

She-Wolves of France

Marlowe has been notorious for the violence depicted in his plays, probably since a staged incident in *Tamburlaine the Great* resulted in the fatal shooting of a member of the audience. Certainly the horrific deaths of Bajazeth and Zabina, Faustus - strictly speaking undying torment - Barabas, Dido, and Edward II enhance that reputation. If the victims are female, however, then I propose that Shakespeare, especially in his early plays, is at least as guilty of inviting his audiences to condone gendered violence towards women as his contemporary. The feisty and pro-active characters who have provided charismatic roles for our greatest female actors perhaps obscure the dramatic violence offered the sex in the earlier, less-performed works. Of Marlowe's roll-call of violence perpetrated against women, both Dido and Zabina, deliberately kill themselves from grief rather than being murdered, although Zabina has received brutal treatment from her conquerors.

Two Gentlemen of Verona, one of Shakespeare's earliest plays, and arguably his first, introduces many of the themes which inform later works. Examples include the supportive friendship of Sylvia and Julia which anticipating those of Rosalind and Celia, Beatrice and Hero, or Desdemona and Emilia. The ring theme is further explored in *Twelfth Night*, *Merchant of Venice* and *All's Well that Ends Well*. The constancy of women contrasted against the fickleness of men resurfaces in *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well that Ends Well*, and is part of the displacement in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As for cross dressing, heroines dressed as page boys inhabit *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Cymbeline*, while Portia and Nerissa both adopt male disguise for the trial scene of *Merchant of Venice*.

However, *Two Gentlemen of Verona* also features an attempted rape by one of the leading characters, Proteus, upon Sylvia, the woman he supposedly loves, while Valentine, following his friend's contrition for the attempt, offers Proteus her body anyway as a gesture of friendship. This uncomfortable episode is frequently omitted in modern performances, in the same way that Petruccio's vicious behaviour and its effects are modified in performances of *The Taming of the Shrew*. In her introduction to the play in the *Norton Shakespeare*, Jean Howard notes the tendency of modern productions to "mitigate the linguistic coercion and physical cruelty" which Petruccio employs.¹ Yet despite all the rehabilitation attempts made for his character, Petruccio demands complicity from an audience invited to enjoy and laugh at the brutalisation and degradation of his wife Kate, excessive even for a waspish termagant.

In direct contrast, the savage and bloody conqueror in battle, Tamburlaine, who, as might be expected, subdues his lovely captive by force, nevertheless woos her with intoxicating words and rewards her acquiescence with every

¹ *The Norton Shakespeare: based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: Norton, 1997) - p.136.

luxury his martial prowess can win for her. He gradually arouses in her a love for him surely as submissive as even Petruccio could have demanded; there is even a touch of the Patient Griselda about the way Zenocrate pleads for the life of her father. Tamburlaine, unlike Griselda's brutish spouse, takes pity on her distress and reinstates his conquered foe for the sake of 'divine Zenocrate'.

"Human sacrifice. Gang rape. Mutilation. Ritual butchery. Mother-son cannibalism." Thus begins the introduction to *Titus Andronicus* by Katherine Eisaman Maus for the *Norton Shakespeare*. This play, according to some commentators a collaboration with Marlowe, involves violence as disturbing as anything he wrote, much of it directed against womankind in the person of the violated and mutilated Lavinia. Tamora, herself brutalised by Titus's mutilation and murder of her son, Alarbus, incites her remaining sons to exact this revenge upon an innocent and defenceless woman.

Of course, Shakespeare, in the outrages perpetrated by his pen, does not compete in sheer numbers of victims with his contemporary. Tamburlaine has a templeful of virgins slaughtered in the course of his wars, and Barabas poisons an entire convent of nuns, including his own daughter. *The Massacre at Paris*, recording an historical event, allows a few actors to stand in for all the Protestants of Paris. Yet even here the brutal Duke of Guise, upon discovering his wife's infidelity, spares her life for the sake of her unborn child, and revenges himself on her lover.

Because of the corrupted and incomplete state of the text of *The Massacre at Paris* it is difficult to ascertain how strong a role the Queen's was. In those speeches left to her she indulges in power politics, rules and overrules her sons, especially Henry, and schemes with the Cardinal of Lorraine and the Guise. Her grief at his death suggests an intimate relationship, but there is little indication in the preceding text that they had been anything more than political allies. Guise himself assumes her complicity is for his aggrandisement:

*The Mother Queene workes wonders for my sake,
And in my loue entombes the hope of Fraunce:
Rifling the bowels of her treasurie,
To supply my wants and necessitie.*

The Massacre at Paris²

Katherine, on the other hand, has her own political agenda: 'all shall dye vnles I have my will,/ For while she liues *Katherine* will be Queene' (657-8). In her final moments on stage she declares that she would have preferred that her own son die in place of the Guise, and her last lines: 'sorrow seaze vpon my toyling soule,/ For 'since the *Guise* is dead, I will not liue', predicate more, a

² C.F. Tucker Brooke (Ed), *The Works of Christopher Marlowe*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1953) - pp 133-6. All quotations are taken from this text and cited with through line nos.

regard and dependence on him for meaning in life. It also infers a truncated speech, a point for further consideration (1101-1102).

The character of Dido, in a play written for a children's company where all the roles, male and female, were played by boys, is articulate, attractive and proactive. She is a queen in every respect, and in control of events in her kingdom until she allows her passion for Aeneas to rule her actions. Here the classic clash between reason and will which underlines so many dramatic narratives of the period is centred on a female lead. From the earliest dramas such as *Cambyses*, through popular successes like *A King and No King* by Beaumont and Fletcher to the later plays of Philip Massinger, theatre was much concerned with the danger to the state inherent in the ruler's subjection to his (or her) obsessions and desires. Examples from Shakespeare include Othello and Leontes - and Richard II's poetic attachment to his own whim is outmanoeuvred by Bolingbroke's prosaic grasp of political reality. In *The Tragedie of Dido, Queen of Carthage* there are strong female supporting and cameo roles; Anna, the loyal sister, in love with the man who has eyes only for Dido, the goddesses who in their mutual enmity cause destruction among the mortals; and the Nurse.

Having introduced the proposition that Marlowe exhibits marginally more chivalry towards his female protagonists than Shakespeare, I shall now look more closely at two warrior queens, one Marlovian: Isabella, Edward II's 'French strumpet', and one Shakespearean: Margaret, the 'she-wolf of France', a major character of the Henry VI trilogy, who survives through *Richard III* as well. These two royal princesses are separated in time by the One Hundred Years' War, Isabella having been forcibly retired from public life by imprisonment before it began, and Margaret born while her country was being ravaged by successive English kings. Isabella was the daughter of Philip IV of France, and Margaret's father, René, was Duke of Anjou, but also titular King of Naples and Sicily. Both princesses were married aged 15-16 to kings in their early twenties, Isabella's in thrall to his minion, Gaveston, and Margaret's still, in effect, ruled by the Lord Protector of his minority, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester.

Edward II survives in a 1594 quarto printed for the publisher and bookseller, William Jones, so editors are working from one substantive text.³ Those of the Shakespeare plays, on the other hand, are the subject of much scholarly dispute, since there are early versions, *The First Part of the Contention of the two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster* (hereafter *2 Henry VI*), of 1593/4, in quarto, and an octavo edition of *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke* in 1595 (hereafter *3 Henry VI*), surviving as the second and third parts respectively of *Henry VI* in the *Folio* of 1623, but with significant variations.⁴

³ For a discussion on the possibility of a lost 1593 quarto, see the Malone Society edition, *Edward the Second* by Christopher Marlowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), pp v-viii.

⁴ The early editions in particular, are often proposed as collaborations, with various contemporaries, including Marlowe, put forward as candidates.

In the absence of documentation, the dating of first performances is problematic, although self-evidently they precede registration in 1593 of *Edward II*, and the 1594 quarto of *2 Henry VI*. The general consensus is that both appeared on stage late 1591 / early 1592, indicating that cross fertilisation of ideas would have occurred only in the unproven event that Marlowe and Shakespeare worked closely together.

Both playwrights used Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* as their primary source material, and recent editors make a good case for both having favoured the 1587 text with additions by Abraham Fleming.⁵ Among secondary sources, Marlowe shows an indebtedness to John Stowe's *Chronicles of England* and Robert Fabyan's *Chronicle*, while Shakespeare preferred Edward Hall's *Chronicle*, and they adapted these sources in markedly different ways. Whether or not Marlowe had the intention of writing more history plays, *Edward II* ends with Isabella's removal from the public arena, making her appearance in any further work unlikely. Shakespeare chose a woman who would feature as a catalyst and linking theme, retaining and developing her character through four plays in the popular history genre.

Marlowe introduces Isabella as rejected, unloved and alone, and for the first part of the play she is subject to abuse and neglect by Edward, while the nobles extol her virtue: 'Hard is the hart, that iniures such a saint' (486). Her first soliloquy is a heartfelt lament for loss of country, for Edward's rejection of her, and for the task enjoined upon her, that of persuading the nobles to repeal Gaveston's banishment so that she can enjoy Edward's favour. When she succeeds and is once more Edward's 'fair queen', she begs:

*No other iewels hang about my neck
Then these my lord, nor let me have more wealth,
Then I may fetch from this ritche treasurie:
O how a kisse revives poore Isabell.*

Edward the Second (627-630)

Throughout Gaveston is her rival in love, and her need for love, firstly from Edward and subsequently from Mortimer, informs all her actions. Tired of defending herself constantly from unjust accusations, she spells out her abandonment when Edward is arranging Gaveston's proposed escape:

*Heuens can witnesse, I loue none but you.
From my embracements thus he breakes away,
O that mine arms could close this Ile about,
That I might pull him to me where I would,
Or that these teares that drissell from mine eyes,
Had power to mollifie his stonie hart,*

⁵ For a full discussion of source material see *Edward the Second*, edited by Charles R. Forker (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1994), Introduction, pp 1-136; *Henry VI part 2*, edited by Ronald Knowles (London: The Arden Shakespeare, reprinted 2001), Introduction, pp 1-141; and *Henry VI part 3*, edited by John D. Cox (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2001), Introduction, pp 1-176.

That when I had him we might never part.

Edward the Second (1112-18)

If the convention that characters reveal their true feeling in soliloquies is true here, it shows Marlowe writing in sympathy with Isabella's unhappiness. He is at pains to emphasize what his sources never suggest, that Isabella spent much of her life in love with her uncaring husband.

After this latest rejection, she seeks revenge on her rival, initiating a discussion with the barons on how best Gaveston may be captured and killed, and it is in this pivotal scene that she first appears to countenance what Edward has so many times accused her of, an affair with Mortimer. While still determined to try to be reconciled with the king once more, she acknowledges Mortimer's worth, employing the intimate 'thou' form for the first time:

*So well hast thou deseru'de sweete Mortimer
As Isabell could liue with thee for euer.
In vaine I looke for loue at Edwards hand.*

Edward the Second (1157-59)

Significantly, it is not until she is rejected by her own family in France - political expediency requiring them to refuse her martial assistance - that she allies herself with Sir John of Hainault and Mortimer. As soon as Isabella at last receives active support, so her improving position is counter-balanced by Edward's diminishing power, gradual isolation and increased suffering. Indeed, Edward's plight is so dramatically intense and all-consuming that, in performance, it is easy to disregard his earlier mistreatment of his wife and dereliction of his duties.

At this critical point in the action, Isabella's loyalties are wholly transferred to Mortimer and to her son, on whose behalf she takes up arms, maintaining that her care is to repair her husband's depredation of the kingdom by advancing her son's interests. Hardship and rejection have given her a sense of reality which Mortimer, filled with hubris and ambition, has lost. She knows that if the now deposed Edward is murdered, her son will revenge himself on the perpetrators: 'Now Mortimer begins our tragedy' (2591).

Although the young king has no pity for Mortimer, nor for his mother's pleading on his behalf, in committing her to the Tower of London he commands: 'Awaye with her, her wordes inforce these teares,/ And I shall pitie her if she speake againe' (2653-4). All through the action Isabella's major concerns have been for love and companionship, and it is the new King Edward's filial love that ensures her sentence is commuted to imprisonment. Personal love or hate and private joys and grief animate both characters.

Honan comments that '[w]e are barely allowed to imagine a riot of senses in Marlowe's tragedy, for the interesting reason that sensuality is not seen as a

dramatic, contentious issue, by either the barons or the playwright himself'.⁶ This is only true because the pace of the dramatic action moves so fast that there is little opportunity for reflection, sensual or otherwise. Marlowe still takes the time necessary to paint a very sensual word picture of Edward's eroticism in Gaveston's famous speech beginning 'I must haue Wanton poets, pleasant wits, / Musicians, that with touching of a string, / May draw the pliant king which way I please'. Similarly, Isabella prefers that '[t]he cup of *Hymen* had beene full of poyson, / Or, with those armes that twind about my neck, / I had beene stifled' . . . rather than that she should suffer Edward's rejection (51-53 and 470-472). These sensual considerations drive most of the actions of the major protagonists and, by association, those of almost everyone else.

Conversely, Thomas Cartelli, in his chapter on *Edward II* in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, notes how the play 'often seems to derive its shape and momentum from within, as a result of Marlowe 'allowing the intensity of personal interests and unbridled emotion from the abrupt and seemingly unpatterned conflicts of rival passions and personalities, to determine the structure and momentum of his play' (p.159).⁷ Isabella's character constantly emphasizes the personal affliction inherent in the wider political dissent and protest, as do those of Edward and Gaveston.

Shakespeare's Margaret is altogether different. Introduced late in *I Henry VI* and wooed by the Duke of Suffolk, by inclination for himself but in deed as the king's proxy, to be a bride for Henry, she is nonetheless used as a pawn by her impoverished father, to ensure his freedom within his own provinces. Political and politicised from the first, she reappears in *II Henry VI* as a demure and grateful princess, transferred like a parcel from Suffolk to King Henry as part of the peace concluded between England and France. Within a few scenes she emerges, confident and politically ambitious, challenging Gloucester's position as Lord Protector, and intent upon curtailing the extravagance of his haughty, and equally assertive, wife, Eleanor.

Neither woman is remotely submissive or solicitous of her husband's good opinion. Both roles include lengthy speeches underpinning their influence upon the unfolding drama, and require their players to dominate the stage for vital periods of the action. From the very first of his dramas Shakespeare's women are more assertive than most of Marlowe's with the notable exception of those in *The Tragedie of Dido*. The editors of *3 Henry VI* make the point that feminist readings of Shakespeare have only appeared during the last fifty years or so, and until then commentators were interested largely in the characters of Henry and Richard, Duke of York, and the development of the character of Richard, later Duke of Gloucester; this despite the fact that the character of Margaret influences the entire tetralogy, providing an enormous challenge to anyone undertaking the role.

⁶ Park Honan, *Christopher Marlowe, Poet and Spy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 303.

⁷ 'Edward II', by Thomas Cartelli, in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, edited by Patrick Cheney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp 158-173 (p.159).

Since then, discussion of her development from youthful beauty through to embittered crone has proliferated.⁸ Cox and Ramussen note the complexity of the character, underlining particularly, the scenes which draw on earlier dramatic conventions, such as her grief over her murdered son 'sweet Ned':

*Margaret's lament for her son is another example of Shakespeare's secularizing stage tradition by using an element from the dramatic history of salvation for its emotional effect.*⁹

So far as can be ascertained from title pages and from Philip Henslowe's invaluable diaries, Marlowe wrote most of his plays for Edward Alleyn's company (soon to be The Admiral's Men), with the exceptions of *Edward II* for Pembroke's, and *The Tragedie of Dido* for the Children of the Chapel Royal. Shakespeare too wrote for Pembroke's before he came into prominence as an actor/writer for The Chamberlain's Men. Perhaps the differing gender emphasis in their respective dramas may partly lie with the companies for whom the plays were intended.

Marlowe may have put the majority of his words into the mouths of men, and written the more proactive roles for them, because he was uncertain of the capabilities of the boys who were to play the female roles, or perhaps because the company management expected it. His men are powerful and charismatic leaders, warriors, searchers-after-truth, or adept at manipulation, and these parts are generally accepted as written for Edward Alleyn, the leading light at Henslowe's Rose Theatre and the theatre manager's son-in-law. Another possibility, first suggested by Carol Chillington Rutter at a Shakespeare Centre lecture, is that the lack of depth on the first stage of the Rose Theatre constricted the movement of apprentices in their wide, stiff Elizabethan skirts, allowing insufficient space for more than one or two at a time. Marlowe certainly did not write abbreviated female dialogue because he was unable to create female characters. His approach may be different from his contemporary playwright, but it can be equally telling dramatically. Where Margaret differs so much from Isabella, is that she is subject to her emotional needs, endeavouring to second Edward, the nobles, or Mortimer, rather than outwit or overrule them. For example, when Isabella joins battle on behalf of her son and begins to show leadership qualities by delivering an impassioned speech to her troops, she is summarily cut short by Mortimer.

*misgouerned kings are cause of all this wrack,
And Edward, thou art one among them all,
Whose loosnes hath betrayed thy land to spoyle,
And made the channels overflow with blood.
Of thine own people patron shouldst thou be,
But thou -*

Edward the Second

⁸ For a full discussion see *King Henry VI*, edited by John D. Cox and Eric Ramussen (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2001), Introduction, pp 1-176 ('Feminist Criticism', pp 140-148).

⁹ *Ibid* - p.146.

At this point, Mortimer interrupts: 'Nay madam, if you be a warriar / Ye must not grow so passionate in speeches' (1756-1763), and Isabella falls silent. Forker ascribes Mortimer's interruption of Isabel to Marlowe signalling 'the change in Mortimer from the outraged baron who oppressed the king's flatterers to the calculating pragmatist and cold hearted power-seeker who will play the role of overreaching villain in the denouement'.¹⁰ This may be so, but Mortimer's own following speech is scarcely less threatening to Edward:

*... for the open wronges and iniuries
Edward hath done to vs, his Queene and land,
We come in armes to wrecke it with the swords.*

Edward the Second (1768-70)

He seems rather to be curtailing her 'more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger' approach, and Marlowe underlines her continuing concern for Edward in the following scene: 'I rue my lord's ill fortune, but alas, / Care of my countrie cald me to this warre' (1852-3).

Cartelli, too, draws attention to Mortimer's tactics in public speaking which drive him to interrupt Isabella in order to make 'his more pragmatic "publication" of his party's mission with the statement, "Nay, madam, if you be a warrior,/ Ye must not grow so passionate in speeches" (4.4.14-15)'.¹¹ They both agree that Mortimer (or the actor playing him) is taking charge and effectively curtailing the Queen (or the boy playing her) from making an autonomous expression of eloquence.

Margaret, just one of the unstoppable and articulate women who people Shakespeare's plays, faced with an England where factious nobles breed insurrection against the commonweal, a Duchess assuming the prerogatives of a queen, and a King too weak to control the situation, arrogates political authority to herself with the support of Suffolk. She abets him in his campaign to humble the Duchess, and demands the resignation of Gloucester, personally placing the staff of office into Henry's hands. She leads the group intent upon Gloucester's downfall, subsequently conspiring with them to murder him.

However, she is politically astute enough to feign sorrow at his death, elaborating her show of grief with a claim which cleverly transforms her defensive mode into an attack on Henry for his neglect and mistrust of her. The genuine experience of humiliation resulting from Edward's scorn suffered by Isabella is invoked by Margaret as a rhetorical tool to undermine her husband's character. When her pleas against Suffolk's banishment for Gloucester's murder fail to commute his sentence, she is passionate in grief, and devastated by Suffolk's subsequent death, but allows herself little time to mourn: 'Think . . . on revenge, and cease to weep' (4.4.3). Her despair that

¹⁰ Forker, op. cit. - p.73.

¹¹ Cartelli, op. cit. - p.168

without Suffolk she has no strong ally to protect her interests is soon subsumed into endeavours to preserve Henry's life, necessary for underpinning her own power base, and now threatened by the increasingly powerful Yorkist faction. She urges retreat to London in order to regroup.

2 Henry VI finishes at this point of irresolution, and Margaret features again in the sequel, *Richard, Duke of Gloucester*. There is some abridgement in this version of Margaret's role compared with that in *3 Henry VI*, but as abridgement seems to be a feature of the earlier text throughout, there was probably no intention to lessen the impact of the character. Commentators, though, are usually agreed that the *Folio* text has the effect of further strengthening Margaret's determination and underlining her ruthlessness.

Although not named in the lengthy earlier title, she is the most powerful of the Lancastrians, undertaking political and military strategy, overruling her weak and indecisive husband. Interestingly, like Isabella, she takes up arms on behalf of her son. Unlike Isabella she is in charge of the action and of the peers. Where Isabella shrinks from personal violent action, Margaret is the instigator of the torment inflicted on the captive Duke of York. In addition to verbal scorn:

*Why art thou patient, man? Thou shouldst be mad;
And I to make thee mad do mock thee thus.
Stamp, rave and fret, that I may sing and dance.
Thou wouldst be feed, I see, to make me sport:*

I Henry VI - 1.4.89-92

and on through a forty-line speech, Shakespeare, in a departure from the source material in Hall's *Chronicles* has her wield a murderous dagger herself.

In another parallel with *Edward II*, Margaret undertakes a mission to France to persuade Louis to grant money and troops in support of her son - another Edward - in his claim to the throne, and is similarly outmanoeuvred by a better offer from the present incumbent. This time the bribe is not gold, but an offer of marriage for Louis's sister to the King of England. Edward, however, with his undiplomatic marriage to Lady Grey, an unforgivable snub to Louis, Lady Bona and to France, undermines his own position, incurring not only France's enmity but also the defection of his nobles, Warwick and Montague.

After Warwick's death in the Battle of Barnet, Margaret, uninterrupted, rallies her troops with a stirring speech of extended nautical metaphor:

*Say Warwick was our anchor
is not Oxford here another...?
The friends of France our shrouds and tacklings?
And, though unskilful, why not Ned and I
For once allowed the skilful pilot's charge?
We will not from the helm to sit and weep,*

*But keep our course, though the rough wind say no,
From shelves and rocks that threaten us with wrack.*

I Henry VI - 5.4.13-23

Here again Shakespeare departs from his source material in Hall, where it is a despairing Margaret who has to be persuaded to continue the struggle. Her own resolution is pointed up in a much briefer speech by her son:

*Methinks a woman of this valiant spirit
Should, if a coward heard her speak these words
Infuse his breast with magnanimity
And make him, naked, foil a man at arms.*

I Henry VI - 5.4.39-41

As Cox and Rasmussen observe, David Bevington established the Margaret of *I Henry VI* as a dominant female, inverting the traditional sex roles, and that this 'argument could easily be extended to *3 Henry VI*'.¹² However, they argue also that her lament for her dead son: 'O Ned, sweet Ned, speak to thy mother, boy' stages a *pietà*, derived from elements both of the N-town cycle and the medieval *Planctus Mariae*.¹³ This duality of dramatic function reinforces the complexity of her character. What Margaret in her ecstasy of grief cannot comprehend is that her own son's death is a *quid pro quo* for the murder of Richard of Gloucester's son and her blatant gloating during Gloucester's torment. She has become not just a type of the dominant female but of the sexual inversion associated with witchcraft and demonism. Indeed, in the last lines of this speech she invokes a curse upon the Yorkist dynasty which will be played out in *Richard III*:

*if you ever chance to have a child,
Look in his youth to have him so cut off
As, deathsmen you have rid this sweet young Prince!*

I Henry VI - 5.5.65-68

Writing about Dido, the queen of Carthage in Marlowe's play, Philip Ford shows how '[f]reedom, for Dido equates to her independence', in a reading of the play which links it to the motto of the putative Marlowe portrait, *Quod me nutrit me destruit*.¹⁴ Dido, he argues 'constantly affirms a link between the creative and destructive processes, and displays the concepts of love and violence to be but different manifestations of the same complex of passions and desires' (p.1). Much the same could be said of *Edward II*. Edward's power and prestige as a monarch are compromised from the beginning of the play by his love for Gaveston, destructive in the wider political sphere as well as

¹² Cox and Rasmussen, op. cit. - p.142.

¹³ Cox and Rasmussen, op. cit. - p.146.

¹⁴ "Quod me Nutrit me Destruit": Relationships in Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, by Philip Ford in *The Marlowe Society Research Journal Volume 07*- p.3 (<http://www.marlowe-society.org/pubs/journal/journal07.html>).

personally for Gaveston, and ultimately for himself. Edward can be seen perversely to pursue his own ruin.

Isabella's tragedy is that, in Marlowe's play in contrast to the character reviled in his source material, she is unable to operate in any autonomous way. He writes of a woman whose actions are circumscribed by the men in her life, Edward, Gaveston, Mortimer, and her own father. The popular view of Isabella, from her own life time forward, is summed up by Alison Weir as 'more vilified than any other English queen'.¹⁵

Margaret's strength and her ability to function in a man's world lie in her whole-hearted pursuit of power untrammelled by affection. She is brought low, not by an abrogation of that power, but by *force majeure*. Isabella, regardless of the historical denigration of her and despite Edward's and Gaveston's verbal abuse, is represented as a victim by Marlowe. After spending much of the action loyal to Edward, despite the failure of her efforts to win his love and respect, she transfers her affections to a man who woos her only for the political advantages she can bring him. In thrall to her lover, she connives in the death of her husband, and weakly fails to second her son's protest when Mortimer summarily commands Edmund's execution: 'Sonne, be content, I dare not speake a worde' (2428). She has become an onlooker on the national stage, unable to influence either events or opinions.

Her actions are not admirable, but they do evoke parallels to this day among women who suffer the abuse of themselves and their children from a controlling partner. Marlowe's psychoanalysis of destructive relationships is acute, and where Shakespeare's tendency is to emphasize love as a positive and redemptive force in a world of hatred, Marlowe charts its destructive potential. Both men were writing in a period when extreme violence was meted out in private, and publicly in the names of the church and state authorities. Their dramatic writing parallels that violence, although Marlowe usually shows it as politically expedient. Tamburlaine, for example, openly regrets that his personal, martial code decrees that the virgins must be the first to suffer. Catherine, arguably one of his last dramatic creations shows his initial development of a female lead as evil and a seeker after political power. From his first dramatic ventures, Shakespeare's women, whether by wile or by force, can be seen to exercise political influence, and he unflinchingly shows how their influence can be brutally negated by physical frailty.

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¹⁵ Alison Weir, *Isabella She-Wolf of France, Queen of England* (London: Pimlico, 2006) - p.2. She notes that the contemporary chronicler Geoffrey le Baker, used such epithets as "that harridan", "that virago" and "Jezebel". Her book is an in-depth endeavour to set the record straight, detailing Isabella's life and times as revealed in the historical source material.

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