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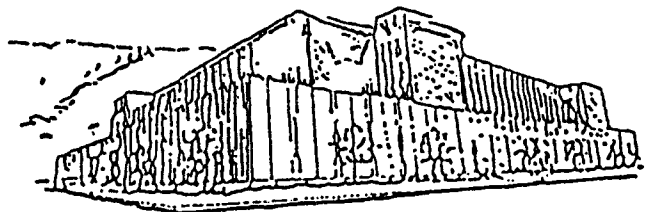
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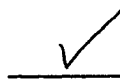
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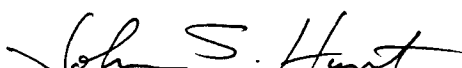
Complexity and Irony in the Works  
of Christopher Marlowe


By

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B.A., Williams College, 1993

Presented in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
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Complexity and Irony in the Works of Christopher Marlowe (63 pp.)

Director: John Hunt

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Traditionally, the plays of Christopher Marlowe have been discounted as being too simplistic. He is accused of writing intentionally provocative pieces glorifying the Renaissance overreacher that pander to the audience's desire for spectacle and use exaggerated characters and overstated rhetoric. These accusations are true, to an extent, but the result is far from simplistic. Modern critics have highlighted the pervasive irony and satire in the plays. However, many critics have ended up oversimplifying Marlowe's works by simply inverting the traditional interpretations. In portraying an almost medieval Marlowe criticizing the excesses of the Renaissance and re-asserting traditional orthodoxy, these critics ignore the powerfully provocative content of the plays.

Almost every character in Marlowe's plays is treated with caustic irony. It is easy to see what is being criticized, but much more difficult to determine what, if anything, is being affirmed. At the same time, Marlowe's plays are rich with humor, spectacle, rhetorical flourishes, and larger-than-life portraits, which further complicate reactions to the central characters. It is easy to find oneself, for example, cheering for Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* as he ruthlessly seeks revenge on the entire Christian community, and then be relieved when he meets his end. Or it is possible to cheer on the bloody tyrant Tamburlaine while simultaneously being shocked by his atrocities. Marlowe further keeps the audience off balance by defying dramatic conventions. He invokes familiar motifs, but then confounds the expectations they produce. He also mixes grandiloquent passages with unexpectedly mundane and comic ones, often within the same scene.

In his works it is often difficult to distinguish naive melodrama from parody; and ironic condemnation from blasphemy. Other than a handful of privileged minor characters, it is difficult for the audience to find any stable viewpoint from which to form a judgment of the spectacular protagonists. The rethinking of the exaggerated traditional view of Marlowe and the recent focus on the irony in the plays has greatly enriched them, but has also made our image of Marlowe more fragmentary and ambiguous than ever before.

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## Introduction

Christopher Marlowe is a singularly fascinating figure in the history of English literature. He has been portrayed as a spy, a heretic, a homosexual, and a hooligan. He was killed at the age of 29 while facing charges of atheism. It has been suggested that he would have been burnt at the stake had he not been stabbed to death in a bar. It has also been suggested that he was not stabbed to death, but faked his own death, and later wrote some of Shakespeare's early plays.

With this defiant image, Marlowe has inevitably drawn comparisons to the bold and shocking protagonists of his plays--Tamburlaine, who threatens to war against the gods while effortlessly building a vast empire and fortune and visiting death and destruction on anybody who opposes his will; Faustus, the brilliant scholar who, bored with the ease of his accomplishments, barter his soul for 24 years of God-like powers; and Barabas, Machiavelli's disciple, whose wealth is greater than twice that of the rest of Malta combined, and who launches a murderous campaign of terror on the Christians who threaten his wealth.

In his own age, Marlowe was praised, admired, and imitated, and had a successful (albeit brief) career as a playwright. He was also denounced and arrested, and his death was held up as an example of God's punishment. His plays quickly faded into obscurity, and were only revived two centuries later by the Romantics, who admired the heroic defiance of his plays and their shocking protagonists.

But more recently, Marlowe's works have been reconsidered, as critics have looked beyond this conception of Marlowe and paid attention to the ironies and ambiguities in the plays. Tamburlaine has been read as a tragic figure who realizes his own absurdity in the face of death. *Doctor Faustus* has been called the most "obvious Christian document in all Elizabethan drama" (Kirschbaum 92). *The Jew of Malta* has been read as a moral work satirizing religious bigotry. Rather than accepting the



image of Marlowe as a defiant rebel, many recent critics have seen him as surprisingly orthodox:

Not content with turning back the clock on the Renaissance itself, they would reinterpret Marlowe's outlook in conformity with canons of traditional belief. (Levin 215b)

How is it possible to interpret these plays in such strikingly opposed manners? How does one reconcile supposedly orthodox moral plays with the accusations made against Marlowe in his lifetime?

[H]ow do the perplexing details of Marlowe's life fit into the total picture of the man and his work? How are we to explain the apparent discrepancy between the charges of atheism in his personal life, and the religious morality of *Doctor Faustus*? How do we reconcile, in our own interpretation of the plays, the radical skeptic with the conservative moralist? (Godshalk 17-18)

The rethinking of the exaggerated traditional view of Marlowe and the recent focus on the irony in the plays has made the image of Marlowe more fragmentary and ambiguous than ever before. At the same time, being freed from the vivid, but limiting, traditional image of Marlowe has enriched contemporary views of the plays. The consideration by modern critics of the irony in the plays has brought out their complexity and richness. However, many critics have ended up oversimplifying Marlowe's works by simply inverting their traditional interpretations. In portraying an almost medieval Marlowe criticizing the excesses of the Renaissance and re-asserting traditional orthodoxy, these critics ignore the powerfully provocative content of the plays.

The pervasiveness of irony and satire in Marlowe's plays is what allows such disparate readings, but also what complicates both of these views. Almost every character (and certainly every major one) in Marlowe's plays is treated with caustic irony at some point. It is easy to see what is being criticized, but much more difficult to determine what, if anything, is being affirmed. At the same time, Marlowe's plays are rich with humor, spectacle, rhetorical flourishes, and larger-than-life portraits, which further complicate reactions to the central

characters. It is easy to find oneself, for example, cheering for Barabas as he arranges the death of two hypocritical friars who seek his money, and later feeling relieved when he meets his horrific end. Or it is possible to find oneself cheering on the bloody tyrant Tamburlaine, while being shocked by his atrocities. Grandiloquent passages are mixed with unexpectedly mundane and comic ones, often within the same scene. Furthermore, the audience is kept off balance by Marlowe's consistent satirization of dramatic conventions. He invokes familiar motifs, but then confounds the expectations they produce.

While Marlowe's writing is provocative, it is ultimately difficult to determine where his sympathies lay. Likewise, he appears to have led a life filled with trouble and controversy, but it is difficult to construct an image of his character. Due to a lack of evidence, most that has been written about Marlowe is mere speculation. Fortunately, that does make it easy to quickly sum up what can be safely asserted about his life.

Marlowe was born in 1564, the same year that Shakespeare and Galileo were born, and that Calvin and Michelangelo died. He received his early education from King's School in Canterbury, and later received his B.A. from Cambridge. His M.A. was not so easy to come by. It was delayed by a year, and only granted upon the intervention of the Privy Council, which wrote:

Whereas it was reported that Christopher Morley was determined to have gone beyond the seas to Reames and there to remaine Their Lordships thought good to certefie that he had no such intent, but that in all his accions he had behaued him selfe orderlie and discretlie wherebie he had done her Majestie good service, & deserued to be rewarded for his faithfull dealinge: Their Lordships request that the rumore therof should be allaiied by all possible meanes, and that he should be furthered in the degree he was to take this next Commencement: Because it was not her Majesties pleasure that anie one employed as he had been in matters touching the benefitt of his Countrie should be defamed by those that are ignorant in th'affaires he went about. (qtd. in Boas 22)

As there was an Catholic émigré colony in Rheims, it is generally suspected that Marlowe infiltrated the colony as a spy for the Queen. There is no substantive evidence to support that supposition beyond this record, however.

Marlowe received his M.A. in 1588<sup>1</sup>, a year after finishing school, but did not pursue the religious career for which he had been trained. Instead he next appears in the legal records at London, where he was arrested in 1589 when a friend he was with killed a man in a fight (Boas 104). He spent less than two weeks in jail, and his friend was later let off on a self-defense plea. However, he had already made a splash on the stage by this point, with *1 Tamburlaine* being performed by 1587 or 1588. Because of this early date, it is speculated that he may have written at least part of it while still in school.<sup>2</sup> Marlowe again enters court records in 1592 on a minor charge (Boas 236). In 1593, he was ordered to appear before the court in regards to charges of atheism made by fellow playwright Thomas Kyd. Before he made any such appearance, however, he was stabbed to death in a tavern in an argument over the tab, according to court depositions.

There has been an immense amount of speculation about Marlowe's life and character based upon these details, and the occasional reference to him. It has been suggested as recently as 1993 that Marlowe faked his own death (using the technique that Barabas uses in *The Jew of Malta*) to avoid charges of heresy, escaped abroad, and lived four years longer, just enough time to author some of Shakespeare's work (Hilton). He has been identified as a homosexual based upon his remark (reported secondhand) about the desirability of tobacco and boys, and the fact that the protagonists in two of his plays are homosexual. But the supposition about Marlowe for which there is substantial evidence is that he held unorthodox religious views.

The term "atheist" has been associated with Marlowe since Robert Greene's 1588 preface to *Perimedes the Blacksmith* in which he tells of a poet "daring God out of heaven with that Atheist *Tamburlan*" followed by criticism of "mad and scoffing poets, that have propheticall spirits as bred of *Merlins* [a common variant of Marlowe] race" (qtd. in Boas 111). Greene would also later write a deathbed pamphlet in which he exhorts Marlowe to give up his supposedly atheistic and Machiavellian beliefs. A fellow playwright made the most serious charges against Marlowe. Just before Marlowe's death, Thomas Kyd was arrested and some heretical papers were found in his possession (denying the divinity of Jesus). He swore they were Marlowe's, and had become mixed with his papers from a time in which they were writing in the same room (Boas 111). When asked for more information about Marlowe, Kyd asserted that it was Marlowe's

custom when I knewe him first & as I heare saie he contynewd it in table talk or otherwise to iest at the devine scriptures gybe at praires, & stryve in argument to frustrate and confute what hath byn spoke or wrytt by prophets & such holie menn. (qtd. in Boas 243)

Confirming Marlowe's mockery of religion, a Robert Baines accused Marlowe of saying "that Moyses was but a Iugler and that one Heriots being Sir W. Raleighs man Can do more then he;" that St. John and Jesus had sexual relations; and

That if there be any god or any good Religion then it is in the papistes because the service of god is performed with more Ceremonies, as Elevation of the mass, organs, singing men, Shaven Crownes & etc. That all protestantes are Hypocriticall asses. (qtd. in Boas 113-4, 251)

(This last quote has been interpreted as showing Marlowe's sympathy for Catholicism, rather than a mocking scorn of religious ceremonies of any type.) It is also possible that Marlowe belonged to Raleigh's free-thinking School of Night, as an informer claims that "Marlowe told him that that he had read the atheist lecture to Sir Walter Raleigh and others" (Salgado 219b).

Based on this record, Marlowe appears to have been a bright young man not content to pursue a safe career in the clergy, but who instead may have been involved in spying, and certainly ran into trouble with the law. He kept company in which at least twice somebody ended up being killed (including himself). He also appears to have enjoyed mocking the church that he was trained to serve, including insulting biblical characters and making ribald references to Jesus. Whether his religious views were simply heretical or actually atheistic is not clear.

During the brief period between the end of Marlowe's education and his early death, both parts of *Tamburlaine*, *Dido Queen of Carthage*, *Doctor Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, *Edward II*, and *The Massacre at Paris* were performed on the London stage. Other than the two parts of *Tamburlaine* (which must have appeared between 1587 and early 1590), there is no firm evidence to date any of the plays. Suggesting a chronological order to the plays has been one technique of dealing with their contradictory elements. Thus by placing *Faustus* at the end of the chronology, Una Ellis-Fermor is able to argue that after rebelling against his religious teaching in the other plays, a "tragedy of the mind" (70) befell Marlowe and he wrote the ostensibly orthodox *Doctor Faustus*. But given the short span of time in which they were written, it is unlikely that an ordering of the plays would give as meaningful a portrait of Marlowe's ideological development as some critics have attempted to draw. Due to the lack of evidence outside of the plays' content, any such effort must rely upon a tautology. The themes and predominant tones of the plays have been further complicated by the fragmentary condition in which they have survived.

The four plays treated in this essay are both parts of *Tamburlaine*, *Doctor Faustus*, and *The Jew of Malta*. All four are

centered around larger-than-life protagonists who easily ascend to giddy heights--Tamburlaine to heights of power and conquest, Faustus to heights of learning and the magic arts, and Barabas to heights of wealth. Critics have been often tempted to compare these exaggerated characters with Marlowe, identifying him as the defiant atheist Tamburlaine, the troubled scholar Faustus, or the Machiavellian Barabas. More recent criticism has demonstrated that the portrayals of the protagonists are more complicated than that. Still, it must be acknowledged that the use of such bold leading figures is intentionally provocative. Tamburlaine's bloodlust is rewarded with resounding success and felicity, when one would expect him to suffer for his defiance of divine authority and total lack of mercy. Faustus commits the gravest sin a Christian can commit, and then repeatedly refuses to repent. Yet he is portrayed sympathetically and appears more sinned against than sinning as he is ripped to shreds and sent to his damnation. Vengeful Barabas is a surprisingly more sympathetic character than his Christian opponents. While his revenge is excessive, his hypocritical enemies do deserve some sort of comeuppance.

At the same time, none of these figures are championed unreservedly in the plays. Tamburlaine's grandeur is undercut by the pathetic portrayal of the entirely innocent victims of his campaigns: the impaled virgins of Damascus, Olympia, and the drowned townspeople of Babylon. Faustus, the most sympathetic of these three characters, stumbles into his damnation by blithely ignoring obvious and tangible warnings. Barabas devolves into a bloodthirsty caricature who can become capable of killing his daughter without a qualm. The resulting plays are as satiric as Marlowe's reputed religious commentaries. It is difficult to determine if there is a serious position driving the ironic portrayals, or if Marlowe indulges in irony only to mock.

## 1 *Tamburlaine*

In the prologue to *1 Tamburlaine*, the audience is informed that what follows is a tragedy, if, perhaps, an ambiguous one: "View but his picture in this tragic glass, / And then applaud his fortunes as you please" (Prologue 7-8). What follows for the Scythian shepherd turned world conqueror is nothing but triumphs. How can his unblemished record of achievements be regarded as "tragic," regardless of how one chooses to applaud them?

The easy answer to this is that it cannot be. Some critics have gone further in deciding that not only is the play not a tragedy, but that due to the lack of complications in *Tamburlaine's* rise to power, it cannot even be called drama. If one takes the play as nothing more than a glorification of *Tamburlaine* (as it has frequently been interpreted), this is a logical conclusion to arrive at. The episodic advance of the play only proceeds to demonstrate that *Tamburlaine* and his admirers are indeed accurate in their assessment of his abilities and expectation of his success. He faces a greater opponent with each battle, and successfully completes each test.

This makes a striking character portrait, but is insufficient to sustain an entire drama. This has led some to see *1 Tamburlaine* as "formless and incoherent," a play that lacks

progress, crises or solution. . . . *Tamburlaine's* rise to power cannot fill five acts of a play without complications, and a complication would be a denial of the very nature of *Tamburlaine's* genius, which triumphs, not after a struggle, but without it. Thus, before his play was begun, Marlowe had committed himself to a theme that was in its essence undramatic. (Ellis-Fermor qtd. in Duthie 227b)

Essentially acknowledging this criticism, several critics have considered both parts of *Tamburlaine* together because Part Two introduces complications and ends with *Tamburlaine's* death. Taken as a whole, the two plays have a more conventionally tragic form. Using this method, John Cutts identifies the tragedy of *Tamburlaine* as a discontent

at the center of his being caused by the reality of his conquests failing to live up to the impossible ideal of his rhetoric (74). At the end of Part One, Tamburlaine appears too busy enjoying himself and his accomplishments to pay attention to any such discontent; only Part Two demonstrates that he is not in fact the demi-god (in that he is mortal) that he has claimed, and so many of his victims have believed him, to be. W.L. Godshalk finds that in Part Two Tamburlaine is on the defensive and similarly arrives at the decision that "He is ultimately absurd" (158).

While it may be critically convenient to consider both parts of the play as forming one tragedy, there is no evidence to suggest the two plays were conceived of as a whole. In fact, the prologue of Part Two states that it was only undertaken in response to the success of Part One:

The general welcomes Tamburlaine receiv'd  
When he arrived last upon the stage  
Hath made our poet pen his second part. (Prologue 1-3)

Taken, as it was apparently written, by itself, Part One certainly fails to be the tragedy that the prologue promises.

But while the play fails to fit the tragic mold, it is much more than an uncomplicated celebration of the protagonist's ability and his aspiring mind. The grand figure of Tamburlaine<sup>3</sup> is initially a heroic figure that might garner the audience's admiration, but the play does not go on to simply reaffirm this image. Tamburlaine's heroism is ironically undercut as the action proceeds: his accomplishments become more astonishing, but his brutality increases even more rapidly. But the main source of dramatic tension in the play comes from Marlowe continually invoking the tragic motif, only to undercut the expectations this produces. In retrospect, Tamburlaine's ascension to power is uncomplicated. But because Marlowe plays with the conventions of



tragedy, it is not clear until the final scene that Tamburlaine's success will be unqualified.

The grounds for Tamburlaine's fall in the terms of classical tragedy (or the Senecan tragedy that served as Renaissance England's model) are more than sufficiently established. Tamburlaine's hubris is overwhelming. He alternates between claiming to be the scourge of God in massacring thousands, and threatening to conquer the gods he finds inferior to himself. Traditional indicators of the protagonist's coming downfall, such as the references to Fortune's wheel and the curses uttered by his dying victims, lead one to expect that heaven will punish Tamburlaine for his presumption. While they are not as successful, his opponents are proud and brutal like Tamburlaine, and their sudden falls from the heights of power suggests that Tamburlaine will experience a similar fall from even greater heights. Certainly, if this were a Greek tragedy, a jealous Zeus could be expected to take offense at Tamburlaine's presumption.

At the same time that Tamburlaine appears ripe for a fall in terms of the conventions of Greek and Senecan tragedy, he is also ripe for a fall in the terms of Christian morality. He is guilty of highway robbery (holding his victims, Zenocrate and her train, as prisoners), covetousness, usurpation of his role in the chain of being, barbarity, absolute lack of pity, and blasphemy. While an early Elizabethan audience might expect to be properly instructed in Christian ways by seeing him suffer, he not only triumphs despite his villainy, he triumphs because of it. Combined with the dramatic conventions that indicate such a fall is coming, the ending is quite a shock:

With his dying breath, Cosroe curses Tamburlaine--a sure prelude to disaster--but the disaster never occurs. Bajazet, the King of Arabia, and even Theridamas and Zenocrate have powerful premonitions of the hero's downfall, but he passes from success to success. Tamburlaine is proud, arrogant, and blasphemous; he lusts for power, betrays his allies, overthrows legitimate authority, and threatens the gods; he rises to the top of the

wheel of fortune and then steadfastly refuses to budge. Since the dominant ideology no longer insists that rise-and-decline and pride-goes-before-a-fall are unvarying, universal rhythms, we undoubtedly miss some of the shock of Tamburlaine's career, but the play itself invokes those rhythms often enough to surprise us with their failure to materialize. (Greenblatt 51-52)

The effect is to parody both the tragic form, and the assumption in early Renaissance tragedy that a person's earthly fortunes will reflect a moral judgment. By upsetting these expectations, Marlowe reversed the form of the morality play:

Marlowe seems to have regarded the notion of drama as admonitory fiction, and the moral order upon which this notion was based with a blend of fascination, contemptuous amusement, and loathing. *Tamburlaine* repeatedly teases its audience with the form of the cautionary tale, only to violate the convention. (Greenblatt 51)

This, of course, is what made the play so offensive to many of Marlowe's contemporaries (although it enjoyed great success). The hero's success implied to them Marlowe's approval of his behavior and consequently his total rejection of Christian morality, but this assumes a total lack of irony in the presentation of Tamburlaine.

To many later critics for whom Tamburlaine's hubris and blasphemy were not sins, Tamburlaine has been seen as a straightforward exemplum for the spirit of a new age, the portrait of a role model of the type Horatio Alger might have admired:

[A] figure of heroic dimensions who epitomizes "Renaissance man" and who single-handedly orchestrates the forging of an empire. According to Gãmini Salgãdo, *Tamburlaine* represents "the saga of the self-made man, triumphing through no advantages of inheritance, but entirely through the qualities of character." As such, the play reflects transitions in Marlowe's society, in which the dependence of personal advancement upon matters of birthright was gradually giving way to advancement earned through individual achievement. (Trudeau 212a)

But such a view entirely ignores Tamburlaine's brutality. While he is a "self-made man," he could hardly be held up as a model for others to imitate:

If Marlowe's dramatization of Tamburlaine's boldness and easy victories in this play has much in common with the optimistic classical theory of history in which man's will and actions make him superior to fickle Fortune, the playwright nonetheless avoids

the happy implications of such a philosophy by concentrating on the diabolical forces that the unlimited exercise of will releases. (Masinton 24)

In fact, Marlowe satirizes the notion of the self-made man in the first overthrow of a king in the play, Cosroe's displacement of his incompetent brother Mycetes. The satiric element exists in the "qualities of character" that are considered kingly. The opening scene develops the idea that the image and speech of a king, rather superficial qualities, are the substance of kingship. Mycetes recognizes his insufficiency in these qualities to some degree, pointing out that a "great and thund'ring speech" is required of him in reaction to Tamburlaine's pillage, but that he is "insufficient to express" (I.i.2-3) his outrage. He is then openly insulted by his brother and demonstrates his lack of self-assurance by inquiring of Meander whether he has the authority to execute Cosroe for his insolence. Tamburlaine, by contrast, would never demonstrate such hesitation and weakness in front of his followers. Reinforcing Mycete's image as comically insufficient, he is shown finally attempting a grand poetic speech, and incompetently mixing his metaphors describing Tamburlaine,

That like a fox in the midst of harvest time  
Doth prey upon my flocks of passengers,  
And, as I hear, doth mean to pull my plumes. (I.i.31-33)

Later in the scene Mycetes declares that he shall send his forces to apprehend Tamburlaine and asks, "How like you this, my honorable lords / Is it not a kingly resolution?" (I.i.54-55). Cosroe replies with contemptuous irony (justifiably), "It cannot choose, because it comes from you" (I.i.56).

The qualities that Mycetes lacks, a fearsome image and forceful eloquence, are further upheld as the fundamental attributes of leadership when Mycetes praises Theridamas: "Go, stout Theridamas, thy words are swords, / And with thy looks thou conquerest all thy foes" (I.i.74-75). (Ironically, Tamburlaine will not even have to take the

field against Theridamas, but persuades him to betray Mycetes using his own conquering looks and forceful speech.)

Mycetes's brother Cosroe explains to Menaphon later in the scene that Persian noblemen have laid a plot to depose Mycetes and crown him as emperor. He claims not to desire the crown, but avows that he must assume it for the good of the empire, due to Mycetes's incompetence (and presumably his own ability):

But this it is that doth excruciate  
 The very substance of my vexed soul:  
 To see our neighbors that were wont to quake  
 And tremble at the Persian monarch's name  
 Now sits and laughs our regiment to scorn. (I.i.113-117)

In this case, Cosroe is advocating position based upon ability. There is only one rightfully born king, and deposing him on grounds of merit establishes a precedent for others to do the same to the new king. If Cosroe's criterion by which kingship is to be vested is justified, then undoubtedly Tamburlaine deserves to rule, rather than Cosroe or Mycetes, as he is most able to make neighbors quake (being the most eloquent and most intimidating).

Ironically, although promoting this ideal as a basis of leadership, Cosroe fails to recognize any potential threat from using Tamburlaine as the means to become emperor, despite the fact that he says of him, "And well his merits show him to be made / His fortune's master and the king of men" (II.i.35-36). As soon as he discovers that this "king of men" will not be satisfied with a subordinate post, Cosroe makes a complete about-face: "What means this devilish shepherd to aspire / With such a giantly presumption?" (II.vi.1-2).

On the basis of merit established by Mycetes and Cosroe, Tamburlaine easily excels them both and is deserving of his easy conquests over them. But that ideal of kingship is a shallow basis for leadership, in place of such qualities as justice, wisdom, and mercy. It is not, as Cosroe sees it, that the king is failing to live up to the

ideal and a better man is needed to take his place; the problem is that the characters posit such an ideal in order to justify their own self-interested plays for power. Sahu points out that this is a common theme in Marlowe's works:

For Marlowe, the tragedy lies not in the inevitable falling off of human achievement from the ideal, but in the travesty of the ideal that the deeds of men so often represent, and in the illusory aura of nobility with which man persistently invests his base desires. His is the tragic view of the ironist, who sees in man the responsible cause of his own misdoing, who presents man as destructive agent, who, by the abuse of freedom and will, persistently betrays others, and inevitably betrays himself.  
(vii)

In *Bajazeth*, Tamburlaine has an opponent that is every bit his match in the established "kingly" qualities. Like Tamburlaine (and unlike Mycetes), Bajazeth seems wholly suited to command. His language is just as supremely confident as Tamburlaine's. In fact, he is the mirror image of Tamburlaine. Act III, scene iii is carefully orchestrated to point out this similarity. Bajazeth and Tamburlaine meet each other to exchange braggadocio, with each one repeating the boasts and threats of the other. Their attendants join in the game as well. First three of Bajazeth's contributory kings urge the emperor to stop tolerating Tamburlaine's indignities and take to battle. Then three of Tamburlaine's generals likewise urge Tamburlaine to leave off arguing and take to the battlefield. Each leader praises his beloved and receives thanks. Then when they take to battle, Zenocrate and Zabina are left behind to exchange reciprocal taunts in a typically Marlovian parody of the exchange that has just occurred.

After the building up of Bajazeth as Tamburlaine's mightiest foe and the virtual mirror image of Tamburlaine, his actual defeat occurs almost instantaneously. The stage directions merely say, "*Bajazeth flies, and he[Tamburlaine] pursues him. The battle short, and they enter. Bajazeth is overcome*" (III.iii, immediately following line 211). For Waith, the ease with which this victory occurs after the scene

establishing the parallels between Bajazeth and Tamburlaine serves to demonstrate that Tamburlaine is of an entirely different order of men:

If Cosroe is a little more like Tamburlaine than is his foolish brother, Bajazeth is decidedly more so. . . . The famous (and to a modern reader ludicrous) exchange of insults between Zabina and Zenocrate reinforces the parallel. Yet Marlowe emphasizes the ease with which this mighty potentate is toppled from his throne. . . . This contrast brings out what was suggested by the contrast with Cosroe, the truly extraordinary nature of Tamburlaine. . . . That even he should fall so easily defines the limitations of the species and sets Tamburlaine in a world apart. He is not merely more angry, more cruel, more proud, more powerful. Though sharing certain characteristics with his victims, he embodies a force of a different order. (Waith 241b-242a)

In my view the quick victory does just the opposite; it suggests how tenuous Tamburlaine's position is, and again re-invokes the tragic motif (as this proud potentate was toppled from power, so shall be Tamburlaine). Bajazeth has been as accustomed to achieving his will with only insignificant resistance as Tamburlaine is. He engages in the exchange of extreme taunts because he, like Tamburlaine, cannot imagine the possibility of losing. But the invincible Turk is all too easily defeated. Likewise it is suggested that Tamburlaine's appearance of invulnerability will prove just as illusory. Zenocrate reinforces this perception and expresses her fear for Tamburlaine after she finds Bajazeth and Zabina dead:

Ah, Tamburlaine, my love, sweet Tamburlaine,  
That fights for scepters and for slippery crowns,  
Behold the Turk and his great empress!  
Thou that in the 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.355-362)

The play does not show that Tamburlaine is a superior strategist or superior fighter. In fact his strength lies in often not having to fight because of the terror he induces with his implacable savagery (as embodied in his three color scheme). He succeeds by the very qualities that might be expected to draw heaven's vengeance. Nor are his soldiers demonstrated to be of superior discipline or skills (in fact by the end

of the play, the vast majority of them formerly served his opponents). The "qualities of character" that enable Tamburlaine to achieve so much are his self-assurance, his commanding figure, his rhetorical skill, and his relentless brutality, all of which marked the easily toppled Bajazeth. After this victory Tamburlaine arrogantly proclaims his superiority and invincibility as loudly as he has ever done. He shows no mercy, and keeps the vanquished emperor in a cage for his own amusement.

All of this sets up the expectation in the audience that Tamburlaine will suffer a tragic fall from the heights he has presumptuously climbed on the strength of superficial qualities. But there is a more religious reason for the audience to expect a sudden reversal of Tamburlaine's fortunes: the barbarities of the final scenes and his blasphemies. While Tamburlaine may not have been a model of Christian charity at the beginning of the play, the full extent of his inhumanity only becomes apparent in the final act in which he has the virgins of Damascus impaled and drives Bajazeth and Zabina to dash out their brains.

The first action maintains the consistency of his three color method of striking terror into his opponents. On the first day of a siege, he displays white colors, indicating he will be lenient if his opponents choose to surrender. On the second day, he displays red, indicating that all those fighting against him will be killed. On the third day he displays black, indicating that every last man, woman, and child in the town will be slaughtered. He tells the virgins with "inhuman logic" (Waith 241a) when they come to plead for mercy that his honor demands that he fulfill his promise, as though a promise to slaughter innocents could have anything honorable about it. (He also tells Zenocrate that his honor will not permit him to break his vow in order to save her father, which he then does.) For good measure he also

taunts the virgins before sending them to be run through by his soldiers (after which they are hung on the walls of the town). Of course, Tamburlaine does not bear the guilt for the death of the virgins alone, since the Soldan of Egypt might have saved his people had he surrendered on the first day, but he is proud and unbending like Tamburlaine. He survives, thanks to Zenocrate's influence, while the people he could have saved are universally slaughtered.

The other major on-stage cruelty that demands divine punishment is the treatment of Bajazeth and Zabina. After their defeat, Tamburlaine will not even show them the mercy of killing them (or allowing them the convenient means to kill themselves). Tamburlaine cages Bajazeth and uses him as the royal footstool, while Zabina is made to serve Zenocrate's servant girl. After the extravagant scene in which Bajazeth and his followers exchange boasts, insults, and threats, it may seem that he deserves such treatment. But after his downfall, the sympathetic aspects of Bajazeth and Zabina are brought to the forefront. Two of the most pathetic moments in the play occur in Act V, scene i (where so much else occurs) between Bajazeth and Zabina. Leaving off cursing Tamburlaine and lamenting their plight, Bajazeth speaks of his love for Zabina and asks her to fetch him some water, while he is really sending her away so that she will not see him run his head against the bars of the cage and brain himself. When she comes back and finds Bajazeth dead, she breaks into an incoherent and pathetic stream of exclamations that, significantly, are the only break from verse in the entire play. Then she too dashes her brains out. This devotion unto death is in stark contrast to Zenocrate's behavior towards her own betrothed, whom she sees die at the hands of Tamburlaine (her servant Agydas also dies for being faithful to her).

The most striking aspect of this treatment is that it is completely extraneous humiliation and torture (for Bajazeth), unless one



considers Tamburlaine the instrument of God who is punishing the Muslim emperor for his persecution of Christians mentioned in Act III, scene iii. This argument greatly overestimates Marlowe's esteem for Christians, in light of *The Jew of Malta* and the King of Hungary's suffering in Part Two, and it ignores Tamburlaine's own blasphemies.

The ironic juxtaposition of lines and scenes of contrasting tone in Marlowe's plays is always important (although in the case of *Tamburlaine*, the excision of the comic scenes has probably lessened this effect). In the line immediately after Tamburlaine has heard of the virgins' slaughter and casually ordered the rest of the city to be put to death, he launches into a remarkable 66-line soliloquy declaring his love for Zenocrate. One line after finishing this poetic outburst, he casually inquires about whether the caged Bajazeth has been fed. These transitions are jarring and force the audience to form some sort of judgment of Tamburlaine (to applaud his fortunes as they please).

The moral judgment of Tamburlaine has been the crucial issue in the play ever since Robert Greene charged in 1588 that Marlowe was "daring God out of heaven with that atheist Tamburlaine" (qtd. in Fanta 4). There has been some disagreement on how an Elizabethan audience would have reacted to the character, but the debate has centered upon the judgment of him made by the play and its controversial author. In this debate, the societal condemnation of Tamburlaine is taken for granted:

The critics who believe that Marlowe approves of Tamburlaine either try to show that he passes over his hero's disagreeable qualities to emphasize others (such as the aspiration for knowledge and beauty) or believe that Marlowe, as a rebel against the morality of his time, approves of Tamburlaine's cruelty, pride, atheism, and ruthless exercise of power. Those that believe that Marlowe disapproves of Tamburlaine assume that such behaviour must be recognized as bad, and that Marlowe's frank portrayal of it indicates his moral condemnation. (Waith 238b)

Waith himself goes on to reject both of these views and instead maintains that to an Elizabethan audience, Tamburlaine would not be a

shocking character. He is, Waith claims, a traditionally heroic warrior (in the style of Achilles or Hercules) comprised of the contradictory elements nobility and cruelty. Therefore Marlowe means to glorify Tamburlaine, but that in itself does not make Marlowe "a rebel against the morality of his time." Salgādo, who sees Tamburlaine as representative of the self-made Renaissance man, explains away Tamburlaine's cruelty as a non-issue. It is the delicate critics of our modern age who find such things shocking, whereas "the atmosphere of cruelty, intrigue and violent death which is an immediately striking aspect of Marlowe's plays needs no special explanation in terms of the dramatist's personality--it was part of the air he breathed as a child" (Salgādo, 217b).

Admittedly bear-baiting and public executions are no longer popular forms of entertainment, but the 16<sup>th</sup> century can hardly be said to surpass the 20<sup>th</sup> century in terms of the sheer number or severity of atrocities committed. Renaissance plays have a high death toll in comparison to dramas of some other periods, but they could hardly compete with modern action-adventure films. More importantly, the characters in the play find Tamburlaine's behavior shockingly excessive and express moral outrage.

Bajazeth tragically recognizes (too late) that his own claims to heavenly justification in his bloody sieges were false, and so expects hell to swallow both himself and Tamburlaine. He also voices the audience's expectation: "Ambitious pride shall make thee fall as low" (IV.ii.76). Cosroe similarly curses Tamburlaine and Theridamas in his dying agony: "And fearful vengeance light upon you both!" (II.vii.52). But these characters would themselves have been up to their elbows in blood had they won their respective battles, so perhaps their testimony

can be discounted. But there remains an important character who can express the audience's shock at Tamburlaine's blood bath.

Because of Marlowe's pervasive irony, it is difficult to find a character with whom the audience can identify. But Fanta identifies the "agonists," a handful of characters in Marlowe's plays who express "sentiments of pity, mercy, mutability, faith in Christian grace, and a longing for peace without struggle," (8) as the keys to interpretation. They are the only characters who do not receive the brunt of Marlowe's caustic irony. In *1 Tamburlaine* Zenocrate is just such a character, who when first captured by Tamburlaine declares, "The gods, defenders of the innocent, / Will never prosper your intended drifts" (I.ii.68-69).

But, of course, Tamburlaine's plans do prosper. Mycetes, Cosroe, and Bajazeth cannot claim to be "the innocent," and Zenocrate (suggesting a weakness in Fanta's argument) comes to enjoy her concubinage (until Tamburlaine makes her his queen at the end of the play). The virgins of Damascus and the townspeople are innocents, however. Upon their slaughter, Zenocrate agonizes:

Wretched Zenocrate, that livest to see  
 Damascus' walls dy'd with Egyptian blood,  
 Thy father's subjects and thy countrymen;  
 Thy streets strowed with dissevered joints of men  
 And wounded bodies gasping yet for life;  
 But most accurs'd, to see the sun-bright troop  
 Of heavenly virgins and unspotted maids,  
 Whose looks might make the angry god of arms  
 To break his sword and mildly treat of love,  
 On horsemen's lances to be hoisted up  
 And guiltlessly endure a cruel death.  
 For every fell and stout Tartarian steed,  
 That stamp'd on others with their thund'ring hoofs,  
 When all their riders charg'd their quivering spears,  
 Began to check the ground and rein themselves,  
 Gazing upon the beauty of their looks.  
 Ah, Tamburlaine, wert thou the cause of this  
 That term'st Zenocrate thy dearest love,  
 Whose lives were dearer to Zenocrate  
 Than her own life, or aught save thine own love? (V.i.319-338)

At this point she sees the corpses of Bajazeth and Zabina with their brains dashed out. Her servant Anippe checks to see if they are dead,

and declares, "Ah, madam, this their slavery hath enforc'd / And ruthless cruelty of Tamburlaine" (V.i.345-346). Zenocrate fears divine judgment for Tamburlaine and prays,

Ah, mighty Jove and holy Mahomet,  
Pardon my love! O, pardon his contempt  
Of earthly fortune and respect of pity,  
And let not conquest, ruthlessly pursu'd,  
Be equally against his life incens'd  
In this great Turk and hapless empress! (V.i.363-368)

Although she is entirely devoted to Tamburlaine, Zenocrate expresses the audience's shock at the excessive carnage of Tamburlaine's rise to power. She also renews the audience's expectation that Tamburlaine will be brought low by heavenly powers. Since her expectation of such punishment is not a self-serving prophecy, as Cosroe's and Bajazeth's, it carries greater weight.

But the divine judgment that this voice of the audience fears, and that Mycetes, Cosroe, Bajazeth, and the Soldan have predicted, never occurs. This leads the characters to the tragic conclusion that God has lost all power, as when Zabina laments, "Then is there left no Mahomet, no god" (V.i.238). Or, even worse, they conclude that the bloody tyrant and blasphemer Tamburlaine is favored by God, as when the Soldan declares, "Mighty hath God and Mahomet made thy hand" (V.i.479). This same assumption that earthly fortunes must reflect divine judgment resulted in Marlowe's censure by some of his contemporaries for having authored the play. But throughout the play Marlowe satirizes such an assumption. All of Tamburlaine's victims have claimed that God was on their side and trusted that the outcome of their struggles depended upon divine favor. They inappropriately call upon heavenly assistance for their bloody and self-interested ends: Cosroe, upon going to battle, asks for divine marksmanship: "Direct my weapon to his barbarous heart / That thus opposeth him against the gods" (II.vi.39-40). Zabina calls upon heaven for a slaughter:

Now, Mahomet, solicit God himself,  
 And make him rain down murdering shot from heaven  
 To dash the Scythians' brains, and strike them dead  
 That dare to manage arms with him  
 That offered jewels to thy sacred shrine. (III.iii.195-199)

But at the very same time Zenocrate is calling upon divine assistance as well. "[T]hey call attention to the logical impossibility of their both receiving satisfaction," (Masinton 28) and the ludicrousness of a belief that God would favor one sanguinary tyrant over another. Nonetheless, Bajazeth still claims to be divinely blessed after his fall: "Ah, villains, dare ye touch my sacred arms? / Mahomet! O sleepy Mahomet!" (III.iii.268-269). And the Soldan of Egypt sanctifies his warring by claiming to be fighting under a "sacred vow to heaven" (IV.iii.36).

The belief that God or the gods have been responsible for the rule of the queen, king, empress, emperor, and sultan that make these statements, and that the usurper Tamburlaine is opposed by God and therefore cannot succeed, proves entirely false. The gods were no more responsible for their possession of thrones than they are for Tamburlaine's triumph at the end of the play in crowning Zenocrate as his empress while around them the streets of Damascus (her home) are strewn with corpses and the virgins still hang upon the city walls. It is abundantly clear that there is no divine power at work in this play. The invocation of divine sanction has served as little more than justification for achieving and maintaining power through brute force. Tamburlaine and his army prove superior to his opponents in this respect. He succeeds through betrayal, terror, slaughter, and the arms of thousands of men. Likewise, the audience sees that the kingdoms he overthrew were maintained not by divine sanction, but by force of arms. In an Elizabethan society in which the divine order was still the official ideology, this is a radical statement. Not only are the characters disconcerted by Tamburlaine's unchecked success, but "Marlowe

amazes his viewers . . . by excluding divine retribution altogether from the work" (Masinton 23).

Like the characters that fail to see the divine retribution that all signs pointed towards, the audience also fails to see the tragic fall that they have been promised from the prologue on. "Marlowe defies theater goers' expectations, for Tamburlaine pays no tragic retribution for his overweening pride" (Trudeau 212a). The expectation of a fall is merely based on fictional conventions, which Marlowe invokes only to satirize. Likewise, the suggestion is made that the expectation of divine retribution is similarly a fictional convention, and that in reality no divine power is active in the world upholding a moral order. The belief in divine justice is thereby equated with the conventions of dramaturgy. This is the tragedy of *1 Tamburlaine*, in which a secure sense of the world and one's place in it is shattered by overwhelming evidence of a lack of moral order to the universe, and the audience is forced into recognition of this by their surprise at having their dramatic expectations upset.

Despite all this, *Tamburlaine* is still a grand figure. Although his cruelty is shocking, his words are magnificent, and his success is astonishing. One critic has described *1 Tamburlaine* as

a kind of Elizabethan equivalent to a modern film about a fabulously successful gangster: since the protagonist lives outside the law, exults in the use of violence, and establishes a huge empire before our amazed eyes, he appeals to our fantasies of uninhibited power and vicariously satisfies our craving for an exciting, romantic life; yet his behavior outrages our moral sense, and he thus has no legitimate claim to our approval. (Masinton 36)

The prologue prepares us for such ambivalence by directing us to "applaud his fortunes as you please" (Prologue 8).

The ending of the play is also ambiguous, promising a respite from the terror and slaughter that has plagued the region as *Tamburlaine* declares, "*Tamburlaine* takes truce with all the world" (V.i.529). But

it is difficult to imagine this warrior being an effective statesman or bureaucratic leader. Nor does he seem well suited to domestic life. No kingdom is large enough for Tamburlaine, and his greatness must be continually proven against new and greater foes.

Such a play can neither be termed a tragedy, nor a glorification of the Renaissance overreacher. Instead, Marlowe satirizes the tragic form by repeatedly invoking it, and then violating it. The magnificence of the overreaching Tamburlaine is undeniable, but the disastrous results of his self-serving egotism are insisted upon. Instead, this complex play (that has repeatedly been oversimplified in contradictory manners) demonstrates that the values of heroism and patriotism not only have little to do with any moral order, but are directly in conflict with Christian morality.

## 2 *Tamburlaine*

The form of 2 *Tamburlaine* appears to fit the tragic mold more than does Part One. Tamburlaine finally encounters complications in his glorious career. Zenocrate dies, a son turns out to be a disappointment to him, and, most importantly, he proves to be mortal. Likewise there are indications of a moral order in the second part of the play. The Christians who have violated their vow to Christ are routed, Olympia outwits Theridamas and remains faithful to her departed husband, and Tamburlaine becomes terminally ill immediately after defying Mohammed and burning the Koran. These events have been seen both as making Tamburlaine a tragic figure, and as asserting the moral order of the universe that was so absent in Part One.

For those who view Part One as undramatic, part two signals a major growth in Marlowe as a playwright, as in this typical view: "one senses Marlowe's embryonic tragic vision emerging from behind an essentially 'comic' structure like that of Part One" (Fanta 17). But attempting to draw out the similarities between 2 *Tamburlaine* and classical tragedy is less fruitful than viewing the play in terms of the expectations that the success of Part One would have created. Obviously Part Two could not be the same play as Part One, another two hours of the same marshal triumphs, and have the same effect. But Marlowe did not abandon his critique and instead create a traditional tragedy warning against pride and the overvaluing of earthly fortunes.

The view that the Tamburlaine of Part Two is a tragic figure and that the play therefore takes a "more classical approach" (Trudeau 212a) essentially rests upon the ludicrous assumption that Tamburlaine could only be called successful if he (and perhaps Zenocrate) turned out to be immortal. Masinton describes Tamburlaine's "downfall" as his simple



failure to recognize his own mortality (38). Likewise, Salgãdo identifies Tamburlaine's mortality as his inevitable failure:

The frustration of his *ultimate* aspiration--divinity--is implicit in the aspiration itself. It has been well said by M.M. Mahood [in *Poetry and Humanism*] that *Tamburlaine* is the only drama in which the death of the hero constitutes the tragedy. (223b)

While the critics may see *Tamburlaine* as "ultimately absurd" (Godshalk 158), there is no indication at the end of the play that *Tamburlaine*, or any other character, would make such a judgment. When he dies, his empire is at its zenith, and he lives long enough to see his son crowned as his successor. On the very day that he dies, he has demonstrated that he is at the peak of his powers, being able to make the enemy flee by his mere appearance on the battlefield. Most importantly, he never displays any sense of lack, failure, or regret. He laments the fact that he must die, but not because it invalidates all that he has accomplished. He is merely disturbed that there still remain sections of the world unconquered. To his followers he is still a magnificent and admirable figure, and in the last two lines of the play his son eulogizes him: "Let earth and heaven his timeless death deplore, / For both their worths will equal him no more" (V.iii.252-253). Everyone else is either dead or being used as a horse, except for Callapine (who has escaped). Should Marlowe have wished to emphasize the futility of *Tamburlaine's* career, it would have been easy, given the historical subject of the plays:

[S]ince anyone who was acquainted with the history of *Tamburlaine* would have known of the disintegration of his empire after his death, the virtual exclusion from the ending of any intimation of this fact, with its readily extractable moral implications, suggests that Marlowe by no means meant to transform his superhuman hero into an object lesson for tyrants. (Fanta 22)

The prologue, on the other hand, leads the audience to believe that there *will* be a tragic recognition at the end of the play by promising that "murd'rous fates throws all his triumphs down" (Prologue 3). As in

Part One, though, Marlowe seems to be playing with the audience's expectations: "This implies that the play is to have a 'falls of princes' theme--that Tamburlaine's death is to be a defeat and nothing else. But that is not the impression we are left with at the end of the play" (Duthie 234a). Yes, there are elements in 2 *Tamburlaine* that one can also find in a classical tragedy, as there are in Part One, but again they only serve to set up false expectations for the audience.

Tamburlaine's death does have a certain appearance of being the divine retribution that has been so long in coming, but this appearance is only caused by timing. In Act V, scene i, he orders that all of the religious books in the Muslim temples will be burnt, for Mohammed has proven to be powerless to defend the Muslims. He issues this challenge:

Now, Mahomet, if thou have any power,  
Come down thyself and work a miracle.  
Thou are not worthy to be worshipped  
That suffers flames of fire to burn the writ  
Wherein the sum of thy religion rests.  
Why send'st thou not a furious whirlwind down  
To blow thy Alcoran up to thy throne,  
Where men report thou sitt'st by God himself?  
Or vengeance on the head of Tamburlaine  
That shakes his sword against thy majesty  
And spurns the abstracts of thy foolish laws? (V.i.185-195)

In the same scene a scant 16 lines later he feels himself suddenly distempered. But does this coincidence signify divine intervention?

Greenblatt suggests not:

Having undermined the notion of the cautionary tale in *Tamburlaine*, Part 1, Marlowe demolishes it in Part 2 in the most unexpected way--by suddenly invoking it. 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 that Elizabethan churchmen themselves might have applauded seems to bring down divine vengeance. The effect is not to celebrate the transcendent power of Mohammed but to challenge the habit of mind that looks to heaven for rewards and punishments, that imagines human evil as "the scourge of God." (52)

The only indication in the play that the burning of the Koran and Tamburlaine's illness and subsequent death have any connection is their temporal proximity. Marlowe here seems to be playing with the

audience's habits of interpretation. Because the events are placed so close to one another, the audience seeks to discern a causal connection between the two. But before seizing upon this scant connection to make a case for divine punishment, the reader should recall the satire of this interpretive process earlier in the play.

The theme arises in the first act when the outcome of a battle is interpreted as divine intervention. In the first scene, the Christians under Sigismund agree to a truce with the Muslim contingent of Orcanes. Orcanes requests that Sigismund confirm the truce with an oath to his prophet. Sigismund swears,

By Him that made the world and sav'd my soul,  
The Son of God and issue of a maid,  
Sweet Jesus Christ, I solemnly protest  
And vow to keep this peace inviolable. (I.i.133-136)

But as soon as Orcanes sends the great part of his troops to battle Tamburlaine, Sigismund's assistant Baldwin rationalizes that their faith does not require that they keep oaths made with infidels (the same Christian hypocrisy that appears in *The Jew of Malta*). When Orcanes is told of their treachery, he calls upon Christ, if he exists, to take his revenge upon the Christians. When the Muslim troops win the battle, Sigismund repents, and Orcanes credits Christ for his victory and promises to honor him. Only Gazellus does not seek a divine explanation and matter-of-factly explains, "'Tis but the fortunes of wars, my lord, / Whose power is often prov'd a miracle" (II.iii.31-2). Should the battle have gone the other way, Sigismund would most likely have viewed it as a punishment for the infidel Muslims and a justification of Baldwin's sophistry. In Part One the characters and audience look for divine judgment and find none. In Part Two they do see the evidence of divine judgment--as long as they do not look at those signs too closely.

The characters' insistence upon seeing their personal fortunes as evidence of a divine plan is symptomatic of a broader tendency of the

characters in *2 Tamburlaine* to romanticize all of their most mundane ambitions and actions. In urging Sigismund to take Baldwin's advice, Frederick has done this most hypocritically. Frederick argues that it is their religious duty to break the vow and kill the Muslims while they have the chance:

Assure your grace, 'tis superstition  
To stand so strictly on dispensive faith,  
And, should we lose the opportunity  
That God hath given to venge our Christians' death  
And scourge their foul blasphemous paganism,  
As fell to Saul, to Balaam<sup>4</sup>, and the rest  
That would not kill and curse at God's command,  
So surely will the vengeance of the Highest  
And jealous anger of His fearful arm  
Be pour'd with rigor on our sinful heads,  
If we neglect this offered victory. (II.i.50-59)

Frederick, Baldwin, and Sigismund are too self-deluded to be openly Machiavellian, although they act upon the same principles. Instead, they undertake such a treacherous political maneuver only after first finding a bogus religious sanction for it.

Even more than in Part One, the characters of Part Two invoke God in all that they do. Almost every major action in the play is accompanied by a sacred oath. First there is Sigismund and Orcanes's oath. Then Callapine swears by Mohammed that he will give Almeda a kingdom for his release (I.iii.65). The clown Almeda parodies this oath by swearing by his position as a jailor that he will protect Callapine's life (I.iii.68). Tamburlaine swears by Mohammed that he will conquer yet another empire (I.iii.109). Callapine again swears by Mohammed, this time that not a man of Tamburlaine's armies will be left alive (III.v.17). Finally, the King of Jerusalem swears by Mohammed that Tamburlaine will be made a galley slave (III.v.92). The first oath is made to confirm a truce. From there the oaths deteriorate to a guarantee of a bribe; a declaration of intent to expand an empire; a promise to slaughter thousands; and finally a vow to torture and

humiliate. But this is certainly not the only inappropriate manner of self-aggrandizement in the play.

Even Tamburlaine's illness is spoken of not as a medical condition, but as a glorious battle between the mighty Tamburlaine and his troops against the ugly monster Death. He threatens to war against the gods themselves:

Come, let us march against the powers of heaven  
 And set black streamers in the firmament  
 To signify the slaughter of the gods.  
 Ah, friends, what shall I do? I cannot stand.  
 Come, carry me to war against the gods,  
 That thus envy the health of Tamburlaine. (V.ii.48-53)

But the physician quickly deflates the grandiose tone of the scene and brings it down to a more practical level by informing Tamburlaine of the results of his tests: "I view'd your urine, and the hypostasis, / Thick and obscure, doth make your danger great" (V.iii.82-83). Likewise, Theridamas points out that Tamburlaine's ranting about Zenocrate's death is not to the point by saying, "She is dead, / And all this raging cannot make her live" (II.iv.119-20).

The pernicious effects that such a habit of romanticizing can have are insisted upon in *2 Tamburlaine*. The language of nobility and heroism is made to serve hypocritical leaders who lead their people to death and tragedy. As a whole, much more attention is given to victims in Part Two than in Part One. Part Two more closely resembles a Euripides play than those of Marlowe's contemporaries (i.e., revenge tragedies). The effect is to point out the brutal nature of the men that clothe their action in such poetic and heroic terms. The same contrast exists to a lesser degree in Part One, as exemplified by the battle of Damascus. The Soldan of Egypt refuses to consider capitulating (which would have spared the lives of the citizens of Damascus) on the grounds that he is defending the honor of Bajazeth and Zenocrate.

A sacred vow to heaven and him I make,  
 Confirming it with Ibis' holy name,  
 That Tamburlaine shall rue the day, the hour,  
 Wherein he wrought such ignominious wrong  
 Unto the hallowed person of a prince,  
 Or kept the fair Zenocrate so long  
 As concubine, I fear, to feed his lust. (IV.iii.36-42)

Consistent with this vow, the Soldan refuses to surrender to Tamburlaine until the third day when he is already showing the black colors signifying total slaughter. Due to Zenocrate's influence, the Soldan is spared and Tamburlaine promises to "add more strength to your dominions" (V.i.448). The Soldan conveniently forgets his vow and announces,

And I am pleas'd with this my overthrow  
 If as beseems a person of thy state  
 Thou hast with honor us'd Zenocrate. (V.i.482-4)

All the people of his city have been slaughtered and the virgins are hanging upon the walls of the city.

In case this example of a leader's hypocritical posturing leading to devastation for the innocent was too subtle in Part One, the same idea is developed in a more exaggerated fashion in Part Two. When Babylon is besieged, one of the generals tells the governor that the overthrow of the city is inevitable and asks him to surrender and hope for mercy. The governor upbraids him and asks,

Villain, respects thou more thy slavish life  
 Than honor of thy country or thy name?  
 Is not my life and state as dear to me,  
 The city and my native country's weal,  
 As anything of price with thy conceit? (V.i.10-14)

In succession three citizens of the town come to beg the governor to surrender the town in hopes of mercy from Tamburlaine's troops. They are likewise insulted as being cowards and traitors. The governor boldly declares, "I care not, nor the town will never yield / As long as any life is in my breast" (V.i.47-48). Theridamas then makes the unprecedented offer to spare the city, despite the fact that it is already the third day of the siege. Still the governor refuses to surrender. Tamburlaine wins the battle, of course, and it is then that

the true nature of the governor is shown. He tells Tamburlaine that he has some hidden gold that he will give to have his own life spared. Tamburlaine takes the gold, then has the governor shot and gives his customary orders for the care of the citizens of the town: "Techelles, drown them all, man, woman, and child. / Leave not a Babylonian in the town" (V.i.168-169). The townspeople are again made to suffer for their leader's hypocritical claims to honor.

A particularly effective contrast between the romanticizing of war and its pathetic outcome occurs in the dramatic transition from scene i to scene ii in Act IV. In the first scene Tamburlaine has returned victorious from war with the captive kings, and has killed his son Calyphas, who refused to fight. Tamburlaine ends the scene with a dramatic oration of 25 lines announcing that he will bridle the kings, conquer and sack their cities, and

I will persist a terror to the world,  
 Making the meteors, that like armed men  
 Are seen to march upon the towers of heaven,  
 Run tilting round about the firmament  
 And break their burning lances in the air  
 For honor of my wondrous victories. (IV.i.199-204)

Then the scene ends and the next scene opens with the entrance of the weeping Olympia, the victim of his "wondrous victories." She is searching for a way to end her life and join her husband and son in death.

The character of Olympia (one of Fanta's "agonists") also serves as a counterexample to the gap between rhetoric and deed that characterizes the other figures of the play. When her husband dies before her eyes, Olympia speaks in the same poetic conventions that Tamburlaine uses when Zenocrate dies and Theridamas uses when Olympia dies: "Now, ugly Death, stretch out thy sable wings / And carry both our souls where his remains" (III.iv.17-18). While Theridamas's

entrance temporarily delays her, she does in fact accomplish that death, showing that she meant what she said.

On the other hand, Zenocrate's death serves primarily as the occasion for Tamburlaine to indulge in poetry. In Part One, her beauty serves the same function, but

the highly conventionalized form of the poems and the artificial treatment they give their subject suggest that, for all his love and respect, the poet's primary pleasure comes not from a true appreciation of his lady but from the artistic expression of fancied passions and longings for which she has simply furnished the occasion. (Masinton 22)

Upon Zenocrate's death, Tamburlaine declares that his life reposes in hers, and that her death will cause his own (II.iv.47-56). It does not, of course. Nor, when Theridamas yells "Villain, stab thyself!" (IV.ii.82) after he has unwittingly killed Olympia, is the audience surprised that he fails to do so. In both cases their exclamations are merely poetic exaggeration, the kind debunked by Rosalind in *As You Like It*: "But these are all lies. Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love" (IV.i.96-7).

But in addition to the serious treatment of this theme, Marlowe uses humor to debunk grandiose rhetoric. The extent to which he used such humor in both Part One and Part Two will, unfortunately, never be known. Richard Jones, the printer of both parts, "purposely omitted and left out some fond and frivolous gestures, digressing and, in my poor opinion, far unmeet for the matter" (Preface). No doubt critics of the last four centuries would have preferred to be the judge of that. One might be inclined to wonder: "How, for example, would one explain 1 *Henry IV* without the comic subplot?" (Godshalk, 103).

Despite these cuts, Part Two still contains ample comedic elements. The jailor Almeda who absconds with Callapine, for example, is a buffoon. Initially he will not let Callapine speak, but he finally permits a 34 line speech promising him a kingdom and describing all the



grandeur that he will behold. Almeda is sold as soon as Callapine mentions a bribe, and his immediate response is not to ponder his moral obligations or consider the consequences of disobeying Tamburlaine, but to ask very practically how far away the galley they are to escape in lies. He then swears by his title as a jailor, the duty he is being bribed to neglect, to conduct Callapine to safety. Later, as Callapine and Tamburlaine are boasting how they shall triumph on the battlefield, Almeda ridiculously asks Tamburlaine's permission to accept the crown that Callapine offers him.

The wooing of Almeda to Callapine's side parodies Tamburlaine's wooing of Theridamas to his side in *1 Tamburlaine*. The similarity emphasizes the nature of the original scene. Although Theridamas claims to have been persuaded by Tamburlaine's god-like oratory, it is really bribery, the enticement of the "heaps of gold in showers" (Part One I.ii.182) that leads him to so promptly betray his king. Theridamas's defection is no more honorable than that of Almeda, who is denounced by Tamburlaine as "Villain, traitor, damned fugitive!" (II.v.117).

In another parodic subplot, Theridamas attempts to woo Olympia just as Tamburlaine did Zenocrate in Part One. Theridamas even inappropriately uses the same technique, glorifying Tamburlaine rather than himself. Theridamas does not meet with the same success as his glorious role model. In a pathetic, but also grotesquely comic, scene he believes Olympia's claim that she has a magic ointment that protects the skin from wounds and agrees to test it by stabbing Olympia's throat, despite the fact that she has been talking of nothing but her own death.

The brutal caging of Bajazeth and Zabina from Part One also has an exaggerated parallel in Part Two. This time Tamburlaine uses several captured kings to draw his carriage, and even goes so far as to deny his sons the use of his spare "horses" because he needs to properly rest them to draw his carriage the next day. In Part One, Tamburlaine's

unnecessary brutality against his conquered foes is cause for the audience to be shocked in horrified. In Part Two, however, it is played up more for comedic effect, as the conquered kings are treated as horses in every detail of their care.

But the most important comic element of *2 Tamburlaine* is Tamburlaine's son Calyphas. He is a sort of lesser version of Falstaff, proclaiming the virtues of wine and women and studiously avoiding danger. He is a clownish coward and epicure, but he also expresses trenchant criticism of the brutality of his father and brothers:

I know, sir, what it is to kill a man.  
It works remorse of conscience in me.  
I take no pleasure to be murderous,  
Nor care for blood when wine will quench my thirst. (IV.i.27-30)

While not exactly admirable, Calyphas is certainly given a more sympathetic portrayal than his cartoonish brothers, who anxiously await their opportunity to build a bridge of corpses to cross a sea of blood (I.iii.92-93). Most importantly, he is the only follower of Tamburlaine's to openly question the values of his father (although Zenocrate also calls them into question when talking to her maid in Part One).

In the end, of course, it is Tamburlaine's vision of the world that reigns supreme, and Calyphas's bloodthirsty brothers inherit his kingdom, while he has been killed by his ashamed father. Fanta's "agonists" Zenocrate and Olympia are also dead, and there remains nobody to advocate peace and mercy. Tamburlaine's own death at the end of the play promises no respite from the endless carnage, just as the truce with the world at the end of Part One seemed unlikely to bring any relief to the world. "The glorious name of war" (IV.i.67) that the Soldan honors in Part One had many followers long before Tamburlaine became its greatest practitioner. Callapine, the son of Tamburlaine's mirror-image Bajazeth, and Tamburlaine's son Amyras survive to carry on

the bloody tradition, as well as a host of governors, captains, and generals who honor the same virtues and will either imitate or inadvertently parody Tamburlaine's legendary figure.

As in Part One, *2 Tamburlaine* satirizes the tragic conventions by invoking them, only even more thoroughly. The apparent fulfillment of the requirements of those conventions is in fact a more complete subversion of them. Additionally, the grandeur that characterizes Part One is not as prevalent in Part Two, as the main events of the sequel are often parodies of those of the original. The greater emphasis on the victims in Part Two and the greater comic emphasis also serves to make *2 Tamburlaine* a less ambiguous and more scathingly ironic portrait than Part One.

### *Doctor Faustus*

Taken straightforwardly, *Doctor Faustus* is an orthodox morality play. Not only does Faustus suffer for his sins, but he recognizes the causal connection between his sin and the damnation that terrifies him. Taking this unsubtle approach to the play, one critic has said of it: "[T]here is no more obvious Christian document in all Elizabethan drama" (Kirschbaum 92). Such a pious play hardly fits Marlowe's image. Kirschbaum prefers to ignore Marlowe's reputation, saying that it blinds scholars to the obvious content of the play, but he also goes so far as to ignore any elements of the text that might undercut this straightforward reading. Especially for critics who have seen *Tamburlaine* as a heroic, albeit blasphemous, portrait of the Renaissance spirit, the almost medieval character of *Doctor Faustus* is a troubling issue: "The explicitly religious theme of *Doctor Faustus* continues to perplex critics, for many consider it uncharacteristic of Marlowe to treat theological issues in his play" (Trudeau 213a).

But many critics have been able to read this "obvious Christian document" in a manner consistent with Marlowe's other works. The interpretation of *Doctor Faustus* that fits Marlowe's image takes Faustus as a Promethean figure. He realizes full well from the outset what the cost will be of his pursuit of power, knowledge, and glory, but is willing to pay it. Although he is struck with doubts throughout the play, even in the end he does not repent and accept a submissive relation to God, but instead wishes for annihilation. In this view, he is a heroic figure who defies the stifling limitations of medieval Christianity:

Marlowe dramatizes blasphemy, but not with the single perspective of a religious point of view: he dramatizes blasphemy as heroic endeavor. . . . Marlowe makes blasphemy a Promethean enterprise, heroic and tragic, an expression of the Renaissance. (Barber 272b)

Such a figure can be seen as representative of the Renaissance transition from a static religious ordering of life, to the scientific spirit of progress: "Faustus embodies the Renaissance notion that man can infinitely improve and develop himself" (Masinton 114). As such, his compact leads to his damnation, but it was worth the price he paid.

However, in an ironic variation of this reading, he can also be seen as embodying a critique of the same Renaissance spirit:

Faustus epitomizes the man of the Renaissance and modern periods who is so transfixed by the possibility of possessing scientific knowledge and the technological means to control his future that he surrenders to allurements of seeking knowledge and harnessing energy for their own sakes. In the end, the optimistic dream that he was to realize through power turns into a hell of dread, because instead of creating his utopia he has become the slave of forces that he either fears to use or cannot control. . . . Faustus is thus the first modern man, and his tragedy dramatizes the potential destruction latent in all post-Renaissance civilization in the West. (Masinton 141)

In this reading, the heroic endeavor to become god-like is not punished by a jealous God, but instead contains within it a destructive element. This makes Christianity irrelevant to the play, which instead becomes more a critique of materialism:

[I]t is a remorselessly objective, ironic play, because it dramatizes the ground of desire which needs to ransack the world for objects; and so it expresses the precariousness of the whole enterprise along with its magnificence. (Barber 280a)

Or, in a more credible interpretation, it has been seen as falling in between these two judgments, representing the tragedy of a man caught in the transitional period in the struggle between medieval Christianity and the evolving Renaissance spirit. According to this view, Faustus's heroic endeavor is neither unreservedly endorsed by Marlowe, nor is his effort ultimately futile. As such, it represents "the first major Elizabethan tragedy and the first to explore the tragic possibilities of the head-on clash of the Renaissance compulsions with the Hebraic-Christian tradition" (Sewall 154).

Such a Faustus sounds fascinating indeed, but unfortunately little like the character in Marlowe's play. Precious little time in his allotted twenty-four years is spent in pursuit of knowledge or other noble endeavors. Faustus never has an ideal of utopia other than the simple gratification of his desires, which he succeeds in achieving. Scientific knowledge for him is never given any higher value than satisfying his curiosity and enabling him to amaze his fellow scholars.

Recognizing that Faustus's pursuits are generally not of a heroic nature, many critics have emphatically rejected the Promethean view of Faustus:

[I]t ought by now to be mere perversity to hold on to the concept of a Promethean Faustus, but champions of this approach seek consolation in the difficulties of the text in A and B versions, and somehow hope these will discredit the authority of those very unflattering scenes which largely bear the differences in text. (Cutts 109)

Instead, following the lead of Walter Greg, many critics (whom Empson labels "neo-Christian") have reinterpreted *Doctor Faustus* as a conventional cautionary tale, and the character of Faustus as a strictly admonitory figure. This view still accepts Faustus as a man with noble intentions, but only at the beginning of the play. "After Faustus has signed the bond with his blood, we can trace the stages of a gradual deterioration" (Greg 269b). Glutted with power and goaded on by Mephostophilis, he becomes a reprobate:

Marlowe masterfully illustrates how Faustus, although he aspires to divinity, is gradually debased throughout the play by the devil Mephostophilis. Succumbing to pride, avarice, and physical gratification, Faustus never realizes he has been duped into trading his soul for a life of triviality, and he refuses to avail himself of numerous chances to repent. (Trudeau 213a)

His deterioration then culminates in his brutal treatment of the Old Man who tries to save him, and his committing the sin of "demonality" (sexual intercourse with a devil) with Helen.

The essential difference between this reading and Kirschbaum's straightforward Christian reading of the play is that here Faustus's

punishment is deserved for his worldly offenses and not for his contract with the devil--for his offenses against others rather than his offense against God. It is a moral interpretation which seeks to avoid being explicitly Christian.

The problem with this view, as well as the conception of Faustus as the Renaissance overreacher who debases his powers by indulging in luxury, is the assumption of a change in Faustus's character. From the outset, though, it is clear that Faustus's desires are wholly masturbatory. The only basis for claiming that Faustus has any aim other than self-gratification is his speech in Act I in which he imagines all the possibilities that necromancy offers him:

Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,  
 Resolve me of all ambiguities,  
 Perform what desperate enterprise I will?  
 I'll have them fly to India for gold,  
 Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,  
 And search all corners of the new-found world  
 For pleasant fruits and princely delicates.  
 I'll have them read me strange philosophy,  
 And tell the secrets of all foreign kings.  
 I'll have them wall all Germany with brass,  
 And make swift Rhine circle fair Wittenberg.  
 I'll have them fill the public schools with silk,  
 Wherewith the students shall be bravely clad.  
 I'll levy soldiers with the coin they bring,  
 And chase the Prince of Parma from our land,  
 And reign sole king of all provinces.  
 Yea, stranger engines for the brunt of war  
 Than was the fiery keel at Antwerp's bridge  
 I'll make servile spirits to invent. (I.i.77-96)

But even in this passage, the emphasis is not on what he will accomplish, but what will be done for him ("I'll have them"). He wishes to be without doubt, rich, pampered, in on all the gossip, beloved in Wittenberg and all of Germany, and a king. He does not imagine the contribution he could make to humanity, but rather what delights he will enjoy.

The brief allusions to learning, philanthropy, and patriotism in this passage are the only such references he makes in the play. But even here, Faustus only speaks of knowledge in terms of knowing secrets

and not being troubled by doubts. Faustus's philanthropy does not extend to the legions of poor in medieval Europe, but only to his immediate vicinity. This lifelong scholar who has always sought the praise of his fellow scholars and students proposes to once again earn their admiration by making the schools luxurious. He patriotically wishes to chase the Prince of Parma from Germany, but only so that he may be king. Primarily, he is motivated by boredom and the desire to be able to satisfy his most extravagant whims. He makes this even clearer in the terms he dictates to Mephostophilis for the sale of his soul:

Say he surrenders up to him his soul,  
 So he will spare him four and twenty years,  
 Letting him live in all voluptuousness,  
 Having thee ever to attend on me,  
 To give me whatsoever I shall ask,  
 To tell me whatsoever I demand,  
 To slay mine enemies and to aid my friends  
 And always be obedient to my will. (I.iii.90-97)

He is asking here not to be made a great man or given fantastic powers by which he would be able to accomplish great things (to steal the fire of the gods). He only asks to have servants that will provide him with whatever he pleases, and is often pleased with the mere simulacrum of what he desires. For this reason he spends the play with Mephostophilis at his side doing his bidding. Mephostophilis has not tempted him into such a passive role. Once the contract has been made, Mephostophilis does seek to distract Faustus from thoughts of heaven by such devices as the pageant of the seven sins, but it is Faustus who calls forth Mephostophilis and proposes the contract, the terms of which are accepted without alteration by Mephostophilis. To his credit, Faustus has no pretensions about his desires and frankly says of himself in the first act, "The God thou servest is thine own appetite" (I.v.11).

Faustus's reliance on servile spirits to confound his enemies and benefit himself invites comparison to Prospero of *The Tempest*. Unlike Faustus, Prospero always manages to present himself as benevolent and



his stratagems do not invite criticism from anyone other than Caliban. However, there are important differences between Faustus's and Prospero's use of magic. Most importantly, Prospero is not seeking to gain power to which he does not already have claim (except that he seeks an alliance for his daughter). He is seeking to restore himself to the throne which was treacherously seized from him. The isolated setting of the island also serves to deter questions about the ethics of controlling others through magic. It is a magical world far removed from the everyday life of the mainland, and before Prospero sets off towards home at the end of the play, he promises:

. . . I'll break my staff,  
 Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
 And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
 I'll drown my book.  
 (V.I61-64)

Unlike Faustus, Prospero recognizes that "The rarer action is/In virtue than in vengeance" (V.I.33-34). He limits himself to restoring his rightful power and avoids abusing the magical means that enable him to accomplish this task.

Faustus, on the other hand, is not a man with noble intentions from the outset who then loses them in his life of ease and power. From the beginning of the play he seeks magical power solely to indulge in pleasure. This leaves the argument for a decline in Faustus's character (as Greg makes it) resting upon the incidents of his cruelty to the Old Man, and his supposed fornication with the spirit Helen which occur in the later part of the play.

The case of the Old Man is undoubtedly an important issue (one that will be taken up later in this chapter), but the ultimate sin of demonality is entirely a fixation of Greg. It is implied in the play that Faustus has been fornicating with devils in the shape of women for twenty-four years. One last kiss hardly seems enough to tip the scales

of God's justice, or particularly upset the audience (except, perhaps, with jealousy). Even Greg recognizes the weakness of his argument:

If, as may be argued, the gradual deterioration of Faustus' character and the prostitution of his powers stand out less clearly than they should, this may be ascribed partly to Marlowe's negligent handling of a theme that failed to kindle his wayward inspiration, and partly to the ineptitude of his collaborator. (Greg 270a)

While Greg's reasoning here is an embarrassing sophistry, there is certainly room for argument considering the condition of the text.

Any analysis of *Doctor Faustus* is inevitably complicated by the fact that the textual state of the play is a mess. There exists a 1604 text and a 1616 text. Each contains scenes that the other does not. It is known that additions have been made to the play, as two writers were hired to add material for its 1594 production. Arguments about the thematic content of the play often depend on which material is considered corrupt, and, of course, the material considered corrupt often depends upon an argument about the thematic content:

The commentators and scholars who have written about it find it notable for such a diversity of incompatible qualities that one sometimes wonders if they are talking about the same play. Frequently they are not. Out of the patchwork of reported playhouse text and presumed incomplete author's manuscript corrupted by putative censor and editor, one can make almost anything. (Sanders 207)

Most of all, the authorship of the comic scenes has been questioned, which is typical of the treatment of Marlowe's plays: "One of the recurrent features of Marlowe's criticism has been the tendency first to deplore and then to deny his authorship of comic passages in the plays" (Sahu 187). The printer tells us that the comic scenes of both parts of *Tamburlaine* were cut, the comic scenes of *Doctor Faustus* are often attributed to other authorship, and the "savage comic humour" (Eliot 105) of *The Jew of Malta* has resulted in it being either generally considered an inferior play, or by having the last two acts attributed to another author. Such reactions have effaced much of the

humor in Marlowe's plays, but fortunately there was an abundance, and much still remains.

Looking closely at, rather than deploring, the comic and satiric elements sheds light on many of the more unsettling elements of the play. One such troubling element is Faustus's obtuseness and flippancy concerning the sale of his immortal soul, and in general when facing theological issues. He refuses to believe in hell, despite the fact that Mephostophilis is standing before him. He mocks Mephostophilis' famous description of damnation and suggests that he show a little more "manly fortitude" (I.iii.85) like himself. His blood congeals to prevent his signing his contract and the inscription "*Homo fuge*" appears on his arm, yet he is unperturbed. Again he denies hell by saying to its representative,

Think'st thou that Faustus is so fond to imagine  
That after this life there is any pain?  
Tush, these are trifles and old wives' tales. (I.v.136-138)

In the face of the most serious matter he could possibly face, Faustus is unexpectedly cavalier.

The entire play is beset by just such a mixed tone. Eloquent lines about suffering and damnation are immediately followed by foolishly flippant remarks. This can be rather disconcerting:

It must be a fairly common experience to come away from a performance (or reading) of *Doctor Faustus* with very mixed feelings. It is an intensely puzzling play. The scenes leading up to Faustus's death are sufficient to convince us that, in Marlowe, we are dealing with a mind of some distinction; but like so many of the play's high points, the final soliloquy is followed by acute bathos. (Sanders, 205)

The audience is continually set up for spectacular and serious scenes and speeches in the play which indeed occur, but offstage. What is seen onstage is oddly juvenile. Offstage, Faustus rides in a chariot pulled by dragons that take him to the height of the *Primum Mobile* as described by the chorus at the beginning of Act III. The chorus then leads the

audience to expect another dramatic scene onstage, announcing that "new exploits do hale him out again" and that he has come to Rome

To see the Pope and manner of his court,  
And take some part of holy Peter's feast,  
The which this day is highly solemnised. (III.ii.17,23-25)

What follows is not solemn, nor does it consist of "exploits" that could be compared to his chariot ride. He has himself made invisible so that he can play pranks on the Pope like snatching away his meat and wine and boxing him on his ears, leading to the hilarious entrance of the friars solemnly cursing him: "Cursed be he that stole his Holiness' meat from the table. *Maledicat dominus*" (III.iii.99).

Such a contrast also marks the source material of the play, the English Faust book (derived from the German version):

One Faust has committed the unforgivable sin and is the enemy of mankind, knowing himself doomed to eternal torture; the other is an avatar of the demigod rogue, found in practically all ancient literatures and surviving oral cultures--the ideal drinking companion, the great fixer, who can break taboos for you and get away with it. (Empson, 47)

The "enemy of mankind" Faustus is the one that promises to "build an altar church, / And offer the lukewarm blood of new born babes" (I.v.13-14) to Belzebub and asks that the Old Man be tormented for having led him to think of repentance. Both acts are extremely out of character for the genial Faustus. There is no suggestion that he ever does anything like sacrifice babies, but Mephostophilis does promise to torment the Old Man. Dominating the play, however, is the lighthearted rogue Faustus, the one who asks Mephostophilis to appear in the shape of an old Franciscan friar, boxes the Pope's ears, lets his leg be pulled off (and his head cut off), and offstage eats an entire wagon load of hay. He entertains the Emperor and leads the Duke to declare, "His artful sport drives all sad thoughts away" (V.i.133).

Given such an affable fellow, Faustus's horrific end seems entirely out of proportion. While Tamburlaine's fall or lack thereof is

a disputed issue, there can be no doubt that Faustus suffers and fully recognizes the cause of his predicament at the end of the play. But whether or not the play suggests that he deserves to suffer ever-lasting hellfire is another matter. The "enemy of mankind" Faustus might, but for the friendly rogue there is something oddly out of place about such a death. "Indeed, modern audiences, when they put up with the play, do so because they feel confident that God did not really commit this gross injustice" (Empson 163). Certainly in a play described as "chronically over-explicit" (Sanders 205), it is surprising not to see any evidence of Faustus's cruelty, if his condemnation is the object of the play.

Faustus is never treated as the enemy of mankind by the other characters of the play. He is well loved by his university friends, by the Emperor, by the Duke, and by all but the clowns who are the victims of his pranks. Only the Old Man does not delight in Faustus's powers and begs him to repent, and even he acknowledges, "Yet, yet, thou hast an amiable soul" (V.i.40). Even at the end of the play after Faustus has told his fellow scholars of his contract with the devil and they have heard him torn apart by devils, they still bear nothing but goodwill towards him and announce:

Yet, for he was a scholar once admired  
 For wondrous knowledge in our German schools,  
 We'll give his mangled limbs due burial,  
 And all the students clothed in black  
 Shall wait upon his heavy funeral. (V.iii.15-17)

Even Mephostophilis is a surprisingly pleasant fellow. When the Horse-courser comes seeking to buy Faustus's fine steed, Faustus, who no longer has need of money, wants to get as much as he can out of him for it. Mephostophilis intercedes for the man, saying to Faustus, "I pray you, let him have him. He is an honest fellow" (IV.v.21-22). A devil with true Christian generosity is a rare find.

Not only does Faustus not seem deserving of severe punishment, but the exaggerated physical form of it is in stark contrast to the abstract

philosophy of damnation that is developed in other parts of the play. Mephostophilis describes for Faustus a more profound damnation than physical torture:

Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.  
Think'st thou that I that saw the face of God  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells  
In being deprived of everlasting bliss? (I.iii.76-80)

Later he describes hell in much the same terms:

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed  
In one self place. But where we are is hell,  
And where hell is there must we ever be.  
And to be short, when all the world dissolves  
And every creature be purified,  
All places shall be hell that is not heaven. (I.vi.124-129)

When Faustus asks Mephostophilis to torment the Old Man, he again discounts the physical:

His faith is great: I cannot touch his soul.  
But what I may afflict his body with  
I will attempt, which is but little worth. (V.i.85-87)

But in the next to last scene, this philosophical conception of hell is replaced by a cartoonish image:

There are the furies tossing damned souls  
On burning forks. Their bodies broil in lead.  
There are live quarters broiling on the coals  
That ne'er can die. (V.ii.128-131)

Finally, Faustus, who had early suffered comic dismemberment, is found by the scholars ripped to shreds by devils. Empson found this ending so inappropriate that he decided (without any evidence) that the play must have been censored and proposed his own alternative ending. An amiable rogue who cares for nothing but pleasure and pranks is cast in the role of a learned scholar selling his soul to the devil. He undergoes profound spiritual torment in his final scene, only to be cast into a version of hell that might be used to frighten children. But these are not the only oddities in this ostensibly serious play.

A troubling issue that has received little attention in the criticism is the unexpectedly antiquated formal devices employed

throughout the play. Marlowe identifies himself as an innovator who scorns the conventions that many of his fellow playwrights follow. In the prologue of *1 Tamburlaine*, Marlowe announces that he will lead the audience away "From jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits, / And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay" (Prologue 1-2). Yet in *Doctor Faustus* he uses many clichés. There are the Good and Evil Angels urging on Faustus, who become nearly indistinguishable in the final act in pronouncing Faustus's damnation. There is a chorus which makes intermittent appearances. There is also the Old Man who comes to warn Faustus about his ways, a stock device and not a developed character. In Act I, scene iii Mephostophilis even resorts to using the rhymed couplet of which Marlowe had been so scornful.

When dealt with at all, these features are dismissed as medieval relics, bad play writing, or the work of inferior hacks who were hired to pad the play. But given Marlowe's tendency to mock Christianity, it is rather unconvincing to suggest that he would naively employ the stock devices of medieval morality plays:

Marlowe chose to use the Morality-framework to use it perversely, to invert or at least to satirise its normal intention. In view of the contemporary Morality-play like *Gorboduc* and the comedies of Lyly and Greene, the tragedies of Kyd, and other plays by Marlowe, it can be safely said for Marlowe, to write such a play at such a time, suggests satire. (Sahu 98)

The effect of these devices is to exaggerate the morality play framework to the point of parody. Many other elements of the play are similarly exaggerated:

Though it is plainly a very serious play, *Faustus* is bedevilled by a kind of naïve absurdity. It is chronically over-explicit. . . . Even Faustus's power fantasies, which are clearly supposed to be 'placed' by context, have a dangerously uncontrolled kind of puerility. Marlowe obviously knows they are absurd; but if he knew *how* absurd, could he permit them to enunciate themselves so flatly? (Sanders 205-6)

Even the most serious scenes are comically parodied in the clown scenes (although these are of disputed authorship), as Robert Ornstein has

shown in "The Comic Synthesis in *Doctor Faustus*." For instance, Faustus's most serious act, the bartering of his soul for four and twenty years of pleasure, is mocked in the following scene by the clown declaring that he would not sell his soul for raw mutton, but would insist upon it being roasted and served with sauce. In the same scene, Wagner seeks to use the sorcery from his master's books to make the clown his servant, as Faustus makes Mephostophilis his.

In 1 *Tamburlaine*, Marlowe used elements of a classical tragedy only to defy the expectations that these elements produced. In 2 *Tamburlaine*, he surprisingly used the tragic form more thoroughly, but in a manner that served to undermine it. In *Doctor Faustus*, the plot is undoubtedly that of an orthodox medieval morality play, but it is, as Sanders suggested, "over-explicit" (205) for the age in which it appeared. There are eloquent passages that are wholly suited to the serious subject matter, but at other times Faustus appears to be an inappropriate lead character, somewhat as if Puck were cast as the protagonist of *King Lear*. What results suggests satire, but an ambiguous one owing to the power of Faustus's serious moments.

Most critics have taken *Doctor Faustus* as a wholly serious play and dismissed the comedy and the exaggerations as weaknesses or the result of later additions. But less than a century after Marlowe's play appeared on the stage, an entirely comic version of it was presented. Maintaining some of Marlowe's original lines, William Mountfort simply rewrote the serious moments:

Albert S. Borgman believed that what Mountfort did was to add farcical material to a play that was already verging on slapstick. But this view presupposes that the appearances of the good and bad angels and of Lucifer and Beelzebub, the pageant, the use of spirits and the compact itself, as well as the scene with the Old Man and its contrastive scene with Benvolio, are humorous, even farcical. (Shawcross 67).



As this quote suggests, Shawcross does not see the parody inherent in the elements he lists. But what Mountfort did in excluding the serious elements and emphasizing the comic ones is really no different than what generations of critics have done in excluding the comic scenes and emphasizing the serious tone of the play. Both greatly oversimplify a complex mixture of profundity and parody which plays upon the audience's expectations.

### *The Jew of Malta*

As in both parts of *Tamburlaine* and *Doctor Faustus*, the prologue of *The Jew of Malta* can be misleading. Machevill introduces the tragedy of his disciple, the rich Jew Barabas. One might thus assume that the play will be an excoriation of Barabas's Machiavellian policies--or, alternately, a blasphemous endorsement of those that "count religion but a childish toy, / And hold there is no sin but ignorance" (Prologue 14-15). But Machevill also warns the audience: "Admir'd I am of those that hate me most" (Prologue 9). This suggests that, at the least, Barabas, the open follower of Machiavelli, will be joined on-stage by more deceptive adherents.<sup>5</sup>

The play is often dismissed as simple anti-Semitism for its own sake. Charles Lamb completely dismisses Barabas and the play:

Marlowe's Jew is a mere monster brought in with a large painted nose to please the rabble. He kills in sport, poisons whole nunneries, invents infernal machines. He is just such an exhibition as a century or two earlier might have been played before the Londoners "by the royal command," when a general pillage of the Hebrews had been previously resolved upon in the cabinet. (qtd. in Sanders 38)

Yet as the play begins, it is not Barabas who appears to be the object of ridicule.

Indeed, in the first act Barabas is treated sympathetically, and it is the Christian government of Malta that is held up for contempt. The governor Ferneze finds himself behind on tributary payments to the Turks, who will attack the city if not paid within one month. The Turkish extortion leads the Christian leaders in turn to extort the money from the small Jewish population of the island.

When Ferneze calls the Jews of Malta together for this purpose he treats them with great civility, disguising his intention to place the entire burden of payment upon their heads. The clever Barabas has anticipated this measure, and can see through the governor's hypocrisy. He plays with the governor, responding to Ferneze's request for aid in

preventing a Turkish invasion by purposely mistaking his intentions:

"Alas, my lord, we are no soldiers!" (I.ii.51). This forces the governor to drop his pretense momentarily and directly declare that it is their money he seeks.

But the governor quickly recovers his hypocritical tone, telling the Jews that he is being charitable in only asking that they each give up half of their wealth, and also showing that he had already made his decision before convening the Jews to request their assistance:

For through our sufferance of your hateful lives,  
Who stand accursed in the sight of heaven,  
These taxes and afflictions are befall'n,  
And therefore thus we are determined.  
Read there the articles of our decrees. (I.ii.66-70)

The only manner of avoiding the excessive tax is for the Jews to convert to Christianity. But despite being named as Machevill's disciple, Barabas does not treat his religion as a "childish toy" and abandon it to save his wealth (nor do any of the Jews).

Barabas is the only one of the Jews who stands up to the governor and denounces his robbery for what it is. But he backs down upon being threatened further, only to have Ferneze demonstrate his Christian charity:

FERNEZE: Either pay that, or we will seize on all.  
BARABAS: *Corpo di Dio!* Stay: you shall have half;  
Let me be us'd but as my brethren are.  
FERNEZE: No, Jew, thou hast denied the articles,  
And now it cannot be recall'd. (I.ii.93-97)

The governor continues in his self-righteous tone, giving the self-serving rationalization, "And better one want for a common good, / Than many perish for a private man" (I.ii.102-103). His rationale is an ironic reference to the Jewish high-priest Caiaphas' justification for the sacrifice of Jesus in John 11:50 (Weil 27). Barabas responds trenchantly,

What, bring you Scripture to confirm your wrongs?  
Preach me not out of my possessions.  
Some Jews are wicked, as all Christians are;

But say the tribe that I descended of  
 Were all in general cast away for sin,  
 Shall I be tried for their transgression?  
 The man that dealeth righteously shall live;  
 And which of you can charge me otherwise? (I.ii.114-121)

Finally, the governor goes so far as to suggest that he is helping Barabas to avoid sin: "Excess of wealth is cause of covetousness; / And covetousness, O, 'tis monstrous sin!" (I.ii.127-8).

At this stage of the play, Barabas appears to be merely an instrument Marlowe is using to satirize Christian hypocrisy. As such, it would be a fairly conventional satire, closely resembling one from the 1580s that Sanders mentions (40) in which a Jew's charity is contrasted with a Christian's willingness to abandon his religion to avoid paying a debt. A judge at the end of the play moralizes, "Jews seek to excel in Christianity and Christians in Jewishness" (qtd. in Sanders 40). Any such notion is quickly dispelled by Barabas's increasingly fantastic and bloody revenge, however. Initially, his desire for revenge seems justified. Even Abigail (another of Fanta's "agonists"), whose viewpoint is the only privileged one in the play, expresses her desire to help her father seek revenge:

Father, whate'er it be, to injure them  
 That have so manifestly wronged us,  
 What will not Abigail attempt? (I.ii.280-282)

But whatever sympathy the audience may have held for Barabas and his wrongs is quickly dissipated by the nature of his revenge.

The governor's son Lodowick is the first object of Barabas's revenge, and Lodowick's and Mathias's love for his daughter provides him with the opportunity. He encourages both Lodowick and Mathias (whom Abigail loves) in their suits, and sets them against one another. Then he fakes a challenge from Mathias to Lodowick, and they kill each other. Lodowick has done no wrong against Barabas. His death is only contrived to make the governor suffer. Mathias has no connection whatsoever with the wrong done to Barabas, except that he is a Christian, and using

Barabas's own logic, one Christian cannot be blamed for the sins of the others.

But more shocking than Barabas's arrangement of the deaths of two innocent men<sup>6</sup> is that he has used his angelic daughter as the tool to bring about the death of the man she loves (Mathias). Barabas's love for his daughter is the most sympathetic element of his character, although even this is expressed at the outset with an ironic reference:

I have no charge, nor many children,  
But one sole daughter, whom I hold as dear  
As Agamemnon did his Iphigen. (I.i.138-140)

She is the only truly sympathetic character in the play, and the only one who acts out of selfless consideration. When she abnegates the world to join the convent upon learning of Mathias's death and her unwitting role in it, Barabas turns against her with shocking speed and lack of scruples. Mistakenly fearing that she will turn him in, Barabas devises the means to kill her, and incidentally any other nuns residing in the convent.

The rest of the play concerns Barabas's increasingly desperate attempts to prevent the discovery of his part in their deaths, and his subsequent cover-up murders. Despite not having any fresh wrongs at the hands of the Christians, his anti-Christian exclamations grow stronger and stronger, and he inexplicably grows ravenously bloodthirsty. Barabas is self-conscious about his lack of moral consideration and his devious stratagems, but otherwise, he is a very poor disciple of Machiavelli. Rather than use his stratagems to ensure an advantageous position for himself, Barabas risks everything (and eventually loses everything) simply for revenge, and he does not even carry out that revenge upon the author of his injustice. This is not good "policy" (as all the characters refer to their scheming), but blind fury that has nothing to do with the cold calculations of a Machiavellian.

Moreover, while the other Jews have a legitimate grievance against the Christian governor, Barabas never does. He had anticipated the possibility of the governor calling upon the Jews to pay the tribute and, as a precaution, had buried more than enough wealth to allow him to maintain his position as the wealthiest resident of the town. His own indignant stance that led the governor to seize all, rather than half, of what remained unburied was mere play-acting. It appears that he was "making a martyr of himself so that he could have an ostensible cause" (Cutts 154) for his excessive revenge.

Once he has a justification for his revenge, Barabas overplays his role. He ridiculously boasts of being the syncretic embodiment of all the worst Elizabethan rumors about Jews. He casually mentions to Ithamore upon meeting him,

As for myself, I walk abroad a-nights,  
And kill sick people groaning under walls.  
Sometimes I go about and poison wells:  
And now and then, to cherish Christian thieves,  
I am content to lose some of my crowns,  
That I may, walking in my gallery,  
See 'em go pinion'd along by my door.  
Being young, I studied physic and began  
To practise first upon the Italian;  
There I enrich'd the priests with burials. (II.iii.179-188)

His list of murderous accomplishments continues for another 15 lines.

In pursuing his insatiable revenge, Barabas appears to be trying to live up to all the worst that has been suggested about him. Since he has been treated as a monster, he will act like a monster:

I learn'd in Florence how to kiss my hand,  
Heave up my shoulders when they call me dog,  
And duck as low as any bare-foot friar,  
Hoping to see them starve upon a stall. (II.iii.22-25)

Harry Levin goes further in attributing Barabas's hatred to his sense of rejection:

[H]e is conscious of being hated, and wants to be loved. To be loved--yes, that desire is his secret shame, the tragic weakness of a character whose wickedness is otherwise unflawed. His hatred is the bravado of the outsider whom nobody loves, and his revenges

are compensatory efforts to supply people with good reasons for hating him. (Levin 259a)

As such, Barabas is an exaggerated version of Shylock (or, rather, Shylock is a subtler version of Barabas) in *The Merchant of Venice* who attributes his desire to take a life (rather than a monetary substitute) to his need to take revenge against the Christian community which has scorned and mocked him.<sup>7</sup>

While Barabas comes across as increasingly monstrous, it would be difficult to side with his opponents, if one were forced to choose. The pointed satire of the first act continues against the Christians right to the very last word of the play. Two scenes in particular stand out: In the first, Ferneze breaks his word to the Turks upon the urging of Spanish troops who hope to profit from the sale of Turkish slaves (prisoners of war) on the island. In the second, two greedy friars that have learned of Barabas's role in the deaths of Mathias and Lodowick immediately stop censuring Barabas and begin to physically fight each other over which one will take him as a convert when he suggests he might wish to donate his money to a religious house. Meanwhile Barabas continues to make devastating satiric jabs at Christians. Upon the subject of marriage, Barabas tells Lodowick,

O, but I know your lordship would disdain  
To marry with the daughter of a Jew:  
And yet I'll give her many a golden cross,  
With Christian posies about the ring. (II.iii.299-302)

And when he urges Abigail to feign being engaged, Barabas tells her,

It's no sin to deceive a Christian;  
For they themselves hold it a principle,  
Faith is not to be held with heretics.  
But all are heretics that are not Jews. (II.iii.314-317)

At the end of the play, it is Barabas's failure to keep this in mind that proves his undoing when Ferneze breaks his word again. Ferneze acts on Machiavellian calculation rather than being carried away by moral furor as Barabas is. Precisely because of this, he triumphs.

He kills Barabas, sees the defeat of the Turkish troops, and holds Calymath (the son of the Turkish ruler) for ransom, all without showing any break in his arrogant hypocrisy:

Ferneze, with acute theological impertinence, identifies his own Machiavellian *virtù* with divine justice. On this note of exquisite casuistry Marlowe ends, leaving his unconscionable prince in command of the situation, his dead hero quietly simmering in his own juice, and no sign that Heaven cares sufficiently about the affairs of men to repudiate the gigantic blasphemy. (Sanders 53-54)

Ironically, when Abigail perceives that "there is no love on earth, / Pity in Jews, nor piety in Turks" (III.iii.53-54) she converts to Christianity, whose representative comes out looking even worse. Unlike Barabas, who is driven by blind fury and morally indignant rage, Ferneze always remains calm and calculating. Since Ferneze does not make the soliloquies or asides that Barabas does, the audience cannot tell if he is also a conscious Machiavellian, or monumentally self-deluded.

Ironically, Barabas's excesses do not lead to his downfall.

Instead, it is his few gestures of restraint that undo him:

Marlowe invokes the motif of the villain-undone-by-his-villainy, but the actual fall of Barabas is brought about in his confidence in Ithamore, his desire to *avoid* the actual possession of power, and his imprudent trust in the Christian governor of Malta--in short, by the minute shreds of restraint and community that survive in him. (Greenblatt 53)

Only by the relentlessly thorough implementation of Machiavellian ethics can one succeed in the bleak world of this play.

The only moral distinction between the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish characters (except Abigail) in the play is that the Muslims and the Jew are honest about their own motives. The contrast is emphasized when the Turks come to collect their tribute. Ferneze disingenuously asks, "What wind drives you thus into Malta-road?" (III.v.2) and the Turk answers straightforwardly, "The wind that bloweth all the world besides, / Desire of gold" (III.v.3-4). It is not an admirable sentiment, but is refreshingly honest in comparison to Ferneze's



sophistries. Although Barabas dissembles for the Christians, he maintains that "A counterfeit profession is better / Than unseen hypocrisy" (I.ii.302-303).

A world in which such a moral distinction is significant is unremittingly bleak, even though it is portrayed consistently throughout with comedy. When the play culminates in Barabas's dying curse against the world, the effect is not tragic, or even shocking:

And, had I but escap'd this stratagem,  
I would have brought confusion on you all,  
Damn'd Christians, dogs, and Turkish infidels!  
But now begins the extremity of heat  
To pinch me with intolerable pangs.  
Die, life! fly soul! tongue, curse thy fill, and die! (V.v.91-94)

One half wishes that Barabas had once again outwitted Ferneze and would survive to carry out his plans, and half feels relief that the carnage is over before it can escalate even more. The only real tragedy is that Ferneze is left behind to carry on his hypocrisy rather than perishing with Barabas.

The bitter ironies and acerbic satire that characterize much of *Tamburlaine* Part One and Part Two and, to a lesser extent, *Doctor Faustus* dominate this play without the ambiguities introduced in the other plays by *Tamburlaine's* grandeur and *Faustus's* moments of profound anguish. "It is a small world, much smaller than the worlds of *Tamburlaine* and *Faustus*" (Godshalk 211). The result is a very cynical satire--so cynical that it is commonly seen as devolving into ludicrous spectacle at the end:

The cold-blooded ruthlessness of Marlowe's portraiture has a certain impressiveness, but it alienates the audience to such an extent that in the latter part of the play he is obliged to sustain the interest by a frenetic proliferation of intrigue and counter-intrigue. (Sanders 55)

But the rich situational comedy of these scenes combined with the frantic pace make the ending, from another perspective, the most entertaining part of the play:

[I]t has always been said that the end, even the last two acts, are unworthy of the first three. If one takes *The Jew of Malta* not as a tragedy, or as a "tragedy of blood," but as a farce, the concluding act becomes intelligible; and if we attend with a careful ear to the versification, we find that Marlowe develops a tone to suit this farce, and even perhaps that this tone is his most powerful and mature tone. I say farce, but with the enfeebled humour of our times the word is a misnomer; it is the farce of the old English humour, the terribly serious, even savage comic humour. (Eliot 104-105)

In this savage farce, the comedic potential of Marlowe's caustic irony and satiric wit, which is rich in his other plays, is expressed in its most unadulterated form.

As in *I Tamburlaine*, it is easy to find oneself cheering on the bloody and morally reprehensible protagonist. However, in this case it is not because of any admiration for the protagonist's grandeur. Instead, it is merely because so many of Barabas's victims deserve their fates (although not enough to make him sympathetic), and he accomplishes their deaths through such clever and humorous devices. Yes, Barabas is ridiculous and murderous, but dismissing the play as an anti-Semitic piece is a gross oversimplification. Likewise, Barabas is more than merely the instrument for pointing out the failure of the Christians to live up to their ideals. One does not wish at the end of the play that Ferneze would realize the error of his ways and repent, but rather that Barabas would be able to pull off one last trick to seal his doom. The play shows the world at its ugliest, and then revels in the comic possibilities provided by the lack of moral restraint.

## Conclusion

Christopher Marlowe's plays are not a favorite of today's stage. Actually, outside of his revival by the Romantics, his plays have not enjoyed tremendous success since the end of the sixteenth century. Today, he is mostly considered important as a historical figure: an important dramatic innovator who helped make possible the important works that followed. He is often portrayed as a John the Baptist to Shakespeare's Christ, preparing the way for the great one by popularizing blank verse and serving as a model for Shakespeare's early career: "Shakespeare, two months younger, could have emerged only by way of Marlovian discipleship" (Levin 214a). Marlowe is also considered interesting because of his unfulfilled potential: "many critics contend that had he not died young, Marlowe's reputation would certainly have rivaled that of the more famous playwright" (Trudeau 211).

Curiously, his plays have been discounted as being too simplistic. He is accused of pandering to the audience's desire for spectacle, and of using exaggerated characters and overstated rhetoric. These accusations are true--but the result is far from simplistic. The wide range of impassioned critical debate over his plays is suggestive of their richness and complexity. The reason for both this richness and the judgment of his plays as simplistic is Marlowe's pervasive use of irony and satire. Marlowe enjoys playing with the stage conventions used by "rhyming mother-wits" (*Tamburlaine* Prologue 1), his predecessors and fellow playwrights. Using these conventions, he invokes frames of reference for the audience, only to confound the expectations they produce. In his works it is often difficult to distinguish naive melodrama from parody; and ironic condemnation from blasphemy. Other than a handful of privileged minor characters, it is difficult for the audience to find any stable viewpoint from which to form a judgment of the spectacular protagonists.

Godshalk compares Marlowe to Swift:

Both saw man's inhumanity to man with the severe eye of the moralist; they picture the inhumanity with clarity and comedy; and ironically, they have been accused of exhibiting those same vices which they consciously and thoroughly despised. (223)

The comparison is an apt one, but the term "moralist" is suspect. In both parts of *Tamburlaine*, Marlowe does appear to be emphasizing a moral position by stressing the innocent victims who suffer from the warring between equally ambitious and ruthless leaders. *Doctor Faustus* is not as readily distilled to a moral position. If anyone is being censured, it is God for damning the harmless scholar with "an amiable soul" (V.i.40). In *The Jew of Malta* a moral position is even more difficult to discern. Except for Abigail, the characters are so despicable that their deaths are more welcomed than lamented. The characters who survive deserve to be swallowed up in a pit even more than the bloodthirsty Barabas.

While Marlowe's plays have been frequently dismissed as being too simplistic and the Romantics only revived his work because of their infatuation with its primitive power, the range of supportable interpretations of his works demonstrates that they are considerably more complex than they have been taken to be. Marlowe was an intentionally provocative figure who enjoyed upsetting and perplexing his contemporaries, and his rich plays continue to provoke a diversity of opinions and judgments.

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the college steward was burned at the stake the preceding year for heresy (Ury 55-6).

<sup>2</sup> The posthumously published (and finished) *Hero and Leander* is also often assumed to have been written during Marlowe's school years.

<sup>3</sup> The actor who originally played Tamburlaine was played by the six-and-a-half feet tall Edward Alleyn (Fanta 11).

<sup>4</sup> In fact, Balaam was following God's order in not cursing the Israelites.

<sup>5</sup> This is not to suggest that the practice of the characters in this play is true to Machiavelli's philosophy. Rather, they represent the general public perception of Machiavelli in Marlowe's time. There is no evidence proving that Marlowe had read Machiavelli.

<sup>6</sup> Actually, Barabas only sets them up. Their own willingness to fight over Abigail leads them to kill each other. Their parents, however, are willing to lay the blame entirely at somebody else's feet, even before they know the details of their deaths: "Hold, let's inquire the causers of their deaths, / That we may venge their blood upon their heads" (III.ii.29-30).

<sup>7</sup> See III.i.48-66 in particular.