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## Carthage's Palladium: John Marston's *Sophonisba*

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**Abstract:** John Marston depicts in his play *Sophonisba, or The Wonder of Women* (1606) an ideal female ruler. In a very powerful image Sophonisba is compared to Carthage's Palladium, a miraculous guardian statue. The first performance season of *Sophonisba* may have been the last, too, because there is no record of its revival. In spite of this it may have influenced later playwrights like Philip Massinger and John Ford. In this article I try to examine whether that is plausible. The female protagonists in Philip Massinger's *The Emperor of the East* (1631) and John Ford's *The Broken Heart* (1633) can be described as ideal women rulers and they have certain characteristics in common with Sophonisba. In addition, I take a look at Massinger's *The Bondman* (1623) and its heroine Cleora. In the beginning of that play, she displays a similar valiant spirit to Sophonisba, although the play as a whole is very different from *Sophonisba*. All in all, these female characters are described as exemplary women whose virtues are beyond the reach of ordinary women. We can only wonder at the wonder of women.

**Key terms:** Renaissance Drama, John Marston, John Ford, Philip Massinger, classical mythology, Sophonisba, Palladium, genius, ideal woman-ruler

In this article I study John Marston's play *Sophonisba, or The Wonder of Women* (1606) and its possible direct or indirect influence on some later plays, namely Philip Massinger's *The Bondman* (1623) and *The Emperor of the East* (1631) and John Ford's *The Broken Heart* (1633).<sup>1</sup> Although the context of *The Emperor of the East* is the Byzantine Empire in a much later period than the other plays, all the works I am dealing with here are set in the ancient world. Considering early modern dramatic conventions, it is, of course, to be expected that classical mythology – both Greek

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank professor Anthony Johnson for his help in all stages of this work and professor Joel Kuortti for his support.

and Roman – has an important role in these plays. I use mostly the Roman names of the mythological figures because these were the ones the seventeenth-century dramatists used.

John Marston was born in 1576 in Oxfordshire in South East England. Marston's father was a prosperous lawyer, and his mother was a daughter of an Italian physician residing in England. Marston studied first in Oxford, where he was awarded a BA degree in 1594. He had been admitted in 1592 to his father's Inn, The Middle Temple, and he was in residence there by 1595 (Jackson and Neill 1986a: ix). Beside the study of law, 'revels' were an integral part of life in the Inns of Court. It is not easy to determine what the contemporaries exactly meant by the term. It seems to cover virtually every pleasurable form of human activity. The Inns were constantly the scene of banquets, masques, dancing, and musical entertainments (Finkelpearl 1969/2014: 32–34). The older Marston had certainly hoped his son would follow in his footsteps in practicing law, but it is quite easy to see that for somebody with literary inclinations the Middle Temple opened also other possibilities. Marston's first play is probably *Histriomastix* written for the Middle Temple's Christmas Revels of 1598/1599. Although the play is written anonymously, there is strong internal evidence to attribute it to Marston (Jackson and Neill 1986a: xi).

During his career as a playwright Marston wrote for the Children of St Paul's and then for the Children of the Queen's Revels at the Blackfriars Theatre. In the Children's companies all the actors were young boys. Because these companies had smaller and more expensive theaters and therefore more exclusive audiences than larger 'public' playhouses, a gentleman-poet like Marston could preserve his amateur status untainted by the 'vulgar' professionalism of the public theaters (Jackson and Neill 1986a: xii). His dramatic oeuvre includes, for example, the plays *Antonio and Mellida* (1599/1600), *Antonio's Revenge* (1600/1601), *The Malcontent* (1603), *The Dutch Courtesan* (1604/1605), *Eastward Ho!* (1605, with Ben Jonson and George Chapman) and *Sophonisba, or The Wonder of Women* (1606). *Sophonisba* was his last complete play, but he is known to have started writing *The Insatiate Countess*, before he abandoned the theater life. It was later completed by other writers and printed in 1613. Philip Finkelpearl (1969/2014: 254) argues that had *Sophonisba* been Marston's last dramatic work, we could take his heroine's willing withdrawal from the world as a sign of the author's imminent retirement from theater, but, then, *The Insatiate Countess* has no similar theme. In 1608 Marston seems to have been involved in the writing of a play satirizing the Scottish faction in court. He was sentenced to a brief term of imprisonment, due to which he apparently turned away from theater, although it is likely that he had already been looking for a new career. In about 1605, Marston had married Mary Wilkes, daughter of one of King James's chaplains (Jackson and Neill 1986a: xv). Marston was ordained deacon (1608) and priest (1609). He had a living at Christchurch, Hampshire, from 1616 to 1631. When

his collected plays were published in 1633, he intervened somehow to get the book reissued in the same year by the same publisher, but without his name on the title page. Marston died in 1634; the renunciation of his past seemed to extend to his burial under a tombstone marked only with the words 'Oblivioni Sacrum' (Huebert 2003: 71).

Marston had a pessimistic view of the world; in his plays there is often an outsider commenting ironically on the state of affairs. In my opinion, however, this does not quite apply to *Sophonisba*, as none of the principal characters fits the role of the commentator. Though I have to admit that the Carthage of the play is not a nice place and the fate of the most virtuous person is gloomy. Finkelpearl (1969/2014: 259) concludes that Marston's plays were of an age and a place, not for all time (like Shakespeare's); nevertheless, his visions of the dark but comic battle between a corrupt world and the integrity of the individual still convey an urgent power.

*Sophonisba* is set in Carthage during the second Punic War (around 210 BCE). Marston's main historical sources were Livy and Appian, but neither of them described *Sophonisba* in a favorable light. For them, she was not the wonder of women, the idealized Stoic martyr that Marston describes. Rather she is portrayed as a worthless woman. Philip Finkelpearl (1969/2014: 241) argues that *Sophonisba* is Marston's attempt to embody perfection, it is a play about perfection and its fate in this world. Marston found a suitable story for his purposes to explore excellence, even if the sources do not support his idea of *Sophonisba*.

*Sophonisba* is a historical character, the daughter of Carthaginian general Asdrubal.<sup>2</sup> Syphax and Massinissa, kings of different parts of Libya, are rivals for her hand in marriage. She favors Massinissa and in the beginning of the play their wedding is celebrated. However, before the marriage is consummated, there is news that the Roman army has landed. The Carthaginian senate asks for Massinissa and Asdrubal to fight for Carthage with their troops. While they are outside preparing to go, *Sophonisba* speaks to the other lords:

Lords,  
 From the most ill-graced hymeneal bed  
 That ever Juno frowned at, I entreat  
 That you'll collect from our loose-formed speech  
 This firm resolve: that no low appetite  
 Of my sex' weakness can or shall o'ercome  
 Due grateful service unto you or virtue.  
 Witness, ye gods, I never until now

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2 Although the *Sophonisba* theme was very popular in the sixteenth century, not only in England but even more in France and Italy, it seems that no play on the subject had any significant effect on Marston's tragedy (Wood 1938: xi-xii).

Repined at my creation; now I wish  
 I were no woman, that my arms might speak  
 My heart to Carthage.  
 (*Sophonisba* 1.2.174–184)<sup>3</sup>

In *Sophonisba*'s speech there are references to the marriage gods (the hymeneal bed and Juno) and the weakness usually attributed to women. But *Sophonisba* is made of stronger mettle than women in general, or even men. She wishes for the first time in her life that she were a man and could fight for Carthage. Massinissa has to leave *Sophonisba* on their wedding night. He had not heard *Sophonisba*'s brave words and expects her to plead with him to stay. But *Sophonisba* sends him to war with brave words: "Go, best man, / And make me proud to be a soldier's wife / That values his renown above faint pleasures" (*Sophonisba* 1.2.219–221).

*Sophonisba*'s response is unexpected; Massinissa thinks that she is fit for gods, not men: "He's sure unconquered in whom thou dost dwell, / Carthage's Palladium" (*Sophonisba* 1.2.231–232). It is a very powerful image to be compared with the Palladium. It was common that ancient cities had miraculous guardian statues, the most famous of these being the Palladium of Troy, a small wooden image of armed Athena. It fell from the sky and the safety of Troy depended on its possession. Odysseus and Diomedes stole it and that made the conquest of Troy possible. According to Roman tradition the statue ended up in Rome where it was kept as a pledge of Rome's fate in the innermost part of Vesta's temple (OCD s.v. *Palladium*). *Sophonisba* is presented as the guardian of the safety of Carthage like the Palladium. This stresses her integrity and exceptionality. Unfortunately for Carthage, the leading men are weaker than she.

In Massinger's play *The Bondman* (1623) the heroine Cleora uses similar courageous words as *Sophonisba* did. The play is set in Siracusa and it combines two historical events: the slaves' revolt of 135–132 BCE and the war against Carthage from an earlier period, 345–336 BCE (Edwards and Gibson 1976a: 301–303). Because in the beginning of the play Carthage is threatening Siracusa with war, Timoleon, a general from Corinth, has been summoned for help. He is given absolute power by the Siracusan men. However, when Timoleon asks them for money in aid of the war effort, the men are reluctant to give anything. But Cleora, the daughter of Archidamus the praetor of Siracusa, speaks up when the men are silent, donates her jewels and promises to sell some clothes. Because of her example others promise their money, too. Then Timoleon asks for soldiers, but the men are reluctant to go them-

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<sup>3</sup> All the citations from *Sophonisba* are from MacDonald P. Jackson's and Michael Neill's 1986 edition of *The Selected Plays of John Marston* (*Antonio and Mellida*, *Antonio's Revenge*, *The Malcontent*, *The Dutch Courtesan*, *Sophonisba*).

selves and want to enroll their slaves. That angers Cleora, who makes another passionate speech:

Cleora. Honour, wonne in warre,  
 And to be stiled preseruers of their Country,  
 Are Titles fit for free and generous Spirits,  
 And not for Bond-men; had I beene borne a man  
 And such ne're dying glories made the prize  
 To bold Heroicke Courage; By Diana,  
 I would not to my Brother, nay my Father,  
 Be brib'd to part with the least peece of honour  
 I should gaine in this action.  
 (*The Bondman* 1.3.354–362)<sup>4</sup>

The implication is that had Cleora been a man (ll. 357–358), she would not be left out of such heroic deeds and never-dying glories. She has similar wishes to Sophonisba who hoped her arms might speak her heart to Carthage (*Sophonisba* 1.2.183–184). Cleora invokes Diana, which suits well to an innocent young woman. Timoleon goes on to praise her: “Shee’s inspir’d / Or in her speakes the Genius of your Country / To fire your blood in her defence” (*The Bondman* 1.3.362–364).

In Roman religion a genius functioned as a kind of guardian spirit. Originally these spirits were confined to personification of the head of family (*pater familias*). But ultimately groups of people, states, and even places were thought to have genii (OCD s.v. *genius*). As Cleora is valiant, she personifies the genius of Siracusa, when men behave in a cowardly manner. Timoleon is so impressed by Cleora’s bravery that he wants to carry her colors in the battle, thus she gives him her scarf.

After hearing Cleora’s inspiring speech, the Siracusan men promise to go to war. The genius of Siracusa is a similarly potent symbol as the Palladium of Carthage, and Cleora’s brave words are reminiscent of Sophonisba’s speeches. They both wish that they were born men and could fight for their countries. Although there are these similarities, the plays are very different. *Sophonisba* is a tragedy and its heroine commits suicide, whereas *The Bondman* is a tragicomedy and its heroine ends up marrying a suitable man.

It seems that *Sophonisba* was not performed after its first performance season, though Jackson and Neill (1986b: 399) think that such plays as Ford’s *Broken Heart* and Massinger’s other play *The Emperor of the East* (1631) suggest that Caroline dramatists were familiar with Marston’s *Sophonisba*. As the elder sister of the fifth-century Byzantine emperor Theodosius II, Pulcheria in *The Emperor of the East* is a historical figure like Sophonisba. After the old emperor Arcadius’s death Pulcheria

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<sup>4</sup> All citations from *The Bondman* are from Philip Edwards and Colin Gibson’s 1976 edition.

raised her younger brother and sisters. *The Emperor of the East* is set in that court, when Theodosius is of age and can rule himself, but he seems to be happy enough to let his sister take care of the cumbersome duties involved with running the state. Massinger's main source was *The Holy Court*, published in Paris in 1626: a translation by Thomas Hawkins of the Jesuit Nicholas Caussin's *La Cour Sainte* from the year 1624 (Edwards and Gibson 1976b: 399).

Marston sets the tone of *Sophonisba* in the prologue, which announced his intention to present an extraordinary woman. Similarly, from as early as Act one of *The Emperor of the East*, Massinger shows us what to think of Pulcheria. There we meet Paulinus, a kinsman to the emperor, and his friend Cleon. Cleon has travelled for six years and seen many wonders of the world. Paulinus praises Pulcheria to him. She has turned the court into an academy and her rooms into a nunnery. He also compares her to Astraea, the goddess of justice: "That 'tis not superstition to believe / Astrea once more lives upon the earth, Pulcheriaes brest her temple" (*The Emperor of the East* 1.1.76–78).<sup>5</sup> In the first book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1916/1956: ll. 149–150) there is a description of the four ages: the golden, the silver, the brass, and the iron age. When during the iron age evil was let loose, the virgin Astraea was the last of the immortals to leave the earth. She has returned in the person of Pulcheria in the Byzantine court. This links her to Queen Elizabeth I, who was, especially in the years following the victory over the Spanish Armada, compared to Astraea (Yates 1975: 59). Paulinus arranges for Cleon to watch how Pulcheria rules on behalf of her brother. A couple of unsavory characters are brought in front of her. She listens to each of them to tell his side of the story, then castigates them and orders them to be sent away from the court. Paulinus asks Cleon: "What thincke you now?" (*The Emperor of the East* 1.2.288). Cleon responds: "That I am in a dreame, or that I see / A seconde Pallas" (*The Emperor of the East* 1.2.289–290). I find Cleon's words a bit exaggerated. Pulcheria acts sensibly, but she does not show any extraordinary wisdom. Anyway, Cleon seems to think so, because he compares her to Pallas, the goddess of wisdom and probably regards her as one of the wonders of the world. Sophonisba and Pulcheria are alike in being presented as extraordinary women, miracles to be wondered at. However, I do not think that it would have been necessary for Massinger to know *Sophonisba*, the resemblances are not very extensive. Actually, as stated earlier, I think that Cleora in *The Bondman* is more like Sophonisba than Pulcheria.

Ford's *The Broken Heart* (1633) is set in ancient Sparta. It does not describe any historical events, although there were two long wars of the Spartans against the Messenians in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE (Spencer 1980: 23). It portrays men and women suffering in silence until it kills them (Barker 2004: 69). The god

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<sup>5</sup> All citations from *The Emperor of the East* are from Philip Edwards and Colin Gibson's 1976 edition.

Apollo is prominent in both *Sophonisba* and *The Broken Heart*. He is called the patron god of Carthage and he is similarly revered in Ford's Sparta. People swear by him and cryptic oracles from Delphos are interpreted. In his narration Ford introduces very plausible oracles. *The Broken Heart* has two prominent female roles, Calantha, the king's daughter and heir, and Penthea, twin sister of Ithocles, the young military leader who has just won against the Messenians. Calantha is a strong female leader like Sophonisba and Pulcheria. She is described as having a masculine spirit (*The Broken Heart* 5.2.95).<sup>6</sup> She controls all the scenes in which she appears regardless of the number of lines she speaks, and her decorum is perfect. Her character is carefully built up for her to take the dominating position in the last two scenes (Spencer 1980: 41).

Penthea had been engaged to Orgilus, son of counsellor Crotolon, but Ithocles had wanted to marry her to the more powerful Bassanes, an older nobleman. Ithocles now regrets the way that he treated his sister, but Orgilus is contemplating revenge and therein lie the seeds of the tragedy in the play. Penthea's fate resembles a little what happened to Sophonisba. Her wedding to Massinissa is interrupted. Thus, when the leading men of Carthage plot against Massinissa, they want Sophonisba to marry his rival Syphax to secure the safety of Carthage. Sophonisba manages to escape Syphax and remain true to Massinissa. But Penthea does not have any possibility to resist her brother's will, even though her heart belongs to Orgilus. As Roberta Barker (2004: 70) points out, although many male characters in the play repudiate the way Penthea was forced to marry and assert that women should be granted liberty of choice, there is an undercurrent of misogyny expressed, for example, in Orgilus's controlling relationship with his sister and Bassanes's jealous rages against Penthea. Furthermore, as Barker (2004: 70) states, even if the women of Ford's Sparta are among the most virtuous in the early modern drama, they gain a good part of their identity from their strict subjection to the ideals of obedience, constancy, and chastity. Penthea rejects any "thought of female change" (*The Broken Heart* 2.3.55–56) and Calantha draws a boundary between herself and those "mere women" who are able to survive the deaths of their loved ones (*The Broken Heart* 5.3.72).

Ithocles has fallen in love with Calantha, who is supposed to marry her kinsman, the prince of Argos. When Ithocles and Penthea are reconciled, Penthea promises to speak to Calantha in favor of her brother. This she does very eloquently, though it seems that Calantha does not need to be persuaded and her father, the king, also gives his consent to their engagement. Later Penthea loses her mind and in her madness, rants against her brother, giving fuel to Orgilus's revenge. Failing to see a way out of the conundrum, she starves herself to death before, finally, Orgilus

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<sup>6</sup> All citations from *The Broken Heart* are from T. J. B. Spencer's 1980 edition.

kills Ithocles. In addition to all the other tragedies Calantha's father dies and she becomes the queen, then her first ruling is to condemn Orgilus to death. When the wedding of Orgilus's sister Eupharia and Ithocles's friend Prophilus is celebrated in the court, Calantha is told about the deaths of her father, Penthea, and Ithocles during a dance. She goes on dancing after each bit of news, as if she does not hear them. Marston had used a rather similar situation in *The Malcontent* (1604), in which Malevole and Pietro reveal themselves to their wives during a dance (Spencer in *The Broken Heart* 201, fn. to 5.2.12).

In the end of *Sophonisba* Massinissa and Sophonisba meet again and for a moment they are happy and content. But then the Roman general Scipio demands that Massinissa surrenders Sophonisba to the Romans. Massinissa is desperate because he must betray either his wife or Scipio. For Sophonisba as a true Stoic there is no problem. She is going to commit suicide to avoid being displayed in a triumph in Rome. Massinissa will keep his word to the Romans by delivering her body. She drinks poison with Stoic fortitude:

You have been good to me,  
 And I do thank thee, heaven. O my stars,  
 I bless your goodness, that with breast unstained,  
 Faith pure, a virgin wife, tried my glory,  
 I die, of female faith the long-lived story;  
 Secure from bondage and all servile harms,  
 But more – most happy in my husband's arms.  
 (*Sophonisba* 5.3.100–106)

Line 104 reminds its audience of Marston's contribution to her long-lived story; in this play he creates a kind of monument to its dead heroine (Jackson and Neill in *Sophonisba* 406, fn. to line 104). The Stoic sage is ruled by his reason. He is characterized by his constancy, firmness, and self-sufficiency. The wise man cannot call himself happy until he has been tested by providence and can show that he is unaffected by misfortune (Rivers 1979/1994: 45). This is also a good description of Sophonisba, a *female* Stoic sage. Among Marston's plays *The Insatiate Countess* is a sort of a companion piece to *Sophonisba* (Finkelpearl 1969/2014: 225); Sophonisba represents the unattainable virtue and Isabella, the protagonist of *The Insatiate Countess*, the horrendous vice. Ronald Huebert (2003: 84) points out that in Marston's writing lust is a ravenous killer of human integrity and virtue consists of renouncing the body completely; he thinks of *Sophonisba* as "the most chilling representation of principled victory over the body".

Portia, the wife of Marcus Brutus, in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is thought to have influenced Marston in creating the character of Sophonisba. In Act 2 scene 1 of *Julius Caesar*, Portia is worried about why her husband is restless and definitely keeping a secret from her, although she is herself capable of keeping secrets:

Portia. I grant I am a woman, but withal  
 A woman that Lord Brutus took to wife.  
 I grant I am a woman, but withal  
 A woman well reputed Cato's daughter.  
 Think you I am no stronger than my sex,  
 Being so fathered and so husbanded?  
 Tell me your counsels, I will not disclose 'em.  
 I have made strong proof of my constancy,  
 Giving myself a voluntary wound  
 Here in the thigh. Can I bear that with patience  
 And not my husband's secrets?  
 Brutus. O ye gods,  
 Render me worthy of this noble wife!  
 (*Julius Caesar* 2.1.291–303)<sup>7</sup>

There is no doubt that Portia's and Sophonisba's speeches sound very similar. They are both stronger than early modern females are usually thought to be. However, their suicides differ, Portia dies off-stage, and we only hear Brutus's rather matter-of-fact description of her death. Besides, it seems to me that Portia's suicide reflects anxiety rather than Stoic fortitude. Another Shakespearean heroine in *Antony and Cleopatra* (1604), namely Cleopatra, dies nobly. Her life is not described as exemplary, but her suicide is heroic:

Cleopatra. Give me my robe. Put on my crown. I have  
 Immortal longings in me. Now no more  
 The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip.  
 Yare, yare, good Iras, quick. Methinks I hear  
 Antony call. I see him rouse himself  
 To praise *my noble act*. I hear him mock  
 The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men  
 To excuse their after wrath. Husband, I come!  
 Now to that name my courage prove my title!  
 I am fire and air; my other elements  
 I give to baser life.  
 (*Antony and Cleopatra* 5.2.274–284)<sup>8</sup>

Cleopatra transforms herself into a Roman by her suicide, her noble act. As Warren Chernaik (2011: 1–2) notes, Cleopatra sees Roman resolution as male; women are changeable, men are better able to do a noble deed. I think that in their noble acts Sophonisba and Cleopatra have more in common than Sophonisba and Portia. An-

7 The citation from *Julius Caesar* is from Martin Spevack's 1998/2004 edition.

8 The citation from *Antony and Cleopatra* is from David Bevington's 1990/2005 edition.

other point worth noting here is that Marston's sources do not describe Sophonisba as an admirable person, but rather like Cleopatra as a dangerous, seductive, foreign woman. *Antony and Cleopatra* was presumably staged in 1606 or 1607 (Bevington 1990/2005: 42) and *Sophonisba* was staged in 1606, thus we cannot be sure if there was any influence. Cleopatra's story was, of course, very well known.

Another famous woman of antiquity ending with suicide is Lucretia or Lucrece. Shakespeare wrote a poem of her, "The Rape of Lucrece". She could also be a model for Sophonisba's character. She was a wife of a Roman noble man and was raped by Sextus, son of the king Tarquinius Superbus. Her suicide was the catalyst for the expulsion of kings and the founding of the republic. Particularly in Livy, Lucretia becomes a paradigm of the Roman *matrona*, heroic in her adhesion to the code of female chastity (OCD s.v. *Lucretia*). In early modern England rape was seen as a crime against the property of the woman's family, a kind of theft. Towards the end of the sixteenth century the legal views of rape started to change; rape was seen as a crime against the person (Swärdh 2003: 71–72). Some English versions of Lucrece's story, such as Thomas Heywood's 1607 play (*The Rape of Lucrece, a True Roman Tragedy*), leave her personal tragedy beneath the political implications. However, both Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton in his poem "The Ghost of Lucrece" (1600) seize the opportunity to personalize an icon of violated chastity. Middleton's Lucrece is riddled with a complex of Christian guilt and pagan shame (Shand 2010: 1985). The Roman ideal of conduct is masculine, suitable for a military society. *Pudicitia*, chastity, is the only one of the dominant Roman moral values more appropriate to women than men. Yet in Livy and Shakespeare, Lucretia committing suicide to save her honor wants to spur the men in her family to revenge (Chernaik 2011: 2). The women like Sophonisba and Lucrece are seen as exceptional, having the characteristics usually considered male. It is rather dismal that to achieve appreciation they need to commit suicide.

There are Stoic deaths in the end of *The Broken Heart*, too. Stoic fortitude suits the Spartans very well. Penthea starves herself to death and Orgilus decides to die by opening his veins (like for example Seneca). But most of all this is true of Calantha who arranges the affairs of the state and her courtiers. When the body of Ithocles is brought on the stage, Calantha turns to him and says:

Now I turn to thee, thou shadow  
 Of my contracted lord. Bear witness all,  
 I put my mother's wedding ring upon  
 His finger. 'Twas my father's last bequest.  
 Thus I new-marry him whose wife I am.  
 Death shall not separate us. O my lords,  
 I but deceived your eyes with antic gesture,  
 When one news came huddling on another,

Of death, and death, and death. Still I danced forward;  
 But it struck home, and here, and in an instant.  
 Be such mere women, who with shrieks and outcries  
 Can vow a present end to all their sorrows,  
 Yet live to vow new pleasures and outlive them.  
 They are the silent griefs which cut the heart-strings.  
 Let me die smiling.  
 (*The Broken Heart* 5.3.62–75)

She dies of a broken heart with great dignity. Everything is arranged and she is ready to leave. Calantha does not commit suicide, but she knows that she is not going to survive. Calantha kisses the cold lips of Ithocles and dies then. The tone of her last speech resembles Sophonisba's or Cleopatra's last words. She has even chosen a song to be performed after her death. Bassanes concludes what has happened:

Bassanes. Her heart is broke indeed.  
 O royal maid, would thou hadst missed this part.  
 Yet 'twas a brave one. I must weep to see  
 Her smile in death.  
 (*The Broken Heart* 5.3.95–98)

Sophonisba says that she, a virgin-wife, dies most happy in her husband's arms. Calantha's destiny is similar; she dies holding the hand of her dead husband. During her discussion with Calantha Penthea says that she has three poor jewels to bequeath, the first of them is her youth which she is going to give:

To virgin-wives, such as abuse not wedlock  
 By freedom of desires, but covet chiefly  
 The pledges of chaste beds, for ties of love,  
 Rather than ranging of their blood; and next  
 To married maids, such as prefer the number  
 Of honourable issue in their virtues,  
 Before the flattery of delights by marriage.  
 (*The Broken Heart* 3.5.52–58)

Spencer (in *Sophonisba* 156, fn. to l. 56) thinks that Penthea is contrasting "virgin-wives (who chastely bear children to their husbands) and women who are married to virginity (and who prefer virtue to the delights of marriage)". Barker (2004: 71) sees here the need to control woman's notoriously wide-ranging desires and to place her at the disposal of one man, although Penthea's discourse insists on a so strict feminine virtue that it is difficult to express through patriarchal categorization. Within traditional patriarchy the terms "virgin-wives" and "married maids" are paradoxes and it is these paradoxes that Penthea wants feminine identity to inhabit.

Earlier on Penthea had said to Orgilus, who insisted that because of their earlier betrothal they are married, that it cannot be, because she is no longer a virgin. Even though she, also, thinks that her brother had no right to marry her to Basanes.

Penthea. The virgin dowry which my birth bestowed  
Is ravished by another. My true love  
Abhors to think that Orgilus deserved  
No better favours than a second bed.  
(*The Broken Heart* 2.3.99–102)

Penthea thinks that she is unworthy of Orgilus's love. She does not fit her own definition of "virgin-wives". Calantha and Sophonisba are virgin wives in the literal sense and are revered because of that. This reminds me of the last scene of Massinger's *The Maid of Honour* (1621?) where Camiola does not marry the male protagonist, but decides to go to a convent and become a nun:

This is the marriage! this the port! to which  
My vowes must steere me, fill my spreading sayles  
With the pure wind of your devotions for me  
That I may touch the secure haven, where  
Eternall happinesse keeps her residence,  
Temptations to frailty never entring.  
(*The Maid of Honour* 5.2.267–272)<sup>9</sup>

The king of Palermo says that Camiola really deserves to be called the maid of honor and she should be an example to all noble maids. Doris Adler (1987: 879) finds also irony in the king's words, if all noble maids imitate Camiola, it leaves ignoble ones to people the nation. Also, Pulcheria in *The Emperor of the East* decided to remain unmarried. Many monarchs had wooed her, but she has refused them in order to devote her life to raise her brother Theodosius and her sisters. Though Pulcheria is described as wise, just, and chaste, some people in the court think that she should step aside and let Theodosius rule. Chrysapus: "The pale fac'd Moon that should / Gouverne the night, vsurps the rule of the day" (*The Emperor of the East* 2.1.28–29).

In classical mythology Moon is female and Sun male. Moon (Phoebe or Diana) is also a virgin goddess; here she (Pulcheria) is accused of taking Apollo's (her brother's) place. In *The Emperor of the East* the same virgin goddess symbols are used for Pulcheria which were used for Queen Elizabeth I. Anne Barton (1984: 312–313) comments that even if Massinger uses the iconography created for Elizabeth, for him

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<sup>9</sup> The citation from *The Maid of Honour* is from Philip Edwards and Colin Gibson's 1976 edition.

the real virtues are political. He contrasts the rule of Pulcheria/Elizabeth with the less admirable monarch (Theodosius/Charles I). Another possible political interpretation of *The Emperor of the East* is that the moon eclipsing the sun (Charles I) is the queen Henrietta Maria (Hila 2016: 165–166). Henrietta Maria was often accused of violating female behavioral standards: as a wife she was supposed to be silent and obedient. At the same time Charles had chosen to prioritize his private life over his duties as a king (Hila 2016: 163).

In the end of *The Broken Heart*, when Calantha disposes of her realms, she says to her heir, Nearchus, prince of Argos:

I would presume you would retain the royalty  
Of Sparta, in her own bounds: then in Argos  
Armosthes might be viceroy; in Messene  
Might Croton bear sway.  
(*The Broken Heart* 5.3.42–45)

Verna Ann and Stephen Foster (1988: 305–306) think that the future relations between Sparta and Argos have reminded a Caroline audience of those between England and Scotland, ruled by one king but separately governed. There are close parallels between the kinship of the virgin princess of Sparta and the prince of Argos with that of between Elizabeth I and James VI of Scotland. Nearchus is “grandchild to our aunt” (*The Broken Heart* 3.3.8), as Calantha’s father Amyclas says. Similarly, James was great grandchild to Elizabeth’s aunt. Furthermore, the Fosters think that the play’s audience would have seen a resemblance between Ithocles and the earl of Essex. Ithocles’ victorious conquest of Messene could have reminded the audience of the victory over the Irish near the end of Elizabeth’s reign. Verna Ann and Stephen Foster (1988: 315–316) find that Ithocles behaves like Essex: impetuous, ingenious, too brave, and too honorable for his own good. I find their argument very compelling, although maybe a bit too much has been read between the lines. But I see in *The Broken Heart* similar political thoughts to *The Emperor of the East*. They remind of nostalgic earlier times when the rulers and their generals were better.

Although in the plays of John Marston we do not find other female characters quite like Sophonisba, there are exemplary women in his other plays. In almost all of his plays Marston invoked the notion of a woman of ideal virtue and goodness who struck wonder in all who saw her (Finkelppearl 1969/2014: 239). In *The Fawn* young prince Tiberio describes Dulcimer, the object of his love, in the following way:

Thou last and only rareness of heaven’s works,  
From best of man made model of the gods –  
Divinest Woman: thou perfection  
Of all proportions, Beauty – made when Jove was blithe,

Well filled with nectar, and full friends with man:  
 Thou dear as air, necessary as sleep  
 To careful man – Woman!  
 (*The Fawn* 3.1.512–518)<sup>10</sup>

The women in *The Fawn* are numerous and generally treated sympathetically (Blostein 1978: 23). Princess Dulcimet is a resourceful, witty, beautiful girl and her companion is Philocalia, an honorable learned lady who tries to restrain the young princess. But, as Blostein (1978: 24–25) remarks, they are not opposites but complementaries; the true courtier loves beauty because he loves proportion, which entails an equal acceptance of body and mind.

Maria in *The Malcontent* is a good example of a woman of virtue. The deposed Duke of Genoa, Altofronto, has come back to court disguised as Malevole. His duchess Maria is kept in a citadel. Pietro has usurped the power, and he is now the duke. Mendoza, the arch villain of the play, is plotting to kill Pietro and to become duke in his turn. Then he plans to marry Maria to strengthen his power. In the last act Malevole has led Mendoza to believe that Pietro has committed suicide. Then Mendoza sends him to Maria with a ring. But Maria stays resolutely faithful to her husband. Malevole is of course in his disguise; therefore, Maria does not recognize him. So, he has an opportunity to test his wife himself. He is happy to witness her constancy:

Malevole. [...] I have  
 found an honest woman. Faith, I perceive, when  
 all is done, there is of women, as of all other  
 things, some good, most bad; some saints, some  
 sinners.  
 (*The Malcontent* 5.2.39–43)<sup>11</sup>

Later Mendoza tries to court Maria himself, but she does not waver. Penelope is a mythical person who provides an obvious parallel to Maria.

Malevole. [...] Ulysses absent,  
 O Ithaca, can chastest Penelope hold out?  
 (*The Malcontent* 3.2.52–53)

In this scene Malevole is talking to Bilioso, an old choleric marshal, who is going as an ambassador to Florence and planning to leave his young wife at the palace. Malevole speaks strongly against such a plan; he would rather leave his wife in a

<sup>10</sup> The citation from *The Fawn* is from David A. Blostein's 1978 edition.

<sup>11</sup> All citations from *The Malcontent* are from MacDonald P. Jackson and Michael Neill's 1986 edition.

bordello. He insinuates that Bilioso's wife is no Penelope. But at the same time Malevole probably thinks about his own situation, too. According to Jackson and Neill (in *The Malcontent* 241, fn. to ll. 52–53) he is like Ulysses, a prince betrayed by his own followers, who returns in disguise to exact his revenge, and the chaste Maria corresponds to Penelope. Maria does not know about her husband's plans, but she waits for him patiently. Bianca, Bilioso's wife, would not hold out even a short absence nor would the other ladies of the court. Because Pietro had usurped the power, the basis of his rule is corrupt, which affects the whole court life. Maria's virtue reflects the values of her husband. In the end of the play Malevole/Altofronto is restored to the throne and clears the court of all unsavory characters. Maria's role is very small; we meet her in the last act. But she is greater than her role suggests. Her integrity is contrasted with the unreliability of the other women. Maria is a faithful Penelope waiting for her husband to come back or ready to die alone if necessary. She is not an active participant who would try change her situation; she only waits passively in the citadel for her husband to return. She is not a ruler.

Juliet Dusinberre (1975/1979: 303) calls Sophonisba an ideal woman-ruler who disarms opposition by talking about women's weakness while she commands her followers what to do. This same stratagem was used by Elizabeth I. There is no development in Sophonisba's character in the play, she is steadily perfect from beginning to end. Massinissa says honoring her dead body: "Heave gently then; / Women's right wonder, and just same of men" (*Sophonisba* 5.4.58–59). Sophonisba's virtue is presented as unobtainable to the ordinary women. They can only wonder at the wonder of women. Pulcheria in *The Emperor of the East* is also an ideal woman-ruler giving wise orders. She is seen as one of the wonders of the world. Calantha suits very well to this group of female rulers, although she says: "A nation warlike and inured to practice / Of policy and labour cannot brook / A feminate authority" (*The Broken Heart* 5.3.10–12). This does not necessarily mean that Ford, who was born in the reign of Elizabeth I, is casting aspersions on female rulers in general, for he probably knew that the kingdom of Sparta never accepted a female succession (Spencer 1980: 24). In fact, Calantha had been very determined in her rulings and the definition of 'an ideal female ruler' would have suited her very well. Although as we have seen in, for example, *The Emperor of the East*, the apprehensions about female rule were commonplace.

They were true about the real-life reign of Elizabeth I, too. The iconography created in her honor uplifted her above ordinary women. She was something exceptional, the wonder of women like the fictional Sophonisba. Pulcheria, Calantha, and Sophonisba were virgins, too. We might see some similarities in the worship of Virgin Mary and the classical virgin goddesses. But the early Christian church fathers interpreted Mary's virginity as an endorsement of the moral value of bodily sexual abstinence. To the classical Greeks worshipping their maiden goddesses,

such thought was altogether foreign. Athena's virginity was not morally prescriptive of ascetism, but of wifely fidelity (Warner 1985: 124). Penthea's words about "virgin-wives" and "married maids" (*The Broken Heart* 3.5.52–58) reflect Christian moral values rather than those of ancient Sparta. I cited earlier Roland Huebert's (2003: 84) idea that in Marston virtue consists of renouncing the body and *Sophonisba* is the most chilling representation of this. I find that this thought of renouncing the body suits both Penthea and Calantha, too. Penthea starves herself to death and Calantha dies of broken heart. Calantha seems to will her death, because she does not want to live when Ithocles is dead.

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It is time to turn back to the original question of whether *Sophonisba* influenced the later playwrights in plays like *The Emperor of the East* and *The Broken Heart*. There are able female leaders in all these plays. Pulcheria and Calantha make good decisions and rule wisely, but this does not mean the knowledge of the earlier play would have been necessary to form their characters. The most compelling similarity to *Sophonisba* that I have found is Cleora in *The Bondman* by Philip Massinger. *Sophonisba* is called the Carthage's Palladium and Cleora the genius of her country. These are potent symbols of the female characters. Besides, they both make valiant speeches to encourage the men and, in fact, both wish that they were men so that they could join the army to fight the enemy. But the two plays are so different that most probably these similarities are coincidental.

Pulcheria in *The Emperor of the East* is described with flattering words. Astraea has returned to earth and travelers come from far to see her. This image is so strong that it is difficult to notice that her actions and their results in the play do not quite measure up to the praise. Massinger's Byzantine court is not as holy as *The Holy Court* of his source, neither is his Pulcheria as admirable. I find that the contemporary political aspects of *The Emperor of the East* either comparing Pulcheria to Elizabeth I or Henrietta Maria are more important in interpreting the play than some lingering thoughts about *Sophonisba*.

Both Calantha and Penthea in *The Broken Heart* have characteristics similar to those of *Sophonisba*. Ford's play is not based on any actual historical events, that is why the female protagonists do not have straightforward models either. I do not see any direct verbal links to *Sophonisba* in *The Broken Heart*. Penthea and Calantha resemble *Sophonisba* in a more general way; they represent Stoic fortitude in facing death and renouncing the body. Ford could have used *Sophonisba* in creating his female characters in this play, but I do not think that it is necessary. To sum up, all these playwrights had classical education and they knew the myths and histories well. Massinger and Ford may have known Marston's *Sophonisba*, but it is also pos-

sible that they had no knowledge of its contents. Probably there are more of these valiant women in Jacobean and Caroline drama. It would be an interesting line of research to try to find them. Others who are described like Sophonisba in the prologue:

and now ye worthier minds,  
 To whom we shall present a female glory  
 (The wonder of constancy so fixed,  
 That fate itself might well grow envious),  
 Be pleased to sit.  
 (*Sophonisba* Prol. ll. 19–23)

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