquy, Abigail berates her father as "hard-hearted" and set upon "extreme revenge," and she laments that "there is no love on earth." When Friar Jacomo arrives, Abigail begs him to allow her to be readmitted to the nunnery. Jacomo, though surprised, acquiesces. Despite her grief, Abigail promises that she will never betray her father.

Analysis

Two literary techniques are prominent in this brief scene. The first is situational irony, in which there is a striking reversal between what we expect to happen and what actually happens. Abigail successfully dissimulated when she first joined the nunnery in order to recover her father's nest egg. Now she begs to return to the nunnery of her own accord as she is totally disillusioned with the cynical "policy" of her father. The second prominent device is apostrophe, in which a character addresses a person or thing that is not physically present. Abigail uses this technique to address her father. "Hard-hearted father, unkind Barabas!" she cries and then

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condemns him for his treachery to Lodowick and Mathias.

Act 3, Scene 4

Summary

Barabas enters, reading a letter from Abigail in which she informs him of her conversion to Christianity and her readmission at the nunnery. He is shocked and outraged, believing that his daughter has betrayed him. When Ithamore joins him, Barabas showers his new slave with endearments. Disinheriting his daughter, he makes Ithamore his sole heir. He then sends the slave to fetch a pot of rice which he intends to poison in order to kill all the nuns, including Abigail. As Ithamore watches in fascination, Barabas mixes in a deadly poison in order to create a lethal porridge. Dispatching Ithamore to the nunnery, Barabas intones an elaborate curse. Ithamore exclaims, "What a blessing!" Just after he departs, Barabas darkly hints that his execrations will befall his slave as well.

Analysis

Just as Abigail reproached her father as "unkind" in the previous Scene 3, Barabas here upbraids his daughter as "false and unkind." It is hard to tell whether Barabas is more afraid of being found out as responsible for the deaths of Mathias and Lodowick or whether he is angrier over his daughter's desertion of her Jewish religion.

Either way, Barabas promptly discovers a replacement for the daughter who had been the apple of his eye. This is Ithamore, whom he promotes to be his "second self." In a shower of extravagant compliments, he names Ithamore as his sole heir. Dissimulation, however, is never far away from Barabas's temperament. When Ithamore briefly disappears to fetch the pot of rice, Barabas says, "Thus every villain ambles after wealth, / Although he ne'er be richer than in hope." This comment, together with Barabas's closing suggestion of vengeance after Ithamore departs—"I'll pay thee with a vengeance, Ithamore"—are sufficient to alert readers that Barabas's adoption of Ithamore is more a matter of policy than authentic affection.

A dramatic highlight of the scene is Barabas's elaborate curse, in which he employs a variety of allusions. For example, he wishes that the potion "be it to her as the draught of which great Alexander drunk and died." These curses allude to Pope Alexander VI, a member of the notorious Borgia family, to a mythological monster, the Lernaean Hydra, and to the Cocytus and the Styx, rivers in the underworld in classical Greek mythology.

In this scene, does Barabas cross the line from quasi-comic villain to paranoid serial murderer? Many readers and audiences would say yes. His decision to kill his own daughter, as well as many other innocents, suddenly creates a new tone in the drama: a tone of terror and horror.

Act 3, Scene 5

Summary

In this brief scene, Ferneze confronts the Turkish emissary Callapine and refuses to render the tribute imposed by the Turks. In response, Callapine threatens that Calymath will destroy Malta. Ferneze bids the Maltese prepare for war.

Analysis

This scene advances the play's plot while maintaining suspense about what will happen at the nunnery. Ferneze's defiant attitude, as readers are already aware, relies on his reassurances from the Spanish naval officer Martin del Bosco.

Act 3, Scene 6

Summary

In a panic, Friar Jacomo and Friar Barnardine deplore the grave illness of the nuns, who are on the point of death. Abigail enters, declaring repentance for her sins. She makes her confession to Friar Barnardine, giving him a paper with the details of Barabas's villainous plot to get rid of Lodowick and Mathias. Friar Barnardine assures her that secrets revealed in confession may never be disclosed to others. Dying, Abigail implores the friar to convert her father to Christianity.

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Father Jacomo re-enters to announce that all the nuns have died. Father Barnardine urges that they depart together to confront Barabas. First, however, they will bury Abigail.

Analysis

Abigail's death marks the climax of the play. Considering the prevalence of deceit, dissimulation, hypocrisy, and betrayal, the audience is compelled to wonder whether Friar Barnardine will keep the "secret of the confessional," namely the details of Barabas's villainy that Abigail has confided in him before her death. One odd feature of the scene is Father Barnardine's regret that Abigail has died a virgin. Perhaps Marlowe alludes here to the widespread scandalous tales of sexual relations between nuns and friars, or perhaps Barnardine simply regrets that Abigail never had the opportunity to wed her chosen suitor, Mathias. The matter is left unclarified and unresolved.

Act 4, Scene 1

Summary

This scene opens with master and slave rejoicing at their success in annihilating the nuns. Perhaps most shocking, Barabas is especially jubilant over the death of Abigail.

Yet the jubilation is short-lived. Friars Jacomo and Barnardine enter, admonishing Barabas to repent. They strongly hint that they know about the villainous, forged challenge that incited Lodowick and Mathias to a fatal duel. In response, Barabas pretends to wish to convert to Christianity. He boasts of his wealth and suggests that he will endow a monastery with treasure.

A dispute erupts at once between the friars, as they compete for Barabas's philanthropic largesse. The friars break out into a fight. After Barabas calms the situation, the friars make their exit, and Barabas cynically vows to take both their lives. One of them, he says, turned Abigail to Christianity, while the other knows enough about Barabas to have him executed.

Ithamore reports that Friar Barnardine has fallen asleep on the premises. Both he and Barabas proceed to strangle the friar. They then use the friar's staff to prop him up. Afterward, they conceal themselves, and Friar Jacomo re-enters. Seeing what he takes to be the sleeping form of Barnardine, Jacomo strikes him with the staff. Barabas and Ithamore emerge from hiding and accuse Jacomo of Barnardine's murder. Seizing him, they tell Jacomo that they will take him to court, where he will have to answer to the legal authorities.

Analysis

In the portrayals of Friar Barnardine and Friar Jacomo, which amount to heavily ironic caricature, the play's tone reverts to dark comedy. The Christian friars are satirized for their greed and violent jealousy. Ithamore's line introducing the friars is notable: "Here come two religious caterpillars." Once again, Barabas employs dissimulation successfully. His manipulation of Jacomo and Barnardine parallels, to some extent, his previous playing off of Lodowick and Mathias against each other. This time, however, Barabas embellishes his deceit with an elaborate pretense of repentance and fervor for Christian conversion.

Act 4, Scene 2

Summary

Pilia-Borza tells Bellamira that he has delivered the courtesan's letter to Ithamore. The Turkish slave enters, uttering a monologue in which he recounts the calm, submissive behavior of Friar Jacomo at the priest's execution. Bellamira showers Ithamore with compliments and endearments, yet her comments aside to Pilia-Borza make clear that she is putting on an act. The three conspire together to blackmail Barabas, and Ithamore writes the Jew a letter demanding 300 crowns. Pilia-Borza exits to deliver the letter. Ithamore then lyrically responds to Bellamira's seduction. Pilia-Borza re-enters with the money, and the blackmailers, encouraged by their prompt success, write another letter, this time for 500 crowns. Bellamira kisses Ithamore as the scene concludes.

Analysis

This scene adds a new, somewhat bizarre twist to the plot. Blackmail and treachery seem to spread like wildfire as Bellamira, Pilia-Borza, and Ithamore turn on the Jew of

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Malta—and seem likely to turn on each other. The sordid action highlights extortion and lechery. At the same time, Ithamore responds to Bellamira's seductive advances with snatches of "high" poetry sprinkled with classical allusions. Ithamore's line "I'll be thy Jason, thou my golden fleece" crystallizes these contrasts, as he alludes to the epic tale of Jason and the Argonauts in Greek mythology and at the same time puns on the word "fleece," which can mean "to plunder." The dialogue verges on comedy when, at the end of the scene, Bellamira theatrically throws the bag of extorted gold aside in order to kiss Ithamore.

Act 4, Scene 3

Summary

Barabas enters, reading Ithamore's first blackmail letter and delivering a scurrilous rant on Pilia-Borza's physical appearance and putative morals. Pilia-Borza enters to demand more money. Barabas winces with pain, complaining that he regards Ithamore's extortion as a personal betrayal. Hoping to poison Pilia-Borza, he invites him to dinner, but the messenger refuses. Barabas reluctantly hands over the money. After Pilia-Borza's departure, Barabas vows to get even with Ithamore, whom he will visit in disguise.

Analysis

This further advance in the plot shows Barabas on the defensive for the first time in the play. He is still a dangerous man to cross, however, as his impromptu scheme to poison Pilia-Borza makes clear. The scene ends with suspense. How will Barabas disguise himself, and what specific tack will he take to revenge himself on Ithamore?

Act 4, Scene 4

Summary

Ithamore, Bellamira, and Pilia-Borza plunge into revelry, toasting repeatedly with cups of wine. Ithamore boasts of the villainous acts he has shared with Barabas, referring to the deaths of Mathias and Lodowick, the poisoning of the nuns, and the murder of Friar Barnardine. Bellamora and Pilia-Borza, in a series of asides, take due note, commenting that they will betray Ithamore to the governor after Ithamore extorts more gold from Barabas.

Barabas enters, disguised as a French musician. The others entreat him to entertain them, which he does after offering them a poisoned nosegay of flowers to smell. Ithamore closes the scene by declaring that 1,000 crowns should now be demanded of Barabas, since it is no sin to ruin a Jew.

Analysis

The luxurious excesses of Ithamore, Bellamira, and Pilia-Borza are juxtaposed in this scene with Barabas's persistent ingenuity, as he fortifies his disguise with appropriate phrases in French and a musical performance on the lute. The poisoned nosegay adds a bizarre, quasi-comic element to the scene.

Act 5, Scene 1

Summary

Ferneze, governor of Malta, enters, attended by his knights and officers and by the Spanish vice admiral Martin del Bosco. Bellamira tells Ferneze the truth about the death of his son, Lodowick, which resulted from a challenge forged by Barabas. Bellamira and Pilia-Borza also accuse Barabas and Ithamore of murdering the nuns and Friar Barnardine. Ferneze commands Barabas and Ithamore to be arrested, and they are brought on stage. Barabas mutters that he hopes the poisoned nosegay will soon do its work. Ferneze takes no notice of Barabas's complaint that Bellamira is a courtesan and Pilia-Borza is a thief.

Soon news of the deaths of the four arrested characters is reported: Ithamore, Bellamira, Pilia-Borza, and Barabas. Ferneze orders the bodies of the first three to be buried, while the corpse of Barabas should be thrown over the city walls to become the prey of dogs and vultures.

Outside the city, Barabas recovers: he had feigned death by taking a sleeping potion. In dialogue with the Turkish overlord Calymath, Barabas offers to lead a detachment of Turkish

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troops into the city by a secret route. He will then open the gates so that Calymath's army can conquer Malta. Calymath promises Barabas the governorship if the plan succeeds.

Analysis

Revenge is the leading theme in this scene. Barabas's strategy with the poisoned nosegay, however esoteric, proves successful, as the blackmailers Ithamore, Bellamira, and Pilia-Borza all succumb to the poison. Barabas's ingenuity is further displayed when he is able to feign death and then, almost like a cartoon character, rise up again to life outside the city walls. Once again, Barabas is back on the offensive, and we have every reason to believe that he will get revenge against Ferneze by delivering Malta to the Turkish besiegers. He says he hopes to see the governor whipped to death.

Marlowe employs dramatic convention several times in the course of this scene. For example, when Ferneze commands Ithamore and Barabas to be arrested, they are brought on stage almost immediately. Time is also foreshortened, and space handled imaginatively, when the scene seems to switch to a location outside the city walls, where Barabas holds his colloquy with Calymath.

Act 5, Scene 2

Summary

Calymath boasts of his victory over the Maltese, taunting Ferneze, who has capitulated. He proclaims Barabas the new governor of Malta and bestows an armed guard on him for protection.

Left alone on stage, Barabas gloats over his newly acquired authority, but he then puts a stunning reversal in motion. Deciding to play the Christians and the Turks off against each other, he makes a deal with Ferneze to destroy the Turkish conquerors in return for further riches. The two men shake hands to confirm their conspiracy.

Analysis

Even in victory, Barabas never remains at rest. Significantly, he uses the word "policy" four times during this scene. He also alludes to Machiavelli's classic work of political theory, *The Prince.* For example, Barabas's words about maintaining his ill-gotten authority through "firm policy" echo Chapter 7 of Machiavelli's work in which Machiavelli explains how difficult it is to maintain power when a new prince does not have an army of his own. Barabas's "stratagem" to invite the Turks to a "solemn feast" where they will be destroyed echoes Chapter 8 of *The Prince* in which Machiavelli describes a Greek tyrant who tried the same scheme. Barabas's concluding words about self-interest may be regarded as his personal creed.

Act 5, Scene 3

Summary

Having toured the city and repaired the damage caused by the siege, Calymath expresses admiration for Malta's strategic position in the Mediterranean. A messenger enters to deliver Barabas's invitation to a banquet before Calymath sets sail for Turkey. Calymath is hesitant to accept at first, but the messenger inveigles him with the mention of a gigantic pearl as a gift and with further details about the banquet: the Turkish troops will dine at a monastery on the edge of the city. Calymath gives his assent.

Analysis

This brief scene contributes suspense to the story, since Calymath's hesitation conveys a hint of suspicion regarding Barabas's plans. The messenger's description of the giant pearl, however, obviously appeals to the Turkish leader. By this time, it is not surprising that Barabas knows full well how to bait his trap.

Act 5, Scene 4

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Summary

Ferneze addresses his knights, admonishing them not to sally forth until they hear a cannon shot. This will be the signal for their attack on the Turks. In order to add a specific incentive, ensuring that his countrymen obey his orders, Ferneze emphasizes their release from Turkish domination and from the rule of Barabas as the governor under the Turks.

Analysis

Like the previous scene, this one helps to build suspense, as we are compelled to wonder about the outcome of Barabas's stratagem. Note that Ferneze is accompanied by the Spanish vice-admiral, del Bosco, which would visually remind the audience of their earlier alliance. The wording of line 4, "the linstock, kindled thus," implies that the actor playing Ferneze demonstrates how the cannon would be fired.

Act 5, Scene 5

Summary

Act 5, Scene 5

Barabas busies himself putting the finishing touches on a "contraption" that will ensure the ruin of the Turkish troops. He pays the carpenters and invites them to taste the wines in his cellar. Ferneze enters with a bag of money. Barabas explains the workings of the devices he has rigged up and gives Ferneze a knife to cut the cord that will act as a trigger mechanism. Ferneze conceals himself while Barabas gloats over his new status as practicing a "kingly trade." He purchases towns by treachery, he says, and sells them by deceit.

Calymath enters, saluting Barabas. Suddenly, Ferneze reveals himself and cuts the cable, sending Barabas tumbling down into a cauldron. Screaming for help, Barabas defiantly shouts that it was he who caused Lodowick's death. He dies in agony, but not without a final curse. Ferneze informs Calymath that the Jew's treachery has caused the massacre of all the Turkish troops at the monastery on the outskirts of town. Calymath will remain a hostage in Malta until the Turkish sultan repairs all the damage caused by the invasion. Ferneze closes the scene by thanking heaven.

Epilogues

In the "epilogue spoken at court," the speaker begs the sovereign's pardon if the play has proved "tedious." In the "epilogue to the stage," the speaker asks for the approval of the audience.

Analysis

The outcome of the play ironically highlights poetic justice, as Barabas is finally disposed of through one of his own elaborate devices. One is compelled to wonder why he takes the foolish step of explaining the operation of the contraption to Ferneze, whom he should know by now is untrustworthy. Perhaps the answer is that Barabas, like many of Marlowe's protagonists, is what literary critic Harry Levin described as an "overreacher." His hubris, or excessive pride, is best captured in his boast about his "kingly kind of trade" of buying and selling towns. Marlowe also hints that Barabas's pride has displaced his greed when he has Barabas decline payment from Ferneze, at least for the time being, until the destruction of the Turks. The play closes on a somber note, with Ferneze's praise of heaven sounding hollow, considering his previous cruelty and hypocrisy.

Quotes

> *"[The] Jew, / Who smiles to see how full his bags are crammed, / Which money was not got without my means."*

— Machiavel, Prologue

Machiavel's brief prologue introduces the play, sets the tone, and foreshadows all that will come. The character, based on Niccolò Machiavelli, who was known and abhorred by

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Elizabethan audiences as a notorious schemer, remarks that Barabas has succeeded in accumulating vast wealth by applying the "policy" that Machiavelli himself has advocated in his *The Prince.* Readers can be sure that the play will show Barabas as a ruthless schemer in the mode of Machiavelli himself.

> *"Nay, let 'em combat, conquer, and kill all, / So they spare me, my daughter, and my wealth."*

— Barabas, Act 1, Scene 1

Marlowe leaves readers in no doubt that Barabas is out for himself and no one else. His own person, his daughter, and his wealth are all that matter to him.

> *"Your extreme right does me exceeding wrong."*

— Barabas, Act 1, Scene 2

The line compactly juxtaposes right and wrong, emphasizing what Barabas sees as the flaws in the Maltese worldview and system of justice.

> *"A counterfeit profession is better / Than unseen hypocrisy."*

— Barabas, Act 1, Scene 2

In the tenuous argument here, Barabas contends that a false statement or commitment made openly is to be preferred to hypocrisy. As it happens, Barabas is adept at both strategies.

> *"Honor is bought with blood and not with gold."*

— Ferneze, Act 2, Scene 2

Ferneze's bombastic assertion here, in context, is somewhat hollow, since it will be the Spaniards, rather than the Maltese, who will bear the consequences of resistance to the Ottomans.

> *"As for myself, I walk abroad a-nights / And kill sick people groaning under walls; / Sometimes I go about and poison wells."*

— Barabas, Act 2, Scene 3

In this semi-comic catalog of outrageous actions, Barabas boasts to Ithamore of his virtuosity in particularly heinous crimes.

> *"O, my master has the bravest policy."*

— Ithamore, Act 3, Scene 3

The quotation exemplifies the meaning of "policy" in Elizabethan English: "stratagem," "self-interest," or "craftiness."

> *"Thus every villain ambles after wealth, / Although he ne'er be richer than in hope."*

— Barabas, Act 3, Scene 4

Barabas mutters these words as Ithamore makes a quick exit to fetch the pot of rice that Barabas will use to poison the nuns. The Jew is under no illusions about the greed of his newly purchased slave.

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> *"Ah, gentle friar, / Convert my father that he may be saved, / And witness that I die a Christian."*

— Abigail, Act 3, Scene 6

Abigail's dying words convey her newly found piety and sincerity. Doubtless, most of Marlowe's audience would have found her refuge in the Christian faith to be laudatory.

> *"Look, look, master, here come two religious caterpillars."*

— Ithamore, Act 4, Scene 1

Ithamore, ever the cynic, here refers to Friar Barbardine and Friar Jacomo. Barabas replies, "I smelt 'em ere they came." Readers clearly see that Marlowe freely attacks religion in all its guises, whether Christian, Jewish, or Muslim.

> *"I'll be thy Jason, thou my golden fleece."*

— Ithamore, Act 4, Scene 2

The classical allusion here is to the Greek myth recounting the heroic journey of Jason and the Argonauts to find the golden fleece. Ithamore combines the allusion with a pun, in which "fleece" also means "to plunder" or "cheat."

> *"Was ever Jew tormented as I am?"*

— Barabas, Act 4, Scene 3

Barabas laments the misfortune of being blackmailed by his slave Ithamore. Typically, he overstates his grief.

> *"Come, let's in. / To undo a Jew is charity, not sin."*

— Ithamore, Act 4, Scene 4

Ithamore uses false arguments and bias to justify the blackmailing of Barabas. Ironically, when he and Barabas first met, they vied with each other, each boasting about his criminal, evil acts.

> *"Thus, loving neither, will I live with both, / Making a profit of my policy; / And he from whom my most advantage comes / Shall be my friend."*

— Barabas, Act 5, Scene 2

These words, spoken late in the play, sum up Barabas's Machiavellian philosophy of self-interest, advantage, and cunning strategy ("policy").

> *"Die, life! Fly, soul! Tongue, curse thy fill and die!"*

— Barabas, Act 5, Scene 5

Barabas's last words show him defiant to the end. It is fitting that the murderer who condemned his own daughter to die with an elaborate curse (Act 3, Scene 4) should die a violent death with a curse on his lips.

Symbols

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Gold

Gold symbolizes riches, superiority, status, and power in the play. In his opening soliloquy in Act 1, Scene 1, for example, Barabas contrasts gold with "paltry silverlings," or inferior silver coins, as he compliments the Arabians, who pay for all their trade goods with "wedge of gold." The stage direction for this scene refers specifically to Barabas in his counting house, "with heaps of gold before him." In Act 3, Scene 1, the courtesan Bellamira haughtily tells the thief Pilia-Borza that she "disdains" silver.

It is not an exaggeration to say that gold is what Barabas lives for. When his wealth is confiscated in Act 1, Scene 2, he exclaims to Abigail in anguish, "My gold, my gold, and all my wealth is gone!" Ironically, the secret stash of gold and jewels that Barabas has hidden away under a floorboard against a sudden reversal of fortune is marked by the sign of the cross—an ambiguous detail that perhaps suggests Barabas, always devoted to his own self-interest, hedges his bets. In Act 2, Scene 1, when Abigail throws down bags of riches to him, Barabas's mood suddenly turns euphoric: "O my girl, / My gold, my fortune, my felicity." His language has the effect, at least for a moment, of conflating his riches with his daughter.

Abigail

The character of Abigail conveys some complicated symbolism. She begins the play as the loyal and very beautiful daughter of Barabas. She is the apple of her father's eye. She symbolizes beauty, innocence, and purity. Barabas is able to manipulate her into a pretended conversion to Christianity so that she can recover a substantial portion of his fortune.

After the death of Mathias, however, the situation changes as Abigail begins to resist her father's stratagems. In the end, she opts for an authentic conversion and the life of a nun, and she pays for this decision with her life. Barabas regards her as a traitor, though it is doubtful that this opinion was shared by Marlowe's audience. In this phase, Abigail symbolizes conscience and integrity. She comes closest of any of the characters, perhaps, to representing a good and admirable person.

In Act 3, Scene 3, Abigail swears never to betray her father. In Act 3, Scene 6, however, she confides a written account of Barabas's misdeeds to Friar Barbardine, just before her death. Abigail believes in the "seal of the confessional," which would prohibit Barnardine from disclosing her account. But in this play, trust is seldom justified, and immediately after Abigail's death, Barnardine determines to blackmail Barabas.

Religion

The three religions represented in the play—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—are all portrayed as gravely flawed. Religion symbolizes pretense, deceit, and greed, rather than piety, devotion, or redemption. Cynicism is ubiquitous in the play. Barabas, for example, has marked the floorboard that conceals the nest egg of his fortune with the sign of the cross. The supposedly pious Friars Barnardine and Jacomo are so eager to gain Barabas's financial blessing that they break out into a fistfight. Ithamore cynically remarks that, "To undo a Jew is charity, not sin."

The prevailing tone toward religion in the play is set by Machiavel in the prologue when he exclaims that he "[counts] religion but a childish toy." Machiavel cynically refers to contenders for "Peter's chair" (meaning the papacy) who are then killed off in turn by other disciples of Machiavel. In Act 1, Scene 2, Barabas refers to his fellow Jews as "silly brethren," chastising them for their readiness to comply with Ferneze. Ithamore, the chief Muslim character in the play, is portrayed as a murderer and a blackmailer, so devoid of moral scruples that he participates in a bragging contest with Barabas in Act 2, Scene 3. Barabas greets Ithamore's boasts with praise, remarking "we are villains both."

Themes

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Avarice

Avarice, which might be defined as unrestrained greed, appears as a theme as early as Act 1, Scene 1. In his opening soliloquy, Barabas virtually deifies his riches. He is sharply attentive to every detail of his trading ventures: shipping routes, geography, investment, and return. Making money is the core of his existence.

Avarice, however, is not limited to Barabas, but extends to other characters as well. Lodowick, for instance, wishes to marry Abigail for her money and inheritance. The friars Jacomo and Barnardine vie with each other for Barabas's philanthropy when Barabas pretends that he wants to be converted to Christianity. And of course there's Ithamore, Barabas's Turkish slave, and the minor characters Bellamira and Pilia-Borza, who turn to blackmail in their efforts to become wealthy.

In short, avarice is one of the play's hallmark themes. It overlaps with the themes of hypocrisy and revenge.

Revenge

Barabas plots to get even with Ferneze for confiscating his entire property. Barabas achieves the first phase of his revenge when he manipulates the governor's son Lodowick into a duel with Mathias, in which both Lodowick and Mathias are killed.

There is little question that the young men's parents, Ferneze and Katherine, will lose no opportunity to take their revenge on anyone who has staged the duel (see Act 3, Scene 2). In the meantime, revenge plays a prominent role in Barabas's decision to poison all the nuns at the nunnery, including his daughter, Abigail, whom he thinks has betrayed both him and her ancestral Jewish faith. She is "inconstant," he says, and she has grieved him with her "disgrace": he solemnly curses her in Act 3, Scene 4.

In the second half of the play, revenge and betrayal run amok. The Maltese want to get even with the Turks; Barabas and Ferneze share a mutual desire to destroy one another; and Barabas is shown as ever more harshly anti-Christian. The deaths of Friar Barnardine, who is strangled, and Father Jacomo, who is condemned to the gallows, are good examples of the latter. Marlowe's play is a strong example of the Elizabethan revenge tragedy.

Hypocrisy

In *The Jew of Malta*, hypocrisy takes the form of a pious declaration of virtue that masks corrupt, vicious behavior, and it is virtually universal among the characters. Barabas, for instance, is a hypocrite in numerous ways. Perhaps his most shocking act of hypocrisy is his invocation of Maltese law in Act 4, Scene 1, when he says that Friar Jacomo will have to be tried for the murder of Friar Barbardine—a murder that was carried out not by Jacomo but by Barabas with the aid of Ithamore. Marlowe adds considerable irony to the dimension of hypocrisy when he endows Barabas with an acute sense of spotting the hypocrisy of others, but this aspect of his character does not diminish his own hypocrisy.

Young Lodowick is also portrayed as hypocritical when he pursues Abigail, ostensibly for the girl's beauty and virtue but really, as is hinted at several times, for her riches (he keeps referring to her, for example, as a diamond). Ferneze's hypocrisy stands out when he uses scripture and Christian "morality" to justify his financial exactions from the Jews in Act 1, Scene 2. Ithamore is presented as hypocritical as well when he pretends to admire his master and then betrays him in the second half of the play. Friar Jacomo and Friar Barbardine are hypocritical in that they pretend to be devout but are shown to be envious and money-hungry.

Hypocrisy overlaps in the play with the themes of avarice and revenge and also with the use of religion as a symbol.

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism is a prominent theme in the play. Its target is not only Barabas but all the Jews of Malta, and its practitioners are not only the Christian rulers of the island but also the Muslim Turks. Barabas is acutely conscious of being not only despised

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but socially and financially oppressed. On the other hand, though, he is intensely proud of his cunning ability to overcome this obstacle by amassing wealth and tricking his enemies. The first half of the play shows him as stunningly successful; it is only with the emergence of Bellamira's and Ithamore's blackmail, as well as the extremely complex plots and counter-plots in the second half of the play that we have the sense of Barabas's powers dwindling. In the end, of course, his enemies win out and deal him a gruesome death.

Policy

As used in this play and understood by the Elizabethans, policy refers to an individual's plan to arrange events however necessary to achieve his own advantage. Barabas applies this selfish "policy" to his actions throughout the play. To the first Jew, for example, he declares that it is the Maltese government's policy that lies at the core of the Maltese officials' demands to take his property, wealth, ships, and home. Soon afterward he exhorts his daughter, Abigail, "Be ruled by me, for in extremity / We ought to make bar of no policy." In short, "policy" is a euphemism for "self-interest."

Suggested Reading

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