

A REVIEW OF TAMBURLAINE
CRITICISM

Robert Adams

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Abstract

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This thesis attempts to classify all critical work on Marlowe's two Tamburlaine plays.

The criticism as a whole is found to fall into three major categories: that which sees the plays as some kind of Marlovian confession; that which sees them as didactic, often as compositely forming a Morality; and that which is willing to examine the plays as dramatic creations independent of their author. There is clear evidence that the first two categories have been affected by a peculiar critical inability to distinguish between the playwright and his creation. The confusion is increased because of persistent but erroneous accounts of Marlowe as a blasphemous revolutionary.

There is a tentative conclusion that an approach to the Marlovian protagonist as a vision-producing agent might be more profitable than any attempt to analyze him definitively.

I am most grateful to my wife,
Pearl, and to my teacher, Professor
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Chapter 1

THE OPINIONS OF MARLOWE'S CONTEMPORARIES

Baines, Chapman, Cholmeley, Greene, Harvey, Kyd, Nashe, Peele, Raleigh, Shakespeare, and the Privy Council

Most scholarship on Marlowe and on Tamburlaine has made considerable reference to the attitudes of his contemporaries to both the man and his work, and any study of Marlovian criticism should first examine what is known of these opinions.

The most celebrated is that contained in the Baines document, "A Note Containing the Opinion of one Christopher Marlye Concerning his Damnable Judgement of Religion and Scorn of God's Word,"¹ handed in to the Star Chamber on 1 June 1593. Baines alleged that Marlowe had declared Christ a bastard and His mother dishonest and the purpose of religion to keep men in awe. Marlowe was also accused of converting one Richard Cholmeley to atheism and of attempting to persuade men "not to be afeard of bugheares and hobgoblins."

It is significant that the document was not submitted until two days after Marlowe's death² when the possibility of a refutation no longer existed. Baines' credibility is also in doubt. Philip Henderson claims him to have been a paid informer who had at one point planned to poison an entire seminary at Rheims.

¹Rpt. in Paul H. Kocher, "Marlowe's Atheist Lecture," JEGP, 24 (1940), 98-106.

²J. B. Steane, ed., Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays (London: Penguin, 1969), p.12.

³And Morning in his Eyes (London: Boriswood, 1937), p.11.

John Bakeless and A. H. Bullen both identify him as a man later hanged at Tyburn.⁴ Alexander Dyce points out that the document also refers to Marlowe's claim "that he had as good a right to coin as the Queen of England," and that, in the light of this ludicrous lumping together of accusations, the total document must be found "utterly incredible."⁵

The Richard Cholmeley referred to is dismissed briefly by Ellis-Fermor as "a notorious character and an informer."⁶

An attack similar to that of Baines was made by Thomas Kyd. Referring to papers found in his room in May 1593 which were thought atheistic by the officials, Kyd protested under examination in June that they were Marlowe's and had lain there since the two had shared rooms two years earlier.⁷ "Nothing seems more improbable when we read them," says Ellis-Fermor.⁸

Kyd continued his condemnation in a letter to Sir John Puckering in which he describes Marlowe as "intemperate and of a cruel harte,"⁹ but both his evidence and his letter followed Marlowe's death and are therefore subject to the same doubts as the Baines document. M. E. Prior finds it hard to accept that Kyd would lie "in matters so easily

⁴Bakeless, The Tragical History of Christopher Marlowe (1942; rpt. Cam. Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1964), I, 112; A. H. Bullen, ed., The Works of Christopher Marlowe (London: Nimmo, 1885), I, lxix.

⁵Dyce, ed., The Works of Christopher Marlowe (London: Routledge, 1850), p. 389.

⁶Una Ellis-Fermor, ed., Tamburlaine the Great, vol. III of The Works and Life of Christopher Marlowe, 6 vols., gen. ed. R. H. Case (London: Methuen, 1930), p. 158.

⁷F. P. Wilson, Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953), p. 42.

⁸Christopher Marlowe (London: Methuen, 1927), p. 7.

⁹Rpt. in C. F. Tucker-Brooke, The Life of Marlowe and Dido Queen of Carthage, vol. I of Case's edn. of The Life and Works of Marlowe (London: Methuen, 1930), appx. xii, pp. 107-108.

checked,¹⁰ but nothing seems more likely than that a man under capital threat would attempt to divert attention onto a dead man already under suspicion. Cholmeley's claim that "he [Marlowe] hath read the atheist lecture to Sir Walter Raleigh and others"¹¹ may be seen in the same light.

One interpretation of the Kyd-Baines attack is that of Bakeless: "Kyd and Baines both seem to have been persons likely to be easily shocked and one strongly suspects Marlowe ... of having deliberately set out to shock them."¹²

It is difficult to understand how some critics have been able to base a whole Marlowe-is-Tamburlaine-is-atheist criticism largely on the dubious Baines-Kyd testimony. Not all are as approving as John Ingram, with his rather hysterical description of Marlowe as "this youthful ringleader of freethought, this champion of revolutionary upheaval against countless centuries of mental oppression,"¹³ but most of this school are as certain as F. S. Boas that, "out of the statements of Baines and Kyd taken together, ... a fairly consistent picture can be framed."¹⁴

The only major attack on Marlowe and his work during his lifetime was that made by Greene. First he linked "mad and scoffing poets" with "that atheist Tamburlan daring God out of Heaven,"¹⁵ and then, in his Grqats-worth of Witte (1592), published after his death by Chettle, attacked

¹⁰ Review of Battenhouse's Tamburlaine, Modern Philology, 40 (1943), 289.

¹¹q.v. Ellis-Fermor; Christopher Marlowe, p.159.

¹²Tragicall History, I, 113.

¹³Christopher Marlowe and his Associates (London: Grant Richards, 1904), p.12.

¹⁴Marlowe and his Circle (1929; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), p.76; see also, inter alia, Paul Kocher, "Marlowe's Atheist Lecture," pp.98 ff.; Mario Praz, "Christopher Marlowe," English Studies, 13 (1931), 209.

¹⁵"Peridemes the Blacksmith" (1588), rpt. in Life and Complete Works of Robert Greene, ed. A. B. Grosart (1881-88; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), VII, 8.

Marlowe's "pestilential Machiavellian policy."¹⁶

Bakeless points out that Greene was known to be jealous of Marlowe,¹⁷ and Ellis-Fermor labels the Machiavellian thrust as merely calculated to "appeal to popular sentiment."¹⁸ For Marlowe's contemporaries, "Inglese Italfanato è un diavolo incarnato."¹⁹ She further asserts that Greene "knew nothing of Marlowe's opinions beyond widespread rumour."²⁰

A childish jealousy of Marlowe was certainly evident in the work of Gabriel Harvey from his reference in the "New Letter of Notable Contents" (1593) to

He that nor feared God, nor dreaded Diu'll
Nor ought admired, but his wondrous selfe
and from the last line of his sonnet "Gorgon, or the Wonderfulle Yeare" (1593), "Weepe, Powles, thy Tamburlaine voutsafes to dye."²¹

But we have Bakeless' assurance that Harvey was considered by his contemporaries, even by Greene, as a "vainglorious ass."²²

What is remarkable in his contemporaries' feelings towards Marlowe is not that he should have been attacked by the jealous, by those in fear of their lives, or by informers, but that so much comment on his work and on his character should be favourable. As Bakeless says, "contemporaries in the Elizabethan theatre, who were ever wont to gibe at one another, ... usually kept a special note of

¹⁶Rpt. in Grosart's Greene, XII, 141-42.

¹⁷Tragicall History, I, 185.

¹⁸Christopher Marlowe, p.162.

¹⁹T. M. Pearce, "Marlowe and Castiglione," MLQ, 12 (1951), 11.

²⁰Christopher Marlowe, p.161.

²¹q.v. F. G. Hubbard, "Possible Evidence for the Date of Tamburlaine," PMLA, 33 (1918), 436-437.

²²Tragicall History, I, 139.

²³Ibid., I, 185.

admiration and tenderness for Marlowe after his death and even before it."²³

Although Thomas Nashe had ridiculed Marlowe's bragging blank verse and "drumming decasillabons" in the preface attached to Menaphon,²⁴ he nevertheless repudiated Greene's Groat-worth of Witte as a "scald triual lying pamphlet,"²⁵ and referred to "poor deceased Kit Marlowe" in the Prefatory Epistle (1594) to Christs Teares ouer Ierusalem.²⁶

Notwithstanding Ennis Rees' view of Chapman's Blind Beggar of Alexandria (1596) as a satire on Tamburlaine "by an orthodox Christian humanist,"²⁷ the respect Chapman felt for Marlowe is obvious in that Chapman completed the unfinished "Hero and Leander" after Marlowe's death, apparently at Marlowe's suggestion.²⁸ Bullen wonders how the Baines document could be true if Chapman, "distinguished for strictness of his life", cherished Marlowe's memory.²⁹

Peele hailed Marlowe as "Marley the muses' darling for thy verse,"³⁰ and Shakespeare's allusion to the "dead shepherd" (As You Like It III.v.82) is generally accepted as an expression of personal loss,³¹ while Pistol's "hollow

²³ Ibid., I, 185.

²⁴ Grosart's Greene, VI, 10.

²⁵ "A Private Epistle of the Author to the Printer," rpt. in The Works of Thomas Nashe, ed. R. B. McKerrow (1904-10; rpt. Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), II, 180.

²⁶ Nashe, ed. McKerrow, I, 154.

²⁷ "Chapman's Blind Beggar and the Marlovian hero," JEGP, 57 (1958), 60.

²⁸ Tragicall History, I, 185; see also A. H. Bullen, ed., Works of Marlowe, li; Ellis Fermor, Christopher Marlowe, pp.127, 166.

²⁹ Bullen, ed., Works, p.lxix.

³⁰ Prologue to "The Honour of the Honourable Order of the Garter" (1593), rpt. in The Minor Works of George Peele, ed. D. H. Horne (Newhaven: Yale U.P., 1952), p.246.

³¹ Bakeless, Tragicall History, I, 187.

pamper'd jades of Asia" (2 Henry IV I.iv.161) echoes nothing but Tamburlaine's popularity.

It is worthwhile examining briefly the evidence for the date of the writing of both parts of Tamburlaine for there is more evidence here against the view of Marlowe as atheist or iconoclast, at least at the time of composition of the play.

"Greene's reference [to the "Atheist Tamburlan"] ... appears to refer to the fifth act of Part Two. The whole play then seems to have been written by 1587, the year in which Marlowe left Cambridge,"³² says Harper. There is support for both the writing and the production of both parts by the end of the same year. E. K. Chambers quotes from a letter of 16 November 1587 from Philip Gawdy to his father in which reference is made to the accidental shooting of three members of their audience by the Lord Admiral's Men. The scene being played had involved one of the players being tied to a post and shot to death. Chambers can find no other scene than the killing of the Governor of Babylon³³ to fit this description and thus concludes that "both parts of Tamburlaine must have been performed before the end of 1587."³⁴

The major evidence for a later date is that the "fortification" passage (2 Tam. III.ii.53-92) is taken from Paul Ive's Practise of Fortification (1589),³⁵ but Ellis-Fermor concedes that Marlowe could probably have

³²J. W. Harper, ed., Tamburlaine (London: New Mermaid, 1971), p.viii.

³³Tamburlaine, Part Two, ed. Irving Ribner, in The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe (New York: Odyssey, 1963), V.1.108-09. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

³⁴"The Date of Marlowe's Tamburlaine," TLS, 28 August 1930, p.684.

³⁵Bakelég, Tragicall History, I, 210; Ellis-Fermor, ed., Tamburlaine, p.8; Paul H. Kocher, "Marlowe's Art of War," Studies in Philology, 39 (1942), 207-225.

had early access to the Iye manuscript.³⁶

If one accepts the date of production then one must accept that Tamburlaine was written by a candidate for Holy Orders, for "the fact that payments for his [Marlowe's] scholarship continue after he had taken his B.A. shows that he must have intended to take Holy Orders, for the [Arch-bishop] Parker scholarships were only renewable on that condition."³⁷

Swinburne links Marlowe with the "mystic" Francis Kett, a fellow of Corpus Christi and a contemporary of Marlowe's, but the hypothesis of friendship is tentative and, anyway, as Swinburne admits, Kett was burned in 1589 for "a deflection from conventional orthodoxy" and not for atheism.³⁸ Paul Kocher attempts similarly to assign guilt by association by suggesting a connection between Marlowe and Raleigh's "school of night,"³⁹ but Raleigh's only reference to Tamburlaine was to use the fall of Bajazeth as an evidence of God's providence in The History of the World (1614).⁴⁰ There is no record of any direct comment by Raleigh on Marlowe himself, or of any conversation the two may have had together.⁴¹ Kocher listened too eagerly, perhaps, to Cholmeley.

In 1587 the government apparently entertained no doubts about Marlowe's loyalty and orthodoxy. Philip Henderson cites the words of the Privy Council to Corpus Christi that Marlowe's M.A. should be awarded: "it was not Her Majesty's

³⁶Ellis-Fermor, ed., Tamburlaine, p.10.

³⁷Ellis-Fermor, Christopher Marlowe, p.3; see also Roy Battenhouse, "Tamburlaine, the 'Scourge of God'," PMLA, 56 (1941), 342.

³⁸"Marlowe," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1911.

³⁹"Marlowe's Atheist Lecture," pp.100 ff.

⁴⁰Roy Battenhouse, Marlowe's Tamburlaine (1941; rpt. Nashville: Vanderbilt U.P., 1964) p.14.

⁴¹Ellis-Fermor, Christopher Marlowe, p.162; see also Steane, ed., Complete Plays, p.14.

pleasure that anyone employed as he had been in matters touching the benefit of his country should be defamed by those that are ignorant of the affairs he went about."² It was a warning against defamation that later critics were not to heed.

The success of both parts of Tamburlaine, "according to Henslowe's Diary ... among the most popular plays performed at the Rose by the Admiral's Men,"³ is itself a witness to Marlowe's relative conformity. "If they (Marlowe's plays) really are as unqualifiedly atheistic as some historians appear to believe, they could never have received acclaim at a time when the Elizabethan theatre was a genuinely popular institution,"⁴ asserts Willard Thorp.

We know that Marlowe was involved in at least two violent street incidents, in 1589 and 1592, but there is no evidence of Marlowe's being the aggressor.⁵ It is impossible to accept F. R. Boas' assertion that there was "consistent contemporary ... testimony to Marlowe's revolutionary iconoclasm which was bluntly summed up by the Elizabethans as Atheism."⁶ The testimony is not consistent. From the fragmentary and often contradictory evidence it is as easy to make a case for Marlowe as being pro-establishment, both spiritual and temporal, as it is to find proof of revolutionary iconoclasm.

The next chapter will attempt to explain why Marlowe has been so frequently identified with Tamburlaine and as an atheist by the centuries that followed him. If critics

²Christopher Marlowe (London: Longmans, Green, 1956), p.8.

³Rees, "Chapman's Blind Beggar," p.63.

⁴The Triumph of Realism in Elizabethan Drama (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1928), p.40.

⁵Steane, ed., Plays, p.12.

⁶Review of Brooke's Life of Marlowe, MLR, 26 (1931), 461.

must confound the man and the playwright, then Marlowe the man should have been canonized for the writing of Dr. Faustus, of which Leo Kirschbaum says, "there is no more obvious Christian document in all Elizabethan drama."⁷

⁷"Marlowe's Faustus: a Reconsideration," Review of English Studies, 19 (1943), 229.

Chapter 2

ATTITUDES TOWARD MARLOWE IN THE
SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Beard, Drayton, Dryden, Jonson, Meres, Ritson, Rudierde, Vaughan, Warton, and à Wood

In 1597 Thomas Beard, Puritan author of The Theatre of God's Judgement,¹ used Marlowe's death as an example of God's punishment of atheists. He cited the alleged denial of God and Christ from the Baines note, and added the tit-bit that Marlowe had "cursed and blasphemed to his last gasp."

In 1598 Francis Meres took up the Beard version in Palladis Tamia and added a further note that Marlowe was stabbed because of a rivalry over a homosexual serving-man.²

Leslie Hotson's discovery of the coroner's report on Marlowe's death makes nonsense of the Beard-Meres details of blasphemy and homosexuality. Marlowe's death at the hands of Frizer was instantaneous. Also, Frizer retained the favour of his employers, the Walsinghams, after his pardon on the grounds of self-defence.³

The inference of Hotson and Bakeless, that Marlowe was killed by an agent of Audrey Lady Walsingham whom Marlowe had suspected of intrigue with the Scots against the crown, seems reasonable.⁴ Of the homosexual charge Hotson says,

¹Ch. xxv, rpt. in Tucker Brooke, Life of Marlowe, appx.xv. pp.112-13.

²q.v. Bakeless, Tragicall History, I, 148.

³The Death of Christopher Marlowe (1925; rpt. New York: Haskell, 1965), pp.65-67.

⁴Bakeless, Tragicall History, I, 184.

"Frizer was occupied with a suit in Chancery when Meres published his libel or he might have made trouble for the ill-informed and imaginative author."⁵

The view of Marlowe as atheist, blasphemer, and homosexual was repeated by William Vaughan, The Golden Grove (1600), and by Edmund Rudierde, The Thunderbolt of God's Wrath (1618),⁶ but they, like Beard and Meres, were without "any first-hand knowledge of the dramatist's private life or opinions."⁷

It is not difficult to understand the reason for the attack. Marlowe was dead and unable to defend himself and the details were attractively salacious. The Puritans were anti-stage and "quite untroubled by any scrupulousness as to fact."⁸

What is remarkable is that the most extreme of the libels should have persisted for so long. As late as 1963, A. L. Rowse felt able to say that "Marlowe was a well-known homosexual."⁹ Although Rowse does not say so, he may have had in mind some identification of Marlowe with Edward or Gaveston. After a school of criticism has been built up on a fancied identification of Marlowe with Tamburlaine the field seems open. It is almost beyond belief that he could have been thinking seriously of the Meres libel, or of Baines' allegation that Marlowe considered Jesus and John the Baptist to have been bedfellows. If one is going to confuse biography with criticism, then there is surely a duty to ensure at least that the biography is not "a tissue of rumour and misinformation."¹⁰

⁵Death of Marlowe, p.67.

⁶q.v. Irving Ribner, "Marlowe and the Critics," Tulane Drama Review, 8 (1964), 211.

⁷Tragicall History, I, 124.

⁸Ibid., I, 144.

⁹"Historians Answer Questions About Shakespeare," ELS, 18 September 1963, p.482.

¹⁰Ribner, "Marlowe and the Critics," p.213.

Comment by the competent continued to be complimentary throughout the early seventeenth century. Drayton's lines,

his raptures were

All ayr and fire which made his verse cleere,¹¹
 were echoed by Thomas Heywood's "Marlo, renown'd for his rare art and wit."¹² Ben Jonson not only alluded to Marlowe's "mighty line" in the First Folio, but "appears to have used the phrase habitually in conversation."¹³ Jonson's criticism of the "Tamerlanes and Tamer-Chams of the late Age" and their "scenicall strutting and furious vociferation"¹⁴ seems to be a discordant note, but Walter Begley points out that the plural titles may mean that Jonson had been thinking of earlier versions of the Tamburlaine story and not of Marlowe's work.¹⁵

Tamburlaine was certainly still popular with the multitude. Percy Simpson cites writings of the late 1620's which mention that the inmates of London prisons, made to draw dungcarts through the streets, were taunted by the mob with "Holla, ye pampered jades of Asia."¹⁶

Marlowe's plays went the way of all theatre under the Commonwealth and were apparently not revived after the Restoration, which was "repelled by what it regarded as the crudity of Elizabethan plays."¹⁷ Bakeless says that

¹¹"To Henry Reynolds" (1627), rpt. in The Works of Michael Drayton, ed. J.W. Hebel (Oxford: Blackwell, 1932), III, 228-29.

¹²"Hierarchie of the Blessed Angells" (1635), q.v. Bakeless, Tragicall History, I, 188.

¹³Tragicall History, I, 188.

¹⁴Discoveries, q.v. Harry Levin, The Overreacher (Cam. Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1952), p.172.

¹⁵"The Authorship of Tamburlaine and the other Marlowe Plays," Baconiana, 5 (1907), 247-63.

¹⁶"Pampered Jades," TLS, 22 September 1945, p.451.

¹⁷Tyrone Guthrie, "Tamburlaine and What It Takes," Theatre Arts Monthly, 40 (February 1956), 23.

if any version did reach the stage at that time it would certainly have been an 'improvement'.¹⁸

The only Restoration reference to Marlowe was that of Anthony à Wood who, in Athenae Oxonienses (1691), accepted completely the Meres libel even so far as to quoting that Marlowe was stabbed to death "by his Rival, a bawdy serving-man."¹⁹ Ribner points out that Marlowe had so far fallen into obscurity that he "is never mentioned by Dryden, the greatest dramatic critic of his time."²⁰ Levin says, "as a Shakespearean primitive, Marlowe held no position in English literature during the classical period."²¹

Marlowe goes unnoticed for nearly a hundred years until Thomas Warton's History of English Poetry (1781) in which the plays receive faint praise. "His [Marlowe's] tragedies manifest traces of a just dramatic conception, but they abound with tedious and uninteresting scenes, or with such extravagances as proceeded from a want of judgment." At least, Warton sees the atheist attack as the work of "the peevish and prejudiced puritans."²² In his Observations (1782) on Warton's work, however, Joseph Ritson returns to the view of Marlowe as one with "diabolical tenets and debauched morals," printing the Baines note in support.²³

This confusion as to what was the character of Marlowe the man will continue on into the next two centuries and will colour almost all criticism of his plays.

¹⁸ Tragicall History, I, 203.

¹⁹ q.v. Critics of Marlowe, ed. J. O'Neill (Coral Gables, Fla.: U. of Miami Press, 1970), p.14.

²⁰ "Marlowe and the Critics," p.212.

²¹ Overreacher, p.11.

²² q.v. Critics on Marlowe, ed. O'Neill, p.14.

²³ Ibid., p.15.

Chapter 3

THE VIEW OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Bullen, Drake, Dyce, Havelock Ellis, Hallam, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Lamb, Swinburne, Symonds, and Taine

Lamb is apparently the first nineteenth century critic to rediscover Marlowe, but his praise is reserved for the "poignancy of Edward II." He discounts the libels of Beard et al., and any identification of Marlowe with Tamburlaine because of the Koran burning (2 Tam. V.i.174). "The holiest minds have sometimes not thought it blameable to counterfeit impiety in the person of another." Of Tamburlaine itself his only comment is, "I had ... difficulty in culling a few sane lines from this ... play."¹

Lamb's praise of Edward II and dismissal of Tamburlaine were echoed almost exactly by Nathan Drake, but in Drake we see the continued acceptance of the libels in his reference to "the vice and infidelity" of Marlowe's life.²

Hazlitt offers a most interesting paradox. On the one hand, "there is a lust of power in his (Marlowe's) writings, a hunger and thirst after unrighteousness, a glow of the imagination, unhallowed by anything but its own energies"; on the other, "I cannot find in Marlowe's plays any proofs of the atheism or impiety attributed to him."³ Hazlitt

¹ "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets," (1808), rpt. in The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb, ed. E. V. Lucas (London: Methuen, 1904), IV, 24, 34, 17.

² Shakespeare and his Times (1817; rpt. 2 vols. in 1, New York: Franklin, 1969), pp. 462-63.

³ "Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth" (1820), rpt. in The Collected Works of William Hazlitt, ed. A.R. Waller and A. Glover (London: Dent, 1902), V, 202, 207.

makes no specific reference to Tamburlaine and, regrettably, there is no attempt to resolve the paradox.

The opinions of Lamb and Drake as to the success of Edward II and the failure of Tamburlaine are repeated by Henry Hallam, but he pays the first nineteenth-century tribute to the "blank verse which became in his hands the finest instrument that the tragic poet has ever employed."⁴

Although Hazlitt had hinted at it, Leigh Hunt was the first to define Marlowe as a "Romantic." "He [Marlowe] perceived things in their spiritual as well as material relations ... and struck them as with something sweet and glowing that rushes by." Hunt was not, though, totally approving of Marlowe. "His plays abound in wilful and self-worshipping speeches."⁵

The first recorded praise of Tamburlaine, not only in the nineteenth century but actually since its creation, was that of the Reverend Alexander Dyce in 1850.

"With very little discrimination of character, with much extravagance of incident, with no pathos where pathos was to be expected, and with a profusion of inflated language, Tamburlaine is nevertheless a very impressive drama ... in the effectiveness with which the events are brought out, in the poetic feeling which animates the whole and in the verve and variety of the versification."⁶

There is no detailed examination of the play but we are spared any Tamburlaine-Marlowe identification.

Such identification was to come with Hippolyte Taine, and his acceptance of the Beard-Meres libel is obvious. The Marlovian protagonist, particularly Tamburlaine, he

⁴Introduction to the Literature of Europe in the Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Centuries (1834; rpt. 4 vols. in 2, New York: Crowell, 1880), II, 265-68.

⁵Imagination and Fancy: Selections from the English Poets (1844; rpt. London: Smith, Elder, 1845), pp. 136-37.

⁶Dyce, ed., The Works of Christopher Marlowe, p. xix.

sees as "the primitive and genuine man, hot-headed, fiery, the slave of his passions." Marlowe himself "denies God and Christ, blasphemes the Trinity, ... and made love to a drab."⁷ Taine's concept of the protagonist is clearly influenced by his acceptance of a distorted view of Marlowe the man.

Taine's confusion of Tamburlaine and Marlowe will set the tone for the remainder of the century. J. H. Symonds sees the plays as "day-dreams of their maker's deep desires,"⁸ and Marlowe's principle as "l'amour de l'impossible."⁹ Such an opinion can only be based on a supposedly detailed knowledge of Marlowe's private life.

Symonds made two additional and original points, however, which were to become commonplaces of certain twentieth-century criticism. Marlowe, he said, was in technique only a step away from the Moralities and was no more than preparing the way for Shakespeare. Further, the characteristic of Marlowe was the characteristic of his age, the urge "to spontaneity and freedom."¹⁰

It is Bullen who brings together the few strands of nineteenth-century criticism. He accepts the view of Marlowe as the creator of English blank verse and the definition of the playwright as a Romantic. He repeats the atheist charge, "Marlowe ... abandoned Christianity," though he doubts the total truth of the Baines document in the light of Chapman's friendship. The same identification of Tamburlaine with Marlowe that Taine saw is implicit in Bullen's agreement with Symonds on Marlowe's

⁷ History of English Literature, trans. H. Van Laun (New York: Holt, 1887), I, 279, 271-72.

⁸ Shakespeare's Predecessors in the English Drama (1883; rpt. New York: Cooper Square, 1967), p.485.

⁹ Introduction to Christopher Marlowe: Five Plays, ed. Havelock Ellis (1887; rpt. New York: Hill & Wang, 1956), p.xxvii.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp.xv, xiii.

"amour de l'impossible," which Bullen elaborates into "an intense aspiration for ideal beauty and ideal power."¹¹

Of Marlowe the dramatic craftsman Bullen says, "he did not pause to polish his lines ... but was borne swiftly onward by the wings of his imagination," but adds, "that he was responsible for vulgar touches of low comedy I am loth to allow,"¹² believing no doubt that Richard Jones had not expurgated all the players' additions.

The final word of the nineteenth century, and a reasonable summary of its findings, is that of Havelock Ellis, who makes an absolute identification of playwright and protagonist. "He (Marlowe) is his own hero and the sanguinary Scythian utters the deepest secrets of his own heart." Of Tamburlaine's "and ride in triumph through Persepolis" (1 Tam. II.v.50), Ellis says, "with this song of radiant joy in the unattainable, young Kit Marlowe ... sailed to discover countries yet unknown."¹³

Swinburne's entry on Marlowe in the eleventh Britannica adds nothing to the body of criticism other than to praise the mighty line while damning the play: "the majestic and exquisite excellence of various lines and passages in Marlowe's first play must be admitted to relieve, if it cannot be allowed to redeem, the stony monotony of Titanic truculence which blusters like a simoon through the noisy course of its ten fierce acts."

With little dissenting opinion, other than that of Lamb, the nineteenth century therefore accepted an

¹¹A. H. Bullen, ed., The Works of Christopher Marlowe I, ix, xix, lxviii, lxix.

¹²Ibid., I, lxxii, xix-xx. B.A.P. Van Dam, "Marlowe's Tamburlaine," English Studies, 16 (1934), 1-17, 49-58, makes an argument that our Tamburlaine is a corrupt text because of the frequent departures from the decasyllabic line without apparent need, as in the lines "Women must be flattered/But this is she with whom I am in love" (1 Tam. I.ii.7-8).

¹³Ellis, ed., Marlowe: Five Plays, pp. xxii-xxiii.

autobiographical theory of Tamburlaine that is based
absolutely on a belief that Greene, Kyd, Baines, Beard,
and Meres had told the truth.

Chapter 4

THE CULT OF YOUTH

Dodds, Ellis-Fermor, Ingram, and Seaton

It was John H. Ingram who first stressed Marlowe's youth as an important factor to consider in any appreciation of Tamburlaine. "In Tamburlaine, written with the freshness of youth, Marlowe not only gives untrammelled scope to his imagination, but bares his very inmost mind to our gaze, dauntlessly proclaiming by the mouths of his dramatic puppets his own opinions."¹ He also quite clearly concurs with the Romantic autobiographical theory of the last century, based as it was on falsehood. Ingram's view of Marlowe as a free-thinking revolutionary has already been noted,² but it is difficult to reconcile such an opinion with the highly orthodox views expressed elsewhere in Marlowe's work. Hell is the absence of God (Faustus I.iii. 76), says the surprisingly Christian Mephistopheles, a creature of Marlowe's as much as was Tamburlaine. Leslie Spence, however, is unfair to Ingram to see him as "largely responsible for the Tamburlaine is Marlowe myth."³ Ingram had the weight of at least a century of inaccurate criticism to distort his approach.

Possibly encouraged by Ingram's example, Ellis-Fermor does not hesitate to dwell on Marlowe's youth and to make of it the cornerstone of her criticism. Tamburlaine, she says, "is the everlasting embodiment of the unslaked

¹Christopher Marlowe and his Associates, pp.110-11.

²See above, Ch. 1.

³"Tamburlaine and Marlowe," PMLA, 42 (1927), 604.

aspiration of youth."⁴ She goes further, "to understand Marlowe demands eternal youth,"⁵ in a gambit which would disqualify scholars past adolescence.

She says, "Marlowe appears to have been on the verge of formulating the idea that the spirit and desire of man are ... God in man. The conception ... is startlingly modern or at least startlingly independent of his contemporaries."⁶ The idea, then, is that Tamburlaine is youth, driven to realize a potential it feels is God-like. The drive is apparently doomed to failure. Tamburlaine is "a character who can, by the very nature of his being, only have a first part ... there are certain instincts and desires at work ... that are so wholly things of the spirit that to pursue them to realization is not within the power of human thought."⁷ Thus the boyish dream, pursued so extravagantly in Part One, must inevitably fail in Part Two as Marlowe begins "to perceive the discrepancy between his dream of the life of action and the world of practical life." Part Two becomes "an overstrained repetition and exaggeration, a vigorous but futile effort to stimulate a tired imagination."⁸ Initially, she feels, "there is something winning--almost childishness--in his (Tamburlaine's) eagerness for the great battle,"⁹ but, with the sweep of victory, the hero becomes "unbalanced now rather than superhuman ... (because of) this increasing insanity."¹⁰ Tamburlaine has apparently dreamed the impossible dream.

⁴Ellis-Fermor, ed., Tamburlaine, p.39.

⁵Christopher Marlowe, p.24.

⁶Ibid., p.33.

⁷Ibid., p.39.

⁸Ellis-Fermor, ed., Tamburlaine, p.53.

⁹Christopher Marlowe, p.26.

¹⁰Ibid., p.40.

Ellis-Fermor feels that that part of us which is eternally a child dreaming of omnipotence is clearly meant to identify with Tamburlaine. Bajazeth is presented "as a self indulgent, headstrong Oriental, thus leaving Tamburlaine secure in our undivided sympathy."¹¹ We are meant to forgive the excesses of youth. "Marlowe is a very young man... still too immature to know the meaning of civilization... who tumbles down lightheartedly the towers of Babylon."¹² When the cruelty of the pursuit of the dream becomes impossible to ignore, Ellis-Fermor has other explanations. Such episodes as the killing of the Governor of Babylon, or the slaying of the Virgins, are "meretricious devices for holding the attention,"¹³ and are "irrelevant to the too simple original theme."¹⁴ The cruelty anyway "has a strange perverse beauty of its own."¹⁵

As a drama Tamburlaine is dismissed. It must be "to us what it primarily was to Marlowe, a poem of escape."¹⁶ By choosing to realize on stage his own dream, "Marlowe had committed himself to a theme that was in its essence undramatic."¹⁷ Marlowe, she alleges, "is distinguished for... an essentially undramatic indifference to normal human experience and variations... which are the fundamental preoccupation of the born dramatist."¹⁸

Ellis-Fermor's argument for the autobiographical quality of Tamburlaine is an interesting one. It is based,

¹¹ Ellis-Fermor, ed., Tamburlaine, p.40.

¹² Ibid., pp.49-50.

¹³ Christopher Marlowe, p.46.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.45.

¹⁵ Ellis-Fermor, ed., Tamburlaine, p.49.

¹⁶ Christopher Marlowe, p.25.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.45.

¹⁸ Review of Battenhouse's Tamburlaine, MLR, 38 (1943), 48.

not on the libels which so attracted the nineteenth century, but on the belief that the intensity of Tamburlaine's speeches suggests that they embody Marlowe's own thought.¹⁹ She sees Tamburlaine's soliloquy on the aspiring mind and the climbing soul (1 Tam. II.vii.12-29) as "the noblest lines he ever wrote" and, because of their intensity, as reflecting Marlowe's own sentiment.²⁰ But argument by intensity is dangerous. The same soliloquy that so attracted Ellis-Fermor was labelled "Scythian bathos" by Havelock Ellis.²¹ Similarly, Calyphas' argument against the cult of arms (2 Tam. IV.i) which amazed the Feaseys with its "ungovernable vitality,"²² and which Kocher saw as "eighty incredible lines,"²³ caused M. Hope Dodds, Ellis-Fermor's own reviewer, to see Calyphas as "little more than a repetition of the foolish Mycetes."²⁴ Intensity is quite clearly in the eye of the beholder.

The urge to identify playwright and protagonist brings Ellis-Fermor to even shakier ground. She describes Bajazeth's reference to the "superstitious bells" of the Christians (1 Tam. III.iii.237) as Marlowe's own attack on Christianity,²⁵ but, as Battenhouse points out, it shows no more than a knowledge by Marlowe of the prohibitions of Islam.²⁶ If Marlowe is to be both Tamburlaine and Bajazeth, then one wonders if he may not also be found in Gaveston, Mephistopheles, and Zenocrate.

¹⁹Ibid., pp.47-48.

²⁰Christopher Marlowe, p.29.

²¹Havelock Ellis, ed., Five Plays, p.xxiii.

²²L. and E. Feasey, "Marlowe and the Homilies," Notes and Queries, 195 (1950), 7.

²³Christopher Marlowe (Chapel Hill: U. of N. Carolina Press, 1964), p.275.

²⁴Review of Ellis-Fermor's edn. of Tamburlaine, MLR, 26 (1931), 189.

²⁵Ellis-Fermor, ed., Tamburlaine, p.77

²⁶Marlowe's Tamburlaine, p.2.

The weaknesses of Ellis-Fermor's approach are evident. The Feaseys discuss extensively the savagery of the play, pointing out the realism of its detail,²⁷ and it cannot be dismissed as the stuff of a boyish dream which will come to grief.

Only two other twentieth-century critics have agreed with Ellis-Fermor and Ingram on the central importance of Marlowe's youth.

Ethel Seaton, in her most thorough examination of Marlowe's use of available cosmography, comments upon "the delicate precision of the draughtsman,"²⁸ in itself a denial of the unpolished Romantic spontaneity that the nineteenth century had seen,²⁹ but is yet so influenced by an image of Marlowe the youth that she can say, in contradiction, that his parade of geography could have been "a final effervescence of boyishness, of satisfaction in youthful cleverness ... pardonable in a young graduate of twenty-four."³⁰

The final comment is that of M. Hope Dodds. Ellis-Fermor, she says, "is too cautious to go further and say that Tamburlaine is Marlowe setting out upon the literary conquest of London, though this is an inference which the reader finds almost irresistible."³¹

The youth cultists have reached absurdity and no further comment seems needed.

²⁷L. and E. Feasey, "Marlowe and the Prophetic Dooms," Notes and Queries, 195 (1950), 405.

²⁸"Marlowe's Map," Essays and Studies, 10 (1924), 34.

²⁹See, inter alia, Bullen, ed., Works, p.xix.

³⁰"Marlowe's Map," p.34.

³¹Review of Ellis-Fermor's edn., p.188.

Chapter 5

MARLOWE: ATHEIST AND ICONOCLAST

F. S. Boas, Grierson, Knoll, Kocher, Poirier, Steane, and Thorp

Just as Ellis-Fermor's school sees Tamburlaine as Marlowe the youth, so there is a school that stresses Tamburlaine as Marlowe the atheist. The least compromising of these is Paul H. Kocher, "the ablest advocate of the subjectivity of Marlowe's plays."¹ He cites the testimony of Baines and Kyd as providing the foundation of his theory.² He claims that Marlowe "talked with the serious purpose ... of making converts," but he accepts flimsy evidence, "numerous rumours that Marlowe regarded himself as a prophet."³

Kocher argues that Tamburlaine is a deliberately anti-Christian play, with the Scourge concept merely a dramatic device, "an opportunistic afterthought," and that Marlowe used the camouflage of formal design to mask his iconoclastic attacks.⁴ Tamburlaine and Marlowe both serve a God of Force whose service is characterized by "a desire for power, unchecked by morality."⁵

"There is in effect only one character in the drama and that is Tamburlaine who is fundamentally Marlowe. The other characters awake to temporary life only when they become like Tamburlaine ... in brief, Marlowe is here not

¹Wilson, Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare, p.47.

²Christopher Marlowe, p.114.

³"Marlowe's Atheist Lecture," p.105.

⁴Christopher Marlowe, pp.79, 114.

⁵Ibid., p.71.

a creator of character but a recorder of his own inner experience which he distributes among his dramatis personae without transmuting and individualizing it as a dramatist should." Calyphas therefore is a coward who exists merely to emphasize Tamburlaine's bravery. Any emotion the audience may feel at the treatment of the virgins or of Bajazeth is no more than "an undercurrent which in a sense really accentuates by contrast the dominant reactions of devotion and awe." Kocher even applies his theory to Faustus, concluding that "we know the Bad Angell in Dr. Faustus is speaking for Marlowe himself."⁶

But Kocher, in forcing the facts to fit his theory, disregards any evidence that does not suit him. Orcanes movingly affirms the existence of a transcendent god (2 Tam. II.ii.49-64); Mephistopheles' hell is very real; and there can be no doubt of the agony of Faustus, unable finally to touch the God whose reality he has never doubted.

J. B. Steane takes the God of Force idea and makes of it a more complex theology than Kocher attempted. Steane considers both parts of Tamburlaine a "glorification" of the protagonist in a "predominantly and profoundly anti-Christian" sense. Tamburlaine transcends death, Steane argues, because, if death were intended as a defeat, Tamburlaine would "succumb, broken and abject ... but ... Tamburlaine ends as he began, in glory."⁷

The glorification is not merely of the Scythian but of the "god within him,"⁸ for, "in his superabundance of energy, he comes near to the essential being of this god."⁹

⁶Ibid., pp.83-84, 114, 184, 304.

⁷Steane, ed., Plays, pp.21-22.

⁸Ibid., p.22.

⁹Steane, Marlowe: A Critical Study (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1964), p.115.

Steane continues, "God is the great unseen actor, felt increasingly as a force, ... and, throughout, Tamburlaine is his scourge and there is no sense that his purpose and morality differ from those of his instrument."¹⁰

Briefly, God is "the Fascist spirit."¹¹

Oddly, Steane accepts that Orcanes' prayer is answered, and that the burning of the Koran causes Tamburlaine's death, but attributes the theological confusion to Marlowe's "divided and agonized mind," torn between the God of his tradition and the God of his creation.¹² Praz will use the same technique to escape from the difficulties of his own interpretation.¹³ An imagined confusion on the part of the writer is an ever present help in time of critical trouble.

Kocher's opinion is strikingly similar to that expressed in the later work of F. S. Boas who also accepts the Baines-Kyd picture of Marlowe.¹⁴ The playwright, Boas says, was "a propagandist, provocative explosive force ... a rationalist intelligence beating its destructive way through all that was held in reverential awe by its contemporaries."¹⁵ Of the protagonist Tamburlaine, he "throbbed with a stupendous vitality that made him the fitting mouthpiece of the dramatist's own tumultuous energies and aspirations."¹⁶ One of the proofs of atheism offered by Boas is that "no avenging ghosts dog the

¹⁰ Ibid., p.114.

¹¹ Ibid., p.83

¹² Ibid., pp.115-16.

¹³ See below, Ch. 8.

¹⁴ Marlowe and his Circle, p.76; and Boas, Review of Tucker Brooke's Life of Marlowe, MLR, 26 (1931), 461.

¹⁵ Marlowe and his Circle, pp.77-78.

¹⁶ Christopher Marlowe (1940; rpt. London: Oxford U.P., 1960), p.76.

footsteps of the Scythian conqueror."¹⁷

It may indeed be true that Tamburlaine's death is not a punishment for blasphemy,¹⁸ but it is equally true that the death of Faustus is certainly a punishment for pride. When Tamburlaine mocks Mahomet (2 Tam. V.i.176-200), Boas concludes that this is Marlowe himself, "in realistic derision of direct divine intervention in human affairs."¹⁹ But it would be as reasonable to conclude that it is Marlowe himself who is making Orcanes' affirmation of a god who has the power to defeat Sigismund's host (2 Tam. II.ii.49-64), or even that it is Marlowe who asserts, with Tamburlaine, of the Christian God that "He is God alone and none but He" (2 Tam. V.i.200).

H. J. C. Grierson makes the same error as Kocher and Boas. He refers to "Marlowe's definitely anti-religious temper" and concludes that "in the dramas of Marlowe there is ... a passionate spirit of resistance to accepted conventions and beliefs."²⁰ Such a conclusion is based solely upon a distorted view of Tamburlaine and ignores the fall of proud Faustus and of homosexual Edward.

The reliance of Kocher, Boas, and Grierson on Kyd and Baines is pointed up by Michel Poirier, another acceptor of the atheist libel, who says, "if he (Marlowe) took up the pen, it was above all to satisfy the need of expressing his profoundest aspirations. While he attempts to realize his ambition in real life he makes it at the same time the plaything of his imagination." Poirier does not attempt to reconcile this with our sure knowledge of the roles of

¹⁷Shakespeare and his Predecessors (1896; rpt. New York: Greenwood, 1969), p.45.

¹⁸See also Harper, ed., Tamburlaine, p.xix, where an argument that the hero's death is non-retributive is part of a totally different theory (see below, Ch. 15).

¹⁹Christopher Marlowe, p.98.

²⁰Cross-Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century (1929; rpt. New York: Harper, 1958), pp.86,103.

Marlowe as divinity student and as Privy Council protégé. "With egotism as his first and last principle," Poirier claims, "Marlowe has no other interest but the worship and expansion of his personality."²¹ Poirier cannot know what Marlowe's first principle was; the only conclusion we can come to, from the evidence of the punishment of Faustus, is that it was not likely to have been egotism.

Willard Thorp provides an interesting variation on the atheist theme. He accepts, with only minor reservations, the Baines-Kyd story, but suggests that Marlowe was afraid to let his atheism permeate his plays.²² Marlowe's problem apparently lay in "finding some means by which he could speak out his Schmerz without alienating his audience."²³

Poirier dismissed the appeal of Tamburlaine as being based on "the more ignoble instincts of the audience,"²⁴ but Thorp believes that the audience would not have accepted anything short of orthodoxy.²⁵ Faustus, he says, is "actually a morality," and he finds three specifically Christian references in the two parts of Tamburlaine: the punishment of the oath-breaker Sigismund (2 Tam. II.iii.1-3), Tamburlaine's promise to free the Christian slaves (1 Tam. III.iii.46-47), and Olympia's spectacular chastity followed by Theridamas' remorse (2 Tam. IV.iv.81-98).²⁶ The only evidence of Marlowe's atheism that Thorp can find in either part of Tamburlaine is the "outrageousness" of Tamburlaine's general behaviour, acceptable to the audience because of their "belief that (the historical) Tamburlaine was God's

²¹ Christopher Marlowe (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951), pp.44-45.

²² The Triumph of Realism, pp.42-43.

²³ "The Ethical Problem in Marlowe's Tamburlaine," JEGP, 29 (1930), 386.

²⁴ Poirier, Marlowe, p.99.

²⁵ "Ethical Problem," p.388.

²⁶ Triumph of Realism, pp.47-48.

instrument in punishing the heathen."²⁷

The argument is ingenious but it is obvious that, had he not been aware of the Baines-Kyd libel, Thorp would have seen Marlowe as an orthodox Christian dramatist.

Robert E. Knoll considers the two parts of Tamburlaine as "two plays glorifying one aspect of the irrational revolutionary spirit ... the love of unrestrained power,"²⁸ a fair restatement of Kocher's theory of the worship of a God of Force. He accepts Thorp's theory that Marlowe wished to "speak out his Schmerz," but feels, unlike Thorp, that Marlowe found a way to do so. We accept Tamburlaine's power, Knoll argues, because Tamburlaine is preferable to Bajazeth, who is "more violent, more bloody, and more vindictive," and because Tamburlaine shows none of the hypocrisy of Sigismund.²⁹ Thus, because of the juxtaposition of Tamburlaine with even greater horrors, we are seduced into accepting the unacceptable. "The plays are immoral," fumes Knoll, "for they persuade us to applaud what is despicable."³⁰

Knoll's explanation is tempting, but it must fail because ultimately it rests upon the false assumption that we know Marlowe's personal philosophy.

²⁷ "Ethical Problem," p.388.

²⁸ Christopher Marlowe (New York: Twayne, 1969), p.68.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.49.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.68.

Chapter 6

MARLOWE IS TAMBURLAINE IS MACHIAVELLI

Bakeless, Brereton, Jump, Pearce, and Ribner

Although a number of critics have made passing reference to Marlowe's indebtedness to some of the teachings of Machiavelli,¹ only five have seen Tamburlaine primarily as a Machiavellian hero voicing Marlowe's own convictions.

T. M. Pearce claims that Tamburlaine has all the qualities of the Italian model of the scholar-warrior-courtier, the love of poetry and music, and the virtue that derives, in the Machiavellian sense, from his own essence.² Further, the speech on the "aspiring minds" (1 Tam. II.vii, 12-29) which Ellis-Fermor saw as the noblest lines Marlowe ever wrote³ is, in Pearce's opinion, worldly and based on the Machiavellian doctrine of an universe of continual warfare and survival of the fittest.⁴ Pearce sees the didacticism of Tamburlaine so clearly as to argue that Part Two is special pleading for "added discipline in the education of English youth," and that Tamburlaine's education of his sons must be accepted literally as Marlowe's own propaganda for "training in arms and physical skills along with intellectual and moral studies."⁵

¹See, inter alia, Mario Praz, "Christopher Marlowe," p.21; Levin, Overreacher, p.56.

²"Marlowe and Castiglione," p.11.

³Christopher Marlowe, p.29.

⁴"Christopher Marlowe--Figure of the Renaissance," U. of New Mexico Bulletin, No. 1 (March 1934), p.15.

⁵"Tamburlaine's 'Discipline to His Three Sonnes'," MLQ, 15 (1954), 24, 27.

Bakeless is equally categoric. "Tamburlaine ... (is) an example of Machiavellian thirst for power at all costs,"⁶ explaining the play's appeal in terms of audience sympathy with "the longing grasp for things impossible."⁷ Bakeless never doubts the Tamburlaine-Marlowe identification; "Marlowe is the least adept of dramatists in concealing himself. All his characters are Marlowe as all Shaw's characters are Shaw."⁸ There is unfortunately no attempt to fit either The Good Angel or Mephistopheles into this theory. Bakeless reaches his conclusion not because of the Baines-Kyd testimony, which he rejects,⁹ but by seizing upon the personal possessive adjectives of such lines as

What daring God torments my body thus
And seeks to conquer mighty Tamburlaine?
(2 Tam. V.iii.42-43).¹⁰

It is clearly an extremely selective approach and one which could conceivably provide any desired conclusion.

The difference between Pearce and Bakeless is the degree to which each considers that Marlowe was in control of his material. Implicit in Pearce's criticism is a belief in Marlowe's carefully planned didacticism, while Bakeless feels that "Marlowe never suspects that his magnificent chieftain is at bottom a bloody and useless brute."¹¹ But then, "Marlowe's gift was primarily lyric rather than dramatic."¹²

Seizing upon "vertu solely is (the sum of glory" (1 Tam. V.ii.126), J. LeGay Brereton says that Tamburlaine "is a colossal embodiment of his (Marlowe's) idea of the

⁶Tragicall History, I, 347.

⁷Ibid., I, 243.

⁸Ibid., I, 140.

⁹Ibid., I, pp.113 ff.

¹⁰Christopher Marlowe: the Man in his Time (New York: Morrow, 1937), pp.8, 109-110.

¹¹Ibid., p.11.

¹²Tragicall History, I, 189.

Machiavellian man of virtue,"¹³ and dwells at some length on the central theme of the plays as being the rise from rags to riches by one whose birth was no blemish.

No one can doubt from the "vertu" reference that Marlowe was aware of Machiavellian thought, but to make it the focus of appreciation seems unjustified. Spence makes a telling refutation of the Machiavellian theory. "It is evident that Marlowe did not have The Prince in mind, for his Tamburlaine is much farther from the Machiavellian ideal of princely conduct than was the Tamburlaine of Marlowe's sources (Mexia's Sylva de Varia Lecion (Seville, 1543), and Perondinus' Vita Magni Tamerlanis (Florence, 1551), according to Spence, though Izard would not agree)¹⁴ who, in killing not only his royal benefactor but the king's two sons as well, exemplified the principles advocated by Machiavelli."¹⁵

Tamburlaine would have saved himself much grief if he had killed Callapine. Macbeth, of course, made the same error, but no one has seriously claimed that Macbeth is a Machiavellian study.

¹³"Marlowe's Dramatic Art Studied in his Tamburlaine," in Writings on Elizabethan Drama, coll. R. G. Howarth (Melbourne: Lothian, 1948), p.71. John D. Jump, ed., Tamburlaine the Great: Parts I and II, pp.xv-xxii, has a view corresponding almost exactly with that of Brereton, though Jump declares himself to be in general agreement with the "Fascist" theory of Steane (see above, Ch. 5).

¹⁴Thomas C. Izard finds much of the scholarship on Tamburlaine's sources unnecessary. He criticizes Ellis-Fermor for dignifying Fortescue's version (1571) of Mexia as an appendix in her edition, pp.286-97, and Bakeless for seeking out esoteric Scourge references, Tragicall History, I, 125. "All this information was to be had in the none too elegant but perfectly clear English of The English Myrror (1586) by Marlowe's contemporary and fellow-Londoner George Whetstone," "The Principal Source for Marlowe's Tamburlaine," MLN, 53 (1943), 411-17. Izard oversimplifies, however; Frank B. Fieler points out that the only source of Bajazeth's suicide is Perondinus, "Tamburlaine Part I and Its Audience," U. of Florida Monographs, Humanities, No. 8 (Gainesville: U. of Florida Press, 1961), p.9.

¹⁵"Tamburlaine and Marlowe," p.616.

Apart from all this, the censure of Barabas as a "Machiavel" in the Prologue to The Jew of Malta makes it obvious that Marlowe was aware of his audience's prejudices. He is not likely to have begun a career in the Elizabethan theatre with a hero who was no more than an exemplum of Machiavellian conduct.

Ribner's theory is more acceptable. While he believes that Tamburlaine is a Machiavellian superman,¹⁶ he feels that the main purpose of the plays is to illustrate Marlowe's concept of history. The two main elements of the plays are Humanism and Substantialism. The Humanism is contained, according to Ribner, in Marlowe's belief that "it is not God who makes kings ... in defiance of the entire body of Tudor political doctrine, it is fortune and human will."¹⁷

Substantialism is the Greco-Roman belief that "man as a substance is fixed and changeless. His actions can have no influence upon his nature."¹⁸

Ribner finds that "everything that Tamburlaine will ever be he already is ... in his speech

But Lady, this faire face and heavenly hue
Must grace his bed that conquers Asia
(1 Tam. I.ii.232-33)."

Ribner continues: "nothing can move Tamburlaine from the course for which his nature calls ... not even his love for Zenocrate can deter him from the conquest of her father's army and the destruction of her native city."¹⁹ This is far from the belief of Duthie and Hunter that Tamburlaine changes as he assimilates the qualities of Zenocrate.²⁰

Ribner argues that any play that deals with the revelation of character rather than its development is therefore

¹⁶Ribner, ed., Complete Plays, pp. xxvi, xxxvi.

¹⁷"The Idea of History in Tamburlaine," ELH, 20 (1953), 258.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 262.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 263-64.

²⁰See below, Ch. 12.

"basically hostile to the very notion of drama."²¹ Drama was apparently not Marlowe's intention, says Ribner. Marlowe first wished to show that "historical event is the produce of human ability and will in a world ruled by blind fortune." The hero may assert his will but must eventually "accept his end with stoical resignation and fortitude."²² "The only consolation he (Marlowe) could afford to mankind was in the heroic²³ stature of a stoic acceptance."²³

Ribner is right in saying that Tamburlaine's description of himself as he "that conquers Asia" contains everything that he will ever be, but it is a narrow definition of theatre that would preclude the possibility of any drama following the statement. Also, to see Tamburlaine as stoic on his deathbed is to ignore his own view of death as an elevation to "a higher throne" (2 Tam. V.iii. 121), as well as his previous outbursts.

Nevertheless, Ribner does valuable service in refusing to accept the play merely as an eulogy to the Machiavellian model.

²¹"Idea of History," p.262.

²²Ribner, ed., Complete Plays, p.xxvi.

²³Ibid., p.xl.

Chapter 7

TAMBURLAINE AS SYMBOL OF MARLOWE'S AGE

F. S. Boas (in his early work), Dick, Wilson Knight, LePage, Rowse, Hallett Smith, and Waith

The simplest of the theories of this group is that of A. L. Rowse, whose vision of Marlowe the jingoist is attractively uncomplicated. "The Elizabethan audience was given in full measure what it relished. There was the appeal to the war-atmosphere, when the time itself stood on tiptoe, expecting and accomplishing great deeds. There was the contemporary value set upon individual heroic achievements ... the belief in energy and initiative, in a man carving out his way for himself and expecting to enjoy his reward. Without any doubt, members of the Elizabethan audience saw themselves in the part of Tamburlaine, as its creator did."¹

Tamburlaine's life and death are, then, no more than those of an Elizabethan adventurer.² Rowse could have claimed support by citing Shakespeare's authorship of the chauvinistic Henry VI, Part II. An Elizabethan author certainly lost nothing by introducing appeals to popular sentiment,³ but, over the centuries, purely nationalistic plays tend to die the death of Shakespeare's almost forgotten first efforts. A more plausible explanation is

¹Christopher Marlowe: a Biography (London: Macmillan, 1964), p.67.

²Ibid., p.74.

³Marlowe is certainly not above pandering to English nationalism. Faustus III.ii. is an attack on the pope, and H. H. Schudder, "An Allusion in Tamburlaine," TLS, 2 March 1933, p.147, also points out that "I will confute those blind geographers/That make a triple region in the world" (1 Tam. IV.iv.77-78) is an attack on the papal Treaty of Tordesillas of 1497.

needed for the continuing twentieth-century interest in Tamburlaine.

A more complex argument is that of Eugene Waith who believes that, by the end of the sixteenth century, the historical Tamburlaine had become accepted as a symbol of Renaissance man, living out a heroic potential and experiencing a glorious death, and that it is as this symbol that Tamburlaine functions in the plays.⁴ Waith also accepts a Marlowe-Tamburlaine identification: "here (in the speech on beauty (1 Tam. V.ii.72-128)) is the aspiring poet who longs like his hero to conquer more and more territory."⁵

According to Waith, Renaissance man, including Marlowe, was not a simple figure. "In the depiction of the Herculean hero there is no relaxation of the tensions between his egotism and altruism, his cruelties and benefactions, his human limitations and divine potentialities. Marlowe never lets his audience forget these antitheses."⁶

What the Elizabethan audience is invited to gasp at are "the very paradoxes of Tamburlaine's nature"⁷ and, by extension, at their own, since Tamburlaine is Renaissance man magnified. There is meant to be no fear of Tamburlaine, since Waith suggests, alas without any explanation, that he is to be "identified with universal order."⁸ Citing the Prologue,

⁴The Herculean Hero (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), pp.83-86. Essentially the same view is expressed by F. S. Boas, Shakespeare and his Predecessors, p.41; Hugh C. Dick, "Tamburlaine Sources Once More," Studies in Philology, 46 (1949), 165; and Hallett Smith, "Tamburlaine and the Renaissance," in Elizabethan Studies (Boulder: U. of Colorado Press, 1945), pp.126-31, though Boas later converted to a belief in Marlowe's atheistic iconoclasm (see above, Ch. 5).

⁵"Marlowe and the Jades of Asia," SEL, 5 (1965), 245.

⁶Herculean Hero, p.85.

⁷Ibid., p.86.

⁸Ibid., p.87.

View but his picture in this tragic glass
 And then applaud his fortunes as you please,
 Waith feels that there is an absence of moral criteria in the Tamburlaine plays.⁹ "To try to deduct Marlowe's religious position from these speeches (Orcanes on "He that sits on high" (2 Tam. II.ii.49), and Tamburlaine on "For He is God alone and none but He" (2 Tam. V.i.200)) is a hopeless undertaking.¹⁰

But there is a weakness in Waith's reasoning. While it is true, as he indicates,¹¹ that the Chorus in Faustus, and the appearance of the highly unpopular "Machiavel" in the Prologue to The Jew of Malta, establish a basis for audience judgement of those plays, it is not true that the audience is never at any time permitted to apply moral criteria to Tamburlaine. Orcanes is clearly meant to be preferred over Sigismund, as Tamburlaine himself is over Bajazeth if one accepts Knoll's view of the Turk's repulsiveness.¹²

Wilson Knight makes a similar case that Tamburlaine reflects Marlowe's own complex view of himself and his time. Marlowe, he says, is the mirror of his age and of his own "magnificent confusions" in the "juxtaposition of idealism and sadism," with "poetry, vice ... on the one side, and religion on the other." He makes two original points, however. Referring to the end of Edward II in a dungeon, and to Tamburlaine's treatment of the captive kings, he finds that "Marlowe, like Tamburlaine, is a king-degrader, an iconoclast." The same comment could surely be made of Shakespeare because of the fates of Macbeth, Lear, and Richard II. His second point is more insightful: "Marlowe ... is the less Elizabethan in that he shows the

⁹"Marlowe and the Jades of Asia," p.235.

¹⁰Herculean Hero, p.83.

¹¹"Jades of Asia," p.235.

¹²See above, Ch. 5.

clash rather than the synthesis of Renaissance and Reformation," but in this, as in his assumption that Marlowe is "tormented by things at once hideously suspect yet tormentingly desirable,"¹³ there is an implied belief that Marlowe's interest in the complexity of man's dual nature must derive largely from a conscious awareness of the forces at work in his own age. There is also in Knight's criticism more than a hint that he has accepted the old libels about the tormented atheist.

In Peter V. LePage's discussion of Tamburlaine as Renaissance man he places a new emphasis on Zenocrate. The plays he defines as "a unified heroic drama"¹⁴ of Tamburlaine's search for god-like power. Tamburlaine already has fame, valour, and victory, but, to become "a perfect example of Renaissance virtu ... and to be worthy to strive for the immortal powers he seeks, Tamburlaine must have the perfect beauty allegorized in Zenocrate."¹⁵ LePage also thinks that Marlowe was aware both of the potential and of the limitations of Renaissance aspiration. Tamburlaine's death is not seen by LePage as a transcendence or a defeat but as "pointing backward to Tamburlaine's power as a demi-god in comparison with other men and forward to his necessary death resulting from the ultimate overreach."¹⁶

LePage's theory seems to throw an unjustified emphasis on Zenocrate, who after all accepts Tamburlaine as "my lord" at their first meeting (1 Tam. I.iii.33). She obviously laments the death of her countrymen in Damascus (1 Tam. V.i.256-80), but she never attempts to dissuade Tamburlaine from an attack on her father and her people.

¹³The Golden Labyrinth (London: Phoenix, 1962) pp.55-65.

¹⁴"The Search for Godhead in Marlowe's Tamburlaine," College English, 26 (1965), 605.

¹⁵"Search for Godhead," p.606.

¹⁶Ibid., p.608.

The Soldan is spared, not because of Zenocrate, but because of Tamburlaine's love for her (1 Tam. V.ii.370-76).

LePage's theory further makes no attempt to explain the significance of the plays from the first Tamburlaine-Zenocrate meeting until Tamburlaine's death.

Chapter 8

TAMBURLAINE: A REFLECTION OF MARLOWE'S MENTAL DISORDER

Guthrie, Henderson, and Praz

The most daring of the Marlowe-Tamburlaine identification theories is offered by Mario Praz. Marlowe, he says, had a "fond tout noir à contenter," and one is hardly surprised to see cited once again the tired evidence of Kyd and Baines. In Tamburlaine Praz finds the "relish for destruction" of the "molochiste" playwright himself, and then, in one great unexplained Freudian sweep, decides that "Marlowe's thirst for impossible things is a sublimation of his own attitude to sex ... a Ganymede complex."¹

Any evidence in the play which does not accord with Praz's thought, such as Orcanes' reference to a transcendental God, is dismissed by Praz as further proof of Marlowe's "schizoid" personality.² Such a dismissal is an ingenious device, calculated to produce critical infallibility.

Tyrone Guthrie's agreement in principle with the findings of Praz must be taken more seriously than Praz himself, if only because Guthrie's revival of Tamburlaine at the Old Vic in 1951, in a version which combined the two parts, may have been its first professional performance since the days of Henslowe.³ As Guthrie says, "hardly any of the learned people who have written about this play really seem to have tried to visualize it." He sees it as

¹ "Christopher Marlowe," pp.213-18.

² Ibid., p.220.

³ "Tamburlaine and What It Takes," p.21.

"an orgy of sadism ... the inflamed dream of this young genius destined to die by violent murder."⁴ It need hardly be pointed out that Marlowe cannot really be held responsible for the nature of his death and that it is rather unfair to attribute the murder to a fault in his character.

A possible excuse for Guthrie's approach to the play is that Tamburlaine was played by Sir Donald Wolfitt, an actor apparently incapable of subtlety on stage.⁵ Guthrie may have had no choice about which element in the play to focus upon.

Philip Henderson also sees Tamburlaine as "a parade of horrors,"⁶ demonstrating Marlowe's "all too obvious delight in bloodshed and cruelty."⁷ The influence of Baines and Kyd is once again evident, as it must be in any such autobiographical interpretation. "Marlowe was quite aware of the peril of the course he followed but, with his passion for extremes, peril was ever the chiefest way to happiness ... like Icarus, he flew for a short while toward the sun--then, his waxen wings melting, he fell as melodramatically as any of his aspiring heroes."⁸

The arrogance of such analysis on such evidence is staggering.

⁴ Ibid., p.86.

⁵ I base this opinion on the many Shakespearean roles I saw Wolfitt play with his touring company in the 1950's. It was impossible to distinguish his Shylock from his Lear. It was a popular saying of the period that, while Olivier's Hamlet was a tour de force, Wolfitt was forced to tour.

⁶ Christopher Marlowe, p.16.

⁷ Ibid., p.21.

⁸ Ibid., pp.41-42.

Chapter 9

HARRY LEVIN: THE GREAT ECLECTIC

It is Harry Levin's achievement to have synthesized all the preceding Romantic theories of the Tamburlaine plays.

He makes the customary Marlowe-Tamburlaine identification without even feeling the need to cite proof: "from what we know of Marlowe's own character we may fairly suppose that he threw a good deal of himself into these monomaniac exponents of the first person."¹

He accepts the view that Tamburlaine functions as a Renaissance hero who can determine his own destiny.² Marlowe's "protagonist is never Everyman but always l'uomo singolare, the exceptional man who becomes king because he is a hero, not hero because he is king; the private individual who remains captain of his fate ... such a figure could be a mouthpiece for his epoch."³

Levin seems to have no difficulty in reconciling this statement, which Rowse almost paraphrases in his description of Marlowe the conventional jingoist,⁴ with an acknowledgment of Marlowe as "a fellow-traveller with the subversive currents of his age."⁵

Levin breaks down the iconoclasm he sees in Marlowe into "the unholy trinity, his Epicureanism ... the appetite

¹Overreacher, p.181.

²cf. Wilson Knight, Hallett Smith et al., and see above Ch. 7.

³Overreacher p.43.

⁴See above, Ch. 7.

⁵Overreacher, p.18: cf. Boas, Kocher, et al., and see above Ch. 5.

for sensation, his Machiavellianism ... the will to power, and his Atheism ... the zeal for knowledge."⁶

Marlowe's "atheism" provides Levin with the greatest difficulty. He admits that, in Part One at least, Tamburlaine "acts as an avenger--if not a defender--of Christendom."⁷ He also admits that Marlowe, after creating the "tragedy of ambition" with Tamburlaine, the "tragedy of revenge" with The Jew of Malta, and after trying his hand at the "chronicle" with Edward II, "reverts to the morality with Dr. Faustus."⁸ Nevertheless, Levin labours to produce proof positive of Marlowe's atheism from within the plays themselves. He sets up a theory that Dr. Faustus was a deathbed recantation for atheistic Marlowe, only to knock it down by pointing out that Faustus never in fact repents.⁹ Levin would have done better to let well alone. The point is surely not that Faustus does not repent but that there is a God who punishes him for not repenting.

The Epicureanism in Tamburlaine Levin finds in Tamburlaine's love of the qualities of Zenocrate, and he sees Tamburlaine's "courtship" of her as "a major theme."¹⁰ But Levin overstates his case. He refers to Tamburlaine as "pleading with Zenocrate, and the Beauty she represents," referring to 1 Tam. I.ii.82-105.¹¹ Levin makes the same error as LePage is to make¹²: any theory that part of Tamburlaine is a quest for Beauty overlooks the rapidity

⁶Ibid., p.45.

⁷Ibid., p.69.

⁸Ibid., p.132.

⁹Ibid., p.160.

¹⁰Ibid., p.52.

¹¹Ibid., p.64.

¹²See above, Ch. 7: there is an evident similarity between LePage's theory of Tamburlaine's quest for power and Beauty and Levin's "unholy trinity".

with which Zenocrate accepts Tamburlaine.¹³ Tamburlaine asserts: he neither courts nor pleads. The "quest" is over almost before it has begun.

Levin has more success with Machiavellianism. He sees Tamburlaine as "the complete prince" with the qualities of both the fox and the lion and points out that he is in fact referred to as both lion (1 Tam. I.ii.52) and wolf (1 Tam. IV.iii.5).¹⁴ But the wolf is not the fox; the fox would have killed Callapine.

Levin is trying to find what he has already decided² is there. He decides that "Mortimer (in Edward II) becomes increasingly Machiavellian and thus more characteristically Marlovian."¹⁵ Levin is too willing to make the part the whole. The principles of The Prince formed one of a great many options open to Marlowe's characters. Barabas chooses it, and Tamburlaine may very occasionally exercise it, but Faustus and Edward II ignore it. There is no evidence that Machiavellianism was the option that became Marlowe's guiding principle.

In Levin's willingness to assimilate any autobiographical theory of Tamburlaine, he even acknowledges Praz's theory that the play manifests a "sublimation of Marlowe's attitude toward sex,"¹⁶ though Levin prefers the term "Icarus complex"¹⁷ to Praz's "Ganymede complex."

Levin accepts Ellis-Fermor's conclusion that it is Part One that embodies Marlowe's dream and that Part Two is a falling-off.¹⁸ He says that Part One "exhausted

¹³ See 1 Tam. III.iii.24, "That I may live and die with Tamburlaine." This after one meeting with him.

¹⁴ Overreacher, p.56; see also the views of Bakeless et al. on Tamburlaine's Machiavellianism, above, Ch. 6.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.122.

¹⁶ See above, Ch. 8.

¹⁷ Overreacher, p.183.

¹⁸ See above, Ch. 4.

Marlowe's source material and, when the play's unprecedented success demanded a sequel, he was thrown back upon his own imaginative devices."¹⁹

There is a discrepancy in his view of the two parts of Tamburlaine. In his discussion of Part One he points out that, whereas Bajazeth is subject to Fortune, Tamburlaine "seems to have felt no remission of her favours."²⁰ In Part Two, however Levin feels that "it is they (the Fates) who overthrow his triumphs."²¹ If Levin is right, and death is a defeat, then there is a morality element in Part Two that was not present in Part One, for he finds no evidence of retribution for overreaching in the first play. Marlowe has apparently reversed his philosophy. Levin devotes no time to the problem and thus misses the obvious conclusion, that the intention of neither play is to project a consistent philosophy, Marlowe's personal one, whatever it might have been, or otherwise. Levin never considers the possibility that Marlowe's purpose might have been that of the dramatist and not that of a narcissistic young man who cannot write outside his own dream.

When Levin does make passing reference to any purely dramatic quality Tamburlaine might have he falls into immediate error. "The drama is built up," he says, "on rivalries like a tournament where each contender is more formidable than the last ... the earliest victory is the easiest."²¹ There is no evidence in the plays that any physical conquest presents Tamburlaine with any difficulty and no critic other than Levin has ever suggested it. As M. C. Bradbrook puts it: "the series of opponents are only a series of ninepins to be toppled over: there is no interest attached to them, except as necessary material

¹⁹Overreacher, p.53.

²⁰Ibid., p.50.

²¹Ibid., p.52.

upon which Tamburlaine can demonstrate his power,"²² and again: "Tamburlaine's enemies appear as in a mummer's play, one down, t'other come on."²³

Finally Levin is thrown back to what is tantamount to a denial of any dramatic quality in the play at all: "let us accept it (Tamburlaine) then for what it is: a resonant fanfare and a pictorial spectacle."²⁴ "The text consists mainly of set pieces or purple passages, rather loosely strung together by short bits of awkward verse and functional prose."²⁵

His conclusion is surprising in the light of two supremely important insights he offers the reader. Of Tamburlaine he says that Marlowe's audacity "lay in taking a metaphor and acting it out,"²⁶ and, of Edward II, "the very word ('Gaveston') is a charm, like 'Tamburlaine'."²⁷ He seems near the comprehension that drama depends upon the establishment by one of its characters of a vision that will either interact with competing visions or, in the case of Tamburlaine's, leave them no room and literally crowd them out.²⁸ Words that can charm are the stuff of which visions are made. Levin should not dismiss them as cavalierly as he does with his comment that "since they (Tamburlaine and Calyphas in 2 Tam. IV.i) are so patently engaged in wars of words we are not deeply touched."²⁹ Donald Peet offers a more acceptable view of words. Marlowe "achieved his triumph largely through

²²Themes and Conventions in Elizabethan Tragedy (1935; rpt. Cam.: Cam. U.P., 1960); p.138.

²³Ibid., p.143.

²⁴Overreacher, p.49.

²⁵Ibid., p.63.

²⁶Ibid., p.67.

²⁷Ibid., p.115.

²⁸See below, Ch. 15, for an elaboration of this point.

²⁹Overreacher, p.74.

writing the most exciting verse which had ever been declaimed from an English stage,"³⁰ he says, and adds that Marlowe's chief aim as a dramatist was to arouse continual astonishment at the awe-inspiring figure who dominates them (the plays); we cannot deny the functional value of the rhetoric he has employed."³¹

Levin, like all those before him who saw Marlowe in Tamburlaine, sees what he wishes to see. Battenhouse suggests that Levin has projected his own sympathies for atheism, Machiavellianism, and Epicureanism on to Marlowe.³² Levin himself offers some support for Battenhouse's criticism when he writes, over a decade after The Overreacher, that "Tamburlaine's chariot fascinates us less than Bajazeth's cage, standing as we do somewhat closer to Kafka than to Nietzsche."³³ The subjectivity of such criticism is obvious, and there is a foreshadowing of a school to come who will define Marlowe as a student of victimhood and a victim himself.

Spence is the clearest advocate of common sense. "The Marlowe-Tamburlaine identification is purely fanciful ... Tamburlaine stands in no closer relationship to the mind and spirit of Marlowe than do Julius Caesar, Coriolanus, or Cardinal Richelieu to Shakespeare or Bulwer Lytton."³⁴

Says Levin: "the hazard of extracting ideas from the drama, of codifying incidental allusions into dogmatic professions, is exemplified in Roy W. Battenhouse's doctrinaire study of Tamburlaine."³⁵ But exactly the same attack is made by Harper on Levin's own assertions; "the

³⁰ "The Rhetoric of Tamburlaine," ELH, 26 (1959), 137.

³¹ Ibid., p.154.

³² "Marlowe Reconsidered: Some Reflections on Levin's Overreacher", JEGP, 52 (1953), 533-44.

³³ "Marlowe Today," Tulane Drama Review, 8 (1964), 24.

³⁴ "Tamburlaine and Marlowe," p.604.

³⁵ Overreacher, p.14.

view that he (Tamburlaine) is the perfect symbol of the Renaissance spirit and the spokesman for Marlowe's own energies and aspirations ... springs from attention to only certain elements in Marlowe's presentation."³⁶

The next chapter will be concerned with Battenhouse's criticism. While certainly guilty of selectivity, he at least made an effort, however unsuccessful it may have been, to escape the biographical trap.

³⁶Harper, ed., Complete Plays, p.xvii.

Chapter 10

TAMBURLAINE: A MORALITY

Roy W. Battenhouse

The best known of those critics who have not found a Marlowe-Tamburlaine identification is Roy Battenhouse. In his refutation of those critics, Ellis-Fermor, Levin, et al., who have, he makes no secret of what his own view will be: "by identifying Marlowe with his Titans they not only employ dramatic material unjustly, but they identify Marlowe with doctrines which were anathema to every Elizabethan moralist."¹ Having decided that Marlowe was a moralist, Battenhouse will find a Morality. He falls into the same biographical trap as did the Romantics, but, believing "that we are not justified in taking our notions of Marlowe from the libels of Kyd and Baines,"² he proceeds to take his notions from what he assumes to have been Marlowe's study material while a divinity student at Corpus Christi. Marlowe, Battenhouse thinks, "had surely read Isaiah."³

The structure of Tamburlaine, Battenhouse feels, is that of a Morality, "its successive scenes have a continuity not dissimilar to that provided by the guild waggons," and Isaiah provides its theme, "that retributive justice is not confined to an after-world."⁵

¹Marlowe's Tamburlaine, p.7.

²"Tamburlaine, the 'Scourge of God'," PMLA, 56 (1941), 347.

³Ibid., p.342.

⁴Marlowe's Tamburlaine, p.150.

⁵"The 'Scourge of God'," p.337.

"The concept of a 'Scourge of God', as formulated long ago by Isaiah and as applied to Tamburlaine by Whetstone and Fortescue, Marlowe's principal sources for his story, involves the paradox of heroic virtues, tragically hell-bent; of human aspirations magnificently splendid but cruelly tyrannous; and of an idealism misdirected into unwitting parody of divine majesty. The wicked actions in a Scourge's career remain governed by a higher providence, which both uses and overrules man's ambition and folly."⁶ There will then be two movements in Tamburlaine, Tamburlaine's punishment of the wicked, and Tamburlaine's own final punishment after he has executed his divine mission. Since "ambition is plainly the central theme ... may we not regard Marlowe's play as a moralizing history after the pattern of the Mirror for Magistrates?"⁷

The Scourge theory presents certain problems. Battenhouse says that "the scourging which he (Tamburlaine) administers is, except in the case of the virgins of Damascus, more or less well-deserved."⁶ But if, as Battenhouse suggests, Tamburlaine punishes only the wicked, it is difficult to account for the death of Calyphas or of the innocents of Larissa (2 Tam. IV.ii; II.iv.137 ff.). It may be that Scourges in real life carry out divine commandments which are inscrutable, but the whole purpose of a Morality is surely that the divine purpose should be very scrutable indeed.

Battenhouse does no better with the theme of ambition punished. It is central to his argument that Tamburlaine's "death scene reveals plainly ... the impiety and torment of unsatisfied desire. Ambition has burned itself to a fever of madness in Tamburlaine so that it punishes itself."⁹

⁶Marlowe's Tamburlaine, p.150.

⁷Ibid., p.15.

⁸"The Scourge of God," p.343.

⁹Marlowe's Tamburlaine, p.233.

It is odd that so many critics should have felt no sense of a diminishing. Many simply regard Tamburlaine's death as a cessation of life,¹⁰ and some see it as a victory.¹¹ If Marlowe had intended the death of Tamburlaine as an object lesson he could certainly have made his point clearer. Christopher Fanta's observation is very relevant: "since anyone who was acquainted with the history of Tamburlaine would have known of the disintegration of his empire after his death, the virtual exclusion from the ending of this fact, with its readily extractable moral implications, suggests that Marlowe by no means meant to transform his superhuman hero into an object lesson for tyrants."¹² Battenhouse tries to bolster his argument by marshalling a host of individual "morality elements" that he detects in the plays. He cites the triumph of the good Orcanes over the perjured Sigismund (2 Tam. II.ii), Bajazeth's fall (1 Tam. III.iii), the chariot scene (2 Tam. IV.iv), and the overthrow of Babylon (2 Tam. V.I).¹³ In his response to Levin's criticism of his theory,¹⁴ he drags out three more evidences; Olympia's piety (2 Tam. IV.iii), the prophecy of the King of Jerusalem, "scalding drops will pierce thy seething braines" (2 Tam. IV.ii.69), and an alleged travesty of the mass when wine is taken "unto the God of War" (1 Tam. IV.iv.6).¹⁵

¹⁰See, inter alia, F. S. Boas, Shakespeare and his Predecessors, p.45; Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (1957; rpt. Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1971), p.216; H.G. Hart, Tamburlaine and Primaudaye, Notes and Queries, 14 (1906), 485.

¹¹See, inter alia, Eugene Waith, The Herculean Hero p.83; Enid Welsford, Review of Battenhouse's Tamburlaine, RES, 19 (1943), 306.

¹²Marlowe's Agonists: an Approach to the Ambiguity of his Plays (Cam. Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1970), p.22.

¹³Marlowe's Tamburlaine, pp.10,11,169,172.

¹⁴Overreacher, p.14.

¹⁵"Marlowe Reconsidered," p.536.

Battenhouse is fighting a losing battle. As Steane says, "one of the basic flaws of Battenhouse's argument is ... the assumption that Marlowe wished you to watch the play with a conventional mind because he is giving something which will fortify you in your conventionality. Such an assumption is at odds with the excitement and thrust of the poetry."¹⁶

There is also a basic technical flaw in Battenhouse's reasoning. To consider the two parts of Tamburlaine a Morality it is necessary to consider the two parts as a whole. Battenhouse does this, but without explanation.¹⁷

It is impossible to ignore the evidence of the Prologue to the second part, that the sequel was written in response to public demand, and that therefore Part One must be considered as an entity. Most critics have accepted this without question,¹⁸ though Warren D. Smith is wrong in asserting that Battenhouse is the lone perpetrator of the ten-act heresy.¹⁹ Stephen Vincent Benet's Yale production of 1911 and Guthrie's Old Vic production in 1951 both presented the two parts of Tamburlaine fused into one.²⁰ LePage sees the two parts of the play as "a unified heroic drama,"²¹ and Swinburne's entry on Marlowe in the eleventh Britannica discusses the "ten fierce acts" of "Marlowe's first play."

¹⁶Marlowe: a Critical Study, p.73.

¹⁷Marlowe's Tamburlaine, pp.252-53.

¹⁸See, inter alia, C. F. Tucker Brooke, "The Marlowe Canon," PMLA, 37 (1922), 24; Ellis-Fermor, Christopher Marlowe, p.3; Kocher, Christopher Marlowe, p.69; Poirier, Christopher Marlowe, p.106; Ribner, ed., Complete Plays, p.xxi.

¹⁹"The Substance of Meaning in Tamburlaine Part One," Studies in Philology, 67 (1970), 156.

²⁰Ellis-Fermor, "A Note on Tamburlaine," TLS, 8 June 1933, p.396; Guthrie, "Tamburlaine and What It Takes," p.85.

²¹"The Search for Godhead in Marlowe's Tamburlaine," p.605.

Battenhouse may have chosen to heed the wrong rumble but at least he has tried to find a dramatic quality within the plays. The autobiographical critics on the other hand have always seemed to think that an audience finds something intrinsically interesting in watching an alter-ego strut through the author's own role, Machiavellian, boyish, sadistic, or otherwise. They have rarely made any attempt to find a dramatic quality in Tamburlaine and it is significant to note how many of them dismiss Marlowe as an incompetent dramatist.²²

It may be that Battenhouse's failure may also have resulted in part from what seems to have become the Marlovian critical habit, fitting the work to what is thought to have been the man. Too much attention to Marlowe the theology student may have led Battenhouse to the Morality; he may have more in common with the Romantic autobiographers than he thinks.

After a consideration of the Battenhouse battalion, those who, like him, find Tamburlaine at least to some extent a Morality, the next chapters will be devoted to those critics who believe, like F. P. Wilson, that Marlowe was "the disinterested artist losing his identity in the stuff which he is turning into art."²³

²²See, inter alia, Bakeless, Tragicall History, I, 189; Ellis-Fermor, Review of Battenhouse's Tamburlaine, p.48; Ingram, Christopher Marlowe and his Associates, p.120; Kocher, Christopher Marlowe, p.304; Levin, Overreacher, p.63.

²³Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare, p.48.

Chapter 11

THE BATTENHOUSE BATTALION

Guy Boas, Cole, Egan, Fieler, Gardner, Leech, Mahood, Richards, and Velz

Clifford Leech is prepared to go even further than Battenhouse, who was prepared to wait for the end of Part Two to see the fall of the conqueror. Leech sees Tamburlaine's failure as being implicit in the end of Part One, "in the mesh that Tamburlaine is caught in by the time he has conquered Bajazeth."¹ Leech supports his theory by arguing the similarity of the structures of the two plays: the virgins become the concubines, the cage the chariot, and the siege of Damascus that of Babylon. The Mycetes-Cosroe conflict has its echo in the Turks' struggle against the Christians, and Bajazeth is recreated in Callapine.²

Unfortunately Leech does not explain the entrapping "mesh" of Part One, and his argument for death as a defeat in Part Two is unconvincing. He sees Tamburlaine's failure in "the manifest insufficiency of Amyras and Celebinus," in whose persons the Scythian tried to immortalize himself in empire.³ But there is no clear insufficiency in the play. Marlowe deliberately omitted any reference to the historical disintegration of the empire.

Leech agrees with Battenhouse on the general principle of Tamburlaine's being a Morality, but sees no evidence of

¹"The Structure of Tamburlaine," Tulane Drama Review, 8 (1964), 42.

²Ibid., pp.38-39.

³Ibid., p.41.

"a personal care felt by a divine power," ignoring rather obviously the response to Orcanes' plea (2 Tam. II.ii.55 ff.), and preferring to see Tamburlaine's fall as caused by vague "certain processes."⁴

John W. Velz makes the same point as Leech, that even Part One is designed to "remind the audience of his (Tamburlaine's) finite mortality." The plays are both Moralities, teaching that "any claim to transcend mortality must be empty."⁵ But there is no more evidence in Velz than there was in Leech to document a fall in Part One.

Frank B. Fieler, like Leech and Velz, believes a fall to be implicit in Part One, but, unlike them, offers proof. Citing Zenocrate's words,

In fear and feeling of the like distress
Behold the Turk and his great emperess
(1 Tam. V.ii.298-99),

he says, "Marlowe suggests ... that Tamburlaine will have his fall just as inevitably as Bajazeth suffered his."⁶

Tamburlaine's fall, Fieler believes, is because "a magnificent human being ... acted in a way unworthy of his greatness."⁷ Tamburlaine's magnificence is first established by making him preternatural, by associating him

⁴Ibid., p.43. See also Helen Gardner, "The Second Part of Tamburlaine the Great," MLR, 37 (1942), 18-24, who says that "the first part ... glorifies the human will, the second displays its inevitable limits," but hedges between Battenhouse and Leech on "the force that in the end destroys the hero ... it can be called Necessity or God according to one's interpretation of Marlowe's religious thought."

⁵"Episodic Structure in Four Tudor Plays: a Virtue of Necessity," Comparative Drama, 6, No. 2 (1972), pp.90, 92. A similar view is expressed by Susan Richards, "Marlowe's Tamburlaine II: a Drama of Death," MLO, 26 (1965), 378: "the structure of the play then is based on the incidents which demonstrate Tamburlaine's power over death and the revelation of death's power over him."

⁶"Tamburlaine Part One and Its Audience," p.80.

⁷Ibid., p.64.

with the gods, or with the elemental bodies of the skies, particularly the sun,⁸ and by having the heavens as the source of his imagery while Bajazeth's comes from darkness and the underworld.⁹

The early over-selling of Tamburlaine to the audience was necessary, Fieler says, because "the actions and thoughts of... the historical Tamburlaine were morally despicable by Elizabethan standards"¹⁰ which thought of ambition as "a most terrible sin."¹¹ Fieler has not apparently been reading the same history books as Rowse et al., who believe that the Renaissance, and the Elizabethans in particular, identified very happily with the historical conqueror.¹²

Fieler sees the turning point of the plays as the impaling of the Damascus Virgins (1 Tam. V.ii), "reversing Tamburlaine's position from underdog to oppressor,"¹³ but he is projecting twentieth-century attitudes. M. C. Bradbrook points out that the virgins' death is "not shocking because it is not dramatically realized," and because of "the natural callousness of the Elizabethans."¹⁴

Like Battenhouse, Fieler comes up with individual Morality elements in the plays, the saving of Christian Constantinople and the fall of Bajazeth in particular, and, in this connection, pays a compliment to Marlowe's dramaturgical art. Our sympathy for Bajazeth is kept "at a minimum by never showing us the Turk's misery from his own point of view. All we hear from Bajazeth are curses."¹⁵

⁸ Ibid., pp. 33-35.

⁹ Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 14.

¹² See above, Chapter 7.

¹³ "Tamburlaine Part One and Its Audience," p. 70.

¹⁴ Themes and Conventions in Elizabethan Tragedy, pp. 138-39.

¹⁵ "Tamburlaine Part One and Its Audience," p. 57.

In his preface to the 1964 edition of his Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Battenhouse claimed the support of both Douglas Cole and M. M. Mahood for his Morality theory.¹⁶

It is odd that Battenhouse should claim Cole for his own since Cole takes both Battenhouse and Ellis-Fermor to task for adopting extremist standpoints.¹⁷ It is true that Cole sees a Morality in Part One but it is not in connection with Tamburlaine. "The most memorable tragedy of Part One of Tamburlaine is the fall of Bajazeth."¹⁸ Tamburlaine's death is, for Cole, a victory: "the final scene has shown Tamburlaine to be above all human suffering ... he dies, as he first appeared, in a soaring and triumphant flight of rhetoric."¹⁹ This is clearly at odds with Battenhouse's own view, but it is not untypical of Battenhouse to fasten upon only one part of Cole's dissertation.

Battenhouse has more reason to claim Mahood, although she attempts to refuse the relationship. She attacks Battenhouse for suggesting that Zenocrate was "a plainly reprehensible pagan queen,"²⁰ and, more generally, suggests that, "if Marlowe's plays were simply Morality plays, their chief characters would be monsters of villainy with none of the complexity which he had bestowed on them."²¹ Nevertheless, the evidence of her Morality view is quite clear. "Tamburlaine is the chronicle ... of the Renaissance discovery that human nature, cut off from its divine source, was not emancipated but impoverished."²² Further,

¹⁶op. cit., p.xii.

¹⁷Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1962), p.98.

¹⁸Ibid., p.94.

¹⁹Ibid., p.111.

²⁰Battenhouse, Marlowe's Tamburlaine, p.167.

²¹Poetry and Humanism (London: Cape, 1950), p.54.

²²Ibid., p.74.

her references to "heaven, which Tamburlaine's pride impels him to defy," and to "the Divine Justice that pursues Tamburlaine,"²³ as well as her refusal of a Marlowe-Tamburlaine identification,²⁴ place her quite clearly in the Battenhouse ranks.

A novel, though poorly argued, variation on the Morality theme is that of Robert Egan. He identifies Tamburlaine's ethic at the beginning of Part One as deriving from Machiavelli's Il Principe, and suggests that the dramatic appeal, at least of Part One, lies in Tamburlaine's having to choose between "the identities of conqueror ... and human being." The choice is apparently made at Damascus: "in slaughtering the virgins and the populace, then, he denies the validity of his love for Zenocrate as well as his affinity for mankind as a whole."²⁵ Egan fails to explain why Tamburlaine, voluntarily reduced to inhumanity, should then spare Zenocrate's father or, ineptly if judged by Il Principe, fail to kill Callapine. Egan is fond of the unproved assertion; he says, "death took Tamburlaine and with him all that he has achieved. This perhaps is inevitably the ultimate statement of a conqueror play."²⁶ Even if the claim to be discussed in the next chapter, that Tamburlaine transcended death, is not to be accepted, it is still clearly not true that Tamburlaine's death meant the loss of all that he had achieved. The empire was firm at his death in the play, and a belief that what they have built will endure after them has sustained more than emperors.

Guy Boas must be given the final word. He finds the Biblical source for Tamburlaine, "the story of Cain and

²³ Ibid., p.75.

²⁴ Ibid., p.54.

²⁵ "A Muse of Fire: Henry V in the Light of Tamburlaine," MLQ, 29 (1968), 18-19.

²⁶ Ibid., p.28.

Abel is eternal," but omits to tell us who is Abel. Bajazeth seems unlikely. Boas approves of Marlowe's moralizing intention, "let us take note of the example which Marlowe has exhibited in Tamburlaine as Hitler in history," but criticizes Marlowe for inserting scenes of excessive cruelty. "Aristotle laid it down in the Poetics that the atrocious must not be shown upon the stage," and "the world's greatest dramatists abide by Aristotle." Anticipating the obvious response, Boas turns on Shakespeare and objects to the blinding of Gloucester: "nor does it seem necessary for this scene to be enacted before our eyes."

It is lucky for Marlowe that Boas, like the rest of the Battenhouse battalion, will excuse the lapses of taste in the light of the "clear moral lesson ... on the measureless degree and incredible nature of evil with which at any moment civilization may be confronted."²⁷

²⁷ "Tamburlaine and the Horrific," English, 8 (1951), 275-77.

Chapter 12

MARLOWE: THE ETHICALLY DETACHED ARTIST

Bevington, Duthie, Hunter, Quinn, Powell, and Spence

Not many critics have been willing to accept Marlowe as an artist who did not try to infuse his work with his own philosophy or moralizing. The few that have must necessarily be forced into some attempt at finding a purely dramatic quality in his plays.

David Bevington explicitly rejects the Morality theory of Tamburlaine and finds that the physiological explanation of Tamburlaine's death, given in some detail by the First Physician (2 Tam. V.iii.82-90), is a deliberate repudiation by the playwright of "the moral implication of the sequence that has led to this moment of death." Nevertheless, Bevington argues, Marlowe had not escaped completely from the dramatic tradition of cause and effect, of sin and retribution. Of Zenocrate's "Behold the Turk and his great emperess" (1 Tam. V.ii.299), he says, "the question of causality ... seems to have been imperfectly resolved in Marlowe's mind."¹ Bevington believes Marlowe's sympathy to have been with Tamburlaine, and thus the dramatic tension is "between a chronicle of life that exalts great deeds ... and a structure inherited from a moral drama."² The dramatic effect is thus accidental and derives from Marlowe's inability to write a chronicle. Bevington does not, however, explain why Marlowe should have felt it necessary to

¹From Mankind to Marlowe (Cam. Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1962), p.215-16.

²Ibid., p.214.

³"Marlowe's Spectacle," Tulane Drama Review, 8 (1964), 195.

work within a Morality framework for Tamburlaine but not for Edward II.

Jocelyn Powell sees a similar fusion of the Morality with the chronicle, but, unlike Bevington, feels it to have been deliberate.³ Since Marlowe combined "the emblematic tradition (of the Morality) with the forward impetus of narrative,"⁴ Powell reasons that the characters function at two levels. The examples cited are interesting. Zenocrate "is not only the hero's wife ... but represents his ambition, and the achievement of that ambition is symbolized in her coronation." "The supplicant virgins recreate the image of Zenocrate," and, in the exchange with Zabina, Zenocrate "represents her husband's enmity for Bajazeth."⁵ Powell observes that, when the needs of the Morality and those of the chronicle come into conflict, "Marlowe ... (is) more interested in the integrity of the symbol than of the fable."⁶ This observation explains "Tamburlaine's lamentations on the death of Zenocrate, which will not do as a man's feelings ... Marlowe is not describing the event, he is imaging its significance."⁷ Powell's insight into the Elizabethan interest in the power of the moment rather than in the passing of time is most valuable. Too many critics have tried to find in Marlowe's work the kind of apparent philosophic and psychological consistency and journalistic reporting of a sequence of events that one sees as the hallmark only of relatively modern work. It is a pity that Powell should finally

³ "Marlowe's Spectacle," Tulane Drama Review, 8 (1964), 195.

⁴ Ibid., p.210

⁵ Ibid., p.204, 207, 208.

⁶ Ibid., p.205.

⁷ Ibid., p.208. Harper, ed., Tamburlaine, p.xvi, makes a similar point: "the passages in Tamburlaine which make little sense as narrative sequence exist to make their point as dramatic emblems, each one capable of communicating its intellectual content through appeal to the eye and of occupying its own pageant waggon."

decide to enlist in the Battenhouse ranks and agree that the play is ultimately a Morality on the limitations of the human will,⁸ since such an agreement necessitates the acceptance of Tamburlaine's death as defeat, a very dubious proposition indeed.

G.I. Duthie suggests that Tamburlaine assimilates both Death and Beauty after struggles which give dramatic meaning to the plays. He argues that "at 1 Tam. V.ii.72 ff. (the fear by Zenocrate for her father's life) we have a psychological crisis in the hero" which was prepared for by Zenocrate's earlier plea for the Damascus virgins ("Yet would you have some pitie for my sake" (1 Tam. IV.ii.123)), and that the crisis centres on "the question of Honour versus Pity," Pity being part of Beauty.⁹ Notwithstanding Hunter's enthusiastic endorsement,¹⁰ Duthie is seeing struggle and crisis where none exist. Tamburlaine does say to her father that Zenocrate is "she that hath calmed the fury of my sword" (1 Tam. V.ii.374), but he had earlier said of Bajazeth's fate, "This is my mind and I will have it so" (1 Tam. IV.ii.91), and nothing has happened to suggest that the liberation of the Soldan is anything more than the whim of a man whose decision is its own justification.

Duthie argues more convincingly for a similar conflict in Part Two. Death is "an even more dangerous foe," but

⁸ Ibid., p.209.

⁹ "The Dramatic Structure of Marlowe's Tamburlaine the Great," English Studies (Essays and Studies), NS1 (1948), 107-109.

¹⁰ "I accept Professor Duthie's suggestion that the psychological battle against Zenocrate's beauty ... is the greatest of Tamburlaine's battles. Having reconciled the warring and incompatible principles represented by Zenocrate and himself, peace and war, beauty and valour, he achieves stability ... the audience can go home with some kind of resolution in their minds," G. K. Hunter, "Henry IV and the Elizabethan Two-Part Play," Review of English Studies, 5 (1954), 239.

"his (Tamburlaine's) spirit will survive on earth in his flesh--his sons will continue his career of conquest--and he himself will pass to a higher existence. Thus, essentially, Death has not defeated him."¹¹

There is textual support for this contention,
 My flesh, divided in your precious shapes,
 Shall still retain my spirit, though I die,
 And live in all your seeds immortally
 (2 Tam. V.iii.172-74),

and,

those powers
 That mean t'invest me in a higher throne
 (2 Tam. V.iii.120-21),

and other critics have made the same discovery. Harper says that Tamburlaine "conquers death by accepting it, by affirming the immortality of his spirit and its continuance on earth in the sons whom he has created."¹² Timothy Nelson adds that Marlowe's "presentation of Tamburlaine's death ... turns out to be ... a crowning panegyric in dramatic form on the departing and still triumphant conqueror."¹³

The reference of the Prologue to Part Two, "murderous Fates throws all his triumphs down," presents a difficulty but Nelson points out that, "if Marlowe had wanted the last scene of Part Two to say what the Prologue makes it say, there were plenty of dramatic pointers he could have used to make his point clear."¹⁴ Nelson does not offer it, but a possible explanation of the Prologue reference is simply that Marlowe wished to be politic. Tamburlaine has after all usurped the throne of a legitimate monarch, Mycetes, and, in the era of Elizabeth, Marlowe may have felt it wise to pay passing lip-service to the ultimate folly of such an action, whatever the actual direction of the play.

¹¹ "The Dramatic Structure," pp.118,120.

¹² Harper, ed., Tamburlaine, p.xiv.

¹³ "Marlowe and his Audience: a Study of Tamburlaine," Southern Review: An Australian Journal of Literary Studies (U. of Adelaide), 3, (1969), 250.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.251.

Michael Quinn proposes an attractive theory. "Tamburlaine poses, probably as a hypothesis, the idea of a morality that is completely self contained." "Tamburlaine and his companions are justified in their ambitious quest because they have a genuine thirst and hunger for power ... (and) because they have the abilities to satisfy those desires."¹⁵ Quinn also detects a didactic quality in the play: "Tamburlaine is distinguished from other characters in that, for him, profession and performance are identical ... Marlowe's demonstration of how contemptible is the failure to equate one's actions with one's words represents a demand for absolute integrity in the individual: that one be true to oneself in a special sense."¹⁶

Perhaps intimidated by Duthie's suggestions, Quinn finds that Marlowe's hypothesis of freedom is weak because Tamburlaine has to cope with the problems of Beauty and Death, but Quinn does not admit the possibility that the weak hypothesis is his and not Marlowe's.

The first twentieth-century critic to claim Marlowe's artistic and ethical detachment from Tamburlaine is Leslie Spence. Seeing the plays as animated history, she feels that, after showing Tamburlaine's invincibility in the first two acts of Part One, Marlowe was faced with a problem which he did not resolve until after the third act, which she finds "weak and uncertain." She suggests that, "by the end of Act II, Marlowe had made Tamburlaine so gloriously invincible that the centre of interest could no longer be physical strife. Hence the inner struggle and the love story."¹⁷ She does not document the inner struggle but it can only be the same painful assimilation of Zenocrate's qualities that Duthie saw.

¹⁵"The Freedom of Tamburlaine," MLQ, 21 (1960), 315-16.

¹⁶Ibid., p.318.

¹⁷"Tamburlaine and Marlowe," p.620.

Battenhouse, not surprisingly, finds much fault? "Miss Spence's attempt (to show that Tamburlaine's qualities are elements in sixteenth-century historical accounts and not products of Marlowe's imagination) falls somewhat short of success ... these historical sources provide us with no source whatever for the three most prominent episodes of Part Two, the chariot scene, the blasphemy scene, and Tamburlaine's impassionate fury ... at the death of Zenocrate."¹⁸ He could also have pointed out that Timur the Lame was known to have begun as a leader, not as a shepherd.¹⁹

But Battenhouse is criticizing the very point that Fieler compliments Miss Spence upon.²⁰ What Spence shows is that Marlowe manipulated his sources, thus revealing a conscious craftsmanship that is in itself a denial of any notion of Marlowe's aspirations bubbling spontaneously out of his mouthpiece.²¹

Battenhouse should be grateful for any help he can get in defeating his Romantic enemies.

¹⁸Marlowe's Tamburlaine, p.9.

¹⁹Levin, Overreacher, p.49.

²⁰Fieler, "Tamburlaine Part One and Its Audience," p.2.

²¹T. S. Eliot, "Christopher Marlowe," in Elizabethan Essays (London: Faber, 1932), p.24, agrees that "Marlowe was a deliberate and conscious workman;" while F. P. Wilson, Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare, p.25, says that "Tamburlaine ... is a work of art deliberately wrought. It is no opus septem dierum."

Chapter 13

THE MIGHTY LINERS

Most autobiographical critics, most nineteenth-century critics, Holmes, Granville-Barker, and C. S. Lewis

Swinburne, in praising the "exquisite excellence of various lines" while dismissing "the stormy monotony" of Tamburlaine,¹ spoke for most of the nineteenth century.² Ellis-Fermor, who sees Tamburlaine as a poem rather than a play,³ may reasonably be taken to speak for those who cannot see the work for what they think is the man.⁴

The critical habit of praising the line and damning the play enlarged in the twentieth century to include a reference to Marlowe as clumsily preparing the way for Shakespeare. Elizabeth Holmes delights in the "metaphysical quality of imagery" that she finds in "the descriptions of countless hosts and far-reaching spaces ... to suggest the infinite."⁵ There is "a sensuous delight," she feels, in the lines of the soliloquy on "what is beauty" (1 Tam. V. ii.97 ff.), but, on the whole, Tamburlaine is only a preparation for Dr. Faustus,⁶ and, anyway, Marlowe "had not time to finish the discoveries he began." It would be for

¹"Marlowe," Britannica, 1911.

²See above, Ch. 3.

³Christopher Marlowe, p.25.

⁴See above, Chs. 4-9.

⁵Aspects of Elizabethan Imagery (1929; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), p.19.

⁶Ibid., p.20.

Shakespeare to carry on the good work.⁷

Granville-Barker is blunter. Marlowe, he says, "never became in fact very much of a dramatist" because "no number of mighty lines will make a play." Tamburlaine, the product of a "great poet, but primitive dramatist," is part of "a groping and stumbling towards the new thing, the presenting of a human being."⁸

The greatest praise and the profoundest contempt is, however, that of C. S. Lewis. In Tamburlaine, "the old type of villain starts up as hero ... (and) Marlowe seems to be on his side. The play is a hideous moral spoonerism: Giant the Jack-Killer."⁹ The characters of Tamburlaine "are as dwarfed by their own poetry as a circus master by his own elephant. We forget Tamburlaine ... the Trochaic in "what is beauty" matters more than the whole pretense of drama which is crawling about down on the stage fathoms below."¹⁰

Lewis, inadvertently, makes very clear the basic error of all the mighty liners; they have forgotten that a character on stage is, in fact, what he says. In Tamburlaine particularly, where the word, at least of Tamburlaine, becomes the deed,¹¹ it is simply not possible to see the person separate from his speech.¹²

⁷ Ibid., p.24. Levin, willing apparently to incorporate the ideas of anyone except Battenhouse, implies at one point the same opinion, that the sixteenth century existed to wait for Shakespeare ("Marlowe Today," p.23).

⁸ On Dramatic Method (1931; rpt. New York: Hill & Wang 1956), pp.56,59.

⁹ English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama, Vol. III of The Oxford History of English Literature, ed. F. P. Wilson and B. Dobrée (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954), p.52.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.481

¹¹ Levin, Overreacher, pp.42,62.

¹² George P. Baker, "Dramatic Technique in Marlowe," Essays and Studies, 4 (1913), 177, finds that Tamburlaine's hyperbole is in "perfect accord" with the "unusual and extreme temperament" of a "clearly conceived character." The idea that speech is inseparable from stage character is central to the argument of the concluding chapter below.

Chapter 14

GOING THEIR OWN WAY

Allen, Begley, Brooks, Camden, Cutts, the Feaseys, Parr, Warren Smith, Wehling, and Wyler

Criticism of Tamburlaine has been seen to fall into two main categories, that which sees the play as autobiography and that which sees it, at least to some degree, as a Morality. There are a number of critics, however, whose approach excludes them from these two major groups.

Lynnette and Eveline Feasey are unique in seeing Marlowe as a Christian satirist. Fastening, like Battenhouse, on Marlowe as the divinity student, they think that he "saw himself in the role of David, reaching to his sling of ironic humour to hurl a stone at that high and monstrous Goliath." Goliath apparently refers to the Calvinists in the person of Dr. Whitaker, Professor of Divinity at Cambridge during Marlowe's studentship.¹ Their proofs are fascinating. Referring to the slaughter of the Damascus virgins and the torment of Bajazeth, they say that "Marlowe is using the story as a vehicle for satirical comment on the doctrine of a Judgment Day when it shall be too late to cry for mercy."² The Calvinistic doctrine of irrespective reprobation, a denial of the autonomy of moral law, is allegedly under attack in the whole Orcanes-Sigismund episode, where the righteous are very clearly victorious.³ The Feaseys also feel "it is difficult not to believe that

¹"Marlowe and the Christian Humanists," Notes and Queries, 196 (1951), 267-68.

²"Marlowe and the Communion Service," Notes and Queries, 195 (1950), 157.

³"Marlowe and the Christian Humanists," p.267.

Marlowe's sympathies are with Calyphas" since Tamburlaine's speeches, "full of grotesquely bloodthirsty images, are intended as deliberate ridicule of these followers of arms."⁴ Indeed, they argue that the violence of Tamburlaine in word and deed is also a satire on the prophetic books of the Bible, Isaiah in particular, which contain the concept of a Scourge.⁵

They conclude that "the Elizabethan church lost an eloquent and moving preacher when, by certain aspects of its teaching, it lost the allegiance of Christopher Marlowe."⁶

It is unfortunate that the Feaseys' argument presupposes an audience which is pacifist and easily horrified by violence. The Elizabethan audience, fresh from the cock-fight and the bear-pit, are unlikely to have shared the Feaseys' gentle principles.

Don Cameron Allen has another view of Tamburlaine. Allen finds "Tamburlaine to be one of the fortunati." The fortunati, according to the theories of Giovanni Pontano, an early sixteenth-century Venetian, are those whose unflinching good fortune is determined astrologically and, through the stars, by the will of God. "To follow his impulses in complete scorn of advice and admonition," as did Tamburlaine, suggests Allen, "... is the hallmark of the fortunatus." Allen overcomes his own admission that "there is no evidence that Marlowe knew the writings of Pontano" by asserting that "the theories of Pontano were part of the atmosphere." Knowledge by osmosis is a tempting concept. He also points out that Tamburlaine "dies of old age," commenting that "such things happened only to fortunati."⁷

⁴ "Marlowe and the Homilies," p.10.

⁵ "Marlowe and the Prophetic Dooms," pp.356-59, 404-07, 419-21.

⁶ "Marlowe and the Communion Service," p.159.

⁷ "Renaissance Remedies for Fortune: Marlowe and the Fortunati," Studies in Philology, 38 (1941), 188-97.

Carroll Camden Jnr. considers Tamburlaine as a study of a humour. Camden cites numerous examples of Tamburlaine's pride, fury, violence, prodigality, thoughts of war and blood etc., and thus sees him as corresponding to the portrait of the choleric man in Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy. In a masterpiece of condescension, we are told that "the case of Hamlet is an entirely different category from that of Tamburlaine. Hamlet is not a character which may be so summarily disposed of as to put him in a pigeon-hole labelled 'melancholic'. In Tamburlaine, however, the Elizabethan drama was still in an embryonic stage."⁸ Summarily disposed of indeed.

Camden is happy to elaborate, and suggests that Tamburlaine's gall, the source of his anger, had not remained within his gallbladder and that, loosed, it brought destructive rancor to the entire body. There is also, apparently, evidence of a deputative psychology within the play. "When Tamburlaine is about to die, his sons undergo the same sufferings that he does." The evidences are Amyras'

Alas, my lord, how should our bleeding hearts,
Wounded and broken with your highness' grief,
Retain a thought of joy or sparke of Life?
(2 Tam. V.iii.161-63),

and Celebinus' "Your pains do pierce our souls" (2 Tam. V.iii.166).⁹

Johnstone Parr, acknowledging Camden's theory of the choleric man, seizes upon the First Physician's diagnosis (2 Tam. V.iii.82-99), and says that it is "as a result of his intense passion ... (that) Tamburlaine has occasioned in his body an excess of febrile heat."¹⁰ There is astrological danger in the doctor's words, "Besides, my lord,

⁸"Tamburlaine: the Choleric Man," MLN, 44 (1929), 430-35.

⁹"Marlowe and Elizabethan Psychology," Philological Quarterly, 8 (1929), 69-78.

¹⁰"Tamburlaine's Malady," PMLA, 49 (1944), 710.

this day is/critical" (2 Tam. V.iii.91), and Parr continues, "Marlowe ... left entirely to his audience's imagination the specific planets which were woefully aspected when the accidental febrile heat dried up Tamburlaine's blood, parched his veins, and so debilitated his humidum and calor (the moisture and natural heat necessary to life, according to Parr's source, Thomas Newton's The Touchstone of Complexions (1565)) that he was speedily dispatched."¹¹

Parr attempts to dignify this reasoning by cataloguing it with Battenhouse's Morality approach and the Fortunatus theory of Allen: "it could be that Marlowe purposely fused all three of these conceptions."¹² The attempt must fail. It is just conceivable that the God of a Morality might bring about the death of a sinner by "natural" physiological causes, but Parr's stress on harmful astrological influences does not reconcile easily with Allen's reference to death by old age.

Charles Brooks sees Tamburlaine as a very masculine Jehovah. It is essential to his argument that Tamburlaine be whitewashed and Brooks is therefore prepared to defend the justice of the slaughter of the Damascus virgins. "In his treatment of the Damascus virgins ... he acts ... as the scourge of presumptuous pride. When the first virgin scolds men who fail to provide adequately for their women (1 Tam. V.i.24-33) ... her speech places the Damascans in a bad enough light for Tamburlaine's later treatment of the virgins to suggest any angry Jehovah."¹³ Brooks must, of course, see Tamburlaine's death as a triumph: "death is for him and Zenocrate a new marriage, just as he goes to be invested 'in a higher throne/as high too high for this disdainful earth' (2 Tam. V.iii.121-22). This marriage in death provides for Part Two the same sense of triumph as

¹¹ Ibid., p.714.

¹² Ibid., p.704.

¹³ "Tamburlaine and Attitudes to Women," Journal of English Literary History, 24 (1957), 7.

the original marriage does for Part One."¹⁴

The play, according to Brooks, is largely an anti-feminist tract. Zenocrate is early established as a mindless object by her juxtaposition with imagery of wealth in the first love scene (1 Tam. I.ii.82-105). The Turkish concubines allegedly demonstrate a "feminine" preoccupation with mere reputation when they beg not to become the mistresses of common soldiers (2 Tam. IV.iv.83).¹⁵ Only the male can rise above this trivia: "Tamburlaine's greatness is illustrated by an emphasis on the natural difference between man and woman ... woman is made for love, man for war. Tamburlaine encompasses both these natures ... when he loves Zenocrate exorbitantly without letting that love affect his virtue."¹⁶

"As various strong men clash with each other ... (and silly women presumable squabble over wealth and reputation) Tamburlaine is the one who can impose order on the world."¹⁷

Like Brooks, Warren D. Smith argues for the impeccability of Tamburlaine though, apparently, without having read Brooks' criticism. Smith somewhat inaccurately claims that "hitherto no one has mentioned, surprisingly enough, how deserving each victim of Tamburlaine's scourge is of God's wrath."¹⁸ He argues the magnanimity, by Elizabethan standards, of Tamburlaine's offer to besieged cities of a chance to surrender, citing the threats of Henry V before the gates of Harfleur as reflecting normal Elizabethan

¹⁴ Ibid., p.10.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp.3-4.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.10.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.9.

¹⁸ "The Substance of Meaning in Tamburlaine Part I," p.159. This is not Smith's only factual error: he also thinks that Battenhouse is the only perpetrator of the tenet heresy, thus neglecting Guthrie, Benet, Swinburne, and LePage (see above, Ch. 10).

practice.¹⁹ However, Smith attempts no justification for the torture of Bajazeth or for the burning of Larissa, thus avoiding the troubled waters that must face anyone attempting to force Tamburlaine into a conventional moral framework. "Tamburlaine the Just" is not, though, the main theme of Smith's criticism; he feels that "the substance of meaning in the play lies in a well defined conflict between Venus and Mars and moreover in Venus emerging victorious."²⁰ The struggle is not dissimilar to that suggested by Duthie, that Tamburlaine assimilates the qualities of Zenocrate after a painful struggle,²¹ and Smith offers as proof "the sudden change of mood (from the slaughter of the virgins to 'what is beauty' (1 Tam. V.ii)) that must have come from some kind of struggle within the protagonist himself." The forgiveness of the Soldan apparently marks the triumph of Venus over Mars.²² The major difference between Guthrie and Smith is that Smith argues that Marlowe is resolving in his drama a literary tension he discovered while at Cambridge. As surely as Battenhouse knows that Marlowe had read Isaiah,²³ Smith knows that he had translated Ovid, associated with Venus, and Lucan, associated with Mars, and that Tamburlaine's relenting in the final scene of Part One means that "in the mind of the dramatist, Ovid has wrested the laurel from Lucan."²⁴

At the other extreme, John Cutts finds Tamburlaine to be a coward and a charlatan who uses "a razzle-dazzle technique" of inflated rhetoric. "His acts of valor amount to rather petty torture and killing," and "his companions win whatever battles have to be fought for him." Tamburlaine

¹⁹ Ibid., p.158.

²⁰ Ibid., p.162.

²¹ See above, Ch. 11.

²² "Substance of Meaning," p.165.

²³ See above, Ch. 10.

²⁴ "Substance of Meaning," p.166.

sneers at Mycetes' absence from the battlefield (1 Tam. II. v.16-17), and Cutts sneers at Tamburlaine for being in the same place. It is fortunate, Cutts says, that Tamburlaine is never called upon to fight, otherwise his "bluff would have been exposed."²⁵

The superficiality of Cutts' criticism is echoed in the faddish quality of his prose: "there is no Ulysses to make him (Tamburlaine) leave these razzle-dazzle weeds because this is the only way a Tamburlaine can operate."²⁶

The only critic to see Tamburlaine as a kind of inadequate high school text is Mary Mellen Wehling. She says of "Tamburlaine in two parts or both considered as a unit, the play is too short for adequate character development," and claims that, "if Christopher Marlowe had shown the same regard for his readers that John Ford did in introducing his characters of The Broken Heart with 'The Speakers' Names Fitted to their Qualities', a literal translation beside each name, he would have made reading and character study easier." She labours long in trying to remedy Marlowe's omission since "I believe anyone will get new meaning and satisfaction, and a much broader understanding of Marlowe's plays by substituting the English translation of their names." Since her opinion of Tamburlaine is that it is "an imaginative drama, faithful to history where records exist,"²⁷ in direct contradiction of history's guarantee that Timur the Lame began as a leader and not as a shepherd,²⁸ her theory has evidently benefitted her little.

The same kind of unnecessary scholarship is that of the semiologist Siegfried Wyler. Anxious to count the word "king"

²⁵"Tamburlaine 'as fierce Achilles was'," Comparative Drama, 1 (1967), 106-08.

²⁶Ibid., p.109.

²⁷"Marlowe's Mnemonic Nomenclology with Especial Reference to Tamburlaine," MLN, 58 (1958), 243-47.

²⁸Levin, Overreacher, p.49.

93 times in the 2316 lines of Part One, Wyler comments that "Tamburlaine's way to power and his making himself a king was the crucial issue of the play." A more blatant statement of the obvious it would be hard to imagine. Wyler's argument is that the audience's problem lies in accepting the low-born Tamburlaine as king, and that this is achieved through substituting "vertu" for the normally required noble birth, and through reinforcing the king-Tamburlaine association by repeating the word "king" constantly in juxtaposition to the name "Tamburlaine", both in supportive linguistic contexts.²⁹

The most remarkable of Marlovian critics, however, is Walter Begley the Baconian. He offers three separate proofs that Tamburlaine belongs to Bacon.

"In Tamburlaine ... there is a knowledge of Tartar and Turkish history drawn from sources which do not seem at present accessible even in the British Museum."³⁰ Only Bacon presumably had this information, though where he got it, and which particular items are being referred to, Begley does not make clear.

Spenser's line in The Faerie Queene, "at every little breath that under heaven is blown" (I, cvii, st. 32), becomes "at every little breath that thorough heaven is blown" (2 Tam. IV. iv. 124). This, says Begley, "points towards Bacon and his peculiar methods."³¹ The suggestion is hardly flattering to his idol.

²⁸ Levin, Overreacher, p. 49.

²⁹ "Marlowe's Technique of Communicating with his Audience as seen in his Tamburlaine Part I," English Studies, 48 (1967), 314-16. The same kind of research is cited by Fieler, "Tamburlaine Part One and Its Audience," p. 60, when he reveals that Marion B. Smith found one image to every 7.69 lines in the two parts.

³⁰ "The Authorship of Tamburlaine and the Other Marlowe Plays," p. 254.

³¹ Ibid., p. 247.

Acclaiming Tamburlaine as a "wonderful play" because of its "heavenly rhetoric," Begley ends with the unkindest cut of all. Tamburlaine was published with all the "jokes and low scenes intended for the vulgar completely cut out. Should we expect this reticence from Marlowe?"³²

³²Ibid., p.255.

Chapter 15

A TENTATIVE CONCLUSION

With reference to the suggestions of Harper, Lever, Mendelsohn, and Nelson

Timothy Nelson believes that the dramatic effect of both Tamburlaine plays derives from the denial of audience expectations. "He (Tamburlaine) possesses ... those traits which in tragedy traditionally provoke retribution from fate ... arousing in the audience a confident expectation that Tamburlaine's stupendous arrogance will be punished with an unusually terrible fall." Since Nelson finds Tamburlaine's death to be a victory, it follows that "the apparently unrepeatable trick played on the audience in Part One is repeated in Part Two."¹

After recognizing that the plays' appeal lies somehow in the manipulation and the involvement of the audience, Nelson falls into the trap of trying to prove that "Tamburlaine is strictly just."² Any such attempt to subordinate Tamburlaine to a conventional morality will always doom the proponent of the argument to the tangle of sophistry. There is no real excuse in our world for the impaling of the virgins or for the burning of Larissa.

Nevertheless, Nelson offers other insights. "Recognition of one's true self will always involve an instinctive recognition of Tamburlaine as ... the controller of Fate," Nelson says, citing Bajazeth's awed

¹"Marlowe and his Audience: a Study of Tamburlaine," Southern Review: an Australian Journal of Literary Studies (U. of Adelaide), 3 (1969), 249-51.

²Ibid., p.254.

But such a star hath influence in his sword
 As rules the skies and countermands the gods
 (1 Tam. V.ii.69-70).³

He also refers to the "aspirations" of Orcanes to fill the sea with bodies (2 Tam. I.i.33-38), of Bajazeth to have a castrated Tamburlaine as guardian of his seraglio (1 Tam. III.iii.78), and of Mycetes to have Cosroe "by the head" (1 Tam. II.ii.11). He comments that men fail in Tamburlaine because they have overestimated their own capacity.⁴

Harper says of Tamburlaine that it is "the great drama of primal will, and nearly all of its characters are caught up in the same pattern as the hero." There is "scene after scene in which the characters ... urge, exhort, or threaten to impose their will." Tamburlaine is "an orator's handbook come to life ... in the recurring pattern of the exhortation." But, like Nelson, Harper finally falls into error. "The real theme of the play is the inevitable frustration of even the most titanic will by circumstances and mortality."⁵ Nelson at least realized that Tamburlaine's "final claim that he is being translated to a throne among the gods ... is accepted and upheld."⁷

Katherine Lever makes observations similar to those of Nelson on the effect of Tamburlaine's vision and on the manipulation of the audience. She claims that, to some extent, "the dramatic tension of the play is based on the interaction of the visual image of man's descent into brutality and the auditory image of man's quest for divinity," and continues: "we expect certain modes of behaviour from a shepherd, lord, king, emperor, or lover, but Tamburlaine is courteous when we expect rudeness, and cruel when we expect

³Ibid., p.259.

⁴Ibid., p.253.

⁵J. W. Harper, ed., Tamburlaine, p.xi.

⁶Ibid., p.xiv.

⁷"Marlowe and his Audience," p.262.

magnanimity."⁸

The manipulation of the audience in these ways is not her only theme. She points out that "the power of Tamburlaine's imagination is nowhere more evident than in his influence on Zenocrate. After a single speech of his, she changes her address to him from shepherd to lord (1 Tam. I.ii.33)."⁹ Other critics have noted the power of the hero's imagination on the other characters and on the audience,¹⁰ but no one has been led to her question: "does a man have a coherent character of his own, a separate entity unaffected by the imagination of himself and others?"¹¹ She does not answer her own question but the question itself suggests an approach to the plays.

Leonard Mendelsohn outlines a theory of drama that seems particularly applicable to Tamburlaine and which will accommodate the observations and speculations of Harper, Léver, and Nelson. "Characters are vision-producing agents ... As one character exercises his ability to affect the situation and to cast roles, he intrudes upon the vision of another character i.e. of another director."¹² Mendelsohn

⁸ "The Image of Man in Marlowe's Tamburlaine," p.426.

⁹ Ibid., p.245.

¹⁰ Fieler, "Tamburlaine and Its Audience," pp.48,60, notes that "extreme confidence, and full acceptance of the Scythian's destiny by every member of his entourage persuasively invites the audience to share the same attitude," as well as rather tediously counting the lines to show that the bulk of the images are concentrated in Tamburlaine's speeches. Battenhouse, Marlowe's Tamburlaine, p.224, agrees that, "by his soaring words, he wins Theridamas, spell-binds Zenocrate, inspires his whole army and completely fascinates the reader." Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p.382, speaks of a "continuing imaginative subjection to the story." None of these critics, however, followed the thought to any conclusions about its importance to Tamburlaine's essential dramatic quality.

¹¹ "The Image of Man," p.427.

¹² "The Player as Director: an Approach to Character," Comparative Drama, 6, No. 2 (1972), 116.

also indicates that the actor himself will inject something new into the function of the character/director, but this is a complication not necessary to the present discussion.

If one examines any protagonist as a "vision-producing" agent rather than as an "inert replica"¹³ of a real man off-stage, the puzzling presence of a dramatic quality in plays like Tamburlaine, where there is no psychological "realism," is explainable.

In Tamburlaine Mycetes himself makes it clear that an essential of the kingly role is the ability to create a compelling vision,

Yet insufficient to express the same.

Good brother, tell the cause unto my friends,
I know you have a better wit than I (1 Tam. I.i.1-4),

though he does not understand that persuasion, especially in terms of promising concrete reward, must be no part of it.

The jiggling vein of his reprimand to Cosroe,

Monster of nature, shame unto thy stock,
That dar's presume thy sovereign for to mock!
Meander, come! I am abused, Meander!

(1 Tam. I.i.104-06),

raises the interesting speculation as to whether he speaks like that because he is weak, or whether he is weak because he speaks like that. Since all one knows of a character is what he says or does, and what other people say and do in reaction to him, it seems obvious that, at least on stage, speech is inseparable from character.

Certainly, the possibility of anyone not participating in his vision does not occur to Tamburlaine when he exclaims,

Disdains Zenocrate to live with me
Or you, my lords, to be my followers?
(1 Tam. I.iii.82-83).

The lines to Zenocrate beginning "Think you I weigh this treasure more than you?" (1 Tam. I.ii.84 ff.)¹⁴ form another "Come live with me and be my love." The vision that Tamburlaine presents to Zenocrate, that she will be "drawn amidst

¹³Antonin Artaud, The Theatre and its Double, transl. Mary Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p.48.

the frozen pools/And scale the icy mountains' lofty tops," is no more a "real" world than is the pastoral ideal, but it exercises the same attraction.

It is the same vision that Tamburlaine presents to Theridamas, an alternative universe where Tamburlaine holds "the Fates bound fast in iron chains," and where "Jove himself" is Tamburlaine's ally and paymaster (1 Tam. I.ii.164, 207).

Theridamas has no answer to the universe that Tamburlaine creates in the instant, but he clearly understands that he is being compelled, not to rise in the world he has understood, but to participate in a new and alternative reality. His soul yields because of what he himself defines as "strong enchantments" (1 Tam. I.ii.223).

Tamburlaine will expel from his vision those like Calyphas who cannot play the role he has assigned; their vision is not permitted to interact with his. This is not to preclude the possibility of incorporating the visions of others when they can be accommodated. It is not Tamburlaine who first calls himself the Scourge of God, although he first mentions the term. When he says "I that am termed the scourge and wrath of God" (1 Tam. III.iii.44), it is quite clear that the origin of the description was not with him.

It has occurred to no critic that, when Tamburlaine twice echoes Menaphon's promise to Cosroe, "And ride in triumph through Persepolis" (1 Tam. II.v.49,50,54), he is being ironic. The stichomythic exchange that follows shows that kingship is important to Techelles and Umsuncasane, not to Tamburlaine. He is the bestower of kingship. His reference to "the sweet fruition of an earthly crown" (1 Tam. II.vii.29) is a reference to the goal of others, which he has incorporated into his own vision.

Whereas the dramatic tension of most plays derives from the complexity of each character's participating in, and

therefore changing, the roles assigned him by himself and by every other character, the drama of the Tamburlaine plays depends upon the absolute participation of the audience and the other characters in the one vision generated by Tamburlaine and contained in his images. There is room for us if not for our morality, though we are sometimes permitted to exercise conventional judgement when Tamburlaine is not on stage and we can prefer Orcanes to Sigismund.

The plays are like a vibrant still-life. Everything is there at our first perception of it. As the eye takes time to travel from detail to detail, and, as the energy of the composition continues to manifest itself, so the audience takes time, the five acts of each play, to move to the circumference of the vision that Tamburlaine established with the present tense of

this fair face and heavenly hue
Must grace his bed that conquers Asia
(1 Tam. I.ii.36-37).

Other visions are generated by other characters, but they are either incorporated or shown to be inadequate. The King of Jerusalem casts Tamburlaine as a galley-slave (2 Tam. III.v.92-96), and Callapine casts the renegade gaoler Almeda as a king (2 Tam. III.v.130), but Tamburlaine's casting of the kings as chariot-beasts is the vision whose ascendancy is never in doubt. Bajazeth casts himself as the hero-martyr,

Sacrifice my heart to death and hell
Before I yield to such a slavery
(1 Tam. IV.ii.16-17),

but cannot play the part, and is reduced to the plaintive "unless I eat I die" (1 Tam. IV.iv.96). He will play the role allocated to him in Tamburlaine's vision.

Everyone derives his meaning from Tamburlaine, and specifically from Tamburlaine's speech. Critics have seen internal struggle in Tamburlaine's admission that Zenocrate's

"sorrows lay more siege unto my soul" (1 Tam. V.ii.92),¹⁴ but it is Tamburlaine who has endowed Zenocrate with significance: "This is she with whom I am in love" (1 Tam. I.ii.108).

The problem of death has disturbed some of the same critics, but Tamburlaine endows death with meaning just as he does Zenocrate. It can be a tool of his victory, as when he charges Techelles to show to the Damascans "my servant Death" (1 Tam. V.ii.54); it is a controllable means of effecting reunion when he has Zenocrate's body embalmed, "though she be dead, yet let me think she lives," setting the stage for the future when "we both will rest and have one epitaph" (2 Tam. II.iv.127,134); or it can be a means to ascend "a higher throne" (2 Tam. V.iii.121), a function of death that Tamburlaine foresaw in his promise to Theridamas that

Thus shall my heart be still combined with thine
 Until our bodies turn to elements
 And both our souls aspire celestial thrones.
 (1 Tam. I.ii.234-36).

It is impossible to argue that death was either punishment or surprise to Tamburlaine. It was assigned its place, its role, from the beginning.

Marlowe deliberately tests the degree of our entry into the protagonist's world. The sudden switch from the impalement of the virgins to a consideration of Beauty is such a test. Marlowe is denying us the conventional response to the virgins' imminent death. He will tell the audience how they must feel; he will assign them their role.

A brief reference to two other of Marlowe's plays will demonstrate the validity of this approach.

Gaveston's opening lines in Edward II, when he compares himself to Leander, is part of a homosexual vision generated by the "amorous lines" of a "sweet prince." The audience is

¹⁴ See above, Ch. 12.

again being tested; it is invited to reject the images because they are created by a homosexual in an age when deviation was a hanging matter. But there is no rejection. The audience is being denied the appropriate response here just as it will be when its chauvinistic support is elicited for homosexual Edward against the Bishop of Coventry who will appeal to the hated see of Rome against Edward's affair with Gaveston. The audience will support what Marlowe thinks fit.

The characters of Edward II wish to direct as ardently as did those of the Tamburlaine plays. Gaveston proposes to fill the court with Italian masques (I.i.55 ff.), Mortimer Junior visualizes a hanging Gaveston (I.ii.28 ff.), and Canterbury conceives that "God himself is up in arms" (I.ii.40). But it is Edward who has the only compelling and consistent vision. He gives up the kingship for Gaveston as he had promised when he said,

But yet I will not yield,
Curse me, depose me, do the worst you can
(I.iv.56-57).

The end of Edward is a loss for the audience; there is nothing so entrancing in Mortimer Junior's Machiavellian world where he can say, "the prince I rule, the queen I do command" (V.iv.48), but where it is Lightborn who outlines the alternative methods of murder, prefaced by an arrogant "you shall not need to give instructions" (V.iv.29-37). Mortimer can only reply, "I care not how it is" (V.iv.40). Tamburlaine never has to choose from another man's options and Edward II refuses to.

Marlowe showed he could handle the cosmic vision in Tamburlaine and the limited vision co-existing with moving realism in Edward II; in Faustus he demonstrates the result of an imperfect vision held by the protagonist.

Faustus casts himself as the victim,
O thou bewitching fiend, 'twas thy temptation
Hath robbed me of eternal happiness (V.ii.87-88),

but Mephistopheles had told him only the truth of the "eternal joys of heaven" (I.iii.78).. Faustus speaks in an almost servile way to Valdes and Cornelius, "gentle friends, aid me in this attempt" (I.i.112), when their help is clearly not necessary. Casting himself as victim or neophyte is at odds with his vision of himself as he that will "join the hills that bind/the Afric shore" (I.iii.107), and it is the confusion of his vision that causes the triviality of its realization.

In Faustus, the protagonist's vision demands the impossible, like the imperative to "stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven" (V.ii.133), but the grandeur of even an imperfect vision created in such images compels the audience's attention. In this final soliloquy Faustus is aware of God, but there is no room for God in the universe-vision he has produced. He has cast himself finally as victim and will brook no intervention in his poetic reality.

Too many critics have attempted to define Marlowe's work as a Romantic escape, a Machiavellian treatise, or a Morality. To define it is to reduce it, as any definition must reduce any work. There are, of course, Machiavellian, Morality, and even nationalistic references in Tamburlaine, but these are like the allusions to our "real" world that one finds in a fairy-tale, allusions designed to facilitate entry into a new world by creating a feeling of vague familiarity.

The great advantage of the theory of the character as a generator of vision is that it is not a definition but an approach and, as such, neither denies nor attempts to resolve the complexity of the work.

It also permits the consideration of the work as a whole. Almost all the critics up until now have paid attention only to a few incidents and to relatively few lines. The first four acts of Part One have been virtually ignored except for the "ride in triumph through Persepolis" (II.v.49-54) and "aspiring minds" (II.vii.12-29) references. Part Two has

been similarly sifted. The first three acts are apparently chaff except for the Orcanes-Sigismund episode in the second, while the fourth act is notable only for Olympia's piety, the death of Calyphas, and the burning of Larissa. Only the fifth act of each play has been commented upon at all fully, with rather more attention to that of Part Two since it contains Tamburlaine's death.

The consensus of four centuries thus appears to be that these are primitive dramas with a narrative framework too frail for the mighty line of their creator, a man whose axe-grinding was more important than his playwrighting.

Such a conclusion is manifestly absurd and derives from a critical refusal to look at the work as a whole and to forget the libels of a few small-minded bigots and jealous men.

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