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OF
CHRISTOPHER
MARLOWE

EDITED BY
ROMA GILL

VOLUME IV

The Jew of Malta

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R.G.

INTRODUCTION

Marlowe and Malta

MARLOWE'S *Jew of Malta* must surely be reckoned one of the most imaginative creations of Elizabethan drama. There are no known sources or antecedents for the main events of its plot, and no counterpart—in life or in literature—for its protagonist! The play has defeated twentieth-century attempts to classify it: T. S. Eliot, noting the 'terribly serious, even savage comic humour', pronounced it a 'farce';¹ and Clifford Leech asked whether it should be called 'Black Comedy or Comic Tragedy'.² Perhaps it belongs in the genre described by Polonius (*Hamlet*, II. ii. 295) as 'tragical-comical-historical-pastoral'—with the addition 'satirical-topical'. And 'problematical'!

When I first started to edit *The Jew of Malta*, in 1970,³ I found it a strangely unsettling experience. There were no major textual problems to speak of—after all, I had just confronted those of *Dr Faustus*! 'Black comedy' or 'tragic farce'? A Morality Play (*radix malorum cupiditas*)? An acting-out of the 'lecture' that Machevil (Prologue, l. 29) declines to read? These were all fruitful avenues (and some of them were well-trodden ways) for exploration—but for me they all proved dead ends, leaving me still with the same uneasiness, which eventually formulated itself into the question WHY—why *Malta*? Marlowe's play has no starting-point—it comes from nowhere. *Dido* springs out of the *Aeneid*, *Tamburlaine* is framed out of the many stories of Timur the Lame, *Edward II* is rooted in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, and *Dr Faustus* translates readily from the Wittenberg of *The English Faustbook* to the Cambridge of Marlowe's youth. But where did *The Jew* come from? What was the peculiar spark that lighted Marlowe's fire?

In desperation I took a holiday—and went to Malta.

Marlowe seems to have known a lot about the island of

¹ 'Christopher Marlowe', in T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932; 3rd edn. 1951), 123; repr. in Clifford Leech (ed.), *Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1964), 16.

² *Christopher Marlowe: Poet for the Stage* (New York: AMS Press, 1986), 159.

³ For *The Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

Malta, its geography, and its recent history. In the play's first scene Barabas, its protagonist, defines Malta's precise location. Looking out from his counting-house, he can see the weather-vanes and his 'Halcons bill', which are indicating a wind direction 'East and by-South'. From this quarter the wind will bring his 'Argosie from *Alexandria*' safely 'through our *Mediterranean* sea', passing the island of Crete ('by *Candie* shoare'), to harbour in '*Malta Rhode*' (ll. 49 ff.). When he interviews the merchant-seamen, Barabas demonstrates his knowledge of sealandes. He is surprised that the captain of the '*Speranza*' has not seen the missing argosy, telling him

Thou couldst not come from *Egypt*, or by *Caire*
But at the entry there into the sea,
Where *Nilus* payes his tribute to the maine,
Thou needs must saile by *Alexandria*. (71-4).

The captain of the missing ship soon appears, however, although he can offer no explanation for his failure to rendezvous with the main body of the fleet. But Barabas knows about the traffic in these lanes, and suggests that they had probably 'coasted round by *Candie* shoare About their Oyles, or other businesses' (ll. 89-90). Barabas also knows that these are dangerous waters, and he reprimands the captain for his foolhardiness in attempting the voyage without escort. There is an explanation however—the solitary vessel had been protected by a Spanish fleet 'That had the Gallies of the Turke in chase'. Again Barabas understands: 'they were going up to *Sicily*'.

Most of this information was available in Marlowe's favourite atlas, the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* of Ortelius,⁴ which he had used to map the travels and conquests of Tamburlaine.⁴ But Malta is a tiny island—at its longest and widest points it measures no more than eighteen miles by nine miles—and it shows as only a speck in Ortelius's Mediterranean. Marlowe must have had access to some other source for what he knows of the island's topography. The earliest of all known maps of Malta was drawn by a French knight, Jean Quintin.⁵ Its scope includes the 'other petty Iles'—Gozo, Comino, Cominotto, and Filfla—with

⁴ See M. E. Seaton, 'Marlowe's Map', *Essays and Studies*, 10 (1924), 13-35.

⁵ Printed in Quintin's *Insulae Melitae Descriptio ex Commentariis Rerum Quotidianarum* (Lyons: Seb. Gryphius, 1536) f.A2^v; the original is in the Museum and Library of the Order of St John, in Clerkenwell, London.

which Malta is 'contermur'd' (v. iii. 9), and it set the example for other sixteenth-century cartographers, who all give the same information (making it impossible to identify any one particular map as the one that Marlowe *must* have used). They all outline creeks and name villages and, in the position of the ancient capital Mdina, they mark a central, often towered, 'Civitas' or 'Oppidum'. Marlowe's characters similarly have no particular name for their local habitation, and they refer generally to the 'Towne'—which appears to combine the facilities of the walled city of Mdina and the fortified township Birgu (in Act V Scene i Barabas, feigning death, is thrown over city walls—only to arise, three lines later, in a position to greet the invading Calymath). Near the biggest of the harbours Quintin's map indicates, using cartographer's turrets, the twin forts of St Elmo and St Angelo (identified as 'C. Santangelo'). For the purposes of the play, these became the 'Two lofty Turrets that command the Towne' (v. iii. 3) which are destroyed by the Turks under their leader, Selim Calymath, in the play's imagined siege.

The Great Siege of Malta is a historical fact, and Selim Calymath, the son of Süleyman the Magnificent, was a real-life person. But the play bears little resemblance to what actually happened. There was never any tributary league of the sort that horrifies Del Bosco in Act II Scene ii: 'Will Knights of *Malta* be in league with Turkes, And buy it basely too for summes of gold?' (ll. 28-9). The Turks coveted Malta and the other Mediterranean islands for their many creeks and harbours, which would afford shelter to the fighting-ships protecting the Holy Land against the Christian crusaders—and which might be used for launching an attack on the 'soft underbelly' of Europe. They besieged Malta in 1565, and there was fierce fighting around the fort of St Elmo. But the Turks were defeated, and the island was never captured. Mediterranean history of the sixteenth century is rich in accounts of Turkish sieges and stratagems; there are even stories of a rich Jew, Joseph Nasi, who was made duke of Naxos for services rendered to the Turks. The subject has been well researched in the hunt for sources for *The Jew of Malta*, and a few analogues have been found,⁶ but ultimately these can only confirm the originality of Marlowe's invention.

⁶ See *The Jew of Malta*, ed. N. W. Bawcutt (The Revels Plays: Manchester University Press, 1978), 4-16.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century Malta was a Spanish possession, and in 1530 Charles V of Spain presented the island to the Knights Hospitallers, of St John, after the Turks had driven them out of Rhodes. In the play, Martin del Bosco reminds Ferneze and his Knights of this fact:

Remember that to *Europ's* shame
The Christian Ile of *Rhodes*, from whence you came,
Was lately lost, and you were stated here
To be at deadly enmity with Turkes. (II. ii. 30-3.)

Ferneze's function seems to be that of the Grand Master of the Order, although the character has an additional social dimension as the father of Lodowicke. In their original foundation, the Knights Hospitallers were defenders of the faith and protectors of Christian pilgrims on their journeys to Jerusalem. They gained some heroic stature after the siege of Rhodes, and the whole of England prayed for them when the Turks attacked Malta in 1565.⁷ Apart from this, however, the Order was not popular. Its members were drawn from the aristocracy of every nation in Europe, and owed direct allegiance to none but the Pope; they were rich, and lived by what Ernle Bradford called 'organized piracy'.⁸ They freed the Christian slaves who rowed the Turkish galleys—and chained their own prisoners to the oars with equal brutality. Gibbon said that 'They neglected to live, but were prepared to die, in the service of Christ.'⁹ Marlowe's Knights are odious—but not incredibly so. To raise money for the unpaid tribute to the Turks, they impose a levy on the Jews with the threat of enforced baptism for those who refuse to pay:

⁷ In England the bishops ordained diocesan prayers, issuing 'A Fourme | to be used in Common | prayer every Wednesdaye and | Frydaye, within the Cittie | and Dioces of London: | to excite all godly peo|ple to praye un|to God for the | delivery | of those Christians, that | are now invaded by | the Turke'; title-page reproduced in Andrew P. Vella, *An Elizabethan-Ottoman Conspiracy* (Mnida: University of Malta Press, 1972), 14.

⁸ Ernle Bradford, *The Great Siege: Malta 1565* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1961), 21. For a more favourable view of the Order see H. J. A. Sire, *The Knights of Malta* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994); on the siege see pp. 68-72.

⁹ *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury, 7 vols. (London: Methuen, 1909-14), vi. 329 (ch. 58).

First, the tribute money of the Turkes shall all be levied amongst the Jewes, and each of them to pay one halfe of his estate . . . Secondly, hee that denies to pay, shal straight become a Christian. (I. ii. 68-74.)

By any modern standards this is outrageous; but the historical truth is not very different. In 1492, before the arrival of the Knights of St John, the ruling class in Malta (who came from old Sicilian and Castilian families) expelled all Jews from the island—except for those individuals who agreed to purchase Christian baptism at the price of 45 per cent of their total wealth. Twentieth-century ears are shocked by the unctuousness of the Knight's rejoinder to Barabas:

If your first curse fall heavy on thy head
And make thee poore and scorn'd of all the world,
'Tis not our fault, but thy inherent sinne.

(I. ii. 108-10.)

Yet he articulates no more than many Elizabethan Christians would believe.

In his opposition to the Knights Barabas, their victim, is almost heroic. At the beginning of the play his self-revelatory soliloquies and conspiratorial 'asides' enlist the spectators' sympathy in much the same way as do those of a contemporary grotesque, Shakespeare's Richard III. Marlowe has thoroughly researched a Jewish identity for Barabas, creating from the Old Testament a character far richer than any of the stereotypes that he could have inherited from popular tradition (which would only have given him the features that Ithimore can describe). Against his Christian persecutors, Barabas proudly maintains his own identity as a Jew, a member of God's chosen race ('unto us the Promise doth belong', II. iii. 48). But privately he cares little for the nationality: 'They say we are a scatter'd Nation: I cannot tell' (I. i. 118-19). The other Jews flock to him, as to their leader, in time of crisis: 'let us goe to *Barrabas*; For he can counsell best in these affaires' (I. i. 138-9); but their leader deserts them in the same breath as he promises aid: 'Assure your selves I'll looke unto (*aside*) my selfe' (I. 170). When Barabas himself is in distress, the other three Jews, ignorant of his treachery, cast themselves into the role of the Job's comforters—but Barabas disdains to accept the part they design for him:

What tell you me of *Job*? . . .

I had at home, and in mine Argosie

And other ships that came from *Egypt* last,

As much as would have bought his beasts and him.

(i. ii. 181-9.)

Barabas is Marlowe's own multi-faceted creation; his individuality encompasses the careful tradesman who counts his 'paltry silverlings', the near-visionary who would accumulate 'Infinite riches in a little roome', and the father who loves his daughter 'As *Agamemnon* did his *Iphigen*'—qualifying his love even as he boasts it. The revenge plot develops from the character thus elemented in the first act of the play. As the plot gathers pace, the character dwindles—and audience sympathy recedes.

No other character engages our feelings for very long. The innocent Abigall has a momentary pathos in her death, but this is immediately dissolved in a crude joke:

ABIGALL. Convert my father that he may be sav'd,

And wisse that I dye a Christian.

2 FRYAR. I, and a Virgin too, that grieves me most.

(III. vi. 39-41.)

The remaining characters are stereotypes, more or less caricatured: the Friars are lustful and avaricious (although they acknowledge the secrecy of the confessional, III. vi. 33-6); Abigall's lovers are easily enamoured and easily duped; the mother who laments the death of Don Mathias is no more than a 'Mater'—even her name (she is 'Katherin' in III. ii. 16) seems to have been an afterthought. But what is remarkable is their heterogeneity—Turks and Jews; Christian Knights, friars, and nuns; aristocrats and the low-life confraternity of slave, pimp, and prostitute.

In the sixteenth century there was only one place on earth—Malta—that would have given entertainment to such a contradiction of characters. How much did Marlowe know about the island, and where did he get his information from? He could have read Malta's history in books—there were several in French, Italian, and Spanish, although little was written in English; and he might have acquired an appreciation of the island's geography through his skill as a map-reader. But books

and maps alone cannot explain his interest. Marlowe seems to be strangely sensitive to the peculiar political and religious tensions of contemporary Malta, and such sensitivity is unlikely to have been learned from literature. I would suggest that Marlowe's experiences as petty spy and go-between somehow equipped him with the insight he needed to create his own world in *The Jew of Malta*.

The establishment of the Levant Trading Company in 1581 forced an uneasy but economic alliance between the English and their traditional enemies, the Turks. A new enemy, Catholic Spain, was threatening the Protestant monarchy, and to counter this the English were developing their espionage network in the Mediterranean. Much more research is needed on this subject, but one—albeit trivial—incident has been brought to light by Professor Andrew Vella, late Professor of History in the University of Malta. In his book *An Elizabethan–Ottoman Conspiracy* he describes how an English ship, the *Roe*, landed in Malta in 1581. Captain and crew were apprehended and subjected to inquisition by one Monsignor Cefalotto, who reported the incident to his superiors in Rome with the warning:

It is a well-known fact that the friendship between the English and the Prince of this island [La Cassiere] and the ambitions and desires of the Knights would impel them to do all kind of harm to the Catholic Commonwealth and to the King of Spain. For this purpose there cannot be an easier place from where to assault and cause havoc than from Malta, because of its strategic position . . .¹⁰

Marlowe's acquaintance was wider and more varied than his career as dramatist would suggest. There are ever fresh details coming to light about the murky underworld which he inhabited and the shabby individuals with whom he conversed—those who secured his degree in 1586, those who occasioned his presence in Flushing in 1592, and the ones who seem to have engineered his death in Deptford in 1593.¹¹ Among these, perhaps, are some whose names and activities would throw light on *The Jew of Malta*.

¹⁰ Tr. Vella, 56.

¹¹ See e.g. Charles Nicholl, *The Reckoning* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992).

Date and Text

ON 26 February 1592 Henslowe recorded the receipt of fifty shillings a performance by the Lord Strange's Men of 'the Jewe of malltuse'; and his *Diary* entry¹² provides a definite *terminus ad quem* for Marlowe's play. This may well not have been the first performance, since the play is not marked 'ne(w)'. The *terminus a quo* would seem to be supplied by a reference in the Machevil Prologue, 'now the *Guize* is dead'; the Duke of Guise was assassinated by Henri III's command on 23 December 1588.

Frequent performances—there were seventeen in the twelve months between 1592 and 1593—no doubt earned the play its description as *the famous tragedie of the Riche Jew of Malta* when it was entered for Nicholas Ling and Thomas Millington in the Stationers' Register on 17 May 1594. Apparently no publication resulted from this entry. The play was entered again on 20 November 1632, when it was licensed by Sir Henry Herbert to be published by Nicholas Vavasour. The following year it was printed by John Beale (STC 17412):

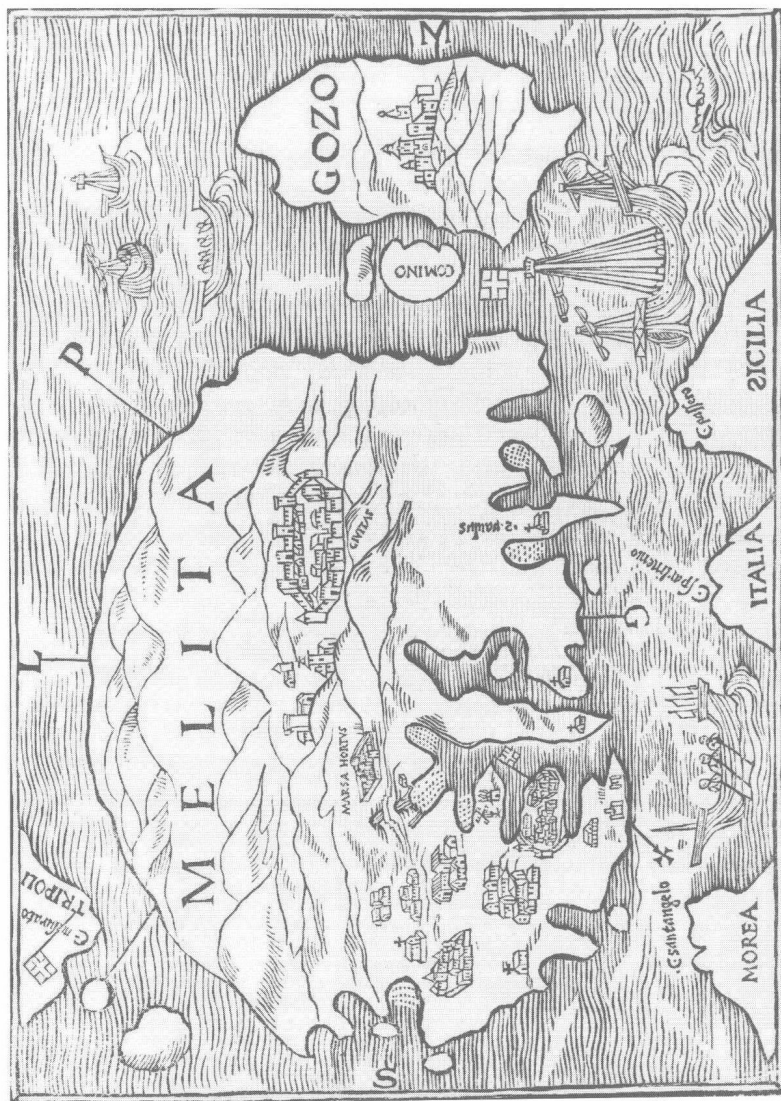
The Famous | TRAGEDY | OF | THE RICH IEW | OF MALTA. | AS IT WAS
PLAYD | BEFORE THE KING AND | QUEENE, IN HIS MAJESTIES | Theatre at
White-Hall, by her Majesties | Servants at the *Cock-pit*. | Written by
CHRISTOPHER MARLO. | [type ornament] | LONDON; | Printed by I.B.
for *Nicholas Vavasour*, and are to be sold | at his Shop in the Inner-
Temple, neere the | Church. 1633. 4° A-I⁴, K²; A₁, 2 blank; A₃
Epistle by THO. HEYWOOD.; A₄^r The Prologue spoken at Court,
Epilogue; A₄^v The Prologue to the Stage, at the Cocke-pit, Epilogue;
B₁^r text starts; K₂^v text ends FINIS.

Bawcutt describes the 1633 quarto as 'a very ordinary piece of book production': the worn type is imperfectly inked, literals abound, prose is frequently printed as verse, speech-prefixes are irregular, and 'asides' are erratically indicated. Circumstances have compelled me to rely on the collations of other editors; but only the most minimal press-correction was detected by Bawcutt (who collated 14 copies) and Bowers (12 copies). Both editors incline to the view that MS underlying Q is some kind of transcript, perhaps Marlowe's fair copy of his

¹² Philip Henslowe, *Diary*, ed. R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert (Cambridge University Press, 1961), 16.

foul papers (Bawcutt), or else (Bowers) a transcript of the theatrical promptbook. Craik argues for a playhouse manuscript, attributing the many confusions in the spelling of proper names to the printer's having expanded the abbreviations which he found in his copy. The frequent mislineation, and the unintelligible Spanish in Act I Scene ii, are similarly accounted for. Recent evidence presented by Dr D. J. Lake supports this view.¹³ Basing his argument on colloquial contractions ('em for 'them', *i'th* and *o'th*), Lake identifies the style of Thomas Dekker, and suggests that Dekker may have introduced some of his own mannerisms into the play whilst copying the text at the beginning of the seventeenth century. For this edition I have used the photographs in The Scholar Press reprint (Menston, 1970) of the Bodleian copy Mal. 172(2), occasionally checked against the far clearer copy Mal. 915(5). Unless misleadingly erroneous, the original spelling and punctuation are retained—although the usages of *i/j*, *u/v* have been normalized. Evident mislining of verse and prose has been corrected and noted in 'Emendation of Accidentals', along with the printer's errors in the attribution of speeches. Proper names have been uniformly italicized. All asides are marked as such, square brackets indicating any variation from Q's erratic practice; I have not, however, followed Q in its occasional use of italics for the words to be thus spoken. Additional stage directions are enclosed in square brackets. In the matter of speech prefixes I have been guided by Craik, who recognized that some characters are named typically rather than individually ('Governor', 'Mater', 'Curtezane' rather than 'Ferneze', 'Katherin', and 'Bellamira'), and that this 'throws into proper relief' the naming of more distinguished characters (Barabas, Ithimore, Calymath, and Del Bosco). Q's speech prefixes are usually abbreviated; here the full names (titles or descriptions) are given, in accordance with those listed in the *Dramatis Personae*.

¹³ 'Three Seventeenth-Century Revisions: *Thomas of Woodstock*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Faustus B*', *Notes & Queries*, NS 30/2 (Apr. 1983), 133-43.



Map of Malta from Jean Quintin d'Aulun, *Insulae Melitae Descriptio ex Commentariis Rerum Quotidianarum* (Lyons: Seb. Gryphius, 1536).

REFERENCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

Editions of The Jew of Malta

1. *Single Texts*

- Q *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta* (London: Nicholas Vavasour, 1633).
- Bawcutt *The Jew of Malta*, ed. N. W. Bawcutt (Manchester University Press; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).
- Broughton *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta*, ed. James Broughton (London: J. Chappell Jr, 1818).
- Craik *The Jew of Malta*, ed. T. W. Craik (London: Ernest Benn Ltd, 1966).
- Penley *Marlowe's Celebrated Tragedy of the Jew of Malta . . . With Considerable Alterations and Additions*. By S. Penley, Comedian (London: Richard White, 1818).
- Reed *A Select Collection of Old Plays*, ed. Robert Dodsley, 2nd edn. ed. Isaac Reed (London: J. Dodsley, 1780), VIII.
- Scott *The Ancient British Drama*, ed. Sir Walter Scott, (London: William Miller, 1810), i.
- Shone *The Famous Historical Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta . . . Imitated from the Works of Machiavelli, by Christopher Marlo, ?* ed. W. Shone (London: Reynell and Son, 1810).

2. *Complete Editions*

- Bennett *The Jew of Malta and The Massacre at Paris*, ed. H. S. Bennett, in *The Works and Life of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. R. H. Case (London: Methuen, 1930-3), iii (1931).
- Bowers *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Fredson Bowers (2 vols., Cambridge University Press, 1973), i.
- Bullen *The Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. A. H. Bullen (London: John C. Nimmo, 1885).
- Collier *A Select Collection of Old Plays: A New Edition*, ed. J. P. Collier (London: Septimus Prowett, 1825), VIII.
- Dyce *The Works of Christopher Marlowe with Notes and Some Account of his life and writings by the Rev. Alexander Dyce* (London: William Pickering, 1850).

- Robinson *The Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. G. Robinson (London: William Pickering, 1826).

Quotations

Quotations from Marlowe's other works are taken from *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, vol. i, *Translations*, and vol. ii, *Dr Faustus*, ed. Roma Gill (Oxford University Press, 1987 and 1990); and from Bowers.

- Hunter G. K. Hunter, 'The Theology of Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 27 (1964), 211-40; repr. in id., *Dramatic Identities and Cultural Tradition: Studies in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Liverpool: University Press, 1978), 60-102.
- Bible *The Bible and Holy Scriptures Conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament* (Geneva: Rouland Hall, 1560).
- Shakespeare The Riverside Edition, ed. G. Blakemore Evans *et al.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

Other Abbreviations

- OED *The Oxford English Dictionary*.
- om. *omitted*.
- SD stage direction.
- Tilley M. P. Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950).

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