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May 01, 2006

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Recommended Citation

Marquis, Liane, "Marlowe, Tamburlaine and the demise of traditional Elizabethan monarchy" (2006). *Honors Junior/Senior Projects.* Paper 4. http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d10001517

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Senior Honors Thesis
April 25, 2006

# Marlowe, Tamburlaine and the Demise of Traditional Elizabethan Monarchy

## ***Introduction***

Perhaps the most striking scene in Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* is when the waters of Asphaltis' Lake swell above the banks while fish feed on human carcasses. This is in response to Tamburlaine's demand, "Drown them all, man, woman and child." When the deed is completed by his subject Techelles, Tamburlaine the Great has decimated another city, another race of people. Such severe violence such as the scene above coupled with the ultimate death of Tamburlaine has led generations of critics to claim Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* as a morality play. More recent scholars such as Emily Bartels and Mark Thornton Burnett have downplayed the idea of Tamburlaine as a morality play; however, a moralistic interpretation has not completely disappeared as critics such as Stephen Greenblatt still make use of it in arguments. Tamburlaine's severe and unending violence throughout parts One and Two of the play leads many critics to cast Tamburlaine as villainous and, in the case of early twentieth-century scholarship, evil. While a character study of Tamburlaine is not my purpose in this essay, I do intend to emphasize the admirable nature of Tamburlaine. I will further argue that this play is

most certainly not a morality play, as once was thought, and may in fact is pushing the boundaries of the genre of tragedy.

The lines of genre are quite blurred in early modern literature. Tragedy and history are not separate ideas for Elizabethans. A case can be made for *Tamburlaine the Great, Part One* as a comedy, or *Part Two* as a tragedy, following Aristotle's definitions of the genres. But Marlowe seeks to complicate any attempt at squarely categorizing his work. More than anything else, *Tamburlaine the Great* is a kind of Epic. Marlowe seeks to employ the epic conventions to raise Tamburlaine to even higher greatness. The scene I describe above, while from Marlowe, echoes Homer's *Iliad* very closely.

> O Achilleus your strength is greater, your acts more violent
> Than all men's; since always the very gods are guarding you.
> If the son of Kronos has given all Trojans to your destruction,
> Drive them at least out of me and to the plain, and there work your havoc.
> For the loveliness of my waters is crammed with corpses, I cannot
> Find a channel to cast my waters into the bridge sea
> Since I am congested with the dead men you kill so brutally. (Book XXI 214-220).

The river Xanthos speaks out to Achilleus, lamenting its condition much as Techelles tells Tamburlaine the circumstances at Asphaltis' Lake. It is not a coincidence that this scene from Marlowe parallels that of the *Iliad*, in fact throughout *Tamburlaine the Great*, Marlowe invokes epic traditions, devices and stories. The stories of Homer, Virgil and Ovid all make an appearance in this play. Marlowe starts his play *in medias res*, invokes the muses, writes epic simile, creates epic catalogs and is thematically concerned with the

same issues as Homer and Virgil: nation-building. Marlowe is writing in the same historical moment that Edmund Spenser is creating his epic, *The Fairie Queene*. Spenser's approach to the epic is clearly more direct than that of Marlowe. Spenser is attempting to write the first Epic in English, to become the quintessential English poet. Marlowe, conversely, seems to take a more light-hearted (yet unnervingly murderous) approach to his version of the dramatic epic.

Marlowe's focus on the epic ideals and histories situate Tamburlaine in a world quite removed from Marlowe's Elizabethan culture. However, as Stephen Greenblatt remarks, "...despite all the exoticism in Marlowe—Scythian shepherds, Maltese Jews, German magicians—it is his own countrymen that he broods upon and depicts. As in Spenser, though to a radically different effect, the "other world" becomes a mirror" (Greenblatt 194). Marlowe's explorations of legitimate and illegitimate power occur throughout these plays, always through Tamburlaine, yet most often Marlowe's various monarchs become quite reflective of the Tudor monarchs. Marlowe complicates the idea of monarchy by posing a question of ownership of authority: should one be entitled to authority simply by birth, or should one have to earn that authority? Tamburlaine's followers seem convinced that he is deserving of kingliness because even though Tamburlaine's violence may be over-the-top, the loyalty he inspires in his "disciples" is startling. Along with violence, Tamburlaine employs a range of tactics throughout his encounters to conquer or woo his adversaries. His brute force and rhetorical elegance are seemingly contradictory, but work together to create an effective, powerful and fearsome king. Tamburlaine utilizes religion as a tool, to invoke, disparage, or aspire to according to the situation. He is a conniving and cunning monarch who holds fast to no particular

belief system, but instead is firmly planted in the "pre-social" world as A.D. Nuttall suggests. His allegiance is to himself and his power; Tamburlaine has no interest in money, no desire for wealth, instead the acquisition of more and more land is all he dreams of. Strangely the land that Tamburlaine conquers is treated with more respect and care than those people who inhabit it. Almost every person that comes into contact with Tamburlaine is conquered and reduced to a commodity, something to be used according to his will, as a creature, not a human person.

I do not intend to deny Tamburlaine's villainy, for it is surely apparent in the plays, but instead I look to explore the roots of Marlowe's play and the characteristics, virtues, ideals and complications of Tamburlaine's rise to power and reign as Arch-monarch of the East. I intend to explore the ways in which Tamburlaine seeks to adorn himself with power, and how certain things bring him success and others lead to his downfall. The ways in which Tamburlaine uses language, love, violence and religion all contribute to his reign, and love and violence especially seem to join together in a perverse relationship; often when one would expect love, Tamburlaine offers violence and vice-versa. Ultimately, Marlowe acknowledges the faulty nature of the patriarchal monarchy system and the absurdity of monarchy's insistence on birthright.

## ***Constructing Authority***

Tamburlaine's authority is established almost completely within the first two acts of *Part One*. Tamburlaine immediately has to overcome the illegitimacy of his birth. While struggling to legitimize his own power, Tamburlaine is openly rebelling against

clearly legitimate rulers. This tension between legitimating his own power and usurping legitimate power is central to *Part One*. Marlowe's representation of Tamburlaine is quite foreign to and removed from the most familiar (Elizabethan) notions of monarchy. Marlowe presents first a recognizable form of kingliness in Mycetes, but rather quickly counters that representation to embrace a seemingly more ideal monarch in Tamburlaine—he is decisive, charismatic and brave. Tamburlaine embodies the ideal qualities of kingliness that Mycetes lacks, and acts as a corrective to a weak and flawed ruler.

Marlowe opens the play *in medias res,* beginning a long line of nods to the Epic tradition. We are first introduced to Mycetes in Act I, Scene i as a king whose only kingly virtue appears to be his birthright that is, inheritance according to the "divine right of kings" theory which holds that a king (or queen) is directly chosen and anointed by God, and is second only to that God. Mycetes' lack of wit, intelligence and decisiveness leaves him vulnerable to attacks from enemies and betrayal from those whom he trusts. As early as his second speech, Mycetes defaults to a lord for advice, "I perceive you think I am not wise enough to be a king, / But I refer me to my noblemen/ That know my wit, and can be witnesses:/ I might command you to be slain for this. / Meander, might I not?" (Part 1.1.1.19-24). By referring himself to his noblemen, Mycetes is in essence absolving himself of responsibility and pressure to formulate a solid opinion. Failure to formulate a solid opinion is not only the defining characteristic of Mycetes, but also that which ultimately leads to his fall. An Elizabethan audience might have recognized this indecisiveness in Mycetes as an echo of the early years of Elizabeth's reign. The young Queen was exasperatingly indecisive when it came to acts of violence and war and

resolved not to act when it came to conflicts, just as Mycetes is here in *Part One.* J.E. Neale comments on Elizabeth's refusal to conform to the will of Parliament, "Invariably they wanted action: too often for their liking, she was resolved on inaction" (Neale 28). The key difference between Elizabeth and Mycetes lies in Neale's analysis of the Parliamentary struggles. Elizabeth saw present dangers of certain policies and chose inaction (or refused to definitively decide) because it was the practical and logical choice to make, and in making this choice, she went against her advisors knowingly, but with quite possibly with a clear idea of what indecisiveness may bring. Mycetes lacks the analytical or forward-thinking skills that Elizabeth exhibited, and instead appears foolishly indecisive.

Beyond his refusal to make a decision, Mycetes threatens those he perceives as superior. In his first speech, Mycetes says to Cosroe "I know you have a better wit than I" (Part 1.1.1.5). Cosroe agrees saying: "Now to be ruled and governed by a man/ At whose birthday Cynthia with Saturn joined,/ And Jove, the Sun, and Mercury denied/ To shed their influence in his *fickle brain*! (Part 1.1.1.12-15 emphasis mine). Mycetes is not so "fickle" as to confuse Cosroe's meaning: "And through your planets I perceive you think/ I am not wise enough to be a king" (Part 1.1.1.19-20). Cosroe's invocation of planets (the Roman Gods) appears to be beyond Mycetes, but the meaning behind that invocation does not escape him.[1] Mycetes' hold on his power is tenuous at best, and thus he appears to be shaken at the smallest abuse. However, this defensive reaction does

[1] Marlowe's choice of Gods and Goddesses in lines 13-14 in a sense encapsulates *Part One*. Cynthia, (another name of Diana) is the virgin goddess of the hunt, the goddess of the moon. Saturn is the god of agriculture, of land, and he is the ruler of the Titans. Therefore, Cynthia, a beautiful, desirable, virginal women, and Saturn, a fearsome martial ruler can be seen in Zenocrate and Tamburlaine. Jove, the Sun and Mercury make continuous appearances throughout both *Part One* and *Part Two*.

come across as humorous because for the third time in less than 24 lines of the play, Mycetes passes on the final decision or responsibility to someone of lower rank than himself when he asks Meander if Cosroe may be slain for this offense. Mycetes is clearly a hesitant king and timid in his steps, following only what those around him approve, and then taking the credit for himself. This image of a weak and inept king, whose claim to the throne is solely birthright, creates a bold contrast to the image of a low born Tamburlaine adorning and creating himself as a king, a conqueror and even possibly a god.

Mycetes' sole kingly attribute lies in his birthright and his unquestionable legitimacy. Unquestionable legitimacy is something that Tamburlaine lacks, in fact it is one of the few virtues that escape him in *Part One* (the others being temperance and mercy.) Marlowe spends much of *Part One* creating for Tamburlaine a legitimate throne. Questions of legitimacy are not foreign to Marlowe or his audience. Left in the wake of Henry VIII's slew of marriages were 3 children in line for the Throne. The male Edward easily succeeded his father, as the only living child to be declared fully legitimate (and of course, he was male!). Both Mary and Elizabeth were bastardized and legitimized and bastardized again throughout their lives. When each ascended to the throne, they were legally a bastard, and one of the first acts of Parliament for each was to declare their legitimate claim to the throne. "...[Elizabeth's] title might be regarded as soiled by a previous and still unrepealed act declaring her illegitimate: soiled also by a Marian act of 1553...Elizabeth's bill was a simple recognition of her title to the succession under the act of 1544" (Neale 44-45). Elizabeth easily surmounted her bastardization in her first Parliament, though she never fully escaped the association with bastardy in public

opinion. The precariousness of Elizabeth's claim to the throne persisted until Elizabeth's perceived competition, Mary Queen of Scots, was beheaded. Tamburlaine, unlike Elizabeth, had no legal or Parliamentary avenue to pursue his claim to legitimacy, and even if he had, his father wasn't a king, he was merely a simple shepherd. Illegitimacy follows Tamburlaine until the very end of *Part One*.

Tamburlaine first usurps authority in Act I, Scene ii when he kidnaps and rapes (seduces?) Zenocrate. Zenocrate is a woman of high birth, a Soldan's daughter, a king's niece. She carries with her literal treasure, but also the treasure that is much more interesting to Tamburlaine, the treasure of *legitimate* royalty. "Think you I weigh this treasure mote than you?/ Not all the gold in India's wealthy arms/ Shall buy the meanest soldier in my train" (Part 1.1.2.85-87). Tamburlaine's abduction of Zenocrate is not primarily an abduction of her person, but rather an abduction of her position. Techelles mocks Tamburlaine saying: "What now? In love?" (Part 1.1.2.106) to which Tamburlaine replies "Techelles, women must be flatteréd./ But this is she with whom I am in love" (Part 1.1.2.107-108). Prior to this exchange, Tamburlaine has for the first time shown potential weakness in his poetic, courtly wooing of Zenocrate. Tamburlaine bites back at Techelles' acknowledgment of weakness, asserting that it is essential to flatter a woman, and that's all he is doing is flattering Zenocrate. This hyper-masculine reaction to a friend's simple chiding illustrates Tamburlaine's sensitivity to his appearance. Tamburlaine does concede in line 108 that he is in love with Zenocrate, but leaves ambiguous whether he is in love with her person, which he hardly has known, or in love with the *idea* of her person, as that of royalty. By abducting Zenocrate, Tamburlaine abducts her power and authority, (and birthright!) and confers it upon himself. Zenocrate

is anything but willing in this scene, asserting her birth and her privilege in hopes that Tamburlaine will recognize the authority of her father. Marlowe is inverting the typical seduction/rape scenario in this instance. Typically in plays such as Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, the male monarch demands a sexual relationship with an inferior (oftentimes married) woman. In this scene, Tamburlaine, the social inferior, is demanding of Zenocrate, the representation of legitimate monarchy, that same sexual relationship. In the conventional rape/seduction scene the woman has no right to say no to the monarch, it is her duty to submit to his will, however perverse and morally reprehensible his desires may be social custom dictates her acquiescence. Tamburlaine is Zenocrate's social inferior but he does not let that impede his desires. In fact, like the conventional model, Zenocrate has no choice but to comply with Tamburlaine. Before he can rape her physically, he is interrupted by the news of Theridamas's approach, but Tamburlaine has already raped Zenocrate of her royalty, power and authority, reducing her to a sexual slave, a commodity to satisfy his pleasures.

The conversion of Zenocrate from enslaved woman to loyal and passionate lover is one that takes place off stage sometime between this exchange of courtly flattery and Tamburlaine's conquer of Theridamas. Perhaps it is Zenocrate's observation of Theridamas bowing to Tamburlaine that wins her over, whether it be simply out of fear of the harm Tamburlaine can inflict, or awe and admiration for the obvious wit and cunning of her captor. By her next appearance in Act III, Scene ii, Zenocrate is entranced by Tamburlaine. "Ah, life and soul still hover in his breast/And leave my body senseless as the earth,/ Or else unite you to his life and soul,/ That I may live and die with Tamburlaine!" (Part 1.3.2.21-24). Zenocrate comments on the life and soul in

Tamburlaine's breast, that power that is the life-giving force in Tamburlaine's blood that he coaxed from her in Act I, Scene ii. When she claims her body "senseless as the earth" Zenocrate is conceding her body to be empty, worthless, and just mere dust without the life and soul of Tamburlaine to complete it. Tamburlaine has raped her of her power, and most probably has physically raped her as well (see Part 1.3.2.6: "When your offensive rape by Tamburlaine") and left her empty and base as the earth. All of her "treasure" is lost, her wealth, her power and her virginity. In renaissance terms, her rape, or "raptus" is ambiguous. It can be a rape in the sense rape is traditionally thought of, or it can be a seizure by force. Either of these interpretations points to the fragility of a woman's reputation and contributes to conflate the forceful seizure with sexual violation. Paradoxically it is at this point, when she is most violated that Zenocrate allies herself with her attacker and pledges her life, love and allegiance to him. It is precisely this "love" that is most troublesome to a renaissance eye. Courtly marriages, and certainly royal marriages were about everything but love. These marriages were arranged for monetary, political or imperial gain. Patriarchal systems secure their power through these loveless marriages. While Tamburlaine certainly gains some financial wealth (not to mention a legitimate claim to authority) by marrying Zenocrate, he also, arguably, marries for love, thus in a way usurping the patriarchal system. Marlowe is making marriage "dirty" by introducing desire and passion. By violating the norms of political marriage, parallel to Tamburlaine's "rape" of Zenocrate, Marlowe is "raping" monarchical marriage.

Zenocrate's rape is essentially the catalyst for violence as well as the catalyst for passion in Tamburlaine. Anthony Dawson discusses the idea of rape as liberation in

regards to *Measure for Measure* and *Women Beware Women* but his insights apply just as readily to *Tamburlaine*.

> ...both [Isabella and Bianca (and I suggest Zenocrate)] are young, fearful, ardent, somewhat alienated, and uncertain how to handle their sexuality in relation to the actual world) [This] should not blind us to the structural similarity between the two situations. In both cases the impasse that the woman finds herself in is registered by her silence, forcing an interpretation on a reader or actor, so that *her* consent becomes a matter of how *we* read, and hence of our own cultural context... Furthermore recent feminist criticism has made us alert to the meaning of silence as it bespeaks powerlessness and passivity, the woman as the object of the male gaze and hence eroticizes and cut off from subjectivity, desire and action (Dawson 305).

Zenocrate is initially vocal in her dealings with Tamburlaine, protesting her mis-treatment, proclaiming her birth and all but demanding her free passage, but as the scene progresses, the more Tamburlaine speaks the less Zenocrate is heard. In essence, Zenocrate is uncertain how to handle her sexuality, the very (carnal) part of her that Tamburlaine desires, in the world outside of her upbringing. Zenocrate makes a point of noting that she is betrothed, a match arranged by her father, where the implications of her sexuality are strictly controlled. Here, in the "wilderness" with Tamburlaine, her sexuality becomes first and foremost the issue in a way she is unaccustomed to acknowledging it, thus she slips into silence the more Tamburlaine extols her beauty and vocalizes his desires.

Following Tamburlaine's lengthy speech[2] in Act I, scene ii, Zenocrate is seen but not heard for 150 lines. This silence, as feminist criticism suggests "bespeaks powerlessness and passivity". Zenocrate initially held all of the legitimated power, but after speaking with Tamburlaine for but a short time, she is silenced, raped of her power. Perhaps it is in this silencing of Zenocrate that the "rape" truly occurs, for once she is silenced (read controlled), she is Tamburlaine's possession.

Dawson introduces the interpretations of Howard Barker, an English dramatist who reshaped *Women Beware Women* and offered new readings on the meaning and circumstance of rape. Dawson summarizes, "In a violent world, only a violent act can split sex off from what drags it down and under—its linkage with money and power. Thus Barker, a male playwright, claims to bring liberation to a woman through sexual violence" (Dawson 303). While concluding that rape brings liberation to the victim is perhaps a bit extreme, the connection of rape to violence, money and power is one that Marlowe is clearly making in this scene. This "rape" (either metaphorical or physical) scene propels Tamburlaine from wit to war, he soon abandons his words, and picks up his sword in violence. Barker appears to be disengaging power and gender, which is precisely what Tamburlaine does when he strips Zenocrate of her power, reducing her from princess to woman. The only successful way for love to occur in Tamburlaine is through violence, because without that violent act of rape, Tamburlaine would never fully rule over Zenocrate, her money and power (while he could withhold it from her) would always be hers if she acquiesces to his will peacefully. If Tamburlaine violently takes that power and status from Zenocrate, it can never be hers thereafter. If he merely relies on

[2] Note in this speech, I.ii.82-105, Tamburlaine's offers of riches and gifts in exchange for Zenocrate's love mocks the form of an epic catalog.

her to give him her power, status and love, she can more easily pull it away from him later. The crisis of rape is avoided only because the "lesser rape" or the stripping of Zenocrate's power occurs first, thus in a perverse way betrothing her to the man who "raped" her. The physical act of rape if it even occurs, occurs only after this silencing and disempowering moment. If Zenocrate in her silence is "betrothed" to Tamburlaine, the sexual act that is implied comes between a married couple, (in promise though not in formality yet). This moment is ambiguous as it vilifies Tamburlaine while establishing his admirable power and strong will.

Tamburlaine doesn't explicitly imitate traditional models of monarchy (at least by Elizabethan standards). Traditionally, the right to become king or queen came by birthright. Even shifts in the royal family on the throne were only among families with substantial royal bloodlines. Shifts in the royal family such as that from the Tudors to the Stuarts was a more peaceful example of transition whereas a shift from the House of York to the Tudors was a more violent example, with Henry VII coming to power amidst the War of the Roses.[3] Henry VII's martial prowess and willingness to challenge "legitimate" power is something that is seen in Marlowe's development of Tamburlaine. Henry Tudor at least had a strenuous link to the throne on which to base his battles, but a simple shepherd such as Tamburlaine had no claim to any throne by birth. The only chance a peasant or less than noble born individual may have to climb to the throne

[3] Henry Tudor (later Henry VII) was originally a Welshman brought up exiled in France. He had "tenuous claim to the throne" but came to it "by right of conquest." He married the daughter of Edward IV, uniting the houses of York and Lancaster bringing an end to the Wars of the Roses. Henry Tudor invaded England with the help of Charles VIII of France and defeated Richard III in the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 thus securing himself the throne. (Pocket Reference Book: Kings & Queens of England, Ireland, Scotland & Wales).

would be to marry the king or queen. However, Tamburlaine does marry a princess (Zenocrate), and makes her queen of his realm in his distribution of power.

Not long before Tamburlaine was written (circa 1590), Queen Elizabeth I had been severely criticized for her relationship with Robert Dudley. Dudley's father and brothers had been executed for treason under Henry VIII, and Robert himself was considered by most as untrustworthy. Dudley was, however, a lifelong favorite of the Queen, and because of this was given titles and power he would not have been in receipt of otherwise. Many of the Queen's closest advisors feared that Elizabeth would marry Dudley, thus promoting him to the highest power in the land. Dudley was not born to be a king, yet he did all in his power to transcend the limits society had implemented. Unlike Tamburlaine, Dudley was deeply imbedded in a ceremonial and yet capitalistic mind-set. He staged elaborate masques for the Queen and was not afraid to use large sums of money to promote his power (in fact he nearly went broke funding entertainments for Elizabeth) Tamburlaine and Dudley both serve as models of low-born, proud and vain men with yearnings for power, but their successes could not be more different. Dudley—noble as he was, he was the son of a convicted and executed traitor—and Tamburlaine surely were low-born, proud and vain. Problematically, Marlowe grants Tamburlaine much success and wealth in his empirical quests; far more success than Elizabeth ever achieved. Next to Tamburlaine, Elizabeth was an isolationist. If looked at in this light, Tamburlaine seems to prove that the deserving nature of certain low-born men is to be raised to power, Dudley included. If a man appeared kingly, acted kingly and sounded kingly, Marlowe seems to be arguing, then he deserves to be a king. Mark Thornton

Burnett briefly touches on the means of Tamburlaine's leap from base to aristocratic as lying in his use of language.

> ...the ability to wield aristocratic expressions is arguably more appealing to Tamburlaine than executing the actions described...It is a moment [Part 1.1.2.33 " I am a lord, for so my deeds shall prove"] dense with social import: traditional concepts of class superiority are held up for scrutiny, and the notion of an aristocracy dedicated to achievement rather than blood is privileged (Burnett 129).

Burnett is working with the idea that Tamburlaine is a king because his actions and his person *appear* to be royal. "Tamburlaine unveils a vision of primacy based on living acts rather than inherited privileges" (Burnett 131). Tamburlaine, like Dudley is climbing the social ladder through his living acts, those things they accomplish themselves, since both clearly have no inherited privilege to lean on. Tamburlaine embodies the deserving king while Marlowe is casting shadow on the idea of an "entitled" king (Mycetes). Entitled to nothing, Tamburlaine doesn't transgress, but transcends class boundaries through his "living acts".

Living acts would amount to nothing if Tamburlaine didn't *appear* kingly in his own right. Among the first impressions that one gains upon meeting Tamburlaine is his appearance, and for that sake, he is adorning himself as would a king. "A Scythian shepherd so embellished/ With nature's pride and richest furniture?/ His looks do menace heaven and dare the gods;/ His fiery eyes are fixed upon the earth..." (Part 1.1.2.154-158). Marlowe is hinting early on that Tamburlaine will threaten the gods with his power, a complete break from the Elizabethan ideas of monarchy, which was so rooted in

Christian theology. The ambivalent religious attitude of Tamburlaine is just beginning to emerge in one of its many forms. Marlowe is distancing himself and his Tamburlaine from (while commenting on) the Elizabethan idea of monarchy; he is instead working from the more classical, i.e. pre-capitalist models of monarchy and power. The most remembered and respected classical figures (Odysseus, Hector, Hercules, Achilles) are those with godly appearances and amazing feats of oration and battle. Tamburlaine, by his own words, intends to, and for a significant portion of the plays does excel in both of these areas. It is apparent that Theridamas is initially impressed with and surprised by Tamburlaine's appearance, and that he was expecting no more than a ragged shepherd and an easy victory. Instead, Tamburlaine's kingly appearance gives Theridamas cause to pause and consider his actions, or at least give ear to what Tamburlaine makes effort to say.

In this scene, Marlowe also seems to be toying with the criticisms of early modern theater. Tamburlaine's changing of clothes inevitably has certain resonances when it is performed on stage. Strictly legally speaking, changing clothes/identity is a crime according the sumptuary laws. However, the changing of clothing and assumption of another's identity is a necessary condition of theatrical life. Early modern critics of the playhouses railed against theater for exactly this reason, the ability of base persons to assume nobility or aristocracy. Marlowe undoubtedly had such critics in mind when he scripted Tamburlaine's transformation, instead of putting on the armor of nobility, Tamburlaine strips down to it. In other words, how what critics considered false and criminal, "dressing-up" for a part, is complicated by Tamburlaine who instead strips down to reveal his inner nature through his inner costume. Marlowe's argument is

complicated, however, by the fact that the actor on stage is putting off an on all of these various roles. Marlowe may have found a way around the criticism of theater in Tamburlaine's instance, but *Tamburlaine the Great* is still a play, and thus there was inevitably a live actor playing a king on the stage. Tamburlaine is exotic and distant, a character in a world constructed by Marlowe, but the actor is still very much a part of the Elizabethan society, not distant, and certainly not part of the world of Marlowe's making, he is merely a representative of it. As Greenblatt points out, "the "other world" becomes a mirror" (Greenblatt 194). Marlowe is using Tamburlaine as a mirror to his own society to pull Tamburlaine out of his "other world-ness" and bring part of him tangibly into the Elizabethan world through the actor. When at the end of *Part Two* Tamburlaine recognizes and accepts (though grudgingly) his mortality, order is seemingly restored and the Patriarchal system reigns—his lands go to his sons. When the play itself is over, order is restored when the actor strips down to his own acceptable clothing and steps away from Marlowe's world.

While Tamburlaine establishes his own rules, and asserting his hoped-for power in Act I, scene ii, he sheds the clothing that marks his class as a shepherd in an attempt to win over Zenocrate and reveal to the world his underlying, hidden greatness. Instead of just declaring a move from one class of clothing to another, Marlowe has Tamburlaine dramatically "tear off his shepherd's garb to reveal a suit of armour" (stage directions, I ii, after l. 41). The fact that Tamburlaine is already wearing a suit of fine armor beneath his shepherd's clothing is meant to show that Tamburlaine considers himself a knight, and perhaps even a king before he considers himself a shepherd. His low birth has been hiding his greatness until this point, just as the shepherd's garb was hiding the knight

underneath it. This moment is crucial to understanding the dynamics of class and power in this play.

Marlowe is quite conscious that appearance alone is not enough to convince Theridamas of Tamburlaine's authority and power. To this end, Tamburlaine wastes no time in wooing Theridamas with his words. The importance of language is first emphasized at this point, but throughout the play language plays a large role, in several permutations. Tamburlaine's chief asset in his initial bid for power and authority is his ability to bend others to his will through his flowery, flattering, promise-laden speeches. Flowery, flattering and promise-laden speech is generally attributed to courtiers vying for the love of a woman (or the favor of a queen), but here Marlowe further "rebels" against authority and tradition, by giving Tamburlaine these speeches. Instead of the strong, warlike mythological figure he seems to be up to this point Tamburlaine is now attempting to woo a man he has just encountered. While this courtier-like language wasn't uncommon for men in Early Modern England, Tamburlaine's speech to Theridamas is oddly quite similar to that of his speech to Zenocrate. He praises Theridamas's appearance, "And by thy martial face and stout aspect" and continues to create a catalog of the riches and privileges Theridamas stands to gain in Tamburlaine's favor. (Part 1.1.2.169). The proximity of these speeches (both in Act I, scene ii) beckons the question of whom Tamburlaine is more fixated upon, his love or the means to win his lands. But even more so, it juxtaposes severe violence (on a woman) with courtly, rhetorical language (used on a man). While the brute power and rhetorical power appear contradictory, they in fact go hand in hand, becoming tools that Tamburlaine uses when he deems them necessary. The effect of his persuasive powers is great; he recognizes

talent in Theridamas and rewards it rather than simply commanding it. In the case of Zenocrate (and most of his later conquests), Tamburlaine resorts to brute force when his rhetoric fails to yield him his desires.

It is in these initial speeches of Tamburlaine's that Marlowe's extensive training in logic and rhetoric becomes most apparent. These verses are well crafted, and deliberately arranged. As Tamburlaine constructed his own power through the rape of Zenocrate, he is beginning to construct power in Theridamas in a similar, albeit artificial, way. Marlowe constructed Tamburlaine as a king, stripped him down to armor and filled his speeches with intelligence, wit and cunning. Tamburlaine has, in a sense, taken control of his own power in this exchange. He is acting almost as a playwright and is adorning Theridamas with the very same attributes that Marlowe gave him. Marlowe has created a mighty emperor or even perhaps a tyrant, who in turn is creating mini-Tamburlaines beneath him. By praising his appearance, Tamburlaine is showing a measure of respect to Theridamas. It is in this small measure of respect that Tamburlaine truly catches Theridamas's attention. In the same breath that Tamburlaine flatters Theridamas he also disparages his emperor, beginning to break down all social and class boundaries that remain. "Deserv'st thou to have the leading of a host?/ Forsake thy King and do but join with me" (Part 1.1.2.170-171). It is likely Theridamas had never dreamed of becoming a king or emperor, but Tamburlaine presents this possibility as real and tangible to him by subverting the natural order of things and creating his own rules. The idea of deserving nobility is one quite central to the Tamburlaine plays. Marlowe separates the ideas of deserving monarchical power and being entitled to monarchical power. Tamburlaine is portrayed as deserving because of his stately looks, his enviable

wit, his wartime strength, his unquestionable fertility and his seeming immortality and his apparent special distinction among the gods or god (and not to forget his inner nature as exposed by his stripping down). All of these are qualities that an Elizabethan would hold as ideals in a monarch. Henry VIII was many, but certainly not all, of these things in his time and he was respected, feared and loved (before his parade of wives began). Marlowe constructs Mycetes to be really none of these things and thus truly nothing but born (or entitled) to the throne. While Tamburlaine for years was interpreted as vicious and villainous in many critical texts, what has failed to be noticed until recently are those aspects of Tamburlaine that do indeed appear deserving of kingliness. He is, or at least initially appears to be, everything kingly that Mycetes is not, lacking only in birthright, compassion and pity.

Marlowe may construct Tamburlaine with the image and actions of Henry VII and Henry VIII in mind, but he takes Tamburlaine's fortunes leaps beyond those Henry VIII, and perhaps more aptly, Elizabeth. Tamburlaine marries Zenocrate and produces three healthy boys. Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen, has refused to marry and thus shunned her duty to produce an heir. In making Tamburlaine thrice a father to a healthy boy, Marlowe can be seen as mocking Elizabeth's (self-imposed) barrenness. In fact, Tamburlaine is so abundant in heirs that he may pick and choose those that measure up to his expectations. Should they not measure up, and prove to be an embarrassment to him, they will be killed without remorse, as Calyphas was, a sacrificial slaying that will be explored in depth later in this chapter. Marlowe also praises the wit and intelligence and of Tamburlaine, and the loyalty he inspires, perhaps nodding to the obvious wit and intelligence possessed by Elizabeth I. Despite these vague ties to a complimentary view of Elizabeth's intelligence,

Marlowe seems to exert quite a bit of effort to criticize the failures of Elizabeth through the successes of Tamburlaine. Elizabeth or Marlowe's contemporaries may have understood this witty and intelligent side of Tamburlaine to be direct flattery to the queen. Tamburlaine's abundance of heirs may escape being a dangerous criticism of Elizabeth solely because Tamburlaine is a man, and it is expected and required of a man to be fertile. While it is expected of a female monarch to be fertile as well, there was still some aspect to the Elizabethan society that would deem a celibate, virginal woman to be holy and pure and perhaps even more desirable. A celibate or virginal male in that time may only be associated with Catholicism, and thus dangerously popish in nature.

In the remainder of Tamburlaine's speech to Theridamas, Marlowe utilizes stories from Ovid to frame Tamburlaine's orations. By doing this, Marlowe is further attempting to equate himself with the classical poets just as earlier he aligned Tamburlaine with the classical heroes, and as he has repeatedly used epic conventions in the plays. In his first speech to Theridamas, Tamburlaine proclaims that "sooner shall the sun fall from his sphere/ Than Tamburlaine be slain or overcome" (Part 1.1.2.174-175). Marlowe's familiarity with and indebtedness to Ovid also make the choice of the *sun* falling from the sphere an interesting one. In Ovid's Metamorphoses, Phaethon begs to ride his father's chariot, (Phoebus' car) which of course is the sun. In a moment of panic, Phaethon loses control and chaos ensues. "The Moon in amazement sees her brother's horses running below her own, and the scorched clouds smoke. The earth bursts into flame..." (Ovid 75). The idea of devastation coming from the sun's fall is shown here to be an ancient symbol in literature that Elizabethans still recognize. Marlowe's use of the sun's fall is also quite prophetic. Sun can also be read as "son". Marlowe is predicting

(using Tamburlaine) that devastation of lands will occur when the "son" falls. At the end of *Part Two*, Tamburlaine leaves his empire to his clearly incapable son, Amyras.

> Heavens witnesss me with what a broken heart
>
> And damnéd spirit I ascend this seat,
>
> And send my soul, before my father die,
>
> His anguish and his burning agony! (Part 2.5.3.207-210).

Amyras does not desire this throne, and clearly does not know how to rule, and thus when his inevitable fall occurs, Tamburlaine's empire, his lands, will fall with it.

Marlowe continues in Ovidian myth when Tamburlaine enlists Jove on his side of the battle, or at least claims to do so, even going so far as to say "...he rains down heaps of gold in showers/ As if he meant to give my soldiers pay" (Part 1.1.2.182-183). In Book VI of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Jove comes to Danae in a shower of gold, raping her and impregnating her with her son Perseus. Invoking this myth of Ovid's likens Tamburlaine to Jove (as Tamburlaine certainly likens himself to Jove throughout these plays) in a much more negative sense, as a rapist. Jove's divine rape of Danae can easily be seen in Tamburlaine's initial rape of Zenocrate. These lines are also telling because soldier's pay is something that is not always guaranteed and is often something that causes quite a disagreement or ill feelings between soldiers and their monarchs. This appearance of wealth at the hand of Jove would be something quite alluring to an underpaid or unpaid soldier. "The warlike soldiers and gentlemen/...Now living idle in the walled towns,/ Wanting both pay and martial discipline,/ Begin in troops to threaten civil war/ And openly exclaim against the King" (Part 1.1.1.140, 146-149). Openly exclaiming against Tamburlaine is something that surprisingly, we never see in either part of the play. The

capitalist economy versus the pre-social economy becomes clear with this allusion. Tamburlaine is suggesting money (gold) for the service of murder. However, it is crucial to note that Tamburlaine doesn't engage in offering soldiers *his own* money (if indeed he has any), but rather suggests that Jove will pay the soldiers, thus removing himself from the capitalistic equation. Tamburlaine will reap the bloody rewards of his soldiers, trading power and blood while claiming alliance with religious figures to intimidate Theridamas into submission. Tamburlaine also sets a precedent of promising something seemingly impossible and then actually following through on those promises. This is an almost inconceivable idea in the age of Elizabeth where few such promises were made for fear of not fulfilling them, and the Queen refused to pay for anything, forcing her court to take on the financial burdens. Tamburlaine is winning loyalty through gold and persuasion, whereas many monarchs made men buy their way into position. He buys these men completely before they serve him, and because of that, Tamburlaine makes them completely his creatures, perhaps even slaves.

Further, Tamburlaine knows, and understands that he cannot compel a soldier to break a loyalty to a king and become a traitor just by claiming that he is safe-guarded by Jove. Tamburlaine in essence bribes Theridamas into joining his army. He offers "thy share of this Egyptian prize" (Part 1.1.2.189) and vows that he will "sit with Tamburlaine in all his majesty" (Part 1.1.2.208). By offering Theridamas not only material wealth, but also a crown and subjects to reign over, he appeals to the pride within Theridamas, a person certainly not of the royal class or born into a royal bloodline, but nevertheless as Tamburlaine points out, kingly in his own deserving right. Tamburlaine evokes the image of "Jove sometime masked in a shepherd's weed" scaling the heavens to take his place

with the gods (Part 1.1.2.198). This image, not far removed from Tamburlaine himself being masked in his own shepherd's garb, compares the two, suggesting that Tamburlaine himself may soon join Jove who has "scaled the heavens" (Part 1.1.2.199). The placement of praise, victory and renown in Tamburlaine's argument follows the logical sequence of a successful argument. The arrangement maximizes the impact of Tamburlaine's speech while also in the process giving away quite a bit about the man Tamburlaine is manipulating in Theridamas. Tamburlaine's combination of fear, godly influence and bribery convince Theridamas of Tamburlaine's power, and more importantly, Tamburlaine's authority. "Not Hermes, prolocutor to the gods,/ Could use persuasions more pathetical" (Part 1.1.2.209-10). This is Tamburlaine's first assertion of his newly-raped power, and he paradoxically wins the battle without lifting his sword, (while raising his "sword" is clearly what gained him his power). It also is striking in that Theridamas is the first to place Tamburlaine above the realm of the gods. In a way, placing Tamburlaine akin to or even above a godly messenger absolves Theridamas of guilt in his betrayal of Mycetes. After all, he is more persuasive and eloquent than a god, how could a mere mortal possibly resist his orations? As Mark Thornton Burnett points out, "The implication [of Part 1.1.2.209-210 (quoted above)] is that Tamburlaine is beyond even the most rhetorically skilled of the deities and thus functions as a type of god himself. By extension, Theridamas, who is privy to the divine communication, joins the ranks of a heavenly elite" (128). Tamburlaine, through persuasive language, has converted an army sent to destroy him, and now increased and strengthened his own forces. No longer is his authority only in his mind, but rather his reign has truly come into being and his authority is for the most part fully established by Marlowe.

***Maintaining Authority***

Among the differences between *Part One* and *Part Two* is a major distinction in Tamburlaine the man. *Part One* focuses on constructing his authority and creating a fearsome martial force. Tamburlaine must, and does, rise above his social class and have such success that those he confronts see only Tamburlaine the Great and, by act V, Tamburlaine the Shepherd has all but vanished. In *Part Two,* Marlowe has elevated Tamburlaine and he is no longer a slave to his birth. Tamburlaine's focus on persuasive and beautiful oration ultimately wanes as he begins to allow his sword to speak for him. The further behind him his birth seems, the less he attempts to conquer and woo with his words. In other words, the less of a shepherd he is, the more of a brute he becomes.

While sheer wit won his first encounter with Theridamas, Tamburlaine is seemingly intelligent enough to know that his flowery words and promises will not always be successful in conquering cities and collecting the spoils. Instead he must learn to maintain and intensify this level of authority he has already achieved. Tamburlaine increasingly turns to his sword, letting his progressively more aggressive and violent bloodshed and torture speak volumes. Tamburlaine's language (and arguably his wit) deteriorates rapidly as he becomes dependent on the sword. In *Part One*, Tamburlaine generally led the battles and conquests himself, rushing into the action, ready to prove his valor. However, in *Part Two,* it appears as though his desire to lead his men into battle has diminished, and his willingness to let others fight his battles has increased. Take, for example, the scene I explored in the introduction, the complete decimation Babylon and

its inhabitants. "Go, bind the villain; he shall hang in chains" Tamburlaine commands to Theridamas (Part 2.5.1.84). "Techelles, drown them all man woman, and child" he continues several lines later (Part 2.5.1.168). Tamburlaine has not abdicated his power, nor his right to command his soldiers, yet he has divorced himself from the actual duty of performing the violence. With this divorce from physical involvement, Tamburlaine is placing himself "on high." He is granting himself a type of immortality while enlisting his mortal followers to fight. His linguistic capabilities deteriorate steadily as he removes himself from the action. The distance between word and action on the part of Tamburlaine has grown wider as his power has grown greater, the less oration matters and the more he depends on a sword, namely the swords of his soldiers, the less he appears to bloody his own "royal" hands. While Techelles is slaughtering the Babylonians, Tamburlaine orders Usumcasane to gather the "superstitious books/ Found in the temples of Mahomet,/ Whom I have thought a God?" (Part 2.5.1.172-174). Usumcasane gathers the books and then "fling[s] them in the fire" on Tamburlaine's command (Part 2.5.1.184). This desecration of words, the one power Tamburlaine is using, but that Marlowe utterly relies on, is the culmination of Tamburlaine's deterioration. He literally must destroy words—books—to show that his violent nature conquers all, religion included.

Mark Thornton Burnett takes issue with Tamburlaine's linguistic prowess (or lack thereof) in *Part Two.* Burnett traces the moment when he believes Tamburlaine hits rock bottom linguistically:

> 'If words might serve, our voice hath rent the air' (Part 2.2.4.121),
>
> cries Theridamas, reprimanding a grieving Tamburlaine for deploying

> hollowed-out articulations and concluding that '[A]ll this raging cannot make [Zenocrate] live' (Part 2.2.4.120). The point is clear: Tamburlaine's waning control is linked to his failing prowess with parlance. The remainder of *Part Two* extends the development, with Theridamas standing in for Tamburlaine as an ultimately ineffective speaking exponent (Burnett 128).

Tamburlaine's ability to speak clearly and persuasively deteriorates steadily as his control over every aspect of his life decreases. The loss of Zenocrate demonstrates to him that immortality does not touch all those around him, and he cannot successfully command the Gods at his will. Zenocrate pleads with Tamburlaine at her death, "With love and patience let your true love die;/ Your grief and fury hurts my second life" (Part 2.2.4.67-68). Love and patience are perhaps the two most complex emotions for Tamburlaine to grasp, as it appears that perhaps he never does quite grasp "patience," and grief and fury are two that come quite naturally to him, fury most of all. As Burnett describes, Tamburlaine reaches his low point at the death of his love. As Marlowe has made apparent in *Part One*, Mycetes' lack of ability to speak for himself comes not long before his reign is ended, and in fact is a major contribution to his downfall. Tamburlaine's focus has become destruction and conquest, and his choleric personality has overtaken his wit. "Tamburlaine's friends and enemies alike recognize him as a creature governed by his passions" (Camden, Jr. 434). Tamburlaine has descended from the rational, intellectual sphere of imperialistic thought of *Part One*, into the tangible, murderous, passion and choler-driven realm of unbridled violence in *Part Two*.

Tamburlaine's affinity for martial force (as well as apparent back-stabbing) begins to unfold in Act II, Scene iii of Part 1 when he takes up arms with Cosroe against Mycetes. Immediately after securing the crown for Cosroe, Tamburlaine muses on the grandeur of being a king. "Is it not passing brave to be a king,/And ride in triumph through Persepolis'?" (Part 1.2.5.53-54). Tamburlaine's ambition becomes contagious and Techelles and Usumcasane soon rally around him and prepare to conquer the barely crowned Cosroe. It is worth noting that the battles are rarely, if ever on stage. While this certainly could be explained away by the impracticality of staging literally dozens of large battles throughout these two plays, in fact, Marlowe's refusal to show Tamburlaine in battle creates a grander and more fearsome image of Tamburlaine in the minds of the audience. Marlowe's denial to satisfy any measure of curiosity one may have about Tamburlaine in battle exponentially intensifies the legend surrounding him, guiding Tamburlaine to mythical status in the minds of the awe-struck and curious onlookers.

Maintaining his authority and power has become a systematic venture for Tamburlaine by the end of *Part One*. Tamburlaine develops a system of colored tents to indicate levels of mercy that he is willing to give:

> The first day when he pitcheth down his tents,
> White is their hue, and on his silver crest
> A snowy feather spangled white he bears,
> To signify the mildness of his mind
> That, satiate with spoil, refuseth blood.
> But when Aurora mounts the second time,
> As red as scarlet is his furniture;

> Then must his kindled rath be quenched with blood,
>
> Not sparing any that can manage arms,
>
> But if these threats move not submission,
>
> Black are his colours, black pavilion,
>
> His spear, his shield, his horse, his armour, plumes,
>
> And jetty feathers menace death and hell,
>
> Without respect of sex, degree or age,
>
> He razeth all his foes with fire and sword (Part 1.4.2.50-64).

This rigidity in Tamburlaine's martial system points to an unmerciful, yet also a ruler who is not totally secure in his throne. Mercy is a virtue that most monarchs acknowledge to be necessary to avoid tyrannical rule. Through this system of colored tents that Tamburlaine creates, mercy is completely unaccounted for. Life or death depends on the opponent's willingness to surrender, and Tamburlaine in some sense seeks to absolve himself from responsibility for thousands of deaths is the opponent refuses to surrender. Tamburlaine refuses mercy perhaps because he feels that mercy would show weakness. This tent system and its consequences sound like a scene out of the Old Testament, "For by fire and by His sword will the Lord execute judgment upon all flesh, and the slain of the Lord will be many" (Isaiah 66:16). This parallel between Tamburlaine and the vengeful God of the Old Testament goes to further Tamburlaine's claim to immortality, at least as he sees it, he is a god executing judgment upon the damned. While Tamburlaine cannot be faulted for being completely without mercy as he does grant

Zenocrate's father the chance to live, his routine is so rigid that not even the pleas of virgins will move his heart on the third day.

> Virgins in vain ye labour to prevent
> That which mine honour swears shall be performed...
> Techelles, straight go charge a few of them
> To charge these dames, and show my servant Death,
> Sitting in scarlet on their arméd spears...
> What have your horsemen shown the Virgins Death?
> (*Techelles)* They have, my lord, and on Damascus' walls
> Have hoisted up their slaughtered carcasses
>
> (Part 1.5.1.106-107, 116-118, 129-131).

Tamburlaine clearly considers his honor of the utmost importance, and his quest to maintain his honor will certainly prevail over the pleas for mercy from virgins. The rigidity of his own version of martial law allows those he challenges fair warning and he believes they should know what to expect of Tamburlaine. It can even be argued (by a mind that thinks like Tamburlaine's) that the deaths of those that come in the way of Tamburlaine are not the fault of Tamburlaine, but rather of the governor, king or emperor who refused to acknowledge the threat of Tamburlaine and chose to try their hand in battle with him or his army.

Marlowe was without question aware of the 1513 publication of Machiavelli's *The Prince*, and in fact Tamburlaine's rigidity and much of the make-up of his personality seems to come directly from *The Prince.* "People are less concerned with offending a man who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared: the

reason is that love is a link of obligation which men, because they are rotten, will break any time they think doing so serves their advantage; but fear involved dread of punishment from which they can never escape" (Machiavelli 46). Tamburlaine clearly understands this relationship between love and fear, and in fact has already exercised it in his relations with Cosroe, Theridamas, Techelles, Usumcasane and Zenocrate. Tamburlaine's understanding of this relationship between love and fear is perhaps far more complex than Machiavelli's explanation leaves room for. In the early stages of *Part One*, Tamburlaine made both Theridamas and Zenocrate love him enough to want to remain with him on his conquests. He won that love primarily with oration, but beyond those two initial linguistic conversions, love for Tamburlaine had little to do with maintaining or expanding his influence over them or others. Rather, fear became the tactic Tamburlaine chose, he demonstrated early on that those who dissented from him would face brutal reprisal and vengeance, and while Theridamas and Zenocrate's love for Tamburlaine never wanes, it is certainly amplified by a notion of fear. This fear is what blinds otherwise honorable human beings (prior to meeting Tamburlaine, that is) to Tamburlaine's villainies and abuses of basic human dignity.

Cosroe, in *Part One*, reached out to Tamburlaine as a sort of brother, an equal in status, for help. This brotherly-connection implies a sort of "love-bond" between Cosroe and Tamburlaine, (though clearly only in the mind of Cosroe). And, as Machiavelli predicted in 1513, Tamburlaine did turn on Cosroe when it served his advantage and usurped his throne. In his own dealings with potential allies and future kinds, Tamburlaine has reached out to Theridamas, Techelles, Usumcasane, and to a lesser extent Zenocrate, not as a "brother" type of relationship, but rather as a deity-faithful

relationship. In other words, Tamburlaine is at times playing the role of Jove, God, Jesus, and Mahomet, and is promising these subjects a taste, glimpse and possible attainment of immortality. "We will both walk upon the lofty cliffs.../ Both we will reign as consuls of the earth" (Part 1.1.2.192, 196). There is an inherent respect for a "god" figure that is not present in a "brotherly" figure. As far as his later conquests are concerned, it is clear that Tamburlaine completely works with the "god" and "fearsome warrior" image to subdue his enemies. His tent system of warfare functions as a type of "sky." One often hears a black sky referred to as an "angry sky" or a white one "fairly peaceful, though with the threat of becoming angry" in terms of a weather forecast. When a threatened city looks out over Tamburlaine's army's encampment, one can only imagine that they saw a literal sea (or sky) of tents in progressively aggressive colors, white, red, black. This reflects a sort of deification of his "warning system" as the gods or god were thought to control the weather in the sky; Tamburlaine controls this "weather" on the ground by orchestrating an awesome display of colors. This rigid system of tents and murder instills such a sense of fear in those cities and towns he intends to conquer, that once he succeeds, any survivors would so fear retribution that they are forever bound to him in service, dreading the ruthless punishment he would devise if one were to dissent.

Tamburlaine's rigidity in martial law extends even to his own family, in the instance of his son, Calyphas. Calyphas clearly does not fear his father, and does indeed dissent, refusing to fight, preferring to play cards. Tamburlaine is certainly a proud man, and one who refuses to allow anyone or anything to threaten his empire, even family. He says of Calyphas: "Bastardly boy, sprung from some coward's loins/ And not the issue of great Tamburlaine!" (Part 2.1.3.69-70). Perhaps here, Tamburlaine is invoking the

Renaissance notion of a changeling child, one whom the fairies have stolen and switched with an inherently evil child. This belief allowed the parents to do away with their child seemingly without guilt. But changeling child or not, Tamburlaine disinherits his son, for shame of his aversion to battle and all laborious activities. As has been proven time and time again in his conquests, those who do not support Tamburlaine or help to further his empire can only be perceived as being against him and as provoking a battle. Tamburlaine holds no special regard for his family; if they are not warriors as he himself is, then they are not worthy to inherit what he has won, and they are not worthy to even be considered his relations. Paternal love seems to play no role in his relationship with his sons either. Rather Tamburlaine chooses to rule his children as he rules his lands, with fear and intimidation. His sons fear the wrath of Tamburlaine and thus seek to appease him with their valor. Zenocrate, of course, could do no wrong in Tamburlaine's eyes and Celebinus and Amyras prove their devotion to the warlike laws and lifestyle of Tamburlaine.

> *Tamb*. Now, my boys, what think you a wound?
>
> *Caly.* I know not what I should think of it;
>
> Methinks 'tis a pitiful sight.
>
> *Cel.* 'Tis nothing. Give me a wound, father.
>
> *Amy.* And me another, my lord. (Part 2.3.2.139-133).

Celebinus and Amyras are clearly the sons that Tamburlaine expects them to be, the sons he can be proud of for their willingness to engage in violence and endure pain. Calyphas however, fears war: "My lord, but this is dangerous to be done;/ We may be slain or wounded ere we learn" (Part 2.3.2.93-4). While Calyphas clearly fears the dangers of

battle and prefers to distance himself from it, he expects to reap the rewards of his father and brother's fighting. Tamburlaine regards Calyphas as weak, a blemish in his own, now distinctly royal, flesh and blood. While this suggests a type of confidence in Tamburlaine's royalty it also exposes a weakness. There is a continuing need to prove his family's worthiness to rule. When others have challenged his authority, Tamburlaine has killed them, and so he does here, stripping himself of all weakness that surrounds him or touches him in any way. "By Mahomet thy might friend I swear,/ In sending to my issue such a soul,/ Created of the massy dregs of earth,/ The scum and tartar of the elements,/ Wherein was neither courage, strength, or wit,/ But folly, sloth, and damned idleness" (Part 2.4.1.123-38). Tamburlaine is strictly adherent to his own code of martial conduct and law. This strict adherence demonstrates not only to his enemies, but also to himself, his capacity for his ruthlessness, seriousness and brutality. He maintains his authority by instilling fear and respect in those around him, and by never allowing his thirst for empire to be quenched. At the end of *Part One* Tamburlaine claims that he has made peace with the world and he has finished warring. But at the start of *Part Two* Tamburlaine is again seeking battles and foreign lands to conquer. Tamburlaine's insistence on war and aversion to peace resonates in this unwillingness to cease his conquests. It is though Tamburlaine truly fears peace. His power is so wrapped up in martial force that should he cease his bloody conquest it would in a sense undermine his own authority. He is literally unable to translate his power into anything but violence. This image of Tamburlaine is a stark contrast to that of Elizabeth I, who was known for avoiding violence and conflict at all costs.

Tamburlaine's unquenchable bloodlust is unquestionably the driving force of this play. Generally, one would think that the role of King or Emperor would be one that would mystify the man of Tamburlaine, obscuring him from all public view, but this is clearly not what Marlowe is trying to do. Instead Marlowe seems to demystify Tamburlaine the man. The role (the crown) is what people marvel at, the crown is what people fear, and what people may loathe. Tamburlaine the Great is mystified and mythologized as Marlowe obscures the most successful of his battle tactics, while Tamburlaine the man is deteriorating in full public view (as is characterized by his speech, and later his declining and failing health). Marlowe is allowing the audience a type of glimpse into the private world of a monarch that the world fears, that appears for all purposes indestructible, but nonetheless exhibits internal decomposition throughout the plays.

The distinction between Tamburlaine the Great and Tamburlaine the man comes from the public and private spheres of his life. Tamburlaine the Great is a conqueror, and king, an emperor, while Tamburlaine the man is a husband and a father. The only "soft" side we see to Tamburlaine is truly that of him as a man, interacting with his wife, and then mourning the death of Zenocrate. With his sons, he is Tamburlaine the Great, instilling fear, promoting warfare and drawing blood. This multi-dimensionality of Tamburlaine is similar to the multi-dimensionality of Elizabeth I, at least when it comes to warfare. Tamburlaine, in his perverse, warlike way acts as a sort of "mother-figure" to his sons, teaching them what he knows about warfare, and survival. "but now, my boys, leave off and list to me,/ That mean to teach you rudiments of war:/I'll have you learn to sleep upon the ground,/ march in your armour through watery fens" (Part 2.3.2.53-56)

and so on he goes, preparing his sons to survive in the life of a soldier and a conqueror, hoping to secure a future for them. While he is fiercely brutal in his methods of teaching, and eventually murderous, there is a perverse sort of "motherly" quality in his looking out for his sons. (Which could be construed as his looking out for nothing more than his own legacy's continuance, and therefore is selfish and not nurturing.) After the death of Zenocrate he is truly acting as a mother and a father to his sons, acting as a nurturer and a discipliner in a strangely androgynous configuration. Though the oddity in this androgyny is that women typically gain from the masculine while men lose from taking on the feminine.

In Tamburlaine's parenting attempts, it is possible to infer that Marlowe is commenting on the androgynous nature of Elizabeth through the perversely androgynous nature of Tamburlaine. In 1588, Elizabeth delivered one of her most famous speeches to the troops at Tillbury preparing to fight against the Spanish Armada. She appeared at the battlefield, clothed from head to toe in soldier's armor. And in perhaps her most infamous moment, she declared: "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a *king*" (Elizabeth 326 emphasis added). This moment in her speech not only amplified any androgynous nature inherent in Elizabeth, but also confused her title of "Queen." No longer was it completely clear who, or what she was, but it was only her deliberate construction of herself that her subjects came to know. She was in essence, portraying herself as a king trapped in a woman's body. Elizabeth, the woman no longer existed underneath Elizabeth the monarch. It is conceivable to wonder whether Marlowe is commenting on the outer appearances of Elizabeth's reign and queenship, while questioning whether Elizabeth the woman is deteriorating behind the

façade she has constructed for public viewing. After all, at the point in history when *Tamburlaine the Great* was first published in 1590, Elizabeth would have been 57 years old and would have been on the throne for an astounding 32 years. Perhaps the only reason mystification of a king or queen was needed was to hide that inevitable deterioration from the public and create an image of godliness and perfection in all senses of the word. By all means, Marlowe could be hiding the real Tamburlaine from his enemies behind his exploits and excursions, making the myth and aura around Tamburlaine greater and greater until no one dares cross his path. This myth-within-fiction that Marlowe is creating does call for a closer examination of the monarch. Marlowe is in essence presenting two Tamburlaines, the external, mighty, violent Tamburlaine and the inwardly deteriorating and unsure Tamburlaine. Tamburlaine's weaknesses are only perceived in his deteriorating linguistic capacity, and his fierce clinging to his legacy. His weakness is subtle, easily missed and almost completely masked by his mounting violence.

Tamburlaine continues to maintain his authority and appear the epitome of kingliness through instilling fear and shame among those he conquers. The language used about Tamburlaine is what begins to expose the second "inner" Tamburlaine that Marlowe is writing. Throughout the beginning of his rise, rival kings and emperors consistently referred to Tamburlaine and his men in animalistic terminology, for example calling Tamburlaine savage or "incivil" (1 Tamb 1.1.40), or, doubly implying that he is either deity or beast, noting that he "was never sprung of human race" (1 Tamb 2.6.11), and that his troops "lie in ambush waiting for a prey" (1 Tamb 2.3. 17). The imagery of animalism in reference to Tamburlaine is not only an insult to his character, but also a jab

at his low birth. While Tamburlaine may never directly hear these insults, it is almost as if he perceives them as he turns around and punishes formerly mighty kings as animals once he has gained authority. In a perverse version of a popular, yet violent, Renaissance sport, bearbaiting, Tamburlaine keeps Bajazeth and Zabina locked in cages and incites them to eventual deadly violence. Keeping Bajazeth and Zabina in separate iron cages, having their lesser contributory kings drag the cages through the streets as if they were horses, and using Bajazeth as his own personal footstool to mount his throne was probably Tamburlaine's most notorious abuse of authority. Here, Marlowe may also be thinking to Machiavelli, "You should consider then, that there are two ways of fighting, one with laws and the other with force. This first is properly a human method, the second belongs to beasts. But as the first method does not always suffice, you sometimes have to turn to the second" (Machiavelli 47). Though the first way of fighting was entirely effective for Tamburlaine, it proved not to be rewarding enough for him, and thus he felt compelled to take his conquests to the second level for punishment, retribution and ultimately overkill. Marlowe is reinforcing Tamburlaine's beast-like nature in his abuses of former royalty. Though, like all things Tamburlaine does, he takes fighting like a beast to the extreme, going beyond what even Machiavelli most likely had in mind. The effect of this "overkill" on Tamburlaine's part is a monarch almost wholly devoid of a *human* nature, or a conscience.

Marlowe's construction of Tamburlaine is at times strongly Machiavellian. "...He should appear all compassion, all honor, all humanity, all integrity, all religion. *Nothing is more necessary than to seem to have this last virtue*" (Machiavelli 49 emphasis added). The most notable thing about Tamburlaine is that he is dubious in his adherence to so

many of these tenets. And while Tamburlaine's adherence to the first four virtues are clearly questionable, this virtue of religion is one that Tamburlaine continually reworks to fit his own particular needs. Perhaps, as Machiavelli seems to suggest, to appear to have the virtue of *all* religion is one that Tamburlaine takes too literally. Tamburlaine is consistent in that he utilizes one religion after another as the needs so suit him, pleasing those who need to be pleased at any particular moment. This ambivalence toward religion is not only a characteristic of Tamburlaine, but also one of Marlowe. As he does in *Part One*, Marlowe introduces us to a (inevitably doomed) king in Act I, scene i of *Part Two.* Orcanes and later Sigismond join together to defeat Tamburlaine, not because of his overwhelming greed, piety or power, but rather his pride. Gazellus says to Orcanes (a Muslim) "We all are glutted with the Christians' blood/And have a greater foe to fight against-/Proud Tamburlaine-..." (Part 2.1.1.14-16). As we clearly saw in *Part One*, the first king we are introduced to represents some form of a fault that ultimately leads to his downfall. In Mycetes it was his inability to make a decision or speak for himself, and in Orcanes and Sigismond, it is their strict adherence to religion. Act II, scene i has Sigismond agreeing to turn against his pact with Orcanes, "No whit, my lord, for with such infidels,/ In whom no faith nor true religion rests,/ We are not bound to those accomplishments" (Part 2.2.1.33-35). Sigismond is calling both Tamburlaine and Orcanes athesists at this point because their religious beliefs are non-existent or "not correct." Orcanes reacts in II, ii saying,

> Traitors, villans, damnéd Christians!
>
> Have I not here the articles of peace
>
> And solemn covenants we have both confirmed,

He by his Christ, and I by Mahomet? (Part 2.2.2.29-32).

Again, Machiavelli's assertion that "...love is a link of obligation which men, because they are rotten, will break any time they think doing so serves their advantage" is apt (Machiavelli 46). Here Sigismond proves this assertion completely true by breaking the covenant as he sees fit, and as Mycetes does in *Part One*, makes Tamburlaine appear all the more logical and intelligent for avoiding quibbles of religious doctrine. Tamburlaine holds allegiances to no one, and attaches himself to no particular creed. Instead he calls on Mahomet when he sees fit, Jesus when he so desires and Jove when he cares to. And he denounces them all when he has no use for them any longer. Tamburlaine often considers himself above the gods, and places himself above their ranks. While initially this would seem blasphemous to the Elizabethan audience, in the continuation of *Part Two*, it could begin to seem a bit more logical. Without the bounds of religion to anchor his sword, Tamburlaine can conquer whomever he pleases. While Tamburlaine *appears* literally "all religion" because he takes into account and uses all religions to his advantage, he in fact is *no religion* at all as he in the end denounces religion.

Tamburlaine's sole moment of anything close to a genuine religious notion comes at the death of Zenocrate. "The golden ball of heaven's eternal fire,/ that danced with glory on the silver waves" (Part 2.2.4.2-3). Tamburlaine speaks of a divine heaven, a celebratory heaven, moments before he takes it upon himself to order the gods to do his will: "Apollo, Cynthia, and the ceaseless lamps/That gently looked upon this loathsome earth,/ Shine downwards now no more, but deck the heavens/ To entertain divine Zenocrate" (Part 2.2.4.18-21). Tamburlaine imagines the capability of the gods to create a paradise for Zenocrate, but also takes it upon himself to order them to do so, as if they

were his servants and he the master, clearly inverting the traditional master/servant relationship between God and his creation. It is also important to note that it is at this point that Tamburlaine becomes his most incoherent and rambles continuously, his initial reaction to her death being to take up arms, "Casane and Theridamas, to arms!/ Raise cavalieros higher than the clouds,/ And with the cannon break the frame of heaven" (Part 2.2.4.102-104). In just this one moment, Tamburlaine initially bows to heaven's beauty and power, then orders it to obey his will and finally threatens to destroy it for taking up his love. These fluctuations are ones that wouldn't be seen in a religiously minded king such as Orcanes or Sigismond, but instead belong solely to Tamburlaine in his lowest moment.

The fluidity of Tamburlaine's religion is familiar to Elizabethans because of the fluidity of religion on the throne of England during the Tudor period. From Catholic to Protestant, Protestant to Catholic and back, each change of monarch changed the state religion in the Tudor period. Marlowe, rumored to be an atheist himself, (though some believed him possibly Catholic for he spent time in Rheims, a Catholic stronghold in France,) could have looked at the transitions in religion and thought it absurd, thus creating a character such as Tamburlaine who used and abused religion to suit his own wants and needs, much as it would appear the Tudors did during this time period. Religion works when Tamburlaine needs it to work. He calls himself the scourge of God to inflict fear upon those who attempt to conquer him, but so soon does he turn from the scourge of god to greater than god. Theridamas, by act IV, fully amazed by Tamburlaine speaks: "And thou shalt see a man greater than Mahomet,/ In whose high looks is much more majesty/ Than from the concave superficies/ Of Jove's vast palace, th'empyreal

orb/ Unto the shining bower where Cynthia sits,/ Like lovely Thetis in a crystal robe;/ That treadeth Fortune underneath his feet/ And makes the mighty god of arms his slave" (Part 2.3.4.46-53). Tamburlaine's riches help create the illusion that he is godly. Again, it is appearance that awes men into submission. If Tamburlaine looks more majestic than Jove, then he must be more majestic and powerful than Jove. Thus religion has been a valuable tool for Tamburlaine, as much so as a sword or an army in wooing those to his side and in creating a sense of fear in those who follow him. Without his use, and abuse, of religion Tamburlaine would not have been able to hold onto the power he adorned himself with in *Part One.* Tamburlaine believes in the power of oaths not because he himself is religious, but because those men he conquers believe in a god and in the binding nature of oaths. As Lars Engle suggests in his introduction to *Part One*, "[Machiavelli's] book was taken by many to suggest that religion serves mainly to keep people submissive to authority—an opinion attributed to Marlowe himself by Richard Baines in a note to the Privy Council accusing Marlowe of atheism" (Engle 184). Marlowe, and subsequently Tamburlaine, use religion to subdue men and hold onto the power that they have gained. It is the soldier and subject's fear of God that gives the monarch power.

Tamburlaine's conquest, villainy and lengthy reign comes to a halt only when his physical health prohibits him from going further. In Act V, scene i, Tamburlaine daringly challenges Mahomet, believing himself to be superior in every way to this feeble god: "In vain, I see, men worship Mahomet:/My sword hath sent millions of Turks to hell,/Slew all his priests, his kinsmen, and his friends,/ And yet I live untouched by Mahomet" (Part 2.5.1.177-200). At this he throws a pile of books into the fire, among them at least one

the Islamic holy book, the Koran. While Tamburlaine denounces Mahomet and not Jesus, one is lead to wonder if given the chance he would do the same to Jesus. In truth, he likely would, but for an Elizabethan stage, it would be too scandalous, and possibly even contribute to the death of Marlowe to present such a thing. The denouncing of Mahomet and burning of his holy book is just enough into the realm of "other" that it is permissible for the Elizabethan stage, and possible to believe and even support. But because Tamburlaine sent not only millions of Turks, but also millions of Christians to their deaths by his sword, one must also wonder if, though unspoken, he claims the same sort of superiority to the Christian God, who was unable to do so as easily as Tamburlaine.

While he has for almost ten full acts claimed himself as immortal and godly, in Act V, scene iii, Tamburlaine first tastes mortality. "What daring god torments my body thus,/ And seeks to conquer mighty Tamburlaine?/ Shall sickness prove me not to be a man,/ That have been termed the terror of the world?" (Part 2.5.3.42-45). Ever the quintessential Tamburlaine, in the same breath he admits his potential mortality, Tamburlaine threatens the gods, exalting himself above the status of "man". The question in the final scene of this play is essentially: Is growing old and sick and dying the whole story of Tamburlaine? Or is there more to him? Despite the insistence of moralistic critics of the early twentieth century Tamburlaine's sickness is never clearly linked to any divine retribution for his challenge of Mahomet. Greenblatt explains that

> The slaughter of thousands, the murder of his own son, the torture of his royal captives are all without apparent consequence; then Tamburlaine falls ill, and when? When he burns the Koran! The one action which the Elizabethan

> churchmen themselves might have applauded seems to bring down diving vengeance (Greenblatt 202).

Greenblatt doesn't completely believe in the moralistic view of Tamburlaine's death, but what he does point out is an interesting irony in the way that religion is viewed in the Elizabethan era. The irony is that the impiety of Tamburlaine is acceptable because it is acted against Islam. It would not be acceptable if it were acted against Christianity. There is a power in Tamburlaine being against what Elizabethans may view as an "infidel" God. But even suggesting that there is a link between the burning of the Koran and Tamburlaine's is weak. While many critics have put forth the belief of divine retribution visited upon Tamburlaine, it is clearly not the cause of his death but rather as the physician says, "The humidum and calor [choler- moisture and heat] which some hold/ Is not a parcel of the elements/ But of a substance more divine and pure,/Is almost clean extinguished and spent,/Which being the cause of life, imports your death" (Part 2.5.3.86-90). Literally, Tamburlaine has "run out" of life, and therefore perhaps even divinity. Tamburlaine has spent his life conquering and destroying for the sake of his power and prestige, but what has he left to show for it when his death is imminent? Land and wealth to give his sons, for sure, but as Amyras says to his father, "Your soul gives essence to our wretched subjects/Whose matter is incorporate in your flesh" (Part 2.5.3.165-166). In other words, it is by Tamburlaine's life that his sons are able to hold onto the wealth and lands, but upon his death they will become so unanimated that they will no longer be able to hold onto his legacy. Tamburlaine goes ahead and crowns his eldest son, Amyras, who unwillingly accepts the crown, and laments this unwelcome authority bestowed upon him. It is clear, upon looking at Tamburlaine's death speech that the legacy of his lands

and his life is left in unfit hands, and will soon perish as well. Tamburlaine again invokes the myth of Phaeton, this time in warning to his son.

> "So reign, my son, scourge and control those slaves,
> Guiding thy chariot with thy father's hand.
> As precious is the charge thou undertak'st
> As that which Clymen's brain-sick-son did guide
> When wandering Phoebe's ivory cheeks were scorched
> And all the earth, like Etna, breathing fire.
> Be warned by him, then learn with awful eye
> To sway a throne as dangerous as his..." (Part 2.5.3.229-236).

Tamburlaine continues on, encouraging his son, attempting to impart fatherly wisdom and encouragement, but all the while leaving the audience wondering if Amyras is simply another "brain-sick-son" and will fly the chariot too close to the sun, just as Phaeton did. The "sun" could be perceived as the immortality and divinity that Tamburlaine longed for, but ultimately did not achieve.

Perhaps Amyras and Celebinus fight over the lands, destroying all that their father devoted his life to amassing? As Tamburlaine lays out his map of unconquered territories, he outlines those lands that he hasn't won, and commands his sons to conquer them after his death. While Marlowe in this scene is divvying up lands to conquer to his two "good" sons, one is reminded of King Lear divvying up his "conquered" land among his two "bad" daughters. In each situation, the betrothal of the child to the land absolves the king of any power. Tamburlaine abdicates his throne to his son Amyras to ensure a "successful" transition. No matter which way Tamburlaine's death is looked at, his

legacy seems to die with him, his life's work in the incapable hands of his sons, and the mythological reign of Tamburlaine the Great ends with his final breath. So is the whole story of Tamburlaine his actions while growing old and dying? Reducing this play to its bare bones, I am tempted to say yes, it is. Tamburlaine's aging is chronicled, and his death is the end, no legacy but fame lives on after him, and the countless victims he murdered on his rampages are forgotten. *Tamburlaine the Great* is the story of one man, his life, and his death, all creating nothing of substance in the end, his conquests are forgotten, and his lands are lost, the map of unconquered areas he lays out for his sons before his death becomes less and less conquered as time goes on, and we as readers are given no indication that the sons will do anything but squander his wealth. This vision of imperialism is certainly a bleak one. While this bleak vision may be inherently Marlowe's, Tamburlaine has convinced himself that his legacy will live on through his son Amyras, so that he may die in relative peace. Whether or not Tamburlaine truly believes his empire will survive is questionable, but Marlowe is clearly questioning the ability of (perhaps incompetent) royal children to hold onto the parent's spoils. (As in recent history was illustrated by the loss of Calais, France in 1558.) Tamburlaine was a man who worked for every inch of land he gained, raising himself from shepherd to terror of the world, to god and back to man gaining respect and admiration, and fear along the way. Marlowe clearly feels that conquered lands belong to those that conquer them, but eventually will be lost by those who inherit them, most probably criticizing England's recent adventures in India and America or attempting to justify England's miserable imperial success. Marlowe demonstrates through Tamburlaine that the crown would never be able to hold on to these lands, because there would be no real continuity among

monarchs. If the terror of the world, the mighty king and emperor Tamburlaine could not safely hand his sons his lands then what hope had the flawed and weaker kings in their imperialistic adventures? Tamburlaine shows the terrors of imperialism, and ultimately the failures, though on an expedited timeline. Inevitably an empire is at risk for a fall, and it is because of the fickle nature of monarchy, according to Marlowe, that lands cannot necessarily always remain in the possession of a monarch. There are too many opportunities for an heir to lose the wealth of their predecessor, and ultimately, because one cannot control empire beyond their death, it is an unsuccessful venture.

Throughout *Part One* and *Part Two*, Marlowe speaks through Tamburlaine, creating in him at times a mirror to Elizabeth to amplify her faults, and at other times, exalting him above foolish kings, showing his superiority as much as possible. Tamburlaine appears to be the true and honorable form of a prince, created in the likeness of Odysseus, Achilles and Machiavelli's Prince, but harbors many negative aspects that lie beneath the surface of his character. Tamburlaine is like nothing the Elizabethan stage has seen before. Tamburlaine increased his kingdom, produced three healthy heirs (of which he eliminated one whom he felt too weak), and created alliances based on fear, and less importantly, respect. Tamburlaine, though infamously vicious, villainous and evil at times, was an ideal king one that Marlowe used to show England his idea of a real king, a conqueror and a hero. But nonetheless, as much as Marlowe may see Tamburlaine as a true king, conqueror and hero, he acknowledges the faulty nature of the monarchical system. From Act 1, scene 1 of *Part One*, Marlowe challenges traditional monarchy by creating the downfall of two legitimate kings and the successful rising of a shepherd to a prince. This critique of monarchical structure continues through Act 5 in *Part Two*, when

Marlowe makes clear the familial succession will undoubtedly fail sooner or later—and in Tamburlaine's case, sooner rather than later. Marlowe does appear to criticize without offering a different, perhaps more successful model.

Genre can be argued in these plays, but whether one is inclined to call this text a history or a dramatic epic, or even an unconventional tragedy is not of the greatest importance—the pervasive theme of *Tamburlaine the Great* lies in Marlowe's suggestion that the true tragedy of these two plays lies in the traditional monarchical system and its inevitable demise. Marlowe focuses the plays on the ideas of nation building and the approaches and tactics that one mighty emperor takes to build the mightiest nation in the world. While Tamburlaine is hardly a sympathetic character, he is also not wholly detestable. True he rapes, pillages and murders innocent victims, but he is also cunning and inventive in his leadership tactics. These two plays are the stories of two men, Tamburlaine the Great (the king) and Tamburlaine the man (the shepherd). While the former nearly obscures the latter by the play's conclusion, one would not survive and flourish without the other. Marlowe's epic flourishes certainly go quite a ways to give Tamburlaine an air of mythical status. His prowess for parlance in the initial stages of his reign coupled with his brute force make Tamburlaine both a courtier and the courted. He is constantly playing dual roles throughout the plays, father and murderer, lover and rapist, man and god. Marlowe turns the traditional ideas of patriarchal systems upside down and brings to light the absurdity of monarchy's insistence on birthright. These plays argue that the success of a nation is too dependent on charismatic rule and that successes cannot just be handed on to the next generation. Written fifty years later, this play would have been the treatise of the Parliamentarians of the English Civil War. But as it stands,

Marlowe, anything but simply, illustrates the complexities of a too-rigid system of governance.

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