

From **A**bigall to **Z**enocrate:

Patterns of learning and change in Marlowe's women

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Interweaving a modern IT software methodology, or an organisational management theory, with the early modern plays of Christopher Marlowe is perhaps a little unorthodox. Even more unlikely is the application of such software and management approaches to the women gracing Marlowe's stage, from the virtuous Abigail to divine Zenocrate and of course, the contriving Queen Isabella. Perhaps it is Marlowe's radicalism that invites such an interdisciplinary approach; or perhaps it is simply the result of an extension of my "band of perceived relevance".¹ Without doubt, though, one underlying cause of the ease with which these two disparate elements interweave and apply themselves to the texts is what organisational theorist Chris Argyris claims is their worldwide cross-cultural relevance. Argyris identified evidence of his organisational theory at work "all over the world" with "almost no variance".² As such, this approach proves an enlightening way to engage with the women of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* (Parts One and Two), *Edward the Second* and *the Jew of Malta*. This argument utilises a combination of two methodologies: agile (an approach to software and IT business management), and Chris Argyris' organisational learning theory. On a basic level, Argyris' organisational theory uses the concepts of one's "espoused theory" and "theory-in-use", and two associated learning patterns: single-loop (or Model I), which does not question its governing value, changing only action strategies in attempts to ensure the desired outcome, and double-loop (Model II), which reconsiders both its overarching governing value and strategies.³ Agile, a software methodology, bases itself on the embrace

¹ L. Semler, *English 3651*, communications, April 2009.

² Fulmer, R. M., & Keys, J. B. (Autumn 1998). 'A Conversation with Chris Argyris: the Father of Organisational Learning'. *Organisational Dynamics*, 27(2), p24; and Argyris, C. (Autumn 1982). The Executive Mind and Double-Loop Learning. *Organisational Dynamics*, p12.

³ It is important not to oversimplify by condemning single-loop thinking. Argyris says: "[T]his doesn't mean we throw out Model I [single-loop learning] – Model I is very good for incremental improvements" (Fulmer, p27). This is a highly simplistic definition, but both theories will be complicated and explored throughout this analysis.

of change and adaptability over predictability.⁴ Agile methods “respond to change over following a plan” and aim for “working software over comprehensive documentation”.⁵ One essential aspect of the agile method is its iterative development, which prevents the hiding of flaws through early and regular testing.⁶ Whilst the two theories may differ vastly in usage and practice, they share some fundamental similarities in approach, particularly as double-loop learning is designed “to promote adaptability and flexibility”.⁷ This discussion will make use of both Argyris’ single- and double-loop thinking, and Agile theories, specifically based on the Agile Manifesto and its key Principles.⁸ Through these two approaches I hope to in some small way begin to rectify the “surprising” lack of attention given to Marlowe’s women by offering Zenocrate, Abigail and Isabella the chance to have their agency examined and their processes of learning explored.⁹ And in so doing, I will argue against the assumption that “the plays present a world of relatively uncomplicated gender roles”.¹⁰

⁴ Fowler, M. (13 December 2005). ‘The New Methodology’. Retrieved 4 June, 2009, from <http://www.martinfowler.com/articles/newMethodology.html> According to Fowler, Agile refers to “a philosophy of software development” and includes approaches such as Lean Development, Scrum and Extreme Programming. See Larman for more information on these specific methods: Larman, C. (2004). *Agile and Iterative Development: A Manager’s Guide*. Boston: Addison-Wesley, p35.

⁵ Highsmith, J. (2001). ‘The Agile Manifesto’, Retrieved Thursday 4th June, 2009., from <http://www.agilemanifesto.org/>

⁶ Fowler, ‘The New Methodology’, 2005.

⁷ Fulmer & Keys, p26. My emphasis. In addition to applying these theories to Marlowe’s women, this argument will also demonstrate that Argyris’ organisational theory and the IT industry’s agile methodology share some surprisingly common features, an understanding of which could potentially enrich either of these practices in their original fields.

⁸ Jim Highsmith, 2001, ‘The Agile Manifesto’.

⁹ Gibbs, J. (2000). ‘Marlowe’s politic women’. In J. A. Downie & J. T. Parnell (Eds.), *Constructing Christopher Marlowe* (pp. 164-176). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p164.

¹⁰ Gibbs, p164.

“Divine Zenocrate”: change and adaptation in *Tamburlaine the Great*¹¹

For agilists the question is business value - did the customer get software that's more valuable to them than the cost put into it. A good predictive project will go according to plan, a good agile project will build something different and better than the original plan foresaw.¹²

As the daughter of the Sultan and the betrothed of Arabia, one could fairly state that Zenocrate's life was originally a “good predictive project”. However, when her plan alters in favour of Tamburlaine, Zenocrate is able to build a life “different and better than the original plan foresaw” as “queen of Persia” (5.1.506). This is especially true when we consider that if not for her relationship with Tamburlaine, Zenocrate would have been one of the women slaughtered at Damascus or at best widowed by the death of Arabia. Zenocrate harmoniously embodies the qualities of an agilist and a double-loop learner, her inherent adaptability enabling her to overthrow her initial governing values and redefine her place and agency within the texts of both *Tamburlaine* plays. Initially, however, Zenocrate presents the traits of a single-loop thinker. The princess first attempts to escape from Tamburlaine without questioning or altering the underlying values of her system. She is utilising a single-loop learning approach, demonstrated in Figure 1.

¹¹ Marlowe, C. (2003). ‘Tamburlaine the Great, Part One’. In R. Lindsey & F. Romany (Eds.), *The Complete Plays* (pp. 69-154). London: Penguin Classics. 4.4.28. All subsequent references to these editions are incorporated in the text.

¹² Fowler, 2005.

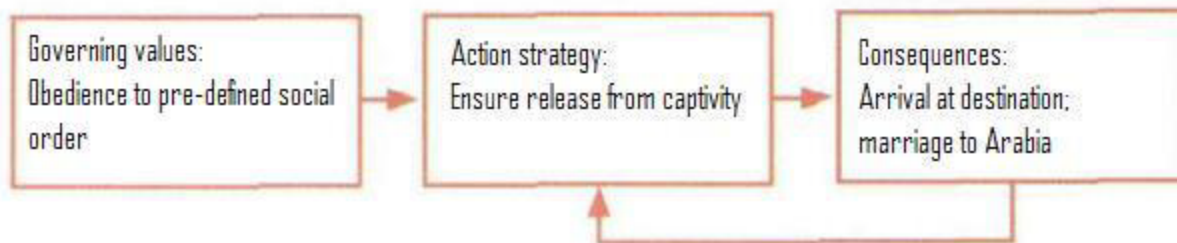


Figure 1

She attempts several reinterpretations of her action strategy in order to resolve the situation in which she finds herself. She plays on her innocence by constructing herself as a “silly maid” (1.2.10) and utilises her high-status connections through name-dropping references to the Median lords, her uncle, and the “privy signet” meant to ensure their safe passage (1.2.11-16). For Zenocrate, the use of influence and power is the best method of defence against the “mean” (1.2.8) shepherd – this reinforcement of his lower status indicating that class differentiation is one of her espoused governing values. As Tagg states, “We embark upon every action with some usually unstated (and often unconscious) assumptions about what we want to achieve and what it is possible for us to do – our governing values”.¹³ However, whilst her initial characterisation suggests that for Zenocrate these values (including the importance of social order, class distinctions and tradition) are crucial, she then almost immediately disregards these for Tamburlaine. This suggests that the values inherent in her initial reaction are part of her *espoused* theory – what she professes to believe in – rather than part of her implicit, unconscious “theory-in-use”. This complicates our consideration of the princess, but may explain the ease with which Zenocrate transitions from a single-loop to a double-loop learning pattern.

¹³ Tagg, J. (July-August 2007). ‘Double-loop learning in higher education’. *Change*, 39(4), p38.

[W]hat if something from outside the system introduces a factor that the system's original assumptions did not allow for? ... Single-loop learning will no longer suffice.¹⁴

Tamburlaine is that rogue factor outside of the ordered system, which Zenocrate had made no allowances for. When Zenocrate is not liberated from Tamburlaine's captivity, she has not – according to her espoused theory – achieved the “satisfactory consequences” she had hoped for; that is, her liberty.¹⁵ Zenocrate, according to Tagg, is thus “called upon to revise [her] thinking and [her] actions – to learn something”, which brings us to the second stage of Zenocrate's development; her transition to double-loop agile thinking and thus a reconfiguration (or revelation) of her governing values.¹⁶

When the single-loop approach fails to achieve a comfortable environment, the only way to get better results is to move up to double-loop learning. What needs to be adjusted now is not just the action strategy but the governing value itself.¹⁷

Marlowe absences Zenocrate in Act 2, preventing our view of this adjustment just as he prevents our view of Isabella's persuasion of Mortimer in *Edward II*. When Zenocrate reappears her double-loop learning becomes apparent. She tells Agydas that Tamburlaine's “exceeding favours” and “the entertainment we have had of him” “hath changed my first conceived disdain” (3.2.10-12; 37-39). Zenocrate has had the opportunity to test Tamburlaine, and has found unexpected value, which endorses the agile belief that “often the most valuable features aren't at all obvious until customers have had a chance to play with the software”.¹⁸ Her opinion of Tamburlaine has changed because an

¹⁴ Tagg, p38.

¹⁵ Tagg, p38.

¹⁶ Tagg, p38.

¹⁷ Tagg, p38.

¹⁸ Fowler, 2005.

agile “plan doesn’t predict much of value – we must adapt what we’re doing as circumstances change”.¹⁹

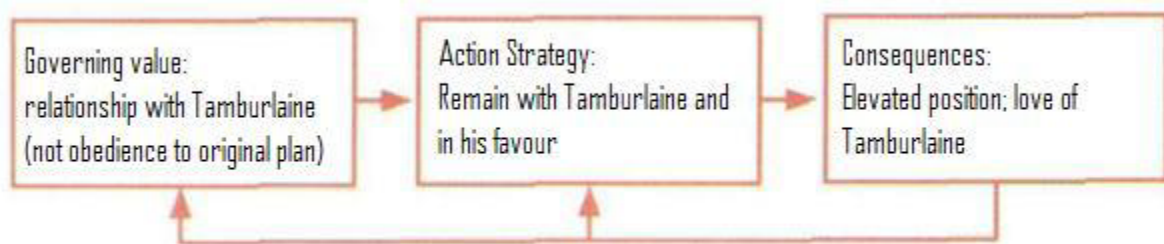


Figure 2

Figure 2 demonstrates that Zenocrate has not just changed her action strategy, but in loving Tamburlaine she has adjusted her governing values. Her very understanding of worth and power has changed; no longer does it matter that Tamburlaine is lowborn and outside the proper realm of nobility. She twice compares herself with Juno through her connection with Tamburlaine, which suggests a reconceptualisation of how she sees herself and her relation to the power sources around her (3.2.11; 54-55). In choosing Tamburlaine, Zenocrate is “putting passion before family duty”, which exemplifies the role of emotion in double-loop learning.²⁰ Emotions “are integral to learning...Emotions can also act as a change agent to influence people in adapting”.²¹ Agydas, who is emotionally unaffected by Tamburlaine, is utilised by Marlowe as a foil to draw attention to Zenocrate’s transition more explicitly.²² As a non-agile thinker still operating under the older governing values that Zenocrate has

¹⁹ Mellor, S. J. (May-June 2005). ‘Adapting agile approaches to your project needs (software development)’. *IEEE Software*, 22(3), p18.

²⁰ Deats, S. M. (1997). *Sex, Gender, and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, p146.

²¹ Yeo, R. K. (2007). ‘(Re)viewing problem-based learning: an exploratory study on the perceptions of its applicability to the workplace’. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 22(4), p384.

²² Marlowe also offers further ‘foil’ characters to accentuate Zenocrate’s change of governing values. Agydas, Zabina and the Sultan all refer to Zenocrate as a ‘concubine’ (‘worthless concubine’; ‘base concubine’ (3.3.166); ‘concubine’ (4.1.5 and 4.3.38-42). Zenocrate, however, is no longer operating under their governing values, and so does not comprehend their perspective: “Call’st thou me concubine, that am betrothed/unto the great and mighty Tamburlaine?” (3.3.169-170).

relinquished, Agydas still regards Tamburlaine as a “vile and barbarous” man that holds Zenocrate “from [her] father in despite and keeps [her] from the honours of a queen” (3.2.26-28). He still sees escape as the right action strategy to ensure the manifestation of desirable consequences.²³ Agydas tries numerous “action strategies” without rethinking his governing values: from suggesting that Zenocrate not honour Tamburlaine with her love “but for necessity” (3.2.30); to using Tamburlaine’s militancy to try and sway Zenocrate against him (3.2.40-46); attempting to remind Zenocrate of her betrothed (3.2.57-58); and finally by claiming that Tamburlaine’s affections are waning (3.2.60-1).²⁴ Unsurprisingly, none of Agydas’ attempts prove effective, but they do prove Zenocrate’s devoted transferral of her loyalties to Tamburlaine. This transferral is read by Deats as a violation of “social conventions”:
“Zenocrate’s choice of love over honour...and her advocacy of peace over violence offer an alternative value system”.²⁵ Deats here elucidates Zenocrate’s change of governing values in her transition from a single-loop to double-loop learner, as her initial single-loop governing values of honour, family and adherence to social order are overturned by her passion for Tamburlaine, through which she is entitled to greater power, wealth and influence within a new, alternative value system. The text thus offers more autonomy to Zenocrate than her gender may traditionally allow, particularly in her independent choice of Tamburlaine over Arabia.

As Agydas states, and Zenocrate later affirms (3.2.25-34; 5.1.381-90),
her inconstancy to her betrothed, the Prince of Arabia, violates traditional
sixteenth century standards of feminine honour, which denied the woman,

²³ Agydas’ incompatibility with the governing values of Tamburlaine’s world leads to his demise. His suicide acknowledges his inability to find another action strategy to remove him from his situation; he never even contemplates the thought of supporting Tamburlaine as Zenocrate does. Agydas thus goes to his grave a confirmed single-loop thinker. In his suicide Agydas succumbs to Tamburlaine’s world and so becomes incorporated within it as “wise and honourable” (3.2.110). Agydas’ incompatibility with this new system is reinforced by Zenocrate’s lack of grief for Agydas, where she finds grief for Bajazeth and Zabina.

²⁴ Agydas stands in almost as a proxy for Arabia, repeatedly reminding Zenocrate (and Tamburlaine) of Arabia’s prior claim on the princess, which demonstrates his continued operations within the initial framework that Zenocrate has abandoned.

²⁵ Deats, p146.

particularly the upper-class woman, autonomy in choosing her mate, regarding her as the property of the patriarchal family. However, this issue was much debated at the time of the play's production, and Agydas's accusation thus foregrounds one of the most topical issues of the day, the friction between family arranged marriages and marriages of personal choice.²⁶

Zenocrate's choice thus represents an alternative decision to the accepted governing values of the patriarchal tradition.²⁷ Her initial omission of any reference to her betrothed suggests that she was never enthusiastic about her arranged marriage: in her first scene Zenocrate makes no mention of Arabia, only affirming her marital status when directly asked by Tamburlaine, and even when given this opportunity, she does not name Arabia nor utilise the potential influence of this connection (1.2.32). It is Agydas who eventually refers to Arabia (1.2.78), warning Tamburlaine that Lord Alcidamas "expects th'arrival of her highness' person" (1.2.78-79). This behaviour strongly favours Zenocrate's deliberate flouting of her (patriarchal) governing values and also reinforces her agency. In the siege of her father's city, it is some measure of her agility that she manages to retain Tamburlaine's favour, ensure her father's safety and the control of his lands through Tamburlaine's delegacy.²⁸ Although Marlowe again absences Zenocrate until after the slaughter at Damascus (5.1.319), her effective and agile use of her position is evident in that during her absence both Theridamas and Tamburlaine acknowledge her influence, the latter promising to "save the reverend Sultan's life" "For sweet Zenocrate, whose

²⁶ Deats, p145-146.

²⁷ Whilst we can speculate that such a choice was influenced by her captivity and threats of enslavement, we must not forget that accepting Tamburlaine as a partner is not her only option; Marlowe clearly demonstrates alternative choices. Olympia goes to great lengths to end her life rather than be forced into marriage, and Agydas even offers Zenocrate the suggestion of feigning her love for Tamburlaine. It is also interesting to compare the father-daughter relationship of Zenocrate and the Sultan to Abigall and Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*. Unlike Abigall, who goes against her father despite her strong familial loyalty only once she is made aware of his iniquity, Zenocrate never favours the stronger familial bond over Tamburlaine.

²⁸ It is also worth noting Tamburlaine's private conflict over how Zenocrate's sorrow affects him: Zenocrate has such an effect on Tamburlaine that he is almost led out of his normal actions: "But how unseemly is it for my sex,/My discipline of arms and chivalry,/My nature, and the terror of my name,/Tamburlaine harbour thoughts effeminate and faint!" (5.1.174-178)

worthiness/Deserves a conquest over every heart” (5.1.203-5; 206-208).²⁹ This is particularly powerful because Zenocrate is not present; her agency is very tangible in that her influence permeates scenes in which she is absent. Returning to the stage after the battle, Zenocrate has no choice now but to adapt to the situation that greets her, and that is one of violence. She walks in on the corpses of Bajazeth and Zabina, whilst reflecting on “Damascus’ walls dyed with Egyptian blood” (5.1.320).³⁰ From this moment onwards in Part One, Zenocrate has no words of love or devotion for Tamburlaine, evidencing that once again, she has adapted her behaviour to suit the situation. After the battle she expresses no relief for Tamburlaine’s safety, not even greeting him – her eyes (and words) are only for her father, even though he enters with Tamburlaine: “O, sight thrice welcome to my joyful soul, To see the *king my father* issue safe from dangerous battle of my conquering love!” (5.1.440-442) Her explicit privileging of her father is very marked. Although Zenocrate may be increasingly silent towards the end of Part One, it is no signal of her lack of agency (or agility) as often concluded, but rather evidence that she is giving her beloved what is in effect “the silent treatment”.³¹ This concurs with Deats’ suggestion of Zenocrate’s silence as a potential “mute protest against her lover’s belligerence”.³² She has adapted her behaviour to punish her betrothed, and this treatment proves highly effective – to “gratify” Zenocrate (5.1.516) Tamburlaine

²⁹ Her absence here may be due to several reasons. First, as Shepherd states, the actor playing Zenocrate would often also play the role of one of the Virgins. See Shepherd, S. (1986). “Women’ and Males’, *Marlowe and the Politics of Elizabethan Theatre* (pp. 178-207). Brighton: The Harvester Press, p186-7. Secondly, perhaps Marlowe could not conceive a way for her to retain her affection for Tamburlaine whilst he simultaneously destroys her home (and for the audience to believe this). Removing her until after the conflict has been won by Tamburlaine is one way of avoiding Zenocrate being forced to assent to or support Tamburlaine’s actions. Furthermore, her absence from the stage heightens the evidence of her impact on Tamburlaine, who is preoccupied with thoughts of her during her absence (see 5.1.135 onwards).

³⁰ In her horror at the deaths of Zabina and Bajazeth we can see Zenocrate echo her old value system: “Blush, heaven, that gave them honour at their birth,/And let them die a death so barbarous!” (350-351) Their nobility gives them status in Zenocrate’s eyes, which it didn’t before, when she was happy to flyte with Zabina over precedence and see both royals caged, debased and enslaved. Noteworthy is her careful blame of heaven for their deaths rather than any blame falling directly on Tamburlaine.

³¹ This reading is in contrast to interpretations of her silence which attribute it to her increasing passivity or lack of agency. Deats says Zenocrate, “interpellated into female passivity and silence by the end of Part I, petrifies into the figure of the ideal wife and mother in Part II” (p149).

³² Deats, p146-7.

promises an extension of the Sultan's "mighty arm" (5.1.521), and in what could be construed as an attempt to ease his guilt, Tamburlaine promises an honourable entombment for Alcidamas and solemn burial for Bajazeth and Zabina, who in his eyes are transformed from mocked slaves to "this great Turk and his fair empress" (5.1.530-534). Tamburlaine's generous attempts to placate Zenocrate demonstrate the effectiveness of her agile thinking and double-loop learning; she has *learnt* that Tamburlaine is susceptible to her sadness ("why art thou so sad?"; 4.4.66), and thus correctly assumes that the demonstration of her unhappiness through her silence may effect further change upon Tamburlaine. She is evidence that the key to double-loop thinking "is to learn the new skills and acquire a new set of governing values".³³ Similarly, Zenocrate's inactivity in *Tamburlaine Part Two* is also demonstrative of her agility and double-loop learning pattern, not her loss of agency. Zenocrate needed to preserve her home town and her father in Part One; she has no high stakes in Part Two and thus does not need to use her agility. The agile method "lies on a continuum of more or less empirical, driven by need", and the less changeable and more stable world of Part Two requires less violent adaptation.³⁴ Furthermore, her easy death in 2.4 is exemplary of her continuing agility; she adapts to her illness and impending death far more rapidly than does Tamburlaine, asking that he "let me die, my love, yet let me die,/With love and patience let your true love die." (2.4.66-67) Even in her final moments, we can witness Zenocrate projecting her agency upon her husband as she guides him to be calmer: "Your grief and fury hurts my second life" (2.4.68). This is a superb example of her learning patterns in action; Zenocrate understands from the siege at Damascus that evidence of her misery affects Tamburlaine

³³ Argyris, 1982, p22.

³⁴ Larman, C. (2004). *Agile and Iterative Development: A Manager's Guide*. Boston: Addison-Wesley, p32. Although outside the scope of this study, an interesting avenue for further research would be to analyse the influence of Zenocrate's learning patterns upon her sons, particularly Calyphas. We see a brief example of Zenocrate projecting her own learning patterns upon her sons, desiring them to learn in a particular way, when she expresses concern that "such speeches to our princely sons dismay their minds before they come to prove the wounding troubles angry war affords" (3.1.85).

strongly; thus here she uses her emotions to improve his behaviour.³⁵ Even in her dying moments, Zenocrate is a double-loop agilist in action. The character of Zenocrate in *Tamburlaine the Great*, Parts One and Two, evidences that Marlowe's texts do perhaps problematise "the construction of gender difference" through creating a female character capable of reacting and adjusting to her situation for the benefit of herself and her value system.³⁶ I hope that my utilisation of double-loop thinking and the agile method has demonstrated the flaws in the argument that "Zenocrate is rendered passive, encased, and encoded within the meanings made for, and fashioned out of her, by Tamburlaine, the active and assertive male".³⁷ In her agile double-loop thinking, Zenocrate, as Shepherd comments, is an autonomous experiential learner.³⁸ It is to the experiential learning of another character that we now turn.

³⁵ In Part One we hear Tamburlaine claim that Zenocrate's "sorrows lay more siege unto my soul than all my army to Damascus' walls" (5.1.151-159).

³⁶ Shepherd, S. (1986). "Women' and Males', *Marlowe and the Politics of Elizabethan Theatre* (pp. 178-207). Brighton: The Harvester Press, p196-7.

³⁷ Gibbs, p173.

³⁸ Shepherd, p206-7.

Industrious Abigail: “strangely metamorphised” from dissembling agilist to double-loop realisation³⁹

“There must be incentive for us to upset our routine.”⁴⁰

“I do not doubt, by your divine precepts and mine own industry, but to profit much.” 1.2.332-333

Cloaked under the stereotype of loyal daughter and innocent tragic heroine, it is perhaps too easy to overlook the agility of Barabas’ daughter. As with Zenocrate, the application of agile thinking and double-loop learning enables us to reveal the impact of experience upon Abigail’s patterns of learning and behaviour, and how these develop throughout *The Jew of Malta*. Beskins is quite right in identifying that Abigail is initially constructed as an ideal daughter, embodying “the saintly traits of femininity during the early modern period”.⁴¹ Her offer to go to the senate house to convince them to “reduce the wrongs done to my father” (1.2.236) suggests the thinking of a single-loop learner who wants to effect change within her governing values (and within the bounds of the law).

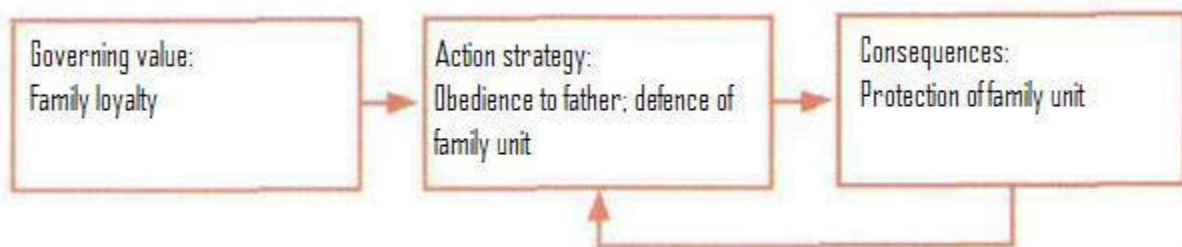


Figure 3

³⁹ Marlowe, C. (2003). ‘The Jew of Malta’. In R. Lindsey & F. Romany (Eds.), *The Complete Plays* (pp. 241-340). London: Penguin Books. 1.3.15. All subsequent references to these editions are incorporated in the text.

⁴⁰ Yeo, p380.

⁴¹ Beskins, A. (Spring 2007). ‘From Jew to Nun: Abigail in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*’. *The Explicator*, 65.3, p133.

Her privileging of her father over herself, in addition to her offer to try to persuade the senate rather than to step outside their control, is evidence of a single-loop action strategy as seen in Figure 3. Abigail is proof that “most innovations alter action strategies without moving on to make the second loop and re-examine governing values”.⁴² Contrastingly, Barabas’s double-loop approach is already evident in his command that “*in extremity we ought to make bar of no policy.*” (271-272)⁴³ In echoing her father’s agility Abigail shows an adaptability of her own:

Father, whate’er it be, to injure them
That have so manifestly wronged us,
What will not Abigail attempt? (273-275)

However, as the play unfolds we realise there *are* limits to what Abigail will attempt: her claim here is simply her *espoused* theory on show, because her real theory-in-use would never allow her to murder Lodowick and Mathias in order to injure “them that have so manifestly wronged” her.⁴⁴ Within these limitations, however, Abigail does demonstrate an innate agility at dissembling. Abigail successfully plays the nun, a risk she takes even though she fears “they will suspect me there” (1.2.282). This is evidence of her single-loop behaviour; “Programmed with Model I, they seek to win and not lose...to suppress negative feelings”.⁴⁵ Abigail is given little time to ready herself for her ‘dissembling’, as Barabas’ plan is brief and not detailed – a classic agilitist trait; they cannot over-plan for the circumstances are risky and unstable. They prefer “adaptive” to “predictive” planning: “A detailed schedule is not created beyond a relatively short time horizon, so that the level of detail and commitment is commensurate with the

⁴² Tagg, p38.

⁴³ My emphasis.

⁴⁴ Her role in Lodowick’s and Mathias’s downfall is a blind one as she follows the instructions of her father. She is spectacularly unaware that Barabas has “sworn to frustrate both their hopes [Abigail and Mathias’]/And be revenged upon the governor” (2.3.145-47). We can safely say that had she known of his intentions she would not have participated, and this evidences that Abigail’s claim here is nothing more than her espoused theory in action.

⁴⁵ Argyris, 1982, p14.

quality of information”.⁴⁶ Barabas is still relaying the basics of the plan to Abigail as she dissembles to the Abbess and Friars, demonstrating a true agile approach which advocates that:

A usable, although minimal, system can go into production early on. The customer can then change its capabilities according to changes in the business, and also from learning how the system is used in reality.⁴⁷

Abigail’s “own industry” (1.2.333) – that is, her agility in adapting to this new situation – offers a penultimate example of true adaptability. This adaptability is later compounded by her genuine conversion to the Christian faith; Marlowe offers us a mock-version of what truly eventuates.⁴⁸ Rather than reading her as simply the submissive obedient daughter, the ease with which she transitions through situations and dissemblings proves her quick-thinking, bright and agile. She easily insinuates herself within the nunnery, then somehow disentangles herself in time to reappear smoothly at Barabas’ place of abode, where her adaptability is enhanced by her calm entry (2.3.225); she is already apparently quite settled, taking care of domestic duties as evidenced by the letters she carries. This reading of her adaptability and agency is reinforced by Shepherd: “The split staging of the scene [2.1] ... point up how it is the active agency of Abigail that enables Barabas’s satisfaction”.⁴⁹ Her agility is highlighted again when she is instantly required to “dissemble” and play a particular role for Lodowick, despite the inherent difficulty involved because of her love for Mathias (2.3.227-233). It is important to consider the dangerous game that Abigail is forced to play here. By manipulating others through her sexuality – that is, her availability for marriage – she could potentially damage her own reputation and her *real* marriageable prospects. In particular, her relationship with Mathias comes under direct threat,

⁴⁶ Larman, p17-18.

⁴⁷ Fowler, 2005.

⁴⁸ The short scene between Abigail’s faux-conversion and Barabas’ arrival at his home-turned-nunnery serves to foreground the disparity between Abigail’s nature and her ‘dissembling’, highlighting Abigail’s agility. Mathias and Lodowick cannot conceive of Abigail as a nun, to them “She were fitter for a tale of love” (1.3.4). Thus if her appearance suggests this, she must be working particularly hard to pass for a nun.

⁴⁹ Shepherd, p180. My emphasis.

which Abigail recognises: "O father, Don Mathias is my love!" (2.3.240) Her reluctance to play this part evidences that Abigail is becoming aware of her skilled behaviour.⁵⁰ Whilst this skilled behaviour was effortless in her portrayal of a nun, in the reversal of this role as a sexually-available woman she is becoming more self-conscious of her skilled dissembling.⁵¹ This can be recognised as the beginning of her awakening to double-loop thinking. Argyris says that in Model I or single-loop learning, the individual is unaware of their skilled behaviour.

If you ask yourself the question "What is skilful behaviour?" I would answer, (1) it works; (2) it appears effortless; and (3) you take it for granted. Indeed you could lose your skill if you start focusing on it. ... The dilemma is that once you're skilful at Model I [single-loop], you no longer pay attention to what creates the skill because you've now internalised it. You are unaware of the impact, but the unawareness is due to the skills you have.⁵²

Abigail's skilful behaviour in her nun scenario is effective, effortless, and taken for granted by herself, by Barabas, and even potentially by the audience. However, by her second act of dissembling, Abigail begins to reflect on her skill: "O wretched Abigail, what hast thou done?" (2.3.323), and in doing so she reverses the internalisation of Model I, resulting in the loss of skill. This is evidenced in her inability to remain in character before Lodowick, which we become aware of through Lodowick's comments: "Why on the sudden is your colour changed?" (2.3.324) and "Mute o' the sudden? Here's a sudden change" (2.3.27).⁵³ At this crisis point, Abigail is still within the single-loop pattern; her comment that she

⁵⁰ Marlowe takes Lodowick and Abigail offstage for this scene, which potentially heightens suspicion about what it is that Abigail actually says and does to convince Lodowick here. It also greatly resembles Isabella and Mortimer's silent exchange in *Edward II*.

⁵¹ The fact that Abigail has to perform the role of a sexually available woman after her previous public 'conversion' to celibacy is further evidence of her agility.

⁵² Argyris in Fulmer, p26.

⁵³ Barabas must demonstrate his impressive agility to save the situation by claiming her silence is a Hebrew custom for newly-betrothed maids (2.3.228-331). This is the second reference to Abigail's vocality: earlier Barabas instructed her to "be silent" (1.2.239), and now Lodowick is surprised by Abigail's silence. We have seen the

“cannot choose, seeing [her] father bids” (2.3.319) shows that she does not even comprehend the possibility of transferring her primary allegiance from Barabas to Mathias, as Zenocrate does to Tamburlaine almost immediately. However, as she has now become aware of the skill she is using, we can see some form of subtextual rebellion inferred in her claim that “Nothing but death shall part my love and me” (3.2.320), in which she is most likely referring to Mathias, thereby allowing herself some small satisfaction. Perhaps, in consciously registering that she “cannot choose” because her father bids her, she is beginning to question *why* she cannot choose; her consciousness of her restriction is threatening her Model I thinking. In recognising that she is acting this way because her father bids, she is transitioning to Model II or double-loop thinking, where “you detect and correct an error by first re-examining the underlying values”, rather than just “changing one’s words”.⁵⁴ Her fear of the loss of Mathias is the incentive that Abigail needs to begin reconsidering her governing values, and his death at the hands of her father is the final tipping point.

[S]ingle-loop learning begins when a feedback from an organisational outcome prompts a shift in the way employees approach daily tasks. A common question asked during the single-loop stage is, “Are we doing things right?” On the other hand, double-loop learning operates when there is a second feedback loop concerning personal or organisational values and goals. ... At this stage, employees find themselves asking, “Are we doing the right things?”⁵⁵

From the moment that Abigail asks herself “*what hast thou done?*” (2.3.323) – or, in Argyris’ terms, *am I doing the right thing?* – she commences a second feedback loop. She begins to question the intent behind her father’s scheming, something she has not done before: “Father, why have you thus incensed

attention paid to Zenocrate’s increasing silence in *Tamburlaine*, but perhaps more scholarly attention should be paid to Abigail’s voice in *The Jew of Malta*.

⁵⁴ Argyris in Fulmer, p25.

⁵⁵ Argyris and Schon in Yeo, p371-372.

them both?" (2.3.358) She examines Barabas' actions by looking at his governing value of "extreme revenge" (3.3.45):

Was this the pursuit of thy policy,
To make me show them favour severally,
That by my favour they should both be slain? (3.3.40-42)

Abigail has identified and denounced the governing values or policy behind Barabas' action strategies.⁵⁶

The discovery that her father was "furtherer" of the deaths of Mathias and Lodowick (3.3.23) is the catalyst she needs to completely overthrow her governing values, which she does, abandoning her father and converting to Christianity (3.3.29-32).⁵⁷ Her snap decision to convert to Christianity suggests either a highly agile mind, or perhaps that she has considered conversion before: it is possible that Abigail quite enjoyed her time at the nunnery. In begging for re-admittance to the church as a nun, Abigail *adapts* the story for her benefit (unless she has been hiding her conversion from both the audience and her father).⁵⁸

Then were my thoughts so frail and unconfirmed,

And I was chained to the follies of the world;

But now experience, purchasèd with grief,

Has made me see the difference of things.

My sinful soul, alas, hath paced too long

The fatal labyrinth of misbelief,

Far from the Son that gives eternal life. (3.3.62-68)

⁵⁶ Barabas, quickly recognising her rebellion, forcibly imprisons her (2.3.365-66).

⁵⁷ Interestingly, she is using a technique that she has learnt from her father, but rather than removing treasure from the nunnery, she is installing herself – a valuable commodity to her father – beyond his reach.

⁵⁸ When she first asks to join the nunnery, she explicitly asks to join as a "novice" (1.2.329). This second time, she wants to be "admitted for a nun" (3.3.58).

In referring to being “chained to the follies of the world”, she is perhaps referring to being chained to the governing values of her father, forced to enact action strategies to achieve *his* objectives. When these values and strategies achieved undesirable consequences for her, as an agile thinker she was forced to implement double-loop learning and re-examine these values, or in her words “see the difference of things” as in Figure 4.

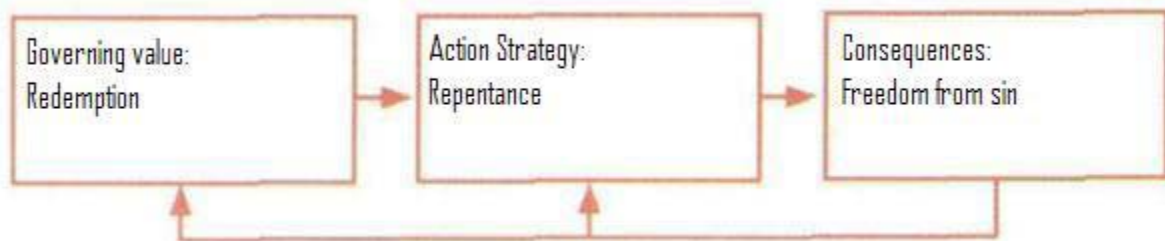


Figure 4

However, I would complicate what I have identified as Abigail’s breakthrough into double-loop thinking by suggesting that in her love for Mathias Abigail was already operating outside her original governing values.⁵⁹ As a Jew and a daughter of Barabas, it is very unlikely that Abigail was unaware of the unacceptability of considering a non-Jew as a potential match. Beskins says “It is clear to the audience that Barabas would not let her marry a Gentile, yet Abigail’s naiveté is demonstrated by the fact that she believes he would.”⁶⁰ Beskins is doing a disservice to Abigail here, because Abigail is fully aware of her father’s disapproval, admitting no surprise or argument against Barabas’ complaint that Mathias is not Jewish, simply responding with a stubborn refusal to give him up (2.3.364).⁶¹ We would be underestimating Abigail severely if we did not admit her awareness of Barabas’ disapproval of Christians.

⁵⁹ By converting to Christianity, Abigail feels she is transferring her loyalty from her father to Mathias: “Mathias was the man that I held dear, and for his sake did I become a nun.” (3.6.24-25) Whilst Abigail is rebelling against her previous governing values, she is still limited by her gender, and unable to ally herself with another man because of Mathias’ death, she turns to the next most secure option, echoing her earlier false performance of conversion.

⁶⁰ Beskins, p134.

⁶¹ Whilst one could support Beskins’ argument by claiming that Abigail is deceived by her father’s promises that “Yes, you shall have him” (2.3.365), Barabas simultaneously makes plain his disapproval: “Are there not Jews enow in Malta/But thou must dote upon a Christian?” (2.3.362-63)

Thus in loving Mathias she has willingly removed herself from Barabas' governing values.⁶² Friar Jacomo recognises the adaptability and agility that Abigail has demonstrated throughout the text in his warning: "[B]ut see thou change no more,/For that will be most heavy to thy soul." (3.3.73-74) Jacomo is here advocating that in entering the religious life, Abigail leave her dissembling agile ways behind her. Ironically, this loss of agility makes it easy for Barabas to ensure her death. Her father identifies her defection to the nunnery as a betrayal of their governing values:

For she that varies from me in belief
Gives great presumption that she loves me not,
Or loving, doth dislike of something done. (3.4.7-12)

The application of agile theory and double-loop learning to Abigail illustrates that she does indeed eventually vary from Barabas in belief, proving herself to be an agile double-loop thinker who despite a strong paternal loyalty manages to demonstrate a tangible, independent agency.

⁶² This complication can be seen to fit Abigail's original single-loop model of behaviour (see Figure 3), as in loving Mathias she has reconsidered her strategy of obedience to her father, but still sees herself as loyal to the family unit (and thus adheres to the governing value).

Isabella: repetition and predictability in *Edward II*

There's a refrain I've heard on every problem project I've run into. The developers come to me and say "the problem with this project is that the requirements are always changing". The thing I find surprising about this situation is that anyone is surprised by it. In building business software requirements changes are the norm, the question is what we do about it.⁶³

One could make similar comments about political life under the reign of Edward the Second; no sooner does one think they have a handle on the requirements, but the situation changes again. One could also make similar comments about the behavioural patterns of Queen Isabella. As one of the "slippery" characters of *Edward II* who does not easily fit into "conventional categories", Isabella's behavioural and learning patterns are more complex than her counterparts in *Tamburlaine* and *The Jew of Malta*.⁶⁴ This analysis will demonstrate an Isabella who assumes "multiple masks...and many roles" but in retaining the same governing values is essentially limited to a single-loop learning pattern.⁶⁵ Isabella's early mask or role is that of the faithful but abandoned wife, what she describes as a "frantic Juno" who fills the earth "with ghastly murmur of [her] sighs and cries".⁶⁶ Isabella enacts her show of sighs and cries as her primary action strategy to ensure her safety at court; as a loyal wife she is performing her duties to her husband, whilst simultaneously exacting the sympathy of the nobles ("Hard is the heart that injures such a saint", claims Pembroke at 4.190).⁶⁷

⁶³ Fowler, 2005.

⁶⁴ Deats, p163.

⁶⁵ Deats, p166.

⁶⁶ Marlowe, C. (2003). 'Edward the Second'. In R. Lindsey & F. Romany (Eds.), *The Complete Plays* (pp. 397-506). London: Penguin Books. 4.178-179. All subsequent references to these editions are incorporated in the text.

⁶⁷ Indeed this may be a genuine performance; at this stage we have no evidence that Isabella is aware of her real 'theory-in-use' which privileges herself over Edward. Argyris notes that most people are "unaware" of it (Argyris, 1982, p15).

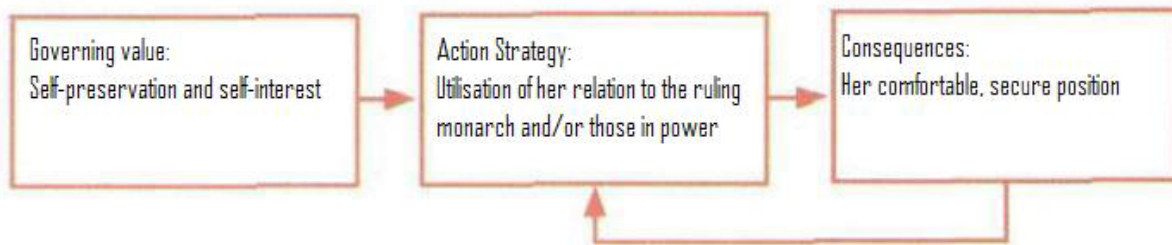


Figure 5

Despite repeated rejections, Isabella continues to persevere with her ‘Juno’ action strategy of playing on her relation to the king (see Figure 5), which given its lack of success suggests a striking lack of agility.

Wherein, my lord, have I deserved these words?
Witness the tears that Isabella sheds,
Witness this heart that, sighing for thee, breaks,
How dear my lord is to poor Isabel. (4.163-166)

Her utilisation of the third person promotes her attempt to construct a performance of herself before Edward’s gaze; the alliterative ‘w’ accentuating the repetition of her pleading. Isabella seems genuinely confused that the role she is accustomed to playing is now ineffective, although at this point she does not even utilise her single-loop learning to reconfigure her action strategy. Through this “frantic Juno” role, Marlowe sets up a clear distinction between Isabella’s espoused theories (her loyalty to Edward) and her theory-in-use (her true values), as Argyris describes:

People’s behaviour in organisations is often governed by an unstated but systematic and logical set of rules, a *theory-in-use*, which can differ a great deal from what the same people would be willing to defend – their *espoused theory*.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Tagg, p37.

Isabella is clearly verbalising the latter theory when she falsely claims to be headed “unto the forest” because of her husband’s displeasure with her (2.47-49), a plan she has no intention of following through, but which suits her Juno role.⁶⁹ Her espoused theory is again evident early on when she petitions the nobles:

Then let him stay, for, rather than my lord
Shall be oppressed by civil mutinies, I will endure a melancholy life,
And let him frolic with his minion. (2.64-67)⁷⁰

We know from her subsequent actions that she does not truly prefer to “endure a melancholy life” to prevent her husband being “oppressed by civil mutinies”: this is her *espoused* theory at work. Her underlying theory-in-use privileges her own needs above the protection of her husband because her paramount governing value is, essentially, her own self-preservation (see Figure 5). Isabella’s first soliloquy further demonstrates her non-agile single-loop learning pattern. She moves from contemplating a past death, to her current “Juno” role, to recalling Gaveston and living in misery; three uninspiring choices that demonstrate a single-loop thought pattern (4.178-186).

Would when I left sweet France and was embarked,
That charming Circes, walking on the waves,
Had changed my shape, or at the marriage day
The cup of Hymen had been full of poison,
Or with those arms that twined about my neck
I had been stifled and not lived to see

⁶⁹ Interestingly, Mortimer’s address to the Queen – “Madam, whither walks your majesty so fast?” (2.46) echoes Edward’s line in the previous scene – “Whither goes my lord of Coventry so fast?” (1.174) This is not the end of the similarities between Coventry and Isabella; Edward also blames Coventry for Gaveston’s exile, with the priest ending up in the tower (1.199).

⁷⁰ The lack of obedience shown by the nobles at her request is interesting. Mortimer replies to her request, “Ay, if words will serve; if not, I must” (2.82). This suggests either that they are already so far gone in mutinous plans that they hold little respect for the Queen’s wishes; or that Edward’s neglect of her has already significantly lessened her power at court. Alternatively, it could potentially show that they have seen through her espoused theory and understand that she actually does want to avoid a ‘melancholy life’.

The king my lord thus to abandon me. (4.171-177)⁷¹

Rather than look ahead to what she can possibly do to alter and improve the situation, Isabella regresses, turning to the past to dream of imaginative ways she could have avoided her current circumstances.

These imaginings all require no action on her part but configure her as the passive subject upon which other forces act. This soliloquy should also be taken as evidence only of her *espoused* theory; for should she truly wish to “not live to see” her king abandon her, suicide remains a viable option.⁷² The repetition of “and” in the final three lines and Gaveston throughout the soliloquy reinforce her limited and cyclical thought patterns, and her inability to discover a means out of the trap in which she finds herself. She is aware of the failure of her action strategies, recognising that her Juno role will only serve to “exasperate” Edward’s wrath, but she is equally aware that recalling Gaveston, whilst making Edward happy, will not resolve her situation because her governing value is her self-preservation. This is the core aspect of the soliloquy in terms of identifying Isabella’s learning patterns: she begins to explicitly distinguish between serving Edward’s happiness and serving her own. The former is her espoused theory; the latter her theory-in-use. The fact that the soliloquy concludes on this note suggests that this is the incentive for her decision to convince the nobles to assassinate Gaveston.⁷³ Some “adaptive development” is evident

⁷¹ Deats believes “The imagery of metamorphosis, specifically the allusion to Circe...prefigures Isabella’s change of shape (and role) in the following scene, while also foreshadowing her later instigation of her husband’s murder” (p169). What I find particularly interesting is that Isabella is imagining an enforced shape change by a third party, which perhaps suggests that she views her role-changing as essential to her survival rather than as an independent choice.

⁷² Her espoused theory claims that her grief is due to the loss of Edward’s love, but her theory-in-use reveals that her grief is due to her loss of position, a situation that her death would not cure, which explains why Isabella does not enact the suicide of a tragic romantic heroine.

⁷³ We cannot read the soliloquy as a complete insight into Isabella’s thought processes, however, as it deliberately does not shed light on her consideration of Gaveston’s assassination, which occurs immediately after. Given the evidence of her limited agility, I believe that Isabella must have been considering the possibility of assassinating Gaveston long before she puts it to the lords in this scene. It is unlikely that it is a spontaneous idea, and this means that our reading of this soliloquy must be a suspicious one.

here; she adapts “in response to feedback from prior work” in realising that Edward’s feedback to her role as “Juno” is not positive.⁷⁴

We act most of the time out of habit, and most of the time habitual actions produce the consequences we hope for, or a reasonable facsimile thereof. It is usually when they do not that we are called upon to learn. Learning is a process by which we discover how to achieve our objectives or to correct or redress negative consequences of our actions.⁷⁵

Isabella’s recognition that her current action strategy will not produce the consequences she desires leads her to expand her learning processes to discover how to achieve her objectives. Her recognition of her true theory-in-use is evident in her discussion with the nobles, when she plays on her own needs – not Edward’s – to try to persuade them: “‘Tis for myself I speak” (4.219).⁷⁶ Recognising that the nobles will not be persuaded (4.220), Isabella’s tactics change slightly, evidencing her single-loop agility. She rethinks her actions and commences a new iteration – or in Argyris’ terms a new action strategy; isolating and persuading Mortimer.⁷⁷ As “Most readers now credit Isabella with the ‘reason of such weight’ that Mortimer urges upon the barons”, one can also give Isabella credit for her agility in

⁷⁴ Fowler, 2005 and Larman, p15.

⁷⁵ Tagg, p38.

⁷⁶ This is a substantial change to her first appearance in which she privileges Edward in claiming to prefer a “melancholy life” rather than see him “oppressed” (2.64-67).

⁷⁷ Gibbs reads this scene and the Queen’s physical separation “as a succinct dramatic metaphor for the actual relations between the sexes in later sixteenth century society”, and as “indicative of her inability to figure herself in the public terms that patriarchy reserves for men”. (167) However, I read the separation of herself from the lords during the relay of her plans to Mortimer as evidence of her distancing herself from the actual effect of her agency, just as she does when she wants Edward dead “not by her own hand”. Gibbs claims that Isabella “assumes the position which a male-dominated society deems appropriate to women” and through this she is able to cause Mortimer and the others to “Embrace her own plan of action without appearing to intervene in the male realm” (Gibbs, p168). There are several flaws in this reading: primarily that Isabella makes no attempt to disguise the fact that she wants to persuade the lords. Secondly, when this persuasion fails, she also *publicly* convinces Mortimer: Lancaster, Mortimer Senior, Pembroke and Warwick explicitly mark the exchange, commenting on her attempts – “Do but mark how earnestly she pleads” (4.234). To claim that she is not appearing to intervene in the “male realm” seems absurd given how Marlowe constructs the scene, and does a disservice to Isabella’s action strategy here; she makes no attempt to hide her desire to be rid of Gaveston.

suggesting Gaveston's assassination whilst simultaneously separating herself from the suggestion.⁷⁸ In this plot, Isabella is diverting from her espoused theory of loyalty to Edward, proving that "Often when people are dealing with difficult and threatening problems, their behaviour is inconsistent with their espoused theories".⁷⁹ Isabella's happiness is always her governing value: "This news will glad him [Edward] much, Yet not so much as me." (4.300-301) Whilst in her second soliloquy Isabella is still considering attempting to "importune" Edward with her prayers yet again, she is also toying with other options, amongst them leaving the king for Mortimer (an unrealistic ideal), travelling to France, and the revived hope of Gaveston's death (8.59-69). However, by the next scene it is clear that Isabella has abandoned her loyal wifely "Juno" role as she makes absolutely no attempt to importune Edward "once more". She is business-like and brief, with only a third person reference to Edward in "Unnatural wars, where subjects brave their king" (11.86); Edward is no longer *her* king.⁸⁰ It seems that she has already decided the fruitlessness of any attempt. However, one must be careful not to allow this to exaggerate our understanding of "her flexibility and virtuosity" as Deats does.⁸¹ Whilst Isabella is clearly possessed with "the flexibility to alter her roles in response to political exigencies", it is critical to emphasise that this flexibility is only present when she is desperate.⁸² Alone in France with her son, Isabella is clearly at quite a loss:

Ah, boy, our friends do fail us all in France,
The lords are cruel, and the king unkind.
What shall we do? ...
Unhappy Isabel! When France rejects,
Whither, O, whither dost thou bend thy steps? (15.1-12)

⁷⁸ Weil, J. (2002). 'Visible Hecubas'. In N. C. Liebler (Ed.), *The Female Tragic Hero in English Renaissance Drama* (pp. 51-70). New York: Palgrave, p58.

⁷⁹ Argyris, 1982, p11.

⁸⁰ Similarly Edward shows no emotion to her; it is the nicest he has been to Isabella for the entire play. Given this, it is strange that she makes no affectionate overture towards him; her mind, it seems, is made up now.

⁸¹ Deats, p172.

⁸² Deats, p167.

There is no-one else present in the scene to whom she is dissembling: this is not the “skilled and innovative player queen” described by Deats, but a desperate and uncertain woman.⁸³ I believe this is a crucial and revealing scene which demonstrates that Isabella is far less cunning than some would like her to be. She is clearly only an *opportunistic* agilist, not a flexible double-loop thinker. It is fortunate that Sir John makes his well-timed entrance and offer here; fortunate also that Edmund and Mortimer escape and find the Queen in France.⁸⁴ She is certainly agile in adjusting to these opportunistic circumstances, but without them appears rather helpless. Isabella thus “performs the roles required for survival”, and once certain of her role again she transitions sharply from this uncertain queen to an obvious dissembler who is as much at ease professing sadness for her husband (22.25) as she is in planning his dispatch (22.45).⁸⁵ This is the role she needs to play for her survival; she understands that there is little safety “For us, or for my son” if Edward II lives (22.42-3). Importantly, her governing value of self-preservation is still the same; but her action strategy now no longer includes her husband.

The end of *Edward the Second* sees Isabella return to several earlier behavioural patterns, proving her single-loop learning and her very limited agility. Most notable is her repeated reversion to the Juno role which she appeared to have forsaken. Despite her public voice against Edward II (17.10-11), she still desires his favour:

Commend me humbly to his majesty,
And tell him that I labour all in vain
To ease his grief and work his liberty. (22.68-70)

⁸³ Deats, p169.

⁸⁴ She clearly had not expected this; believing that Mortimer was “dead” (15.37-38).

⁸⁵ Deats, p167. Isabella carefully distances herself from decisive action repeatedly: in a public speech she says “Deal you, my lords, in this, my loving lords,/As to your wisdoms fittest seems in all” (19.27-28); and to Mortimer she says “Conclude against his father what thou wilt/And I myself will willingly subscribe” (22.19-20). She espouses a lack of responsibility because such an admission threatens her position and theory-in-use.

Given that she understands he will soon be executed, this dissembling is pointless, but she will not relinquish the role.⁸⁶ Her limited agility is also evident in Kent's immediate recognition of her role playing: "Ah, they do dissemble" (22.85); she is not quite the skilled performer she may wish to be. Isabella's repetitive behavioural patterns are also seen in her twice encouraging the death of a man beloved by the King for her own self-preservation; originally with Edward II's Gaveston, and now with Edward III's uncle, Kent. Her third fundamental (and potentially fatal) repetitive error lies in incorrectly predicting her son's loyalty: "Ultimately Isabella fails in her performance because she makes one fatal error: she overestimates her influence on one of her chief co-stars, her son."⁸⁷ In her "predictive" and not "adaptive" behaviour, she reveals herself as an essentially non-agile thinker who does not realise that "One of the big dangers is to pretend that you can follow a predictable process when you can't".⁸⁸

Predictability is a very desirable property. However if you believe you can be predictable when you can't, it leads to situations where people build a plan early on, then don't properly handle the situation where the plan falls apart. You see the plan and reality slowly drifting apart. For a long time you can pretend that the plan is still valid. But at some point the drift becomes too much and the plan falls apart. Usually the fall is painful.⁸⁹

Isabella openly predicted the loyalty of Edward III, and thus instigated a plan without early testing to verify it. Her lack of agility is compounded by her subsequent behaviour, when she attempts to use her position as mother of the monarch as she did with her position as wife of the monarch (26.68-69; 26.90).

Isabella fails to realise that as this failed with Edward II, it will not work with Edward III. Echoes of her

⁸⁶ It is doubtful that her "dissembling" here (22.68-70) is to fool Matrevis, who is a part of the murder plot, and her son and Kent are not yet onstage. Further evidence for her reluctance to relinquish her Juno role is found elsewhere: at one point Sir John asks "Why stand ye in a muse?" (19.63) at talk of Edward II's fleeing England; and Mortimer quickly chides her to "have done with care and sad complaint;/ Your king hath wronged your country and himself" (19.66-67).

⁸⁷ Deats, p173.

⁸⁸ Fowler, 2005.

⁸⁹ Fowler, 2005.

original claims to innocence against Edward II's accusations return when she similarly claims that Edward III's accusations are "untrue" (26.74). Whilst Gibbs reads Isabella's final role here as "so convincing ... [that Edward's] command collapses into a plea that she be removed before pity cause him to revoke his edict", I suggest that this overlooks that her performance now becomes irrelevant; Edward III has explicitly stated that her familial connection is immaterial, just as her marital bond was irrelevant earlier.⁹⁰ Isabella has still not learned the lesson she should have realised from the beginning: her relationship to the monarch does not ensure her self-preservation. Whilst some scholars argue that her escape from death is suggestive of her power, thus proving her "impressively capable of consolidating her position in a society hostile to female power", I would argue that Isabella – from a perspective of behavioural and learning processes – has failed miserably.⁹¹ Her lack of agility means that there is now no time left to change her plans after the discovery of a system flaw. This application of agile and double-loop theory has illustrated that Isabella's role-changing is far less seamless, quick-thinking and effortless than Deats' interpretation of Isabella as a "deft and versatile impersonator" suggests.⁹² Organisational and agile theories reveal that Isabella's roles are by no means as clear-cut as Deats makes them: they are messy, with roles overlapping, repeated and fumbled over. Whilst *Edward the Second* may evidence an "undermining of gender stereotypes through the role reversals and gender performances of its central characters", it also essentially evidences Isabella's failure to develop past a single-loop behavioural framework.⁹³

⁹⁰ Gibbs, p170.

⁹¹ Gibbs, p170.

⁹² Deats, p169.

⁹³ Deats, p201.

For Abigall, Isabella and Zenocrate, the application of agile thinking and double-loop learning has proven an invaluable method by which to illuminate patterns of behaviour and processes of learning in the three women of *Tamburlaine the Great*, *The Jew of Malta* and *Edward the Second*. Whilst Zenocrate's agility is plainly in evidence, as is the transition of her shift to a double-loop learning process, Abigall's agility is limited to the roles she is required to play within the governing values of Barabas. Her eventual break out of those governing values into double-loop learning sees her echo an earlier action strategy in order to secure her safety. Of Marlowe's women, Isabella is surprisingly the most limited in her behavioural and learning patterns. Permanently restricted to her governing value, the application of Argyris' organisational theory reveals the Queen's repeated utilisation of the same ineffective action strategies throughout *Edward II*. This is by no means a conclusive study on Zenocrate, Abigall or Isabella, but rather an attempt to encourage the identification of actual female agency in the texts. This research could potentially be expanded to other female characters in Marlowe, and of course, to the broader arena of Marlowe's men. Whilst my analysis has limited itself to considering the women independently, further developments could also be made through more explicit intertextual comparisons. This application of double-loop learning and agile thinking reveals that Marlowe constructs each of his women with idiosyncratic learning patterns, and whilst these patterns are also clearly influenced by their surrounding contexts – whether that be imprisonment by a rebellious Tartarian thief, the loss of one's love at the hands of one's father, or the dangerous politics of a mutinous court – they demonstrate individual choice and agency outside of the narrow bounds of gender.

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