



Lars Engle *and*  
Eric Rasmussen

Studying  
**Shakespeare's**  
**Contemporaries**

WILEY Blackwell

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*For Holly, Carl, and Sage*  
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*For Vicky, Tristan, and Arden*  
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Lars Engle

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Eric Rasmussen

# Preface: How to Use This Book

Shakespeare's preeminent importance has both sustained and deformed the study of the drama of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in England. As the title of this book suggests, the other playwrights who wrote at the same time and for the same players and public as Shakespeare are always in danger of being relegated to the background: treated as part of Shakespeare's context. There are of course worse things than being part of Shakespeare's background. Serious students of Shakespeare need to know the work of Kyd, Marlowe, Jonson, Webster, Middleton, and their many contemporaries and collaborators. In the process, they usually come to care deeply about these authors. In another way, however, Shakespeare is part of the background for study of other English Renaissance dramatists, as one almost invariably comes to their plays after having studied some of his. The expectations that Shakespeare's most-studied plays arouse – expectations about depth and complexity of characterization, about density of brilliant metaphor in language, about intellectual coherence and social insight – are sometimes fully gratified by the works of other dramatists (though not often all at once). Masterpieces like *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The Changeling*, *The Alchemist*, or *Doctor Faustus* resemble Shakespeare in a number of kinds of excellence. But English Renaissance drama is also full of plays that are wonderful in ways that are quite un-Shakespearean: for example, in the hilarious literary spoofing in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, or the savagely funny satire of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, or the unsentimental generosity about women's sexual lives in the city comedies of Middleton. *Studying Shakespeare's Contemporaries* works on the assumption that the privative term "non-Shakespearean" need not be a deterrent to pleasure or profit. We might wish to substitute the less negative "para-Shakespearean" in the minds of our readers. The book aims to accompany students who have embarked on first readings of major plays, illustrating the ways the plays take up issues that we care about, and opening them up as sites for

pleasure in reading or performance as well as for reflection on important aspects of life.

The book proceeds by brief individual treatments of major non-Shakespearean Renaissance plays organized according to a movement outward from psychological interiority to large social and political structures. From the perspective of beginning students, there is nothing more frustrating than an argument that uses as evidence a series of brief references to plays they have never read. *Studying Shakespeare's Contemporaries* avoids this by handling each play in a discrete, independently readable section, under the assumption that some of its users may well open the book to the sections on the particular play they are reading. At the same time, it offers a developing overview of major issues in the field of study. Some of these issues are indicated by section topics and subtopics in the table of contents. The book also, in discussions of some of the most widely taught plays (e.g., *Doctor Faustus*, *The Changeling*, *The Duchess of Malfi*), describes the conditions under which plays were commissioned, written (often collaboratively), licensed, staged, and published. The final section offers brief descriptions of the careers of Shakespeare's most important contemporaries, discussing their lives in the theater alongside Shakespeare's. Throughout, the goal has been to provide a brisk, appreciative, and accessible guide to what keeps these plays alive for readers. Plays are quoted from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology* unless otherwise noted.



# Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Preface: How to use this book	xi
Part One: Inwardness	1
1.1 The Inward Self	2
1.2 The Inward Self in Soliloquy: <i>The Jew of Malta</i>	4
1.3 The Inward Self in Aside: <i>The Changeling</i>	16
1.4 A Digression: The Inner Life of Modernized Texts	25
1.5 The Christian/Stoic Soul Under Duress: <i>The Duchess of Malfi</i>	36
1.6 How to Behave When You Have a Soul Always Already Damned: <i>Doctor Faustus</i>	42
1.7 Obsession and Delusion: Comic Inwardness in <i>Every Man         in His Humor</i>	53
1.8 <i>Epicene</i>	63
1.9 <i>Tamburlaine the Great 1 and 2</i> : Interior Strength, External Weakness	68
1.10 Disguise and Honor in <i>The Malcontent</i>	78
1.11 Conclusion: A Drama of Interiority?	80
Part Two: Intimacy, Rivalry, Family	83
2.1 Rivalry and Intimacy in <i>A Trick to Catch the Old One</i>	85
2.2 <i>The Tragedy of Mariam</i> : Intimacy, Tyranny, and Ambivalence	90
2.3 Domestic Tragedy and Moral Commentary: <i>Arden of         Faversham</i>	96
2.4 The Battle of the Sexes: <i>The Woman's Prize</i>	99
2.5 Intimacy, Rivalry, Family: <i>Women Beware Women</i>	103
2.6 Familiar and Familial: Incest in <i>'Tis Pity She's a Whore</i>	113
Part Three: Society, Politics, the City, and the State	123
3.1 Dreaming Up the Free City: <i>The Roaring Girl</i>	124
3.2 <i>The Shoemaker's Holiday</i>	138
3.3 <i>A New Way to Pay Old Debts</i>	144

3.4	<i>The Knight of the Burning Pestle</i>	155
3.5	The State at War in <i>The Spanish Tragedy</i>	161
3.6	Two Bodies: State and Self in <i>Edward II</i>	167
3.7	Resistance to Tyranny in <i>The Maid's Tragedy</i>	173
3.8	Tyranny as a Boundary Condition for a Subject's Violence: <i>The Duchess of Malfi</i> and <i>The Revenger's Tragedy</i>	189
3.9	Republic and Tyranny in <i>Sejanus</i>	190
Part Four: Not Shakespeare – Lives of the Theater Poets		207
4.1	“Non-Shakespearean”: The Dire Privative	207
4.2	Christopher Marlowe	209
4.3	Ben Jonson	211
4.4	Thomas Middleton	215
4.5	Thomas Kyd	217
4.6	Thomas Dekker	218
4.7	Francis Beaumont	218
4.8	John Fletcher	219
4.9	John Ford	220
4.10	John Marston	221
4.11	Philip Massinger	221
4.12	Elizabeth Cary	222
Appendix: Performance History		225
Bibliography		245
Index		251

# Part 1

## Inwardness

Twenty-first century readers are used to the idea that the cultivation and exploration of an inner self is both a predominant literary concern and one of the rewards of literary study. Their central experience of serious literature is usually the novel, which features narrative description of the contents of the minds of characters, or internal monologs in which those minds are revealed, or both. Their predominant experience of drama comes from television and film, which feature revelatory close-ups of expressive faces and occasional voice-overs of thought. As an assumption to bring to Early Modern drama, the idea that inner selves are being explored is both helpful and misleading. It is helpful in that theatre consists of unusually self-revealing action, and Renaissance theatre is no exception to this. But it is somewhat misleading in that Early Modern ideas about what selves consist of differ from twenty-first century ideas, often in significant ways. This part of *Studying Shakespeare's Contemporaries* will discuss personal inwardness as it is presented in the plays of Shakespeare's contemporaries, beginning with techniques for the dramatic representation of inner states and moving on to discuss key features of the inner self. As the preface suggested, Shakespeare excels in evoking human inwardness, so much so that he is sometimes credited with inventing it (see Fineman, Bloom) and with exercising a critical influence on later mapmakers of modern inwardness like Freud. In the following sections, we will discuss a play that influenced Shakespeare in his representation of inwardness, Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, and then a play that is influenced in turn by Shakespeare's representation of inward disturbance in *Macbeth* and *Othello*, Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling*.

## 1.1 The Inward Self

What makes you think you have an inner life? What makes you believe that other people do? Surely, one major constituent of these linked beliefs is your own capacity to talk to yourself, to maintain a discursive existence when not directly prompted by others, and your experience (which may well be more literary than it is personal) of overhearing other people talking to themselves. Of course, most such discourse is private and never rises to the level of audible speech. Part of its interest, indeed, derives from its variance in tone and intention from public speech. Honesty and candor may keep this variance from reaching the level of complete contradiction; the vice of hypocrisy consists in allowing one's public discourse to overtly contradict one's private internal discourse, and may include taking private pleasure in that contradiction. But even in honest, candid people there is substantial variance between internal and external discourse, and relations with particular others will be as it were measured for intimacy by how great that variance is.

This raises a question. Is there internal discourse that is not, in some way, a response, perhaps even a reply, to an external prompt or gesture? Is internal life private in the sense that it is entirely separate from a social matrix, from the outer world of others speaking and writing and exerting authority that conditions all of the life most adults can remember (given that few can remember anything from before they were speakers and understanders)? Twentieth-century theorists have, on the whole, answered "no" to this question. To cite two famous examples among many that could be offered, Ludwig Wittgenstein denies that there could be such a thing as a private language, and Mikhail Bakhtin claims that every utterance is a reply, part of an always already ongoing dialogic exchange (Wittgenstein, 1974: 94–102, Schalkwyk, 2004: 120, Bakhtin, 1981: 276, Bakhtin, 1986: 121, Clark and Holquist, 1984: 348). Do such claims compromise the idea of inwardness? They certainly cast in question absolute claims about individual autonomy, and they point to the complexity surrounding the ideas of free choice and free will, but they do not in fact do much to undermine the less complex idea that human beings have inner lives that are in large part concealed from those around them, and that those inner lives are objects of the curiosity, and sometimes of the urgent or violent inquiries, of others. These observations, in their generality, do not seem located in any particular historical moment. They seem likely to be true of any culture that shares the moral vocabulary in which lying and hypocrisy are (at least officially) bad and honesty and candor, good. Although strong claims have been made in discussions of Renaissance culture about the emptiness or nullity of the inward self in the Renaissance (see e.g., Belsey, 1985: 48), these claims often seem based on twentieth-century

thinking about the social and linguistic imbeddedness of inward mental life rather than directly on readings of Renaissance texts. As Katharine Eisaman Maus remarks of critics who deny interior life to Renaissance subjects, “such critics characteristically work from philosophical positions that reject as illusory the possibility of a subjectivity prior to or exempt from social determination. That is, they are making a claim not only about English Renaissance subjectivity, but about subjectivity *tout court*” (Maus, 1995: 26). She suggests that hostility to the idea of Renaissance inwardness may derive from “a false sense of what is necessitated by the premises of cultural-materialist and new-historicist criticism” (Maus, 1995: 26, see also 2–3 for a set of quotations of cultural materialist and new-historicist critics on interiority).

New historicism and cultural materialism are the names of related schools of historically oriented literary criticism that arose in the 1980s – the first on the whole in the United States and the second on the whole in Britain – and have deeply influenced the way literature is read in universities since. Both emphasize the ways works of literature are properly to be seen as documents in larger social processes involving conflict and domination. Not only literary works, but human lives, are elements in such processes, obviously, and both movements question the independence of the self at the same time that they dispute the autonomy of the literary work seen as a self-sufficient aesthetic whole. Thus these movements work against a cherished idea about literary reading that used to be central to the declared purposes of literary education – the idea of a modern self becoming “deeper” and “richer” by gaining a satisfactory experience of the rich self-sufficient wholeness of a literary masterpiece. Clearly, the issue of Renaissance inwardness has a number of contentious political dimensions, dimensions that may be an aspect of the difficulty of understanding works from a different historical period, or may be an aspect of the philosophical problem of other minds. These are hard and important issues, and it may be better to approach them more simply by asking yet another question. Do questions about inner selves arise differently in the Renaissance, or at any rate in Renaissance drama, from the way they do now? This is the question this part will attempt to answer, first by looking at the direct ways Renaissance dramatists represent human inwardness, then by moving on to discuss religious dimensions of English Renaissance inwardness, the treatment of psychological obsession in Renaissance drama, and, finally, inner strength and personal honor, inward characteristics that empower or condition the ways characters can act, or can feel obliged to act, on others. As is suggested by its part titles, this book as a whole moves outward from the psyche to the social and political order, so that by its later parts it will be promoting ways of looking at drama which differ from the intentionally individualistic focus of this part.

## 1.2 The Inward Self in Soliloquy: *The Jew of Malta*

Drama has two powerful techniques for making inward discourse directly available: the soliloquy, where a character speaks his or her thoughts alone on the stage, and the aside, where a character turns away from the action and speaks a thought that is unheard by some or all of the other onstage characters. By discussing soliloquy first in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, this section approaches an inwardness technique in a play that is emphatically *not* prized for its successful evocation of stable, deep selfhood. Moreover, as Jews in sixteenth-century Europe and the Near East were people with limited political rights, tolerated in some Christian and Islamic states and officially expelled from others (from England in 1290, from Spain in 1492), they had fewer communal resources for self-stabilization than citizens or subjects whose religious and ethnic affiliations were those of the dominant culture. The Jews who appear on the Renaissance English stage are usually isolated. As we shall see in later parts, however, English Renaissance drama was profoundly interested in outsiders, and many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Londoners were aliens, criminals, Catholics, or Puritans, and some were Jews, black Africans, transvestites, sodomites, or atheists. Any person in these categories could easily identify him or herself as a persecuted member of a disempowered group, and all except black Africans and Puritans might well be involved in forms of self-concealment that distorted firm, stable identity. Barabas, Marlowe's Maltese Jew, is at any rate no exemplar of consistency; as Emily Bartels points out, he "appears in so many postures that his character seems to consist more of what he is not than of what he is" (Bartels, 1993: 97). Close readings of a series of soliloquies might seem a more natural way to approach a play like *Hamlet*, preoccupied with the inadequacy of outer life to inward experience, than Marlowe's "farce of the ... serious even savage comic humour" (Eliot, 1932: 16), which moves from rapid action at the start to frenzied action at the end. Nonetheless, as we shall see, Barabas's inward life is strongly represented.

Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* begins with a prologue by "Machiavel" followed by a soliloquy by Barabas. One of the aspects of Machiavelli's 1513 book *The Prince* that made it notorious in sixteenth-century Europe was its recommendation that leaders be able to dissimulate their intentions, to lie, when it is expedient to do so. That is, Machiavelli disputes the idea that lying is in all circumstances bad and that honesty is invariably good. This strategic rationing of one's inward thought for purposes of control and safety was one of many ways in which Marlowe found Machiavelli provocative. As Maus remarks, "Marlowe ... keeps returning to the implications of a personal inwardness withheld or withholdable from others" (Maus, 1995: 210). The Machiavel of Marlowe's prologue expects those

who read him to dissimulate their indebtedness to his advice, “such as love me guard me from their tongues, / ... /Admired I am of those that hate me most” (Prologue 6–9). His comments prepare audiences for two important aspects of *The Jew of Malta*: deceptive self-presentation (set off by private self-revelation), and ambivalence toward a figure who presents a strong but amoral version of the reality of human economic and political life. The first is established early on by soliloquy and aside.

Barabas’s first soliloquy, “*in his countinghouse, with heaps of gold before him,*” as the stage direction has it, seems at the outset impersonal, the talking to himself of a merchant reckoning his accounts: “So that of thus much that return was made; / And of the third part of the Persian ships, / There was the venture summed and satisfied” (1.1.1–3). But the soliloquy soon becomes more expressive, although it remains focused on the wealth in front of him. He reveals impatience at having to account for small sums: “Fie, what a trouble ’tis to count this trash!”, contrasting himself with “The needy groom that never fingered groat” who would wonder at “thus much coin” (1.1.7–14). As he proceeds to an approving account of the hoards of “the wealthy Moor” (1.1.21), he seems enthralled by the way objects of enormous economic value concentrate beauty and power in tangible form:

Bags of fiery opals, sapphires, amethysts,  
Jacinths, hard topaz, grass-green emeralds,  
Beauteous rubies, sparkling diamonds,  
And seld-seen costly stones of so great price  
As one of them, indifferently rated  
And of a caret of this quantity,  
May serve, in peril of calamity,  
To ransom great kings from captivity.

(1.1.25–32)

As an exposure of inwardness, this does not seem very inward. It represents Barabas’s participation in the thrill of possessing what others desire, and an awareness that such objects also represent the resources others may desperately need. The neediness of those who do not have his resources – the goatless groom, the captive king – is a major component of the resources themselves, from Barabas’s viewpoint. Although Barabas is talking in part about others, he is also placing himself among them, at the same time registering his own difference as a disenfranchised Jew who has no home ground from which wealth can be directly extracted. The “wealthy Moor” can, in Barabas’s fantasy at least, simply “pick his riches up” from the “Eastern rocks” where precious stones abound, but Barabas’s own more laborious work as a merchant achieves the same kind of concentrated potential by

## 6 *Inwardness*

separation of wealth from the ordinary people who are enmeshed in a market-world they cannot control:

This is the ware wherein consists my wealth;  
And thus, methinks, should men of judgment frame  
Their means of traffic from the vulgar trade,  
And, as their wealth increaseth, so enclose  
Infinite riches in a little room.

(1.1.33–37)

“Judgment,” for Barabas, consists of concentrating the world-spanning reach of human transactions in a private space: the “little room” of his countinghouse, or the privacy of his intentions, unavailable to the “vulgar.” The idea that this is, potentially, a king’s ransom suggests that it represents security and even power as well as accomplishment. Machiavel promises us “the tragedy of a Jew / Who smiles to see how full his bags are crammed” (Prologue 30–31), and Barabas’s soliloquy demonstrates how much more interesting and complex the situation of such a Jew seems from inside his own consciousness than when looked on unsympathetically from the outside. At the same time, Machiavel’s comment warns us that Barabas will not smile for long.

What, then, does this soliloquy accomplish in terms of the representation or evocation of inwardness? It establishes a kind of baseline for Barabas’s later frenzy, in that his complacent account of his own success is shot through with expressions of impatience at the life he has led to achieve “thus much coin,” “wearying his fingers’ ends with telling it” (1.1.16). He clearly prefers to think of his achievement in terms of the solidity and brilliance of hidden gems, “seld-seen costly stones” (1.1.28), rather than as a pile of coins that have passed through many hands and may at any time return to promiscuous negotiation. Moreover, when the soliloquy resumes after an interruption in 1.1, it also sets the terms on which he finds his adversarial relation to the dominant Christians of Malta tolerable:

Who hateth me but for my happiness?  
Or who is honored now but for his wealth?  
Rather had, I, a Jew, be hated thus  
Than pitied in a Christian poverty;  
For I can see no fruits in all their faith  
But malice, falsehood, and excessive pride,  
Which methinks fits not their profession.

(1.1.111–118)

Barabas sees his relation to the Christians as a struggle lightly masked by hypocritical professions of charity on the Christian side and the systematic forgoing of political authority on the side of the Jews:



They say we are a scattered nation;  
I cannot tell, but we have scrambled up  
More wealth by far than those that brag of faith.

...

I must confess we come not to be kings.  
That's not our fault. Alas, our number's few,  
And crowns come either by succession  
Or urged by force; and nothing violent,  
Oft have I heard tell, can be permanent.

(1.1.120–132)

We moderns think of the inner self as prone to ambivalence and contradiction. So far – and in this Marlowe typifies Renaissance norms – Barabas's soliloquy has been marked by a high level of rhetorical consistency and formality; except in its frankness, his speech to himself does not seem that different from a speech he might deliver to an assembly. Nonetheless, as suggested already by our account of Barabas's impatience discussed earlier, the “alas” and the “not our fault” register Barabas's distress at the denial of political power to match the economic accumulation the greatest Jews have achieved. Clearly, it is *faute de mieux*, suppressing his own distress, that Barabas concludes “Give us a peaceful rule; make Christians kings, / That thirst so much for principality” (1.1.133–34). His reference to Abigail, his “one sole daughter, whom I hold as dear / As Agamemnon did his Iphigen; / And all I have is hers” (1.1.136–8), both ominously foreshadows a sacrifice and suggests that Barabas is in his imagination a man who would be king. The punctuated soliloquy of 1.1, then, establishes both Barabas's precarious complacency and his awareness that it is endangered by the collective vulnerability of the Jews. Indeed, the soliloquy locates in Barabas's psyche the social thought-experiment that is at the center of the play: what are the consequences when economic power is concentrated in the hands of the politically powerless?

The first consequence is that when they really need it, the politically powerful will grab the money of the powerless rich. In 1.2 Barabas is, in rapid, plausible succession, summoned to the senate house, told by the Christian governor, Ferneze, that the Turks have demanded payment of 10-years' neglected Maltese tribute, and asked to contribute half his wealth on penalty of forced conversion to Christianity and total dispossession if he refuses. When Barabas declines to be christened and says (in an echo of his opening soliloquy) “Half of my substance is a city's wealth. / Governor, it was not got so easily; / Nor will I part so slightly therewithal” (1.2.86–8), he is held to have “denied the articles” and thus to forfeit all possessions to the state. When his fellow Jews (who have quickly submitted to the expropriation of half their goods, and have so escaped Barabas's total loss) attempt to console him, Barabas rejects their consolations in terms that