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Author(s): David Pecan

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Dramatic Prologue and the Early Modern Concept of Genre: Understanding Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* in its Critical Context

by David Pecan

A text cannot belong to no genre; it cannot be without or less a genre. Every text participates in one of several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging. And not because of an abundant overflowing of a free, anarchic, and unclassifiable productivity, but because of the trait of participation itself, because of the effect of the code and of the generic mark. Making genre its mark, a text demarcates itself.

--Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre" (1980)^[1]

"All great things crush themselves."

--from Marlowe's translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia* (1587)^[2]

A comparison of the title page of almost any Elizabethan drama with the textual contents of that same play will indicate even to the general reader the lack of consistency and clarity that accompanied the application of generic terms in the dramatic literature of the Early Modern period. However, the process of close reading, and the use of dramatic prologue as a guide to the process of classification, can provide the student of Renaissance literature with a means whereby to address the problem of genre through a consideration of context and content. As a case in point, Marlowe's

Tamburlaine the Great, Parts 1 and 2, challenges Elizabethan ideas regarding the rhetorical style of the English stage,^[3] and as such, Marlowe applies much of his energy to developing the play's content in relation to its sense of genre—its place and value as a literary offering. An analysis of the play as a reaction to contemporary critical thought, and a consideration of the mutability of its comic and tragic modes, reveals that *Tamburlaine* functions as Marlowe's manifesto of a newer and more sophisticated epic drama, terminating in a darkly nihilistic portrait of the heroic ethos as Marlowe viewed it. In so doing, Marlowe toys with the relationship between humor and the aesthetic violence of tragic heroism, using the theme of transience to remake the epic form for the stage, dissolving all in a vision of oblivion. Although this dynamic is replicated throughout his text, Marlowe's experiment in genre and theme is first expressed in the play's prologue:

From jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine
Threat'ning the world with high astounding terms
And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.
View but his picture in this tragic glass,
And then applaud his fortunes as you please
(*Tamburlaine*, 1.Pro.1-8)^[4]

Echoing those attitudes in Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* (1580) which indict comic drama as the stuff that "naughty play-makers and stage-keepers have made justly odious" (86),^[5] Marlowe's prologue^[6] to *Tamburlaine*, Part 1, itself written when

Sidney's contribution to the vanguard of English critical theory was in its ascension,^[7] differentiates the traffic of *its* stage from the doggerel which has come before, and offers something new. New, also, are the "high astounding terms," destined to remake the language of the Elizabethan stage in the image of classical epic. Through Marlowe's identification of his protagonist as a Scythian, which in "Elizabethan ideology...demarcated an absolute Otherness" (Hopkins 49),^[8] and his equating of that otherness with threats to "the world," the dramatist heralds a work that is also topical—especially to "Elizabethans, living in daily apprehension of the Spanish Armada" (Levin 36).^[9] Finally, by characterizing his drama as a "tragic glass," in which we view the protagonist's "fortunes," Marlowe offers an application of dramatic literature that is *traditional tragedy*: a genre of drama that exemplifies the cyclical view of history and, as Sidney would define it, embodies the sentiments of the high and excellent Tragedy:

That openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours; that, with stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded. 86)

This vision of tragedy is clearly didactic in nature; the drama functions as a mirror that "*showeth*," that "*manifest[s]*," and that "*teacheth*," all in the service of correcting misrule and tyranny. When coupled with the movement away from "clownage," and linked with the topically important construction of *war-threats-kingdoms*, the prologue to Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* clearly introduces *serious*

entertainment for *serious* times. But the definitive action of Marlowe's prologue is illusory, as *Tamburlaine* challenges expectations on literary, social, and historical levels; even challenging the dialectic of its own text. As such, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* represents a departure, not simply a mental journey "from" the locale of the "conceits" of comic drama "to the stately tent of war," but a departure in form and purpose. The application of the term "departure" is intentional, because Marlowe does not separate his tragic glass from the clownage that comes before—but blends the laughter of one with the threats of the other. As such, *Tamburlaine* appropriates the tragic modality of the *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* typically associated with the high-minded histories of the past, blends it with the constructs of ridicule associated with "clownage," and creates a theatrical experience that both manifests and questions the expectations of these theatrical genres. Therefore, as I hope to suggest, Marlowe's application of humor, his development of the tragic Fortune trope, and the play's attitude towards the continuity of meaning and rule indicate that *Tamburlaine* depicts challenges to worldly kings in the same breath that it challenges generic expectation.

It is interesting, therefore, that twentieth century criticism and contemporary reactions to Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* have often focused on issues of style, of language and rhetoric, instead of the play's overt challenge to generic expectation. In the opinion of Harry Levin (1952), the prologue to *Tamburlaine* is a youthful manifesto, displaying the "disdain of a University Wit for the mother-wit of the popular stage, as he sweeps

aside the doggerel rhymes and clownish jigs of his predecessors" (30). Cole (1995) concurs, interpreting Marlowe's prologue as "establishing a claim for the elevation of his style above the puerile rhyming verse or low comedy of other plays" (62).^[10] Dawson (1997) also sees the prologue as "a challenge, almost a manifesto: away with the old, here comes the new....no more doggerel rhymes or clownage, but real poetry" (xi).^[11] For Levin, Cole, and Dawson, the stress is upon the play's rhetorical innovations, *Tamburlaine's* "high astounding terms," which represent an elevation of style and tone in the service of a grand heroic vision, what Levin terms, "epic imperialism" (32). Cole views Marlowe's use of the descriptive "tragic," to be stylistic and not generic, noting that since the "'tragic glass' of Part I involves no defeat for its hero, no suffering or disaster for him to endure" (62), what the prologue suggests is not simply a choice of tragic form over comic form, but a change in *style*. For Cole, the absence of repercussions in the text of 1 *Tamberlaine* implies a "high or tragic style" (63) and not the establishment of plot requirements:

Marlowe was setting a tone here, establishing a claim for the elevation of his style above the puerile rhyming verse or low comedy of other plays. The rhetoric he offered to represent his martial subject would thus be in tune with its stateliness and with the astounding eloquence of its hero. (62)

Cole's point is well taken, and there is certainly contemporary support for this reading of the term tragic to apply to stylistic elements. Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) notes "Tragedies were written in the high stile" (177).^[12] It is

understandable, in light of this, that Marlowe's use of this "tragic glass" could be viewed as an indication of stylistic shift. There is also contemporary support that may be interpreted as indicating a need for a shift in style, and for *Tamburlaine*, therefore, to embody first and foremost a stylistic manifesto. The bulk of this support takes the form of concerns raised about the comedies that had previously "soiled" the Elizabethan stage. Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* notes a lack of sense and balance in the application of clownage, that the plays of his day are "observing rules neither of honest civility nor of skillful poetry" (94). Gosson's *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579)^[13] bemoans the "ignorant men, not knowing the majestie of auncient musike, abuse both the eares of the people, and the art it self" (92), and George Whetstone, in his Preface to *Promos and Cassandra* (1578),^[14] complains that the advised devices of ancient poets are now "disc[r]edited with tryfels of yonge, vnadvised, and rahse witted wryters, [that] hath brought this commendable exercise in mislike" (219). Each of these examples contribute to an overall impression that comedy lacked poetic skill, misapplied powerful rhetorical devices, and was, in short, a type of hack writing. Therefore, Marlowe's departure was precipitated by the contemporary discourse about the rhetorical quality of comic plays, and is in keeping with the view of Levin and others that Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* is a departure because of its style.

However, Marlowe's contemporaries criticized *Tamburlaine* precisely because the play was viewed as hack writing. Marlowe's stylistic manifesto, in an effort to break

with tradition and create, to use Levin's phrase "language...worthy of tragedy" (30), appears to have displeased a portion of his audience. Greene's epistle "To the Gentlemen readers" prefacing his *Perimedes the Blacksmith* (1588) complains about *Tamburlaine's* "intolerable poetrie" and describes its overblown rhetoric as "euerie worde filling the mouth like the faburden of Bo-Bell."^[15] As Richard Levin points out in his "The Contemporary Perception of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*" (1984), Joseph Hall, in his *Virgidemiarum*, objects "to the inflated rhetoric of the play" (53). Finally, in his *Timber, or, Discoveries*, Ben Jonson engages in a lengthy assault on the overwrought nature of much contemporary poetry, and references Marlowe's play specifically:

Now because they speak all they can, however unfitly, they are thought to have the greater copy; where the learned use ever election and a mean, they look back to what they intended at first, and make all an even and proportioned body. The true artificer will not run away from nature, as he were afraid of her, or depart from life and the likeness of truth, but speak to the capacity of his hearers. And though his language differ from the vulgar somewhat, it shall not fly from humanity, with the **Tamerlanes** and the Tamer-chams of the late age, which had nothing in them but the scenical strutting and furious vociferation to warrant them to the ignorant gapers. He knows it is his only art so to carry it, as none but artificers perceive it. In the meantime, perhaps, he is called barren, dull, lean, a poor writer, or by what contumelious word can come into their cheeks, by these men, who without labour, judgment, knowledge, or almost sense, are received or preferred before him. He gratulates them and their fortune. (780-98)^[16]

Jonson, the great exponent of the "plain style," bitterly complains about the unnaturalness of *Tamburlaine's* "strutting and furious vociferation." We cannot help but

wonder if his sarcastic concluding comment intentionally echoes the use of “*fortunes*” at the close of Marlowe’s prologue, because the “*fortunes*” of Tamburlaine were, indeed, applauded. While it is interesting to note that the very stylistic departure which modern critics hail as Marlowe’s contribution to the language of the Elizabethan stage was the very rhetoric which drew sideways glances from some of Marlowe’s contemporaries, it is the applause that *Tamburlaine* garnered which causes us to pause. For we misunderstand Jonson’s complaint if we see it as a purely qualitative attack on *Tamburlaine*. He is quite clear that Tamburlaine’s “strutting and furious vociferation” is precisely what made it popular: “to warrant them to the ignorant gapers,” as he called them. Therefore, it was not the audience *en masse* which were displeased with Marlowe’s rhetoric, but other writers. In Jonson’s case, it is intellectual elitism--an elitism that often found him marginalized--that motivates the attack on a play that is simultaneously uncouth and popular. As Harrington notes, in his preface to *Ariosto* (1591), there was an indissoluble order through which the elements of literature might be appropriated, and the *popularity* of literature had a place in this scheme:

For the weaker capacities will feede themselves with pleasantness of the historie and sweetnes of the verse, some that have stronger stomackes will as it were take a further taste of Morall sense, a third sort, more high conceited then they, will digest the Allegorie.
(212)^[17]

In light of Harrington’s view of the crowd, it becomes clear that Jonson’s complaint is that the crowd had the *tastes* of the crowd. Regardless of what Jonson, as a

“true artificer,” thought about the bombast of *Tamburlaine*, the crowd had clearly applauded *Tamburlaine’s* fortunes as they pleased. Given the controversial reception of *Tamburlaine’s* rhetoric, both in its contemporary environment and its modern critical evaluation, it is of primary importance to consider why *Tamburlaine’s* value as a dramatic departure should be related to genre as well as style. Just as in the case of style, the problematic nature of *Tamburlaine’s* genre originates in Marlowe’s desire to break with the traditions of the native literary and intellectual environment of his age.

If the critical writings of the times are indicative of a critical consensus, much of what influenced Marlowe probably took the form of censorship and critical displeasure at previous dramatic offerings. As such, Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* is as much a response to previous conditions as it is the establishment of a new standard:

Marlowe began writing plays in the wake of the anti-theatrical campaign initiated in 1579 by Stephen Gosson and pursued by succeeding pamphleteers. With *Tamburlaine, Part 1*, Marlowe thus began his dramatic career in a cultural and political milieu preconditioned by anti-theatricalism. While it might be suggested that Marlowe’s drama, like that of his major successors, constitutes a response to this anti-theatricalism—a simultaneous exploitation and defense of the theatrical medium—it is also possible to see both dramatists and anti-theatricalists as participants by 1587 in an anxious cultural discourse. (Crewe 49)^[18]

The anti-theatricalism inherent in the Elizabethan literary environment, like any discourse that negotiates otherness and official culture, serves to record both modalities. Thus, when a Greene or a Jonson criticizes *Tamburlaine*, they are also recording the nature of its transgression of the official mode. But the general notion of

anti-theatricalism can be easily misunderstood in this context, and requires some clarification. It is important to understand that Gosson, as representative of “anti-theatricalism,” did not indict theatre as a convention, but took issue with the forms and applications of that convention. Gosson’s *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579), Sidney’s *An Apology for Poetry* (1580), and Puttenham’s *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), are not Puritanical tirades against drama as “show,” equating its method of representation with the sin of idolatry, but rather are pleas for balance, arguing for the proper application of dramatic forms and methods.

Gosson’s *Schoole of Abuse* acknowledges the positive application of comic drama as a corrective measure: “Nowe are the abuses of the world revealed: every man in the playe may see his owne faultes, and lerne by his glasses to amende his manners” (94). In this regard, he echoes the attitude of the times. Thomas Elyot’s *The Book Named the Governour* (1531), a considerably earlier text less concerned with critical theory than Gosson’s *Schoole*, also views comedy as a means of social reform: “comedies...[are] undoubtedly a picture or as it were a mirror of a man’s life, wherein evil is not taught but discovered” (61) he notes, adding that spectators are thereby *warned* through exemplified vice “to resist or prevent occasion” (62).^[19] George Puttenham, in *The Arte of English Poesie*, also notes that the social power of comedy is manifested in the “correction of ... faults” (162). For Puttenham, comedy is also part of the maintenance of the hierarchy, in as much as he sees the corrective chastisement of comedy as

appropriately limited to the lower class and emergent middle class; the understanding being that it is in these layers of society that base personalities and behaviors are concentrated:

But never meddling with any Princes matters nor such high personages, but commonly of merchants, souldiers, artificers, good honest householders, and also of vnthrifty youths, yong damsels, old nurses, bawds, brokers, ruffians, and parasites, with such like, in whose behaiours lyeth in effect the whole course and trade of man's life, and therefore tended altogether to the good amendment of many by discipline and example. (163)

Thus Puttenham views comedy's power of representation as being limited to the traditional targets of *low comedy*, and thereby secures the aristocracy a place as observer and not participant, placing them safely outside the dynamics of comic reform. In Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*, however, the application of comedy is seen as necessary for the *common good*. He notes its educational power, "the end be not on the comical part be not upon such scornful matters as stirreth laughter only, but, mixed with it, that delightful teaching which is the end of Poesy" (95), and believes that it derives its power from its accurate depiction of human vice and fallibility: "Comedy is the imitation of the common errors of our life, which he representeth in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be, so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one" (86). Like Gosson and Puttenham, therefore, Sidney believes that comedy has the power to educate, and disapproves, like Puttenham, with the mixing of the noble and the comic modes, decrying playwrights who place kings and clowns

together on the stage. But Sidney's concern is with the gratuitous mixing of the two, in a manner that causes their didactic focus to be blurred:

mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in clowns by head and shoulders, to play a part in majestical matters, with neither decency nor discretion, so as neither the admiration and commiseration, nor the right sportfulness, is by their mongrel tragic-comedy obtained.(95)

Therefore, in the blending of social levels, the tragic and comic forms themselves are *mongrelized* and their respective didactic clarity is undermined. In general, what is made apparent in the examples above is that the genre of comedy was respected as a means of social criticism, and in this regard was firmly rooted in the traditional desire for art to both entertain and educate. It becomes clear, however, that what troubled critics about the license of comic play is its potential to undermine power. Sidney's belief that tragedy is the appropriate mode to educate the ruling classes, "that maketh kings fear to be tyrants," and his critical concern that the "matter" of a play needs to warrant the use of kings and clowns together, indicate that *clownage* is designated generally for the populace at large, and the tragic glass is reserved for reflecting that exclusive segment of society that wields power. What then, do we make of the fact that so much *clownage* punctuates even the darker moments of Marlowe's tragic glass?

Brooks (1968) notes, "Marlowe demonstrated that even when written for the public stage, serious drama could dispense with the low comedy so much favoured by the barbarous taste of the popular audience" (68).^[20] But in light of Richard Jones'

advertisement that prefaces the 1590 printing of *Tamburlaine*, stating that it was necessary for the printer to have “purposely omitted and left out some fond and frivolous gestures, digressing and, in my poor opinion, far unmeet for the matter...though haply they have been of some vain-conceited fondlings greatly gaped at, what times they were showed upon the stage in their graced deformities,”^[21] Brooks’ argument seems more bizarre than anything else.^[22] One even wonders why Jones’ editing would be necessary, since Marlowe’s prologue proposes to avoid *clownage*. The vulgarity of “clownage,” implicit in its relationship to payment, as well as the juxtaposition of “jiggling” with “stately,” and mere “conceits” juxtaposed with “threat’ning” words and “astounding terms,” would imply that his high style and tragic purpose would preclude such vulgar trappings. But Marlowe incorporates the comic reflex into the heroic grandeur of the tragic *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* genre in which it thematically participates. Marlowe’s tendency to punctuate his “tragic glass” with humor generates a *comic distance* in his dramatic writing, what Mulryne and Fender (1968)^[23] describe as a “detached, even half-mocking” audience response to his often ambivalent, ironic, or paradoxical treatment of subject and situation (51). As such, Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* exceeds its role as *serious drama*, and functions as a dramatic hybrid that “openeth the greatest of wounds” (Sidney 86) and stirs “laughter in sinful things, which are rather execrable than ridiculous” (Sidney 95).

It is not the sheer volume of explicit comedy in *Tamburlaine* that creates problems for the critic though, but rather the problem of constructing an adequate theory about humor in *Tamburlaine*, primarily because so much of it reads as humorous to modern sensibilities. There is straightforward comedy, to be sure, as in the bathetic questioning of Techelles, following Tamburlaine's poetic wooing of Zenocrate: "What now? In love?" and Tamburlaine's response: "Techelles, women must be flattered" (1.I.ii.106-7). Such humorous understatement occurs throughout the text, frequently in response to flights of fantastic rhetoric. Another example, of a slightly more sophisticated form, can be seen in Almeda's response to Callapine's attempts to enlist aid in escape: "How far hence lies the galley, say you?" (2.I.iii.54). Beyond the self-conscious humor directed at his own rhetoric, Marlowe also appears to associate humor with motifs seemingly crucial to the drama's theme. Tamburlaine's *anti-heroic* questioning "But are they rich? And is their armour good?" (1.I.ii.123), as the army sent by Mycetes bears down upon him, at once confirms the greed that punctuates so many decisions in the text, but also lampoons Tamburlaine's own disdain for such behavior: "Not all the gold in India's wealthy arms/ Shall buy the meanest soldier in my train" (1.I.ii.85-6). Funny, too, is his lampooning of the value and meaning of crowns, and the ease of transition from one ruler to another, when he dons the crown from the dead Cosroe and asks "Theridamas, Techelles, and the rest, / Who think you now is King of Persia?" (1.II.vii.55-6). Here we have an inversion of attitudes normally associated with Tamburlaine, and that often

quoted hymn to worldly power that terminates' with "Until we reach the ripest fruit of all, / That perfect bliss and sole felicity, / The fruition of an earthly crown" (1.II.vii.27-9). Taking Tamburlaine's humorous streak together with the lampooning of misrule in the form of the fool-king Mycetes (1.I.i, 1.II.ii, 1.II.iv), one realizes that far from avoiding mixing of clowns and kings, Marlowe has kings who are clowns.

Mulryne and Fender (1968) see Marlowe's humor as being predicated upon continual leaps from figural speech to literal action, as in his promise to make people his footstools or chariot horses. Tamburlaine is seen as literally acting out his hyperbole, and thereby generating "the kind of ridiculousness that comes from trying to turn metaphor into fact" (54). They discern this as a pattern in Marlowe's work overall, and equate it with a self-conscious need to have uncertainty permeate his text: We call this a paradigm because it is only one of many instances in Marlowe in which contradictory views of experience are brought together and left unresolved: the ideal and the common sense; the hint of comprehensive order and the rejection of all order; the socially concerned and the individualist; the moral and the libertine; metaphor and fact. (50)

We can discern in this simultaneity of positions the truest form of irony; divorced from dramatic circumstance or humorous reflex, Marlowe's ambivalence about any absolute position is manifested in this plurality of voices, as well as in his conflating of

generic forms. In this regard, then, Marlowe's humor may be interpreted as being part of his play, but not necessarily in the service of either a comic or tragic plot dynamic.

We want to call Tamburlaine 'comic' not because we wish to place it in a formal category—such categories were, after all, very fluid in the late sixteenth century—but because the name comedy helps us to locate, much more accurately than 'tragedy' or 'history,' what we take to be the essential nature of our response to this play. We have insisted on ambivalence of feeling; when ambivalence is specified as theory, it becomes paradox, and paradox is written into the history of comic theory. Aristotle, who defined the ridiculous as a sub-species of the ugly, qualified his definition, and opened the door to paradox, by insisting that the ugliness concerned must be such as did not wholly repel. (52-3)

As Levin (1984) has noted, Marlowe's audience identified with the might and greatness of Tamburlaine. Thus, while the audience may be horrified by moments of gallows humor in *Tamburlaine*, the spectators are not necessarily repelled by his character, but rather left in that same state of ambivalence he represents. Such a pattern of responses would indicate that *Tamburlaine* does not participate in that aspect of comedy which "tended altogether to the good amendment of many by discipline and example" (Puttenham 163), but rather leaves the audience in an amoral limbo. The placement of the audience in a position of ambivalence suggest the question "what is it about the humor in the 'tragic glass' of *Tamburlaine* that makes us laugh?"

Sidney states, in his *An Apology for Poetry*, that “the great fault even at the point of laughter...is that they stir laughter in sinful things, which are rather execrable than ridiculous; or miserable, which are rather to be pitied than scorned” (95). Indeed, it would appear that *Tamburlaine* violates this rule as well. While there are many sequences which *read* humorous, but may *feel* monstrous, it is difficult to note with any certainty what in the text is intentionally humorous, and any attempt to do so indicates more about our recipient culture than the Elizabethan audience. What Leech (1964) refers to as Tamburlaine’s savage humor, is “a predominantly tragic response to the world, complicating but not destroying the tragic attitude” (168). We can equate the tragic and comic elements in some instances, as with the bizarre desire to frame the destruction of a town with construction that prohibits building:

This pillar plac’d in memory of her,
Wherein Arabian, Hebrew, Greek, is writ,
*This town being burnt by Tamburlaine the Great
Forbids the world to build it up again.*
(2.III.ii.15-18)

One wonders how the audience of Marlowe’s day reacted. Could they, as we do now, find humor in such obscenity? I suspect that our response may be closer to theirs than we might imagine; for we, like our Elizabethan predecessors, live in a world of obscenity and violence.

What, then, should we think of a grotesquely humorous tragedy, whose protagonist is a shepherd turned conqueror? As such, Tamburlaine violates the rule

that calls for the separation of clowns and kings, adds outrage to injury by taking a shepherd, who previously would have been “hamyd, / Fortaxed and ramyd” and “mayde handtamyd / With these gentlery-men,”^[24] and puts a conqueror’s sword in his hand. In this regard the play represents a challenge to both literary and social order. At the same time, however, Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* also toys with another sort of order; the cyclical view of history which manifested itself in that type of drama which “teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded” (Sidney 86). As Briggs notes, in *This Stage-Play World* (1983), the Elizabethan conception of tragedy fixed upon “a particular type of plot...a particular sequence of events, the fall of a great man from prosperity into misery” (281).^[25] Thus, when Norton and Sackville, the latter of which would contribute to the 1563 edition of *The Mirror for Magistrates*, lift the substance of their *Gorboduc* from Monmouth’s *History of the Kings of Britain*, ii.17, their chorus interprets the action of the stage in reference to the providential and cyclical associations of loss:

And this great king that doth divide his land,
 And change the course of his descending crown,
 And yields the reign into his children’s hand,
 From blissful state of joy and great renown,
 A mirror shall become to princes all,
 To learn to shun the cause of such a fall.
 (*Gorboduc* I.ii.458-63)^[26]

It is this dynamic that Marlowe’s audience would have expected when his prologue described *Tamburlaine*: “View but his picture in this tragic glass, / And then

applaud his fortunes as you please.” While Cole (1995) expresses ambivalence about the application of the term “tragic” in light of “how flexibly the adjective could be applied” (62), this model of cyclical tragedy, the *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, has found its way into numerous readings of the text, not least of which is Levin’s (1964) providential reading which sees Marlowe moralizing through protagonists who “violate divine authority...and [have] the jealousy of the gods...visited upon their prideful heads” (31). Crewe (1991) also categorizes *Tamburlaine* within this tradition:

The conception of the dramatic protagonist as a negative exemplum is too powerfully entrenched in the sixteenth century for any simple reversal to be probable either at the level of poetic theory or of audience response. (However inclined the audience might be to succumb to the theatrical magnetism of Marlowe’s protagonists, not only they but the audience get “punished” by their deaths. (50)

For this type of drama to meet its didactic aims, to return to Sidney’s belief that it “maketh kings fear to be tyrants,” the play must not inspire a catharsis through identification and empathy, but rather catharsis through revulsion.^[27] As such, the catharsis that occurs in *Tamburlaine* is more in keeping with Golden’s translation of Aristotle’s *Poetics*,^[28] which states that tragedy achieves, “through the representation of pitiable and fearful *incidents*, the catharsis of such pitiable and fearful *incidents*” (46). While Marlowe’s first prologue implies a tragedy in this sense of the term, his prologue for 2 *Tamburlaine* is more explicit in this regard, promising to depict how “death cuts off

the progress of his pomp/And murd'rous Fates throws all his triumphs down" (2.Pro.4-5). The problem that arises, however, as Levin (1984) has noted, is that contemporary responses to *Tamburlaine* indicate that the audience did not see its protagonist as a negative example. Levin states: "if their interpretation is right, then the play must be judged an artistic failure, since it did not communicate its intended meaning to the audiences for which it was written" (66). From a generic standpoint, then, it can't be a *tragedy* if they like *Tamburlaine*. It can't be a tragedy if nothing bad happens to the prideful king. And yet, *Tamburlaine* is as much about fortune as it is about its protagonist's fortunes.

Tamburlaine is riddled with references to Fortune and her fickle ways. Though implicit in its reference, the opening sequence serves as a paradigm for the seemingly endless succession of conquered cities, deposed and punished monarchs, and *Tamburlaine*'s own increasing sadism. Cosroe, soon to be spun under Fortune's Wheel himself, bemoans the rule of his brother, the pathetic fool-king Mycetes, and the debilitated state of Persia:

Unhappy Persia, that in former age
Hast been the seat of mighty conquerors,
That in their prowess and their policies
Have triumph'd over Afric and the bounds
Of Europe where the sun dares scarce appear
For freezing meteors and congealed cold,
Now to be rul'd and govern'd by a man
At whose birthday Cynthia with Saturn join'd,
And Jove, the Sun, and Mercury denied
To shed their influence in his fickle brain!

Now Turks and Tartars shake their swords at thee,
Meaning to mangle all thy provinces.
(1.I.i.6-17)

Once proud, now pushed around, the waning fortunes of all city-states are encapsulated in the dramatic downfall of Persia. But, we are reminded, all of this is part of a larger, wholly impersonal cycle, as Menaphon encourages Cosroe to take the crown from his weaker brother: “This should entreat your highness to rejoice, / Since fortune gives you opportunity / To gain the title of a conqueror / By curing of this maimed empery” (1.I.i.123-26). But all plots only secure temporary victory, as Cosroe’s statement to his Scythian co-conspirator ironically implies: “And, till thou overtake me, Tamburlaine” (1.II.v.44). When Cosroe’s turn comes to be cast into oblivion, his lamentation contains no wisdom—for there is no lesson to teach—because wisdom could not have saved him. Loss of the crown and his death are the prices he pays for having played the game:

Barbarous and bloody Tamburlaine,
Thus to deprive me of my crown and life!
Treachorous and false Theridamas,
Even at the morning of my happy state,
Scarce being seated in my royal throne,
To work my downfall and untimely end!
(1.II.vii.1-6)

Cosroe’s localizing of Fortune’s action within the acts of Tamburlaine and his cohorts is important, not least to heighten the dramatic action of the play, but to imply that Tamburlaine himself is a manifestation of swift and sudden reversal. What these initial

examples have in common is that they are incidental applications of fortune, perpetrated subtly, and related through implication.

The applications of the fortune trope, both implicit and explicit, are too numerous in *Tamburlaine* to be rehearsed in any thorough detail in an essay of this scope. However, we can briefly organize Marlowe's application into incidental or emblematic uses of the trope (1.I.i.6-17; 1.I.i. 123-6; 1.II.iv; 1.II.v.44; 1.II.vii; and 2.V.i.1-4), the cyclical nature of fortune (1.I.i.123-26; 2.III.i.28-38; and 2.V.ii.24-55), applications of fortune as part of the *sentence*, or didactic aims of character or theme (1.IV.ii.75-82; 1.IV.iii.24-55; 1.V.i.347-74; 2.II.iv.42-6; and 2.III.v.77-8), associations of pride with fortune (1.IV.iii.28-42 and 58-60; 1.II.vii.24-40; and 2.IV.i.78-86), general *hubris* of characters who believe they are resistant to the cyclical nature of fortune or believe another character's fortune is changeable (1.I.i.41-43) and instances of Tamburlaine being fortunate, free from fortune's cyclical whimsy, or being capable of bending fortune to his own will (1.I.ii.165-77; 1.II.vii; 1.IV.iv.135-41; 2.I.iii.46; 2.II.iv.96-118; 2.IV.i.111-20; 2.IV.iii.39-42; 2.V.i.215-20; 2.V.ii.20-54; 2.V.iii.52-3). There is, of course, a great deal of blurring of these categories, and we do not pretend to be completely convinced about the criteria established thus far. However, it is clear that Marlowe's use of the fortune trope is deeply ingrained in the tragic reflex and heroic rhetoric of the piece, as in the number of times references to *overthrowing*, *overturning*, *swaying*, or movement *upwards* and *downwards* are used to suggest Fortune's cyclical action

throughout the play. For our purposes at hand, however, we wish to first note the heart of Marlowe's fortune play and then consider how *Tamburlaine* engages in emblematic associations of Tamburlaine with the dynamics of the Goddess Fortuna.

The larger ordering principle of Fortune in Tamburlaine balances on the dissolution of Bajazeth's power at the hands of Tamburlaine, the enslavement of Bajazeth's son Callapine, Callapines' escape, Callapine's challenge to Tamburlaine, and the dissolution of Tamburlaine through the intervention of Bajazeth-Callapine's god. From the moment Part Two begins, there is a focus on Callapine as part of the force that "cuts off the progress of his [Tamburlaine's] pomp/And murd'rous Fates throws all his triumphs down" (2 *Tamburlaine*, Pro. 4-5). As such, this localization of the plot demonstrates the swaying of Fortune, contains a wide array of references to Fortune, and provides the cyclical movement expected from the didactic motives of a "tragic glass." It is for this reason that we find our first overt application of the didactic Fortune trope immediately following Bajazeth's fall into darkness. Marlowe's tragedy, which repeatedly confronts us with the lesson of the "bloody spectacle" (V.i.339), urges Tamburlaine to view the corpses in his wake:

Behold the Turk and his great empress.
Thou that in conduct of thy happy stars
Sleep'st every night with conquest on thy brows,
And yet wouldst shun the wavering turns of war,
In fear and feeling of the like distress,
Behold the Turk and his great empress.
(V.i.357-62)

Zenocrate's warning to the great conqueror is the frame of Marlowe's tragic glass, which utilizes events of the play as part of its didactic method to illustrate the fall of illustrious men. But Tamburlaine does not heed any warning, from anyone, and while his downfall, too, will be included in the movement of Fortune's wheel, we cannot help but notice that the distinction between Tamburlaine and Fortune grows increasingly more and more vague.

And we will triumph over all the world.
I hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains,
And with my hand turn Fortune's wheel about;
And sooner shall the sun fall from his sphere
Than Tamburlaine be slain or overcome.
(1.I.ii.173-77)

It is part of Tamburlaine's role as *overreaching hero* that he be possessed of a will that necessarily transcends the seemingly larger energies of the World, Fate, or Fortune. He is impressive as a character for this very reason; by being as willful as he is he gives those of us who like him the gift of a larger life through association—at least temporarily. But like Fortune, Tamburlaine gives and takes, savors the power of life and death which he wields over his conquered foes, capriciously manifests hyperbole as reality—even his lady-love begins as a *prisoner*. His physical stature manifested in his heroic excellence, his will is embodied in his rhetoric, and as an emblematic manifestation of Fortune he is metaphorically marked, like Cain, with the sign of *his* goddess: "And valiant Tamburlaine, the man of fame,/That in the forehead of his fortune/Bears figures of renown and miracle" ((1.II.i.2-4). When the fool-king Mycetes

acts out the downward dynamic of Fortune by literally placing his crown in a ditch, “Here will I hide it in this simple hole” (1.II.iv.15), Tamburlaine acts the role of Fortune by taking the crown and giving it back again: “Here, take it for a while, I lend it thee” (1.II.iv.35). All crowns in *Tamburlaine* are borrowed crowns. The possession of any crown is *temporary*.

The close of Part One functions much like a traditional comedy in that it depicts a young man who has successfully negotiated his way into a position of power, achieved the hand of his lady from her aging father, and now invites everyone to partake in a feast at which all men are kings. The difference, of course, is that none of this has been negotiated through the relaxing of social constrictions, unless these constrictions were relaxed by being butchered. It is at this moment, during the *comus* of *Tamburlaine*, that he once again resembles Fortune:

And now my lords and loving followers,
That purchas'd kingdoms by your martial deeds,
Cast off your armour, put on scarlet robes,
Mount up your royal places of estate,
Environed with troops and noblemen,
And there make laws to rule your provinces.
(1.V.i.522-27)

There is an inclination to argue that this is the true turning point in *Tamburlaine's* saga. What appears as an uncomfortably ambivalent conclusion to a tale that purported to be a tragedy carries within it the germs of Tamburlaine's demise. Taking thrones and setting up laws is the beginning of the end for this warrior. The “policies” with which

Persia “triumph’d over Afric and the bounds / Of Europe” (1.I.i.8-10) are now embodied in the “laws to rule your provinces” that Tamburlaine requests. His men are told to “cast off” their armor and “Mount up your royal places of estate” (1.V.i.524-25). They will now assume their place at the top of Fortune’s unpredictable wheel, and it is Tamburlaine who places them there.

Even though Tamburlaine is, on one level, outside the influence of Fortune, as he reminds us while he stabs his own son to death, “Ready to levy power against thy throne, / That I might move the turning spheres of heaven; / For earth and all this airy region / Cannot contain the state of Tamburlaine” (2.IV.i.117-20), he is also Fortune’s creature. Tamburlaine, who once spoke of “the Persian crown, / Which gracious stars have promis’d at my birth” (1.I.ii.91-2), ends his days fearfully gazing into his own urine for signs of his impending doom (2.V.iii.42-99). In his book *The Tragedy of State* (1971), J. W. Lever states:

It has become increasingly fashionable in academic criticism to extrapolate from Elizabethan drama a moral order, or a moral vision, which is thought to have been the playwright’s main concern in his honorary capacity as Christian humanist. Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* is explicated as a morality play designed to impress audiences with the spectacle of divine punishment....This neo-pietism, in which we may at times suspect a recoil from subversive currents of our own day, hardly affects the responses of audiences and readers outside academic circles. Shakespeare and Marlowe speak out for themselves.(39)^[29]

While there is no denying that Marlowe has carefully crafted a tragedy of fortune from the clay of this heroic drama, it is difficult to fully equate the cyclical downfall

required with Tamburlaine's own passing. It is clear that Marlowe's "savage comedy" is manifested again in the burning of the *Koran* as the impetus behind Tamburlaine's downfall, but one wonders what his audience would have made of this.^[30] As Crewe (1991) notes, what may pass for deviations from structure is Marlowe's unrealized desire to create a tragedy beyond pedestrian morality:

For Marlowe to fully legitimize his monsters would require him to overthrow (upset) practically all dominant cultural presuppositions of the sixteenth century as well as purge the resulting anxieties. It is scarcely conceivable that even Marlowe could have imagined or desired that full-scale "emancipation." (50)

Clearly, any study of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* that relegates thematic or didactic inconsistencies to issues of psychology simply realigns the question from quantifiable context to speculation. In discussing the subversive applications of *Richard II* during the Essex uprising, Dollimore (1985) notes that the Elizabethan "period's pragmatic conception of literature meant that such appropriations were not a perversion of true literary reception, they were literary reception" (9).^[31] Puttenham, prefiguring Dollimore's sentiments by some four hundred years, states that drama can be about both its subject and its context:

But as the bad and illawdable parts of all estates and degrees were taxed by the Poets in one sort or an other, and those of great Princes by Tragedie in especial, & not till after their deaths, as hath been before remembered, to th'intent that such exemplifying (as it were) of their blames and aduesities, being now dead, might worke for a secret reprehension to others that were aliue, liuing in the same or like abuses. (165)

But what was the context of *Tamburlaine*? How does one clarify its ambivalence in relation to its context? Having established that it toys with genre and theme in ways that appear to be *counterproductive*, we are still left with questions regarding what the play *means*. For Levin (1952), *Tamburlaine* the protagonist is imperial power allegorized (35-40). To Waith (1964), *Tamburlaine* as a character was popular with the crowd because he moves from a position of social inferiority to sovereignty (70-4).^[32] Hopkins (2000) sees the drama itself as a mirror that reflects power: "If the play functions as a mirror, then what the audience will see in it is its own reflection; superimposed on the features of the barbarian Scythian" (50). What is reflected in *Tamburlaine*'s "tragic glass," then, is the power structure of the Elizabethan society that gazes into the mirror.

The play forces us into a radical identification with what, in theory, we most condemn, and at the same time sharply critiques a fundamental aspect of English Renaissance culture, the colonial enterprise, by completely inverting the perspective from which it is habitually viewed. (50)

In such a reading of the text, the ambivalence generated by Marlowe's humor and application of the fortune trope might begin to make more sense. Indeed, such an angle of approach does draw an intriguing context for *Tamburlaine*'s morality as a whole, and certainly brings new meaning to many portions of the text, not least being *Tamburlaine*'s fearful regard of his former *slave*, now turned upon him:

See where my slave, the ugly monster Death,
Shaking and quivering, pale and wan for fear,
Stands aiming at me with his murderous dart,
Who flies away at every glance I give,
And when I look away, comes stealing on.
(2.V.iii.67-71)

While one need not develop a fully integrated reading of the burgeoning colonialism inherent in the text and its context to make sense of *Tamburlaine*, one can appreciate the immediacy that it breathes into Marlowe's creation. But *Tamburlaine* ultimately frustrates even this identification, for it is also ambivalent about continuity of rule, and the coherence of power outside the cult of personality. To recall Crewe's terminology, even Marlowe could not wish for that degree of emancipation. Tamburlaine's parting words to his son, viewed through one side of the mirror, is his imperial mandate to control the unworthy rulers that cower before the might of his legacy:

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 wand'ring Phoebe's ivory cheeks were scorch'd,
And all the earth, like Etna, breathing fire.
Be warn'd by him, then; learn with awful eye
To sway a throne as dangerous as his;
For if thy body thrive not full of thoughts
As pure and fiery as Phyteus' beams,
The nature of these proud rebelling jades
Will take occasion by the slenderest hair,
And draw these piecemeal like Hippolytus
Through rocks more steep and sharp than Caspian cliffs.
The nature of thy chariot will not bear

A guide of baser temper than myself,
More than heaven's coach the pride of Phaeton.
(2.V.iii.228-44)

The inheritance that Tamburlaine bequeaths to his sons is a legacy of doom. Like Seneca's protagonist in *Hercules Oetaeus*, who boasts "Tam virtus mihi / in astra et ipsos fecit ad superos iter" (Now has my valor made a path to the stars and to the gods themselves) (813-14), Tamburlaine has made a path to the heavens. However, the path he has forged is one that none can follow. Tamburlaine's allusions, on the surface functioning as both warning and encouragement, are a death knell for his progeny; his references are to doomed sons, Hippolytus and Phaeton, and the reigns of state he hands over are attached to a chariot that will burn the world to cinders. Tamburlaine's chariot will not obey anyone of baser temper than the peerless Tamburlaine, and he is dying. Tamburlaine's legacy is *apocalypse*. It is this apocalypse that, I suspect, is the emancipation that Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* predicts. It is here that I suspect that we come to the heart of the matter: Marlowe's experiment in genre produces a ghastly, humorous, triumphant sequence of linked nihilistic purities. This is not the nihilism of the "Atheist *Tamburlaine*," nor is it the nihilism sometimes associated with the Renaissance pessimism that goads Hamlet to see man as both the "paragon of animals" and the "quintessence of dust." *Tamburlaine's* is a nihilism that runs through the cyclical view of history that was part of Marlowe's tragic world-view. The power with which it is expressed was as much at home ideologically in *The Mirror for Magistrates* as

it would be in Chaucer's *Monk's Tale*. This lesson regarding the fickle ways of fortune was clearly something that Marlowe carried with him through many of his artistic endeavors. We are reminded, in this regard, of some lines from Marlowe's translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*:

So when this world's compounded union breaks,
Time ends, and to old Chaos all things turn,
Confused stars shall meet, celestial fire
Fleet on the floods, the earth shoulder the sea,
Affording it no shore, and Phoebe's wan
Chase Phoebus, and enraged affect his place,
And strive to shine by day, and full of strife
Dissolve the engines of the broken world.
All great things crush themselves; such end the gods
Allot the height of honour, men so strong
By land and sea no foreign force could ruin.
(73-83)

Although the tendency is to view such fatalism as an intrinsic part of the heroic ethos, to "Dissolve the engines of the broken world" surely goes beyond the inferences of the rhetoric of the battlefield and, in the hands of Marlowe at least, takes on an air of a universal nihilism; *Tamburlaine* does not simply stand at the end of doctrine, but at the end of all things.

While we have only scratched the surface of *Tamburlaine's* potential to upset us and disorient even the most focused critical inquiry, it is clear that Marlowe's drama attempts to challenge its contemporary literary environment both in regard to expectations of genre and theme. In light of the tendency in the last few decades to question the universality of the ordering principles of the Elizabethan world view—or

any world view for that matter--*Tamburlaine's* ability to challenge convention is indicative of its importance as a cultural artifact. Marlowe's disruptive use of savage humor and his malleable application of the Fortune trope, that "symbol and expression of a world where insecurity reigned" (Le Goff 165-66),^[34] coupled with a compulsively intellectual dissatisfaction with a historical view whose "providential mode of explanation had ceased to provide a satisfactory interpretation of the unfolding of events" (Woolf 322),^[35] results in the fashioning of a "tragic glass" which, rather than simply reflecting the fortunes of its protagonist, shatters the framework of our own expectations and leaves us to pick up the pieces.

Endnotes

[1] See page 66 of Derrida, Jacques. "The Law of Genre." Trans. Avital Ronell. *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 7, no. 1. (Autumn 1980). 55-81.

[2] Line 81 of "Lucan's First Book." *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Poems and Translations*. Ed. Stephen Orgel. (New York: Penguin, 1971). 185-207.

[3] See Hopkins, Lisa. *Christopher Marlowe: A Literary Life*. (New York: Palgrave, 2000), Levin, Harry. *The Overreacher*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1952), and Cole, Douglas. *Christopher Marlowe and the Renaissance of Tragedy*. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995).

[4] All citations from Marlowe's works are drawn from the E.D. Pendry edition of *Complete Plays and Poems* (London: Dent, 1976).

[5] All citations from Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* are drawn from Bate, Walter Jackson ed. *Criticism: The Major Texts*. (Florida: Wolf Den Books, 2002) 71-98.

[6] As is typical with much Elizabethan drama, questions of authorship, insertion of material, or collaboration, especially regarding prologues of plays, are part of the critical heritage of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. Although the only play published during his lifetime, there is certainly room for argument here as well. However, the Prologue to Marlowe's *Tamburlaine, Part One*, is clearly a key foundational component of Marlowe's play, supporting the theme of otherness that is so important to the characterization of Tamburlaine (Hopkins 48-49). The Prologue is described by David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (1995), in the introduction to their edition of Marlowe's works, as a "manifesto, both literary and ideological, written by a self-assured dramatist" (ix). More specifically to the question of authorship, Douglas Cole's (1995) discussion of the Prologue states that "Marlowe was setting a tone here, establishing a claim for the elevation of his style above the puerile rhyming verse or low comedy of other plays" (62). Finally, I am content to defer to the expertise of Anthony Dawson, whose note on the Prologue, in his edition of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine Parts One and Two* (1997), characterizes the first three lines of the Prologue as "Marlowe's challenge to the stage conventions of the time" (7).

[7] See Rabkin, Norman. "Marlowe's Mind and the Heart of Darkness." *"A Poet and a Filthy Play-Maker"* *New Essays on Christopher Marlowe*. Ed. Friedenreich, Kenneth, Roma Gill, and Constance B. Kuriyama. (New York: AMS Press, 1988). Of interest also, see Boas' *Marlowe and His Circle* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1929) regarding Marlowe's connection to Sidney through the infamous Robert Poley on 39-42, 104-106, and 122, Marlowe's connection to Sidney during his Cambridge days through the Manwood family in Ingram, John H. *Christopher Marlowe and His Associates* (New York: Cooper Square, 1970) 101, and the connection through the Manwoods reaffirmed in Hopkins, Lisa. *Christopher Marlowe: A Literary Life*. (New York: Palgrave, 2000), especially the statement "all these names [associated with Sidney] take us very close to what seems to have been Marlowe's own circle" (101).

[8] Hopkins, Lisa. *Christopher Marlowe: A Literary Life*. (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

[9] Levin, Harry. *The Overreacher*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1952).

[10] Cole, Douglas. *Christopher Marlowe and the Renaissance of Tragedy*. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995).

[11] Dawson, Anthony B. ed. *Tamburlaine Parts One and Two*. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).

[12] All citations of Puttenham's work drawn from *English Literary Criticism: The Renaissance*. O. B. Hardison, jr. Ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963) 148-81.

[13] Hardison (1963) 86-97.

[14] Hardison (1963) 218-20.

[15] As cited in Levin, Richard. "The Contemporary Perception of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*." *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 1 (1984) 52.

[16] All citations of Jonson's *Timber, or, Discoveries*, unless otherwise noted, are drawn from *Ben Jonson*, Ed. Ian Donaldson (New York: Oxford UP, 1985) 521-94.

[17] Hardison (1963) 208-17.

[18] Crewe, Jonathan V. "The Theater of the Idols: Theatrical and Anti-theatrical Discourse." *Staging the Renaissance*. Ed. Kastan, David Scott and Peter Stallybrass. (New York: Routledge, 1991) 49-56.

[19] All citation of Elyot, unless otherwise noted, are drawn from *Sixteenth-Century English Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Delany, Paul, et. al. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976) 52-64.

[20] Brooks, Harold F. "Marlowe and Early Shakespeare." *Christopher Marlowe*. Ed. Morris, Brian. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968) 65-94.

[21] In Pendry (1976) 5.

[22] It is odd, too, that Jones addresses the play to those that "take pleasure in reading histories," the body of his letter referring to *Tamburlaine* as "so honourable and stately a history," as reproduced in Ribner's edition of *The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Odyssey 1963), page 50. The fact of *Tamburlaine*'s historical existence may make this obvious, as does the Elizabethan tendency to call almost anything a history. As Woolf (1987) notes, "in common parlance, a play could be a history, or a 'tragical history,' or a 'historical comedy,' or...a 'chronicle history.' Poems were often also considered histories" (18-19). This crossover of *historical quality* into a variety of literary applications is ultimately the result of a "legacy of the Greeks and Romans, [where] the exemplum was an historical anecdote employed in a rhetoric of persuasion" (LeGoff *Medieval Civilization*. Trans. Julia Barrow. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988) 78). Jones' application of the term might therefore imply that he was stressing *Tamburlaine*'s didactic focus. Indeed, in a text such as *The Mirror for Magistrates*, which draws its exempla from the

fall of great historical figures, the didactic purpose of the project is always at the forefront. In Baldwin's dedication to the 1559 edition, he states: "*For here is a looking glas, you shall see (if any vice be in you) howe the like hath bene punished in other heretofore*" (65) (All citations from *The Mirror for Magistrates* drawn from the Campbell edition (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960). While it is certainly beyond the scope of this project to outline the general sway of Elizabethan attitudes towards history and historical literature, we hope that the reader will understand that the general purpose of this brief digression is to indicate that the *qualities* of providential and cyclical history often blended in a given work, and Jones' categorization is probably more symptomatic of his own distaste for comedy than it is his love of history, *whatever* that word may have meant to him. Of interest, too, is the degree to which Jones' vocabulary apes the critical terms noted in previous texts; we have disdain for the *mixing* of high and low modes, the provocatively descriptive *graced deformities*, and even the use of the verb *gaped*. Clearly, Jones was not about to offend anyone with a *mongrel tragic-comedy*. We regret that Irving Ribner's insightful comments regarding the potential connections between Marlowe's historical vision and the *substantialism* of Polybius was discovered too late to be included in this essay. See Ribner, Irving. "The Idea of History in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*." *Elizabethan Drama*. Ralph J. Kaufman ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1961) 81-94. Of particular interest also, in regards to the quality of historical narrative in relation to the *de causibus virorum illustrium* genre is Kohl, Benjamin. "Petrarch's Prefaces to *de Viris Illustribus*." *History and Theory* vol.13, no.2 (May 1974) 132-144. See also Woolf (1978) 19-21.

[23] Mulryne, J.R. and Stephen Fender. "Marlowe and the 'Comic Distance.'" *Christopher Marlowe*. Ed. Brian Morris (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968) 47-64. See also Leech, Clifford. "Marlowe's Humor." *Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Clifford Leech, ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964) 167-78.

[24] Wakefield *Second Shepherd's Pageant*, lines 15-18, drawn from Bevington's edition of *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975).

[25] On one level, Marlowe's "tragic glass" offers a vision of tragedy as a didactic analysis of transience. In this regard, Marlowe's approach to tragedy is quite traditional.

*Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
As olde bookes maken us memorie,
Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,
And is yfallen out of heigh degree*

Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly.
(Chaucer *Monk's Tale*. Pro.1973-77)

The definition of tragedy that Chaucer's Monk provides represents that category of writing that Sidney designates as tragic, and which had a variety of literary manifestations in both Chaucer's day and Marlowe's own time. It is curious to note, in light of what has been argued above regarding the ambivalence generated by Marlowe's use of humor, that Chaucer's Monk also experiments with the alternation of pathos and humor, as indicated by the Monk's bizarre meditation upon the dying Julius Caesar's attempts to hide his "*privetee*" (2715) while being stabbed, or the pleas of Count Ugolino's children that the starving nobleman not bite his own arm but rather "*ete the flesh upon us two*" (2451). The point we must take away from Chaucer's Monk, however, is that the idea expressed above, that tragedy is about the fall of great men through the caprice of Fortune, is what Marlowe's audience had come to expect.

[26] All citations from *Gorboduc*, unless otherwise noted, are drawn from Gassner, John ed. *Medieval and Tudor Drama*. (New York: Bantam, 1969).

[27] The application of the term catharsis (καθάρσις) as a means of designating negative behavior, associating it with unpleasant experience, and thereby curtailing its replication in the members of the audience, requires some brief explanation. The term, which Abrams (1957) notes "is much disputed" (173), is translated with its accompanying phraseology by Bywater as a purgation of emotion, not of behavior: "A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incident arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions" (631). Wheelwright (1935) also sees the sense of this passage as applying catharsis to the elimination of depressing feelings, as is evidenced by his translation of the line as "to accomplish a purgation of such emotions" (296). In both these cases, the cathartic effect is directed at the audience experiencing the drama, and geared towards the purging of such emotions as they might experience. Hutton (1982), in his extensive note to this passage in his translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, concurs with this reading of the line, and adds that this discharge of feeling is a "temporary psychological effect without moral consequences" (89). One could distill all of this into very simple terms, and perhaps come away with an understanding of catharsis as an emotional experience that leads to a release, to a *getting it out of one's system*, as it were, of depressive feelings harbored by members of the audience. This, in a nutshell, is the most common application of the term catharsis, familiar to classical and later Renaissance drama.

[28] In Richter, David *The Critical Tradition* (New York: Bedford, 1989).

[29] Lever, J.W. *The Tragedy of State*. (London: Methuen, 1971).

[30] One detects the application of Islam as part of a larger, more magical view of heroic action frequently depicted in the matter of Araby, especially in Middle English romances such as *The Soudwone of Babylone*.

[31] Dollimore, Jonathan. Introduction. *Political Shakespeare*. Ed. Dollimore, Jonathan and Alan Sinfield. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 2-17.

[32] Waith, Eugene M. "Tamburlaine." In Leech (1964) 69-91.

[33] *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Poems and Translations*. Stephen Orgel ed. (New York: Penguin, 1971) 187-207.

[34] Le Goff, Jacques. *Medieval Civilization*. Trans. Julia Barrow (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).

[35] Woolf, D.R. "Genre into Artifact: The Decline of the English Chronicle in the Sixteenth Century." *Sixteenth Century Journal*. Vol. 19 no. 3 (Autumn 1988) 321-54.

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