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"Speak 'em fair": Discourse and Dissembling in *The Jew of Malta*

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A third-year undergraduate and a Gaines Fellow, I am majoring in English with minors in French and Philosophy. My interest in Renaissance drama began last year while studying abroad in Lancaster, England, where I was introduced to the wonders of literary theory. Upon my return, I worked with Dr. Lewin through an independent study course, during which this paper was produced. Later, in March 2005, it was presented at the EGSO (English Graduate Student Organization) Conference on "Rereading the Renaissance."

This summer, I plan to study at the Huntington Library in California, where I will examine the way that the Elizabethans theorized their own dramatic works. This research, supported by an Undergraduate Research and Creativity Grant and an Honors Program Independent Project, will eventually evolve into a Gaines thesis and a writing sample for graduate school. When not studying, I enjoy volunteering in the King Library Printing Press and traveling as much as my budget allows.

"Speak 'em fair": Discourse and Dissembling in *The Jew of Malta*

Abstract

Barabas, the title character of Marlowe's tragedy, is the embodiment of contradiction. Under persecution, he transgresses Christian norms in order to create his own identity, and yet, in the same instant, his antics make him the very monster of medieval legend. Hence the question arises: is Barabas' rebellion skillful enough to deconstruct Maltese (and English) anti-Semitism, or do his actions merely confirm the Jewish stereotype? In working toward an answer, in this paper I provide an introduction to the French philosopher Michel Foucault, using containment theory to create a theoretical framework for addressing the problems of representation in *The Jew of Malta*.

Introduction

Interpreting rebellion on the Renaissance stage has forced critics to develop a new vocabulary for explaining the dialectic between power and the subject. There is a new focus on criminals, delinquents, and outsiders, who seem to function as ideological Others to give the Self a sense of identity. And, with the influence of Michel Foucault, whose work has touched post-structuralists and new historicists alike, this relationship between Self and Other has been interpreted as an instance of productive power, in which the dominant discourse creates dissidence for the purposes of control. This idea, called containment theory, arises from Foucault's work *Discipline and Punish*, in which a critique of the prison system reveals a wider theory on the economy of power.

Because this model focuses on the outcast's relationship to power, it has produced new and innovative criticism of strangeness in Renaissance



Michel Foucault



Mentor:

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Andrew Bozio's paper on discourse and dissembling in *The Jew of Malta* asks a crucial question: after the post-Foucault heyday of containment theory in literary critical studies, is it possible to identify rebellious characters as transgressive without their being contained by the very forces of rebellion? Bozio proposes to answer this question by determining whether "Barabas is enclosed within a space of transgression" in the first place. Using a close reading of Act I of the play, Bozio persuasively shows how Barabas responds to Ferneze's attempts to create a Jewish stereotype in such a way as to deconstruct his "category of Other." Although this strategy eventually shifts to one in which Barabas embraces his marginal identity for the purpose of exploiting it, he is consistently in control of his use of it. By the end of the analysis, Bozio rightly, and wisely, does not choose between containment and escape; he notes that Barabas "shows how transgression can be licensed and thereby neutralized... providing a complex meditation on representation and rebellion."

texts, most strikingly in the work of Christopher Marlowe. Both for his own sensational biography and for his radical characters, Marlowe offers a seemingly limitless space in which Otherness may be examined. Under the principles of containment theory, however, these ideological differences were produced to serve the ends of power. Rather than releasing subversion into Elizabethan society to challenge the ideology of Otherness, Marlowe's texts seem to reproduce the very logic of these representations. "Thus, while Marlowe seems to have been a code word for subversion," Bartels states in reference to *The Jew of Malta*, "the subversiveness of his representations of foreigners seems, in this instance, to have been radically misread." (Bartels, 2004, p. 29) Indeed, if power produces all discourse, the only speech in a Renaissance text is that which has been sanctioned. And, in being sanctioned by power, this transgression loses its subversive edge, signaling the moment in which all rebellion has been effectively contained.

Recognizing the potential of Foucault's theory, however, can one reclaim subversion to use it *against* the power structure? Or is a new chapter of Renaissance criticism beginning, in which Marlowe's texts are catalogued as strengthening the dominant discourse through contained rebellion? Rather than approach these questions in abstract form, I will present an analysis of these themes in the context of *The Jew of Malta*, focusing on the dialectic of rebellion and containment in discourse. Marlowe's work provides a unique intersection, in which one figure, Barabas, marked by power as the Other of society, performs an attack on the discourse that has figured his identity. For Barabas, who is almost a personification of deconstruction, both rejects the ideology of his culture and is constructed in terms of it. Interpreting the play to determine if

Barabas is enclosed within a space of transgression will make *The Jew of Malta* a representative text for testing the viability of Foucauldian theory.

I

As Foucault explains in *Discipline and Punish*, power is not repressive but rather productive, because it generates disorder to legitimate its own authority. Discussing the prison system, a metaphor for the power structure, Foucault argues that "it gives rise to one particular form of illegality in the midst of others, which it is able to isolate, to place in full light and to organize as a relatively enclosed, but penetrable, milieu." (Foucault, 1977, p. 276) The economy of power revolves around the production of the Otherness, of figures who embody dissent and rebellion, to create itself. Just as "the prison fabricated delinquents," power produces opposition rather than seeking to end social disorder. (Fou-

cault, 1977, p. 255) Along with the individual, then, power also creates the ideology of dissidence, "the non-corporeal reality of the delinquency" that allows subjects to identify outsiders and regulate each other through discrimination. (Foucault, 1977, p. 255) This production of dissidence is necessary for power to function, as it uses the marked Other to express its authority.

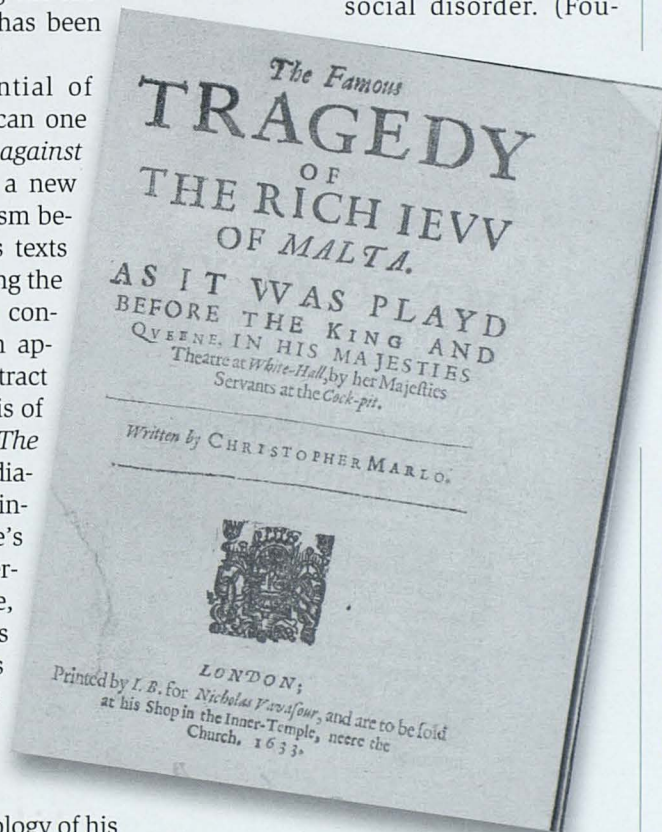
With this production of Otherness, power creates a space of licensed transgression, in which rebellion and disorder are regulated. Essentially, this is containment theory — the claim that all subversion is manipulated to serve the ends of the dominant power. In Foucault's words, "We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'censors.'" (Foucault, 1977, p. 194) Instead, we must recognize that "power produces" and that "The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production." (Foucault, 1977, p. 194) Particularly, individuals such as "the delinquent, a biographical unity, a kernel of danger, representing a type of anomaly" have the greatest use-value in the new economy of power, as they and their identities are manipulated to maintain the power structure. (Foucault, 1977, p. 254) All dissidence, all subversion is, therefore, the very product of power.

II

As *The Jew of Malta* begins its meditation on rebellion, it refers to the discourse of anti-Semitism before it performs this rhetoric onstage. That is to say, Barabas introduces the Christian attack on his religion in his second soliloquy — a scene that occurs before Ferneze demonstrates this hatred by confiscating his property. To himself and to the audience, Barabas muses:

Who hateth me but for my happiness?

And who is honored now but for his wealth?



Cover page from the first edition of *The Jew of Malta*

Rather had I, a Jew, be hated
thus

Than pitied in a Christian pov-
erty. (1.1.110–113)

When these lines are spoken in the play, Barabas has not yet encountered any criticism for his religion; the hatred to which he refers exists in a space beyond the text, either in events that precede the opening scene or in the realm inhabited by the audience. Through the prologue, in which Machevill speaks directly to the audience, the opening of the play inherits a meta-theatrical quality that allows Barabas to gesture toward his audience. As Thurn argues, "[Barabas'] audience with Ferneze quickly establishes the Jew's role in the Christian tradition of biblical narrative," primarily as a result of the prologue and opening scene. (Thurn, 2004, p. 139) Indeed, as Barabas himself admits, he is a familiar figure, for "who amongst 'em knows not Barabas?" (1.1.66) Thus, before the actual drama begins, the audience has been implicated in its discourse, having been identified by Barabas as recognizing (or perhaps perpetuating) the cultural construction of the Jew.

The dialogue of scene two, then, is not an introduction but rather a channeling of this anti-Semitic discourse. Structured in relation to Barabas' self-representation, the speech that Ferneze offers seems to be a repetition of old ideology. To Barabas, he equates the Jews with "infidels" and blames their religion for bringing ruin upon Malta:

For through our sufferance of
your hateful lives,

Who stand accursed in the sight
of heaven,

These taxes and afflictions are
befall'n. (1.2.63–66)

Through these claims, Ferneze brands the Jews as an affliction to Maltese society, constructing them as Others and sources of strife. The justification is that the Jews are marked for having murdered Christ, and so have brought suffering upon themselves; "your first curse," a Knight explains, "make[s] thee

poor and scorned of all the world." (1.2.108–109) These brands and ideologies are rather common throughout the scene, but it is significant to note that the text reproduces this discourse in the figure of Ferneze, as well as other Christians.

From this point, Barabas begins his violent, ideological assault on Christian rhetoric, using everything from poison to semiotics as weapons. This attack, however, is a product of the very power structure that Barabas is resisting. In Greenblatt's words, "the Jew is *brought into being* by the Christian society around him... [and] his actions are always *responses* to the initiatives of others." (Greenblatt, 2004, p. 206) And, as Barabas explains his fury to Abigail, the audience sees a confirmation of this claim:

Think me so mad as I will hang
myself

That I may vanish o'er the earth
in air

And leave no memory that e'er
I was?

No, I will live, nor loathe I this
my life. (1.2.262–265)

Rather than accepting Ferneze's attempts to categorize him, Barabas is incited by this persecution to revenge himself against Christian society. Adding that "I'll rouse my senses and awake myself," Barabas also suggests that his vengeance grows from a type of essence within himself, something that he must "awake" rather than create. (1.2.268) Following Foucault's description, then, Ferneze may personify the power structure, but it is difficult to determine here if rebellion is *produced* in a newly-named delinquent or merely *incited*.

Nevertheless, at this moment, Barabas' rebellion is channeled into an appropriation and manipulation of the Jewish identity. Conjuring the plot to regain his hidden treasure, Barabas sends his daughter forth to represent herself as "The hopeless daughter of a hapless Jew," abasing herself to dupe the Christian monks. The strategy here is one of

dialogism and duplicity, in which Barabas uses opposing forces to create instability. If, as Thurn phrases it, "words can ... transcrib[e] heterogeneous surplus within a system of common signs in order to constitute it as literary, conceptual, or ideological commodity," the double-speak performed by Barabas makes these commodities invalid. (Thurn, 2004, p. 142) In directing his words between Abigail and the monks, Barabas uses the stage convention of the aside to shift from his Christian-constructed identity to the role of a dissembling deconstructionist:

(*Aside to her*) Tomorrow early
I'll be at the door.

[*Aloud*] No, come not at me! If
thou wilt be damned,

Forget me, see me not, and so
begone.

(*Aside [to her]*) Farewell. Re-
member tomorrow morning.

[*Aloud*] Out, out, thou wretch!
(1.2.358–362)

In this passage and others like it, Barabas adopts the Jewish identity created for him, yet he does so in order to invert its logic and thereby undermine it. The strategy is the same as placing the sign of the cross over the hidden treasure, another act of subversion that relies on appropriating and undermining a sign. Turning the cross into a floating signifier gains potency in referencing Barabas' earlier inquisition of Ferneze: "Is theft the ground of your religion?" (1.2.96) By rewriting the Christian signifier, Barabas makes booty quite literally the "ground" of its meaning, placing the sign atop a board that marks the buried gold.

Wearing the Jewish stereotype as a mask and costume, Barabas is able to deceive the Christian society into confidence. In terms of identity, he later employs the constructed Jewish stereotype to deceive Lodowick, wooing him into a confidence that ultimately leads to the fatal duel. For this plot, Barabas begins by performing a deconstruction of language, as he uses double-speak to lure

Lodowick; Barabas dissembles in speaking of his daughter, "The diamond that I talk of ne'er was foiled / [*Aside*] But when he touches it, it will be foiled." (2.3.57–58) Here, the floating signifier becomes a weapon used by Barabas to snare an enemy. As the assumed meaning differs from another version in the subtext, this play of language corresponds to the freedom of Barabas' identity; being composed in Christian discourse out of mere signifiers, the Jewish stereotype is something that Barabas can manipulate in the same manner as the word "diamond."

He dissembles to Lodowick that Abigail cries because it is "the Hebrew's guise / That maidens new-betrothed should weep a while," just as the true meaning can be found in her love of Mathias. (2.3.328–329) Lodowick, though surprised, finds satisfaction in this confirmation of the Jew's Otherness and responds, "O, is't the custom? Then I am resolved." (2.3.332) As this deception ultimately leads to the death of Lodowick, as well as Mathias, Barabas is able to strike against Ferneze and the Christian attack on his property; indeed, this is Barabas' intention, as he confides "I have sworn to frustrate both their hopes / And be revenged upon the governor." (2.3.146–147) In this instance, then, Barabas' appropriation of the Jewish identity succeeds as rebellion, in that deconstruction becomes a tool for disrupting the discourse of Christianity.

Parallel to the free-play of identity that he unleashes, Barabas uses textuality and discourse to reveal the instabilities within Christian rhetoric. Against the holy logocentrism of Ferneze and company, he performs a deconstruction of ideology with the same skill he appropriates the crucifix. To Abigail, he instructs:

It is no sin to deceive a Christian,

For they themselves hold it a principle,

Faith is not to be held with heretics.

But all are heretics that are not Jews. (2.3.312–315)

The strategy of this plot again involves appropriation and inversion, turning holy dogma on its head to reveal its constructed nature. Barabas argues that calling a Jew a heretic is just as arbitrary as branding a Christian with the same title, as arbitrary, in fact, as the connection between signifier and signified. In effect, Barabas' reversal of the last line exposes a gap in the founding principles of Christianity, an instance that Bartels argues "sets culturally inscribed terms of difference in crisis and insists that they be questioned if not rejected, reassessed if not reformed." (Bartels, 2004, p. 19) The tactics employed by Barabas reveal that behind the Truth of Jesus, of Ferneze, Lodowick, the nuns, et al., there is nothing but instability and a missing signified. The titles and doctrines used to differentiate heretics from true-believers are empty signs that can be reclaimed, rewritten, and re-exposed by any figure with enough ability.

If Ferneze's first speeches reflect an attempt to create a Jewish stereotype, to use this category of Other to serve the ends of power, Barabas' response is a deconstruction of Christian discourse. These strategies are performed through signs and symbols, and Barabas works to appropriate and invert the logic that has allowed his identity to be constructed, his property to be confiscated, and his house to be converted into a nunnery. Wearing the Jewish stereotype as an actor performs a role, Barabas is able to regain his treasure, just as he relies on text, letters, and the free-play of meaning to set Lodowick against Mathias in a bloody duel. And if the audience is indeed referred to by the play's opening, this is only to emphasize the extent to which *The Jew of Malta* participates in the production and deconstruction of Jewish Otherness.

III

Barabas' dissembling, while it is successful in undermining Christian rhetoric, slowly alters as the play progresses; eventually, it becomes a sign of Otherness rather than a refutation of this logic, signaling the moment in which rebellion is contained by Ferneze's power structure. If Barabas initially appropriates the Jewish stereotype to deceive Christians, he later uses it for less deconstructive purposes. For instance, in an aside, Barabas tells the audience:

We Jews can fawn like spaniels
when we please,

And when we grin, we bite; yet
are our looks

As innocent and harmless as a
lamb's. (2.3.20–2)

Arguing that all Jews can dissemble to disguise their malice, Barabas contextualizes his own deception in terms of his Jewish identity. That is to say, Barabas stereotypes himself as a perverse, lying Jew, and he replaces his individuality with the constructed persona assigned to him by Christianity. As Thurn comments, "The play's economy depends upon converting the Jew's surplus [of deconstructive potential] to the utility of an abstract model, to the terms of myth, caricature, and farce. By means of a kind of semiotic reduction, the play offers a language to account for the Jew." (Thurn, 2004, p. 140) At this moment, Barabas is controlled through language and signification, no longer manipulating these tools for his own subversive ends. As the ability to deconstruct is re-written in terms of Christian logic, Barabas' potential for undermining Otherness becomes the mark of Otherness itself. Thus he encourages his daughter to deceive according to her religion, to be "like a cunning Jew" in duping Lodowick. (2.3.238) In these simple yet significant passages, Barabas' deconstructive power loses its *jouissance* and comes to signify his distance from early modern society. Thus, his subversion is contained within his

Jewishness, and all tools for rejecting this discourse come to serve the power structure instead.

From this moment forward, the term "Jew" is inscribed as Other in the play, not merely by Ferneze and the other tyrants, but by Barabas himself. Just before he sets Lodowick against Mathias, Barabas confides to Ithamore, and to the audience, his dangerous predilections:

As for myself, I walk abroad a-nights

And kill sick people groaning under walls;

Sometimes I go about and poison wells.

And now and then, to cherish Christian thieves,

I am content to lose some of my crowns. (2.3.177-181)

In this speech and the lines surrounding it, Barabas lists his habitual offences against the Christian population, and in doing so, he further affirms that his identity fits the Jewish stereotype. As Greenblatt notes, this speech "tends to make [Barabas] more vague and unreal, accommodating him to an abstract, anti-Semitic fantasy of a Jew's past." (Greenblatt, 2004, p. 106) This gesture gives credence to Christian discourse by ascribing much of Barabas' violence to his Jewish heritage. In fact, Ithamore performs this connection for the audience, as he says in marveling at his master's deeds, "I worship your nose for this!" (2.3.176) Through this association, Barabas' rebellion is contained just like his subversion of ideology. His actions against Christianity — from poisoning the nuns to murdering the friars — are not a response to his persecution so much as a reflection of his diabolic religion, and thus he says of himself and Ithamore, "Both circumcised, we hate Christians both." (2.3.218) Through his own statements, then, Barabas defines his rebellion as specifically part of his Jewish nature and, thereby, affirms his Otherness with every gesture against the Christians.

The representative moment of this containment may be found in Act four, when Barabas is confronted by Friars Barnardine and Giacomo for the poison plot. If this dialogue is indeed a kind of deconstruction, similar to the inversion of the sign of the cross, it also represents the inherent problem of Barabas' double-speak. Through his dissembling, Barabas reaffirms himself as an Other to the Christian order:

FRIAR BARNARDINE: Thou art a —

FRIAR JACOMO: Ay, that thou are, a —

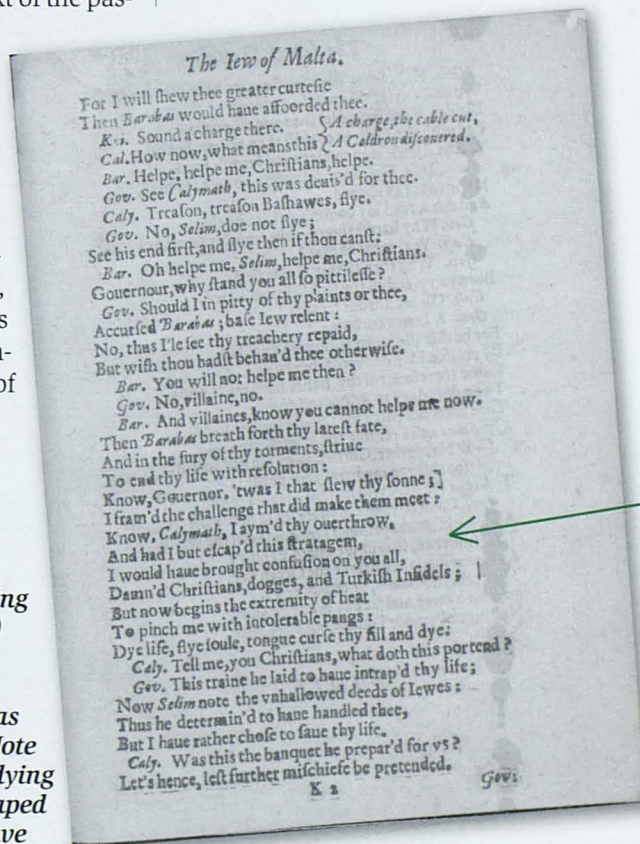
BARABAS: What needs all this? I know I am a Jew. (4.1.33-35)

This is how the dialogue among the three figures begins, with Barabas giving himself a name to which the Christian monks can only refer as a gap. They do not speak the title "Jew," but rather prompt Barabas to speak it for them. Were it not for Barabas' earlier descriptions, this moment would merely affirm his religion. Yet in the context of the passages discussed above, in which Barabas depicts Jewishness as violent and dangerous, the term "Jew" now represents more than simple belief; it is a word, like "delinquent" for Foucault, which refers to dissonance and rebellion. Names, like proverbs in Greenblatt's analysis, represent "the compressed ideological wealth of

society, ... [and] the effect of their recurrent use by Barabas is to render him more and more typical, to *de-individualize* him." (Greenblatt, 1980, pp. 207-208) By naming himself a Jew, then, after he has defined Jewishness as destructive, Barabas re-inscribes himself in terms of Otherness, continuing to morph into the Christian caricature of himself.

As this dialogue continues, Barabas performs another deconstruction of Christianity, which he has inscribed as the actions of a Jew through his own admission. The two friars stumble over each other's phrases, personifying the self-serving repetitions and tautologies that characterize Christian rhetoric. In Bartels' words, "Though stereotypes enlist a specificity that seems to ring 'true', the inconsistencies between and within them leave us with only the broadest and

A page from the first printing of The Jew of Malta (1633) showing Act 5 Scene 5, the final scene of the play, the exact moment when Barabas is killed in his own plot. Note the line by Barabas in his dying speech: "And had I but escaped this stratagem / I would have brought confusion on you all," which is discussed in the article.



most negative outline.” (Bartels, 2004, p. 13) Inhabiting the space of this stereotype, Barabas speaks only in the void left by the monks’ discourse:

FRIAR BARNARDINE: Thy daughter —

FRIAR JACOMO: Ay, thy daughter —

BARABAS: O, speak not of her; then I die with grief.

FRIAR BARNARDINE: Remember that —

FRIAR JACOMO: Ay, remember that —

BARABAS: I must needs say that I have been a great usurer.

FRIAR BARNARDINE: Thou hast committed —

BARABAS: Fornication? But that was in another country; and besides, the wench is dead. (4.1.36–44)

In these lines, a strange paradox is at work. While Barabas disrupts the speech of Barnardine and Jacomo, he fails to achieve the individuality that this deconstruction should allow. Greenblatt captures this problem in stating, “Barabas devises falsehoods so eagerly because he is himself a falsehood; a fiction composed of the sleaziest materials in his culture.” (Greenblatt, 2004, p. 109) As he lists his sins, then, Barabas rewrites himself into the stereotype of a Jew. Though he ruins the discourse of Christianity on a specific level, mocking the monks as they stumble over each other, Barabas remains the product of Christian society, the source of dissembling discourse that it has labeled him.

Ultimately, this control of rebellion anticipates the end of the play, in which Barabas, now contained in the figure of the Jew, is destroyed for the sake of strengthening Christianity. Barabas’ subversion is symbolically controlled when he is later arrested for arranging the duel between Lodowick and Mathias. The evidence comes from former friends, who follow the Christian mindset in arguing: “To undo a Jew is charity, and not sin.” (4.4.88) Through their statements, the two accusers provide the discourse to strengthen the power structure’s anti-Semitism. Not surprisingly, as Ferneze

sends guards to fetch Barabas, he mutters to himself, “I always feared that Jew,” as though his deepest fears were now confirmed. (5.1.18) And so too, once Barabas has feigned death, foreshadowing his later demise at the play’s conclusion, Ferneze uses the moment to reaffirm Christianity through Barabas’ deviancy; while others marvel at the “sudden death” of Barabas in prison, Ferneze advises: “Wonder not at it, sir, the heavens are just. / Their deaths were like their lives.” (5.1.53–55) Constructed by the ideology of Christianity, Barabas is reduced to the compact currency of the Jew before he is physically destroyed. This transition and destruction, as Ferneze’s statements prove, serve to reinforce the power structure, leaving Christianity stronger for having manufactured the Jew.

As *The Jew of Malta* concludes, in the final scene, so too the Christian struggle to produce and contain the Jew reaches its culmination. Once Ferneze is removed from power by a Turkish invasion, he is quick to unite with Barabas and turn a coup to his own advantage. For Ferneze, his betrayal of Barabas is not unjust at all, but rather ordained by the Jew’s original duplicity; thus he shouts, “Accursèd Barabas, base Jew ... I’ll see thy treachery repaid.” (5.5.72–73) Ferneze rewrites the event to cast Barabas as a villain against the natural order. And boiling in his cauldron, Barabas affirms this discourse with his final words:

Know, governor, ’twas I that slew thy son;

I framed the challenge that did make them meet.

Know, Calymath, I aimed thy overthrow, ...

Damned Christians, dogs, and Turkish infidels! (5.5.80–86)

Through his fierce defiance of Christianity, Barabas returns to the Jewish stereotype at the very moment of his death. Being enclosed in a stable identity produced by the Christians, Barabas can now be destroyed in the same manner as his subversion. Ultimately, his final diatribe affirms the idea that he is a perverse dan-

ger, allowing Ferneze to comment that it was “A Jew’s courtesy” to create such disorder. (5.5.107) According to Ferneze, Malta’s good fortune affirms God’s order, even if it is achieved by manipulating Barabas and his rebellion; thus he concludes the play by stating: “let due praise be given / Neither to fate nor fortune, but to heaven.” (5.5.123) Having produced, contained, and destroyed the Jew, therefore, Christianity is strengthened by its consumption of Barabas.

Also in his final words, Barabas offers an ironic commentary on the play’s strategy to expose the truth of his demise. Prophetically, he states that “had I but escaped this stratagem, / I would have brought confusion on you all.” (5.5.84–85) The stratagem, while literally referring to the cauldron plot, has a second meaning in the economy of Ferneze’s power structure — the stratagem of Christian discourse that defines and encloses the Jew. Indeed, had Barabas escaped this discourse, he would have released “confusion,” the free-play of meaning, against his enemies. Instead of liberating, however, this confusion is rewritten by Christian society as disorderly and contained within the logic of the power structure. “Despite itself,” Bartels comments, “the play seems to have been highly influential in ensuring that the stage Jew remain a physically and ideologically marked type.” (Bartels, 2004, p. 29) The reason lies in the concluding scene, which completes the strategy of containment begun by Christianity. As Ferneze inspires Barabas to rebel, he produces a religious delinquent whose very acts of subversion affirm the power structure that Barabas seeks to undermine. Enclosed in the Jewish stereotype, Barabas cannot perform any violent transgression without confirming Christian rhetoric. And once he has been contained in such a manner, Barabas may then be destroyed as a parallel to this ideological entrapment. Having served the ends of power, he must be physically subjugated before his rebellion becomes unmanageable.

IV

While *Dr. Faustus* is the Marlowe play that scholars recognize in two editions, this analysis suggests that *The Jew of Malta* has its own A- and B-texts. In one version, Barabas resists the social order that attempts to define him as Other. He uses deconstruction to interrupt logocentric discourse, places the sign of the cross over buried treasure, and sets monk against monk to expose Christian hypocrisy. In the other version, however, Barabas is produced by the Christian order that he resists, and his acts of rebellion, though ostensibly subversive, merely confirm the reality of the Jewish stereotype. The text ends once the delinquent has fallen victim to his own maleficent plot, leaving behind a purified society now stronger for having faced Barabas.

Critics of the play have struggled with both interpretations, often employing one text to discount the validity of the other. Greenblatt, for example, interprets Barabas as successfully transgressing the limits of his society, stating that "Marlowe celebrates his Jew for being clearer, smarter, and more self-destructive than the Christians whose underlying values Barabas travesties and transcends." (Greenblatt, 2004, p. 112) Through self-destruction, however, Barabas relinquishes control of his identity and allows his selfhood to be written by Christian discourse. To redeem Barabas through "the anarchic, playful discharge of his energy," Greenblatt must emphasize deconstruction in a manner that seems at odds with new historicism, because one can hardly argue that the original Elizabethan audience was familiar with Derridean theory. (Greenblatt, 2004, p. 112) This shift away from history is precisely what other critics, such as Richard Wilson, attack in Greenblatt's argument: "by substituting his new term 'playful' for the original accolade 'magnificent' in his ultimate tribute to Marlowe, he aligned Renaissance studies with one of the most effective of all

postmodern ploys to de-politicise history." (Wilson, 2000, p. 127) In other words, using literary theory in an overly liberal or careless way has the risk of anachronism, especially in the discussion of ideology.

If deconstruction cannot be read throughout *The Jew of Malta*, then the idea of containment must also be critiqued as perhaps more theoretical than historical. For power to produce and control subversion, one must assume "a concept of power which is ... more totalizing in intention and achievement than the actual operations of force and authority in the period can justify." (Thurn, 2004, p. 133) If post-structuralist theory has demonstrated anything, it is that power and discourse are too unstable to produce such a unified meta-narrative as containment theory.

Rather than simply a product of his society, then, Barabas is a site of ideological struggle, as much for the Christians and Jews in Malta as for contemporary critics and, insofar as signifiers create the identity of a character, Barabas will always be unstable because of his basis in language. As Greenblatt notes, "any achieved identity always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion and loss," being the result of competing discourses within society. (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 9) If Barabas is a figure of enclosed rebellion, he also demonstrates the potential for escaping this containment to release his deconstructive energy; if a figure of pure *jouissance*, Barabas likewise shows how transgression can be licensed and thereby neutralized. *The Jew of Malta*, like Barabas himself, contains both discourses in the same instant, providing a complex meditation on representation and rebellion. As Bartels suggests, the text is about itself to a degree, in that "Marlowe's representations of the alien are about the representation of the alien, and the arbitrary, uncertain, and strategic ways in which difference is constructed, deconstructed, and even reconstructed." (Bartels, 2004, p. 19) The real subversion of the play is not Barabas' manipulation of signs, but

rather his struggle against Ferneze and the other Christians, in which the themes of identity, Otherness, subversion, and power are dramatized. Taking Barabas as its subject, the text is able to represent the dialectic between subversion and containment, so that, even if the Jew is defined and destroyed in the final scene, the play remains subversive for decrying power in the midst of its own game.

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