

The Complexity of Character in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*

Master Thesis

BY

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This Master's Thesis is carried out as a part of the education at the University of Agder and is therefore approved as a part of this education. However, this does not imply that the University answers for the methods that are used or the conclusions that are drawn.

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Contents:

Chapter One:	Introduction	Page 4
Chapter Two:	Hero Or Villain; A Case of Complexity.	Page 15
Chapter Three:	The Act of individuality through Transgression	Page 43
Chapter Four:	The Complex Context of <i>Tamburlaine</i>	Page 58
Chapter Five:	Conclusion	Page 74

Chapter One

Introduction

Ever since its publication, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* has been a subject of different interpretations. These interpretations vary according to how the play is viewed. Some critics viewed the play within the convention of the old "morality play"¹, whereas others viewed it as a typical "Renaissance tragedy play"². Latter criticism, however, focused on the play's strong rhetorical effect and its magnificent poetical images. T.S. Elliot, for instance, focused on the aesthetic aspect of the play. He "had sought to define in the plays a 'powerful and mature tone' of farce, a dramatic idiom 'not unlike caricature' (*Selected Essays*, 1932,123,125).³ But the play is far complex than to be confined within any particular category. It is no longer viewed as a "monotonous, feebly-dramatized series of episodes whose central figure was mostly a mouthpiece for a 'dazzled' and precocious author"⁴. Recent critics have focused on the

¹ Marlowe's play can be viewed within "Elizabethan context. Pagan, morality, romance; emblematic imagery; the scripture: scholarship has extended our awareness of the possible range of Marlowe's allusions, though by no means all of these allusions are unchallengeable set up in the text". Marlowe, Christopher, *Tamburlaine the Great*, ed. J.S.Cunningham (London; Manchester University Press, 1999) p.40. It is also to be noted that in morality play or early tragedy " the hero is faced with a choice between good and devil; through his own imperfections he makes a wrong choice, comes to see the error of his consequence suffering, and before his death renounces it." See: Ribner, Irvin, *Patterns of Shakespearean Tragedy* (London; Routledge Library Edition, 2005, 1960) p.53.

² See for example ; Allard, James and Mathew R. Martin ed. and intro, *Staging Pain, 1500-1800: Violence and Trauma in British Theatre*, (Alderhot; Ashgate, 2009).p.15-20.

³ Quoted in Joseph Sandy Cunningham And Eithne Henson. Ed., Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great*, (London; Manchester University Press, 1998) p.30

⁴ *Ibid*, p.30.

subversive nature of the play. They viewed the play as a “radical type of questioning tragedy” which questions both the inherited power structure of Elizabethan society as well as the play’s “generic identity”⁵.

Modern criticism, however, has focused on the different contexts of the play. For Thomas Cartelli, for instance, “the hero’s aspiration speaks to domestic social mobility and the enlarged fortune of an aggressive and increasingly self-assured nation-state”⁶. Some other critics, however, such as Stephen Greenblatt and Emily Bartels pay more attention to the play’s religious and political contexts. For Emily Bartels, for instance, the play refers to England’s early imperial adventures. James Shapiro, in contrary, focuses on the religious aspect of the play. He “argues that Shakespeare’s echoes of Marlowe in *Henry V* can be attributed to *Tamburlaine*’s force as an “Armada play.”⁷

The protagonist’s contradictory attitudes and characteristics may also complicate any attempt of interpretation. Many critics and audiences view Tamburlaine’s character in different ways. Some critics, such as Roy Battenhouse, argues that we meant to “condemn him”, while others claim that “we are invited to admire him”⁸. There are other critics who rather leave it to the audience how to view the protagonist’s character. There are other critics who rather leave it to the

⁵ Quoted in Richard Dutton And Jean Elizabeth Howard, *A companion to Shakespeare’s Works: The tragedies*, London; Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2003, p26.

⁶ Barbour, Richmond, *Before Orientalism : London’s Theatre of the East, 1576-1626*, London: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.41.

⁷ Masten, Jeffrey and Wendy Wall, *Renaissance Drama 28: New Series XXV11*, London; Northwestern University Press, 1999, p.31.

⁸ Keenan, Siobhan, *Renaissance Literature*, London; Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2003, p102.

audience how to view the protagonist's character. These critics "suggest that the plays were 'designed...to leave audiences painfully suspended between admiration and disgust for Marlowe's protagonist.'⁹"

Significantly, each of these interpretations focuses on certain aspect of the play. Some critical approaches focused on the aesthetic and artistic aspects of the play while others focused on its implicit political and religious implications. Accordingly, the protagonist's character, whether a hero or villain, is determined according to the way the play is interpreted; a morality play or rather an implicit political and religious allegorical satire. The play, however, is complex and cannot be defined within certain literary category. This is due to the various complexities that lurk within the play. One must account for all different, even contradictory, readings of the play in order to be able to explain the multiple aspects of the protagonist.

In this thesis, then, I investigate the complexity and multiplicity of the main character in Marlowe's play. In doing so, I will account for the different, even contradictory, interpretations of the play. So, my approach, somehow, is inclusive and it encompasses different aspects of the play. The main focus, however, is to show how the dramatic function or the symbolic or allegorical representations of the protagonist vary according to the different interpretations of the play.

I conduct my investigations in three chapters, and in each chapter, I investigate certain aspect of complexity. In First Chapter, for instance, the focus is on difficulties in determining the protagonist's character, whether he is a hero or a villain. In Chapter Two, however, I investigate

⁹ Ibid.102

whether the protagonist's character could be considered a symbolic representation of the Renaissance hero or not. The Final Chapter of my thesis will investigate whether the protagonist's allegorical may carry certain religious or political implications or not.

Marlowe may have used a complex character for many different purposes. He may have used such complex character for the aesthetic or entertainment purpose. In this respect, it is necessary to investigate how the spectators or the readers respond to the contradictory characteristics of the protagonist; how their perceptions affected by the conflicting images the protagonist projects and ; how they judge the final outcome of the protagonist's tragic course.

Throughout the play, conflicting images of the protagonist are presented. On certain occasions, for instance, the protagonist is depicted as a heroic figure, while on other occasions; he is depicted as a villain or anti-heroic figure. The contradictory attitudes of the protagonist would contribute to the construction of such conflicting images. Such conflicting images would certainly have evokes ambivalent responses in the audiences as well as in the readers.

The protagonist's act of self-presentation, either through the physical power or the use of strong rhetoric, may also contribute to the building of such contradictory and conflicting images. So often the protagonist elevates himself above the power of different deities. He even claims to be the "Scourge and Wrath of God".

Furthermore, in the play, the protagonist's character is identified with various mythological figures. For instance, he is compared to a whole range of figures such as Jove, Hercules and Achilles and many other mythological figures. Such identifications symbolically serve to assert the protagonist's defiant nature. Tamburlaine's challenge to different earthly rulers would further

assert such defiant image. Similar to Jove who challenged Saturn in order to gain the throne, Tamburlaine is challenging the earthly rulers to gain an earthly crown.

The protagonist's defiant act occurs in the scene in which he is faced with his own mortality. Regardless of his weakened and tormented body, Tamburlaine still strives for greater glory and even vows revenge on mortality. At his death bed, Tamburlaine does not show any sign of weakness, and still worse, does not express any feelings of remorse, as do most tragic heroes.

Ambivalently, Tamburlaine's death-defying heroism does not accord with the conventions of Elizabethan tragedies. In such tragedies, the hero at the end of the play recognizes his follies and painfully accepts his tragic fate as in *Hamlet* or *Faustus*. In contrary, Tamburlaine stays vigilant and defiant till the very end of the play. Even his death is far from being tragic. Tamburlaine dies while he is still at the peak of his glories and he even in his death bed commanding his faithful sons and loyal followers to follow his glorious path. In certain ways, there is to some extent an inconsistency between the kind of heroic image that has been being constructed throughout the play and the sudden and somehow (un) tragic ending of the play, leaving the audience bewildered and even frustrated. Certainly, the audience may be amazed by the protagonist's act of heroism in challenging his own death. Ambivalently enough, the heroic image of the protagonist, especially when it comes to his death-defying act, may "magnify" the spectator's admiration just it "minimizes" their "pity for his victims".

Another complex issue is related to the play's generic identity; that is whether we consider *1 and 2 Tamburlaine* as one complete play in two parts or simply two different plays. Some critics claim that Marlowe added the second part of the play merely to fulfill the morality convention in having a tragic end for the ambitious protagonist.

The first *Part* of *Tamburlaine* asserts the heroic and glorious image of Tamburlaine. This part could be regarded a complete play in itself. It could be read as heroic play or a pastoral romance or even a comedy since it ends with ceremonial marriage. Ironically, the eventual death of the protagonist is delayed till the end of the second part of the play. Ironically though, while the first *Part* may assert the heroic character of Tamburlaine, the second *Part*; however, proves his villainous nature. So, the complexity of the play's generic identity, whether romance or tragedy, does also complicate any attempt to define the protagonist, a hero or a villain.

The second complexity that I will investigate is whether the protagonist could be viewed as symbolic representation of Renaissance hero or not. Interestingly Marlowe treated Tamburlaine's character as it has been treated by the early Humanist Renaissance historians; as a typical Renaissance Hero. In Marlowe's play, similar to *Faustus*, the focus is on demonstrating the protagonist's extraordinary ability to shape his own destiny. This manifests itself in Tamburlaine's ability to transcend his humble origins and attain the highest status. Such acts of transformation of character or "identity shift" "is manifested by "a symbolic change of costume", -rags into armour, shepherd into chivalric leader".¹⁰

On different dramatic occasions, Tamburlaine demonstrates great ability to perform different social roles. For instance, during his first encounter with Zenocrate, Tamburlaine shows a great deal of nobility and acts in a chivalric manner. The protagonist's love rhetoric may provide a clear example of such shift in character.

There is already a jarring contrast between Tamburlaine's courtly praise of Zenocrate and

¹⁰ Womack, Peter, *English Renaissance Drama*, London; Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006, p136.

his brutal attitudes against his victims. Similar to other characters, Zenocrate becomes bewildered by Tamburlaine's contradictory attitudes. The most brutal act by Tamburlaine, probably, is when he orders his followers to massacre the virgins of Damascus. The killing of Caliphas by Tamburlaine, furthermore, provides another example of the brutal side of Tamburlaine's character.

Ironically, though a shepherd, Tamburlaine is glorified as a chivalric heroic figure while those of highly status are constantly degraded and are subjected to laughter and sarcastic humor. Through such kind of contradictions between Tamburlaine and his enemies, the play problematizes the concepts of chivalry and heroism. It is no longer clear what makes a noble distinct from a savage or a shepherd from a king.

The easiness by which Tamburlaine shifts his identity may have created a paradoxical complexity for Elizabethan audience. Through such complexity, the play satirizes and ridicules rigid Elizabethan concepts of social categories; among others; chivalry, nobility and the ideals of heroism. Noticeably, during the early modern period, chivalry, and nobility both as political and social institution witnessed enormous changes. So, in many ways, the play reflects on such changes.

Significantly, the play focuses more on asserting the protagonist's exercise of his free will. But such power is used in an excessive and arbitrary manner. In a way, Tamburlaine exemplifies the most extreme examples of Machiavellian hero. Marlowe, through such a villainous character, may have satirized the more extreme ideas by some renaissance intellectuals such as Pico and Poggio. These writers emphasized on Man's Free will in mastering his own destiny. Pico's *Oration on the dignity of Man* provides a good example of such controversial thinking.

However, although the play may assert the protagonist's practicing of his free will, it nevertheless, questions the extent to which such freedom is allowed. The protagonist's eventual death could bring an end for the protagonist's unlimited aspiration for power. Through such complexity, the play questions certain controversial theological and philosophical issues such as Freedom of Will and Predestination.

The Third complexity I will address is related to the play's complex sociopolitical context. Similar to other plays by Marlowe, *Tamburlaine* could be viewed both as a religious play and as political allegory, reflecting many controversial religious and political issues during that period.

One of the most significant features of the play is its religious implications. In certain way, the play reflects on the Christian-Muslim antagonism during that time. The contrast between Tamburlaine and Bayzeth, for instance, may present a symbolic example of such religious antagonism. Contrary to Bayzeth, Tamburlaine is depicted as heroic and glorious figure. The audience may have found such heroic figure amusing and as subject of admiration.

Nevertheless, similar to the historical figure, Tamburlaine's acts are far from being heroic. It is difficult to assume which side Tamburlaine is on: the Christians or the Muslims. The protagonist's shifting alliances may complicate any attempt to define his religious alignment. There is already a striking similarity between Tamburlaine's character and the Turkish military figure described in the numerous historical accounts. Similar to the Turkish military leaders, Tamburlaine enlarges his kingdom by military conquests and mostly through the unrestrained use of power. Through such a symbolic parallel, Marlowe may have intended to warn the English public about the danger posed by the Turkish Muslim conquerors.

But the religious implication of the play goes far beyond the simple Christian-Muslim antagonism. The play may implicitly propagate certain protestant ideas. Some symbolic elements within the play may incite anti-Catholic ideas. For instance, the stage image of Tamburlaine “using Bayzeth as his footstool” may carry “anti-papal” meanings. Furthermore, the play’s reference to “the sacking of the city of Babylon” may carry apocalyptic meaning. The protagonist’s astounding, somehow “apocalyptic”, rhetoric may bring into mind the kind of rhetoric used by many militant protestants during that time.

Ambivalently, the play is equally could be regarded as a “blasphemous” or anti-religious one. In the play, both Islam and Christianity are satirically ridiculed. It is unclear whether the protagonist advocates certain religion or not. In different occasions, for instance, the protagonist expresses his rage and anger against different deities. One may even argue that Tamburlaine’s anti-divine attitude may mirror the author’s own anti-religious attitude.

Still, it is difficult to assume whether Tamburlaine is a “blasphemous work” or not, or even it might reflect Marlowe’s anti-religious attitudes. Ironically, one may find numerous examples in which the protagonist both supports and satirically ridicules all different deities. More ambivalently, the protagonist’s latter claim being the “Scourge of God” further complicates any assumptions one may make about his religious attitudes.

Beyond its religious implications, the play may reflect on many controversial political issues during the Elizabethan period. Even though the play is set in a remote foreign land, yet implicitly, it mirrors many political issues. The play may have been written to fulfill the popular demand for heroism and military conquest in an age characterized by various religious wars and oversea military conquests.. For instance, the Armada episode, among other things, triggered a

sense of patriotism among the English public. One must also take into account the troubled domestic political atmosphere of England during that era

Marlowe may have employed the heroic image of Tamburlaine in order to allude to certain attitudes of Elizabethan character. For instance, Tamburlaine's way of consolidating power recalls Elizabethan way of legitimizing her authority. One method through which the Queen employed in order to consolidate her power was through the act of self-presentation or "image-making". Ironically, the protagonist's constant act of self-presentation; that is his display of power, may resemble Elizabethan's self-presentation tactics.

The play may also implicitly reflect on Elizabethan way of ruling. Paradoxically, Tamburlaine's method in securing his authority (-which interestingly comes through the excessive use of power-) may resemble Elizabeth's Machiavellian way of ruling. The many execution acts during the play, justified by Tamburlaine as part of his quest for gaining the crown, recalls Elizabeth's similar acts during her ruling.

The play may also reflect on England's early colonial and imperial activities during Elizabethan age. Similar to other play written during that period, *Tamburlaine* exemplifies the west's fascination or fear of the Oriental East. Such plays aimed to evoke the audience's imagination about the undiscovered richness of the exotic East. Yet, the main aim was to legitimize the current imperial policies by the early colonizing powers, especially England's oversea policies. So, one might argue that the play in certain way glorifies Elizabeth's policies, regardless of the many controversies surrounding such policies.

Paradoxically, the play raises more questions about the real objectives of England's early

imperial policy than simply glorifying it. The foreign setting of the play might not have prevented the English audience from noticing the implicit critical messages. Certain scenes in the play like the killing of the virgins by Tamburlaine might have recalled the brutal attitudes of the early colonial powers in the newly discovered colonies.

So, the play is open for many different and even contradictory interpretations. This has to do with its complex political and religious context as well as the complex characteristics of the main character. So, throughout this thesis, I examine these different, even contradictory interpretations of the play. In doing so, I will consider both the aesthetic aspect of the play as well as its complex religious and political implications. The primary aim, though, is to investigate the complexity of the main character; that is, its dramatic function as well as its various symbolical implications.

Chapter Two

Hero Or Villain? A Case of Complexity

Tamburlaine dramatic figure, in many aspects, is driven from the Vice or villain character rooted in old morality and “medieval mystery plays”¹¹. In Morality play, the vice, the subversive element, transgresses the Natural Order, and as a result, will be punished, so often through a tragic death. Similarly, Tamburlaine can be taken as a more modified version of the Vice character of old morality play. Nevertheless, the Vice figure in Tamburlaine’s play, as in many of Marlowe’s plays, is more multifaceted and more controversial. In *The Jew of Malta*, for instance, as Bevington notes, the antagonist ‘ is in part a lifelike Jewish Merchant caught in a political feud on Malta, and in part an embodiment both of the morality Vice and of the unrepentant protagonist in homiletic’ tragedy” (Bevington 1662: 218)¹²

Similarly, Tamburlaine character is complex and cannot be labeled within certain category. He could be viewed as both hero and anti-hero, depending on how the play is interpreted:

Both plays are notoriously ambiguous, like all of Marlowe’s work, and can be read either as moral tales that condemn over-reaching, or , more likely, as attacks on the cant, hypocrisy, or, and injustice of traditional social and belief systems which are equally as vicious as any

¹¹. See for example Wendy Griswold, *Renaissance Revivals: City Comedy and Revenge Tragedy in the London Theatre, 1576-1980* (U.S; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. P.42, 43) and John Gassner and Edward Quinn, *The Reader’s Encyclopedia Of World Drama* (Mineola, N.Y. : Dover Publications Inc. 2002, p.140.

¹². Hopkins, Lisa. *Christopher Marlowe, Renaissance dramatist*, UK, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (2008),p.60.

imaginable alternative¹³

The plot of the play is structured around a contrast between the protagonist and his opponents. Ironically, Tamburlaine sets himself in opposition to both earthly and divinely authorities. Besides, in the play, there are different oppositional themes; various contradictory elements, and binary symbols that may reveal the oppositional discourses of the play:

White and black, mercy and doom, pliancy and resolution, fire and dross, life and death, Jove and jades, Heaven and Erebus. These bold opposites govern the play's visual and verbal rhetoric. They range together in sets-white, mercy, pliancy, life ; black, wrath, resolution, death-but they also activate our sense of ambivalence, complicating the simple patterns of response".¹⁴

In this play, however, the conventional duality of 'good versus evil' is not quite clear. It is also unclear what makes a hero character distinct from a villain one. The role of the "Divine Power", as well, is ambiguous and there is little indication that it might have any effect in changing the course of the play. Tamburlaine's claim that he is the "Scourge and Wrath of the God" may further complicate any conception of the role of the divine. Tamburlaine's claim of divinity could be interpreted in different ways: "On the one hand it could mean that he serves as avenging sword of a hostile god; on the other, it can imply that Tamburlaine successfully challenges the empty pieties of orthodox religion"¹⁵. Moreover, while Tamburlaine's violent attitude might contribute in constructing the image of a defiant or villainous figure, "his physical

¹³. Hadfield, Andrew. *The English Renaissance: 1500 – 1620*, UK, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, (2001), p.209.

¹⁴. Marlowe, Christopher, *Tamburlaine the Great*, Edit. J. S. Cunningham. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press (1999), p.47.

¹⁵. Hadfield, 2001, p. 214.

appearance, his acts and rhetoric must create the imaginative effect of some god incarnate”¹⁶

Tamburlaine’s power, as well, is not in accord with divine authority; rather, it defies such kind of authority. “In one sense, Marlowe may have created a universe in which the existence of God is not an issue.”¹⁷ Moreover, the play sets focus on Tamburlaine’s physical strength and his strong will than on the invisible, somehow silent, power of divine authority. Ironically, “The divine order, to which reference is made; in Tamburlaine’s world is pagan. Jove is the supreme deity he evokes (.), and Juno, to whom Zenocrate is likened, is the consort of that God”¹⁸. In that sense, the protagonist could be considered the ultimate incarnation of evil for he acts as anti-thesis to the divine order by stirring disorder and chaos in the world. Furthermore, his excessive aspiration to acquire the highest status beyond the limitations set for him is a great defiance to the hierarchical order of thing, known as “The Great Chain of Being”¹⁹. Thus, in the world of the *Tamburlaine*, disorder alters order and false providence alternates divine providence.

In *Tamburlaine*, furthermore, power and violence are celebrated as significant means of fulfillment and greatness. The protagonist uses power as means to consolidate his authority over his opponents. Characters challenged by Tamburlaine are fascinated by his enormous power and they attribute supernatural qualities to his character. He even uses such power against innocent victims without feeling any remorse. “This Tamburlaine angrily asserts, when

¹⁶. Kelsall, 1981, p.76.

¹⁷. Hadfield, 2001, p. 210.

¹⁸. Kelsall, 1981, p. 73.

¹⁹. See for example Newton Key Robert Bucholz, *Early Modern England 1485-1714: A Narrative History* (UK, Chester ; MA, Malden : Wiley-Blackwell (2009) , .p125), and Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being : A Study of the History of an Idea*, U.S; Transaction Publishers (2009).

challenged in the name of pity, that he is not a man, but 'no other than the ire of God, and the destruction of the world.'²⁰ Somehow, the play implicitly makes a daring, yet ambivalent, analogy between the divine power and the power of Tamburlaine.

Tamburlaine is complex and ambiguous character because he possesses both heroic and anti-heroic traits. He may be a hero for he battles against ruthless rulers, or he may be a villain for his cruelty against innocent victims. There is a clear contrast between Tamburlaine's noble act towards Zenocrate and his ruthless attitude towards the Virgins of Damascus or even his own son Calyphas. These ambivalent attitudes, certainly, complicate audience's responses. They may admire his heroic acts just as they renounce his villainous attitudes.

Similar to *The Jew of Malta*, the play is remarked for its use of staged violence. During the Elizabethan period, staged violence had been used as an effective dramatic technique to instigate fear and suspense in the audiences. "In his early histories (the *Henry VI* plays) and in *Titus Andronicus* Shakespeare was much influenced by Marlowe, and competed in composing plays that invent more and stranger incidents of torture and murder"²¹. One may find a great deal of similarities between *Tamburlaine* and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, at least in the graphic depiction of violence and murder. "The cannibal imagery of the banquet scene in *Tamburlaine the Great*, Part 1 (c, 1587) parallels the physical horrors of the climatic banquet in *Titus Andronicus*: Marlowe even refers to Procne's revenge, a conspicuous theme in Shakespeare's play"²². In

²⁰. Cunningham, 1999, p. 2.

12. Foakes, R. A. *Shakespeare and Violence*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, (2003), p.36.

²². Shakespeare, William, *Titus Andronicus*, Edit, Hughes, Alan. Cambridge and New York : Cambridge University Press, 1994. 2006.

Marlowe's play, however, staged violence far surpasses being merely an element of fear and suspense. What is significant here is its aesthetic and artistic value:

The pleasure of reading or watching Marlowe's plays in performance is derived in large measure from the pain endured by his protagonist: In one sense this inverse relation is among the axioms of tragedy: the reader's or spectator's aesthetic pleasure is completed by the torment of Oedipus, by the madness of Hamlet, by the humiliation of King Lear. But (...) in Marlowe the protagonist's commitment to disastrous or unattainable pursuit in special way the condition on which aesthetic pleasure is built: the protagonist commits himself to the course of action that we as spectators want to endorse, to objectives that we wish might be achieved, even if we know them to be unattainable.²³

Tamburlaine character is so often associated with ambivalent attitudes and ascribed with very complex characteristics. This includes various ambivalent and ambiguous descriptions such as, among other things, "merciless villain", "prince of hell", "scourge of Jove", and even an "earthly god"²⁴. In contrast to the historical figure, "Marlowe's hero has no disability; indeed, he is projected as ideal of male physique and bearing"²⁵. Characters challenged by Tamburlaine would be overwhelmed by his outstanding physical strength and they attribute supernatural qualities to him. Menaphone, for instance, depicts the protagonist as a mythological divine figure:

Of Stature tall, and straightly fashioned /
like his desire, lift upward and divine (16).
So large of limbs, his joints so strongly knit,

²³ Huebert, Ronald., *The Performance of Pleasure in Renaissance English Drama*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, (2003) , p.28.

²⁴. SEE : Bevington, David & Rasmussen, Eric, *Christopher Marlowe; Doctor Faustus And Other Plays* (Oxford World's Classics), (UK; Oxford University Press, (1998) .

²⁵. Marlowe, Christopher, *Tamburlaine The Great*, Edit. Cunningham. J. S. ; Henson, Eithne, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998. P.4.

Such breadth of shoulders as might mainly bear

Old Atlas' burden: 'twist his manly pitch, (*Tam. P.1, Act ii, Scene i, 7-11*)

Other character, however, give rather a grotesque image of Tamburlaine by focusing on his supernatural power. In these lines, the protagonist is described as a villainous figure with immense power:

His looks do menace heaven and dare the gods;

His fiery eyes are fix'd upon the earth,

As if he now devis'd some stratagem,

Or meant to pierce Avernus' darksome vaults

To pull the triple-headed dog from hell. (*Tam.Pi, Act i,Scene ii , 157-61*)

It is noticeable that most of these descriptions focus on showing the protagonist's supernatural qualities and his defiant nature. "There are many occasions, especially in Part Two, when divine powers are explicitly defied"²⁶. This is evident in the scene in which Tamburlaine gives his order to burn the 'superstitious books.'

The protagonist is also depicted as antithetic figure against earthly power. His rise from a Scythian shepherd to the greatest status is a clear challenge to the fixed social hierarchy, especially; the king's divinely given power. Characters challenged by Tamburlaine so often degrade his lower origin but latter on recognize his greatness. Cosroe, for instance, is ambivalent about Tamburlaine's abnormal aspiration and he questions his lower status:

What means this devilish shepherd to aspire

²⁶.Cunningham, 1999, p. 22.

To cast up hills against the face of heaven

And dare the force of Angry Jupiter? (*Tam.Pi*, Act. ii, Scene vi, 1-4)

Certainly, the romantic and pastoral image of a shepherd's figure is far in contrast with the image of a "devilish" figure that may challenge the gods and instigate terror upon the world. Significantly, in different occasions, Tamburlaine refers to himself as a 'Shepherd'. This may assert the protagonist's ability in transcending his lower status and achieving a high status. The protagonist even identifies himself with Jove, the controversial mythological figure: 'Jove sometimes masked in shepherd's weed'. The figure of Shepherd may also carry implicit religious connotations:

There is (..) a particular kind of irony playing around Marlowe's consistent depiction of Tamburlaine as *anti*-shepherd, preying on his neighbours 'like a fox in harvest time', as Mycetes has it (Part One, 1,I, 31) and 'Threat'ning the world with high astounding terms'(Part One, Prologue, 1.5) instead of singing the pastoral songs of the shepherd. At the same time, moreover, Tamburlaine offers an equally ironic fit with two of the other stereotypes of the shepherd: he is a lover, and when he insists that he is a lord, he reminds us of how many of the apparently simple shepherd of Elizabethan literature turns out to be princes in disguise. In this context, too, Tamburlaine's war on religion takes on new and richly ironic meaning, since the good shepherd was one of the standard metaphors for Christ.²⁷

Throughout the plays, the protagonist's character is identified with various mythological figures. He is so often identified with Jove, Mars, Phaethon, and Hercules. ²⁸Tamburlaine's identification with Jove figure may carry significant implications. The figure of Jove, as it has been described in old mythology, is an archetypal model of courage and defiance. He gains

²⁷. Hopkins, 2008, p.133.

²⁸. Cunningham, 1999, p.56.

power by dethroning his father King Saturn. So, by alluding to this figure, Tamburlaine attributes to himself heroic qualities. Similar to Jove, Tamburlaine aspires for greatness through the use of power. Both figures also represent a symbol of defiance against the high order. Tamburlaine's challenge higher authorities recalls similar act by Jove against his father king:

Tamburlaine's identification with Jove is evident in these lines:

The thirst of reign and sweetness of a crown,

That caus'd the eldest son of heavenly Ops

To thrust his doting father from his chair,

And place himself in the empyreal heaven

Move'd me to manage arms against they state.

What better precedent than mighty Jove?(*Tam.P1:ActII, Scene VII*) 12-17)

Thus, challenging authority, earthly or divinely, and striving for the 'crown' are the main significant themes of the play. Tamburlaine's ambition, however, is not sanctioned by moral and ethical constraints. This may had triggered ambivalent reactions by the audience:

Tamburlaine is "superhuman in his relentless ambition, and this sets him beyond considerations of ordinary morality. Members of an Elizabethan audience would not necessarily have rejected this, despite the homilies and other exhortations to respect established authority. They might have been excited by Tamburlaine's indifference to the ideology of hierarchy and deference, and even by his disregard for ethical injunctions."²⁹

Like the protagonist himself, the figure of Jove, referred to in the play may carry complex meanings. It could be taken as a symbol of power and strength which may inspire

²⁹. ((AS Quted ...)Sinfield, Alan, *Falutlines: cultural materialism and the politics of dissident reading*, Oxford and New York : Oxford University Press (2001) , p.239.

heroism and glory; while at the same time, it could be viewed as subversive element against the fixed established order. Nevertheless, beside being a model of rebel and defiance, Jove is also referred to as the protagonist's protector: This is asserted in Tamburlaine's claim that 'Jove himself will stretch his hand from heaven/ to ward the blow and shield me from harm.' Through such identification, the protagonist may ascribe to himself divine qualities. This may also provide a heroic image for Tamburlaine: :

(Tamburlaine) rejoices in Jove's protection, as he rejoices also in being the *protege*' of Nature, Fortune, 'fates and oracles of Heaven', and his uniquely propitious stars. He proclaims himself Jove's scourge, his 'wrathful messenger'. At his death, he boasts that Jove snatches him to heaven, esteeming him 'much too good for this disdainful earth.'³⁰

The protagonist even claims that his power is much greater than Jove. In these lines, Tamburlaine's defiance of Jove, symbolically, is an implicit challenge against the Divine Authority since Jove in more than one occasion referred to as the symbol of Supreme Deity:

Jove, viewing me in arms, looks pale and wan,
Fearing my power should pull him from his throne
Where'er I come, the Fatal Sisters sweat,
And gristly Death, by running to and fro
To do their ceaseless homage to my sword; (*Tam.P.1, ActV,Scene1,391-94*)

Tamburlaine's great aspiration for glory, especially his quest for the *crown*, also become the supreme object of other's admiration. In away, his heroic achievements become the realization of other's dream of glories. Some find in his ambition the possibility to achieve the unattainable goal; that is, transcending one's lower status to a higher one. Theridamas, for

³⁰. Cunningham, 1999, p.56.

instance, justifies his desertion of Cosroe side and joining Tamburlaine's camp: "For he is gross and like the massy earth, / That moves not upwards, nor by princely deeds". Likewise, Usumcasane views Tamburlaine a great leader who could win him enormous glories, similar to the ones achieved by the great Jove. Here, in these lines, the protagonist, once again, is identified with Jove:

For us, when Jove did thrust old Saturn down,
Neptune and Dis gain'd each of them a crown
So do we hope to reign in Asia,
If Tamburlaine be plac'd in Persia. (*Tam, P.1, Act 11, Scene VII, 36-39*)

Aspiring "“*earthly crown*“, interestingly, becomes the object of unattainable desire by Tamburlaine and his followers. However, the 'crown' exceeds its literary meaning to become "the symbol of the ultimate earthly ambition, of something beyond the grasp of ordinary man."³¹. In this speech, similar to Tambourine, Theridamas aspires for great glories :

A god is not so glorious as a king
I think the pleasure they enjoy in heaven,
Cannot compare with kingly joys in earth;--
To wear a crown enchas'd with pearl and gold,
Whose virtues carry with it life and death;
To ask and have, command and be obey'd;
When looks breed love, with looks to gain the prize,--

³¹ . Daiches, David. *A Critical History Of English Literature: Shakespeare to Milton*, Volume 2, Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd., 1960, New Delhi , The Ronald Press Company (1960) , (1979),p.281.

Such power attractive shines in princes' eyes. (*Tam.P.1; Act II, Scene V, 58-64*)

Here, Theridamas express his desire to gain the earthly crown..He even finds earthly crown more important than the heavenly one. For Theridamas, as for other followers of Tamburlaine, the earthly crown becomes the ultimate object of glory.

However, Tamburlaine's quest for glory far exceeds the earthly crown. He even exalts and magnifies himself above king's authority. He may view the earthly crown as an object for glory but not an end in itself. In other words, the earthly crown becomes a means for gaining the heavenly crown:

Earthly crown can be celebrated as an ultimate in itself, 'perfect bliss and sole felicity'. This affirmation is given one placing by contrast with the phrase that looks towards higher glory, 'both our souls aspire celestial thrones.'³²I

Moreover, in the play, the protagonist shows unsatisfied appetite for more glories. The more power he gets, the more ambitious he becomes. He even finds pleasure in inflicting pain and terror upon opponents. His humiliating, somehow sarcastic, treatment of Mycetes may prove his ruthless nature:

Tamburlaine : Is this your crown?

Mycetes Ay. Didst thou ever see a fairer?

Tamburlaine You will not sell it, will ye?

Mycetes Such another word, and I will thee executed.

Come give it me.

Tamburlaine No. I take it prisoner.

³². Cunningham, 1999, p.62.

Mycetes You lie. I give it you

Tamburlaine Then 'tis min'. (*Tam.Pi*, Actii, Scene iv, 27-34)

In this scene, Tamburlaine's "playing with the crown" is a symbolic degradation of Mycetes kingly status. Challenging and degrading earthly authorities latter on become a common pattern in the play. There are occasions that "conquered kings are harnessed, bitted, reined and whipped: they draw Tamburlaine's chariot"³³ Through such acts, the protagonist demonstrates his dominance over earthly authorities. This also represents a challenge to the Divine Right of Kings:

For an Elizabethan audience, the image of a king reduced to appalling physical dignity is at once a shocking affront to proper ceremonial form and a reminder of the impermanence of all worldly prosperity.³⁴

Tamburlaine's rhetorical skill, similar to his physical strength, plays a role in making his character so great. The play's prologue noticeably refers to his distinctive rhetorical skill : ' Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine / Threatening the world with high astounding terms,' The difference between Tamburlaine's rhetoric and other characters is noticeable throughout the play. "Interestingly, Tamburlaine's power is rhetorically as well as physically aggressive"³⁵. In fact, much of Tamburlaine's heroic image that will be constructed throughout the play is framed due to his strong rhetorical skill. Characters challenged by Tamburlaine soon

³³.Blamires, Harry. *A Short History Of English Literature*, Routledge ; New edition of second revised edition (1984), p. 44.

³⁴ Munson, Deats And Logan, A. Robert , *Placing The Plays Of Christopher Marlowe: Fresh Cultural Contexts*, (England ; Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008,) p 33.

³⁵ .Vaught, Jennifer. C, *Masculinity And Emotion In Early Modern English Literature, England, Aldershot ; US, Burlington : Ashgate Publishing Company,(2008),p.74.*

acknowledge his rhetorical skill. Paradoxically, Tamburlaine employs such heroic and threatening rhetoric as an effective means for consolidating his power.

In the play, the difference between high and low rhetoric reveals the difference in power relations between the protagonist and other characters. On different dramatic occasions, Tamburlaine's superiority over his enemies is asserted. Noticeably, most of Tamburlaine's military conquests begin by verbal wars. "Words are weapons to be 'manage(d)' (3.3.131) in verbal duels, part of the play's expression of power"³⁶. In this speech, for instance, Tamburlaine manifests his magnificent power through his defiant rhetoric:

By this my sword that conquered Persia,
Thy fall shall make me famous through the world
I will not tell thee how I'll handle thee,
But every common soldier of my camp
Shall smile to see thy miserable state.(*Tam.* P 1, Act iii, Scene iii, 82-86)

In this speech, Tamburlaine's heroic nature is displayed through his strong and defiant rhetoric. Such strong rhetoric by Tamburlaine certainly made a great impact on the audiences. They were fascinated by the character's heroic speeches as much as his heroic physical power. Similar to other heroic plays during that period, Tamburlaine's heroic speeches reflected the public's desire for heroism and bravery in an age characterized by various military conquests.

Moreover, the contrast between different levels of rhetoric also reflects character's different power status. For instance, Mycetes status is degraded due to his lower rhetoric. In this

³⁶-Marlowe, Christopher., *The Complete Plays*, Edit: Romany, Frank. And Lindsey, Robert, London, Penguin Classics ; New ed Edition (2003), p.580.

speech Mycetes laments himself for not being able to produce strong speeches, similar to the ones by Tamburlaine:

Brother, Cosroe, I find myself agriev'd;

Yet insufficient to express the same,

For it requires a great and thundering speech: (*Tam.P1 , Act.i, Scene i, 1-3*).

In this scene, Mycetes is portrayed as weak character. His weakness is due to the lack of rhetorical skill. This character is set in opposition to Tamburlaine whose thundering speeches challenge both earthly and heavenly authorities. Whereas Tamburlaine's heroic character draws admiration from his loyal followers as well as his foes, Mycetes weak character becomes a subject of laughter. When faced by Tamburlaine, he proves to be a weak leader and flees the battlefield. Tamburlaine.

Tamburlaine's persuasive rhetoric is also as effective as his heroic language. It could shift the balance of power in his favor and win him support even from his enemies. Theridamas, for instance, is amazed by Tamburlaine's persuasive ability and he praises him : ' No Hermes, prolocutor to the gods,/ could use persuasions more pathological'. Here, Tamburlaine's character is elevated to divine status due to his astounding heroic rhetoric. "The implication is that Tamburlaine is beyond even the most rhetorically skilled of the deities and thus functions as a type of god himself."³⁷

On many occasions, the protagonist alludes to the element of *fire* as a symbolic projection of his ambition. The play also contains many references to the element of fire. For

³⁷. Cheney, Patrick, *The Cambridge Companion To Christopher Marlowe*, Edit: Cheney, Patrick & Cheney.G.Patrick, UK, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.128.

instance, elements such as “ constellations, metors, fiery vision, which prefigure and reflect careers of conquest, are abnormal, yet they are phenomena of nature. They threaten the stable order and announce apocalypse”.³⁸.Significantly, Tamburlaine’s fiery ambition is as ambivalent as the power of nature. It can be taken either as a symbol of inspiration and wonder or as a source of destruction and fear. Consequently, the figure of Tamburlaine might attract both attractions as well as it can instigate fear and terror:

As a figure of life, he may command admiration--however reluctant we are to grant it --while provoking troublesome questions about vitality’s apparent dependence on egotism and on strife. As a figure of death, he excites terror and revulsion, but draws justification from the imperatives of heroic conquest and imaginative ardour, and from the supposed sanction of divine sponsorship. As a figure of both life and death,he can be felt to exemplify a daring command over extremes, stirringly defiant, bursting doors on Janus ‘temple’³⁹

So often, the protagonist’s character is “identified with the power of Death”.⁴⁰ On many occasions, the protagonist demonstrates his mastery over other’s destiny. Unlike most tragic characters,“ Tamburlaine appropriates the power of death, and, worse still, he can get away with this shocking arrogance.”⁴¹When the virgins plea for their lives, Tamburlaine shows no mercy at all, and instead shows his sword: “For, there sits Death, there sits imperious Death,/ Keeping his circuit by the slicing edge.”. Then, in a ruthless manner, he orders Techeles to “charge theses dames, and “shew” them his “servant’ **Death**” (Emphasis added). Yet, it is his “firmness of

³⁸- Marlowe, Christopher, *Tamburlaine the Great*, Edit: Eithne, Henson & Cunningham, S. Joseph.UK, Manchester ; University of Manchester Press, (1998), p.13.

³⁹. Cunningham, (1999) , p.48.

⁴⁰. See Neill, Michael. *Issues of Death: Mortality And Identity In Renaissance Tragedy*, Oxford : Clarendon Press; New York : Oxford University Press, 1998, p.98.

⁴¹ . Hadfield, Andrew, *Shakespeare and Republicanism*, UK: Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, (2005), p.60.

mind” and his indifference to the pain and suffering of his victims that make him so villainous and terrifying figure:

I will not spare theses proud Egyptians
Nor change my marital observations
For all the wealth of Gihon’s golden waves,
Or for the love of Venus, would she leave
The angry god of arms and lie with me.
They have refused the offer of their lives,
And know my costumes are as peremptory
As wrathful planets, **death**, destiny. (Emphasis Added) (*Tam.P1:ActV,Scene 1*)

This speech demonstrates another side of Tamburlaine which is far from being heroic. In this scene, the protagonist decides to punish his innocent victims for no apparent reason. Ironically, he justifies his action in terms of military ‘*custom*’. This act demonstrates that Tamburlaine’s actions are not constrained by any moral and ethical considerations. “The aggression is as overwhelming as it is motiveless, but what Tamburlaine’s words and gestures convey is the brutal pleasure and the crude eroticism of pure power.”⁴²

Significantly, Tamburlaine’s identification with the power of death is somehow consistent with Tamburlaine’s claim that he is the “Scourge and Wrath of God”, and he “is able to assume this god-like power without interruption through out his triumphant progress in the

⁴². Downie, J. Alan & Parnell, J.T, *Constructing Christopher Marlowe*, UK, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, (2000) (reprint 2001), p.80.

play⁴³. Beside his defiant and villainous attitude, Tamburlaine's appearance as well is identified with destruction and violence. In these lines, for instance, Tamburlaine's appearance is depicted as a figure of demise and fatality:

Black are his colours, black pavilion;
His spear, his shield, his horse, his armour, pulmes,
And jetty feathers, menace death and hell;
Without respect of sex, degree, or age,
He razeth all his foes with fire and sword. (*Tam.P1.ActIV, Scene i,60-64*)

For characters challenged by Tamburlaine, however, death becomes an escape from the pain and agony inflicted upon them. Agydas, similar to Bayzeth, chooses to die by his own hand than being tortured and humiliated at the hand of Tamburlaine. For Olympus, too, death provides an escape from Tamburlaine's soldiers:

Death, whither art thou gone, that both we live?
Come back again, sweet Death, and strike us both!
Contain our bodies! Death, why com'st thou not? (*Tam.PII.Act111, SceneIV*)

In these lines, Olympus appeals for 'sweet Death' to save her from her agony. Her use of the words "sweet Death", implies that she considers death more merciful than Tamburlaine's power. This furthermore asserts Tamburlaine's image as an agent of Death and destruction.

Similarly, Zenocrate finds peace and comfort in embracing death. Her emotional plea for death is in clear contrast to Tamburlaine's defiant speeches. In this speech, Tamburlaine

⁴³. Hadfield, 2005, p.60.

symbolically projected as someone who holds control over her destiny:

But let me die, My love , yet let me die;

With love and patience let your true love die

Your grief and fury hurts my second life.

Yet let me kiss my lord before I die, (*Tam.PII,ActII,SceneIV,p.91*)

In clear contrast to Tamburlaine's defiant attitude towards death, Zencorate embraces her own death with courage and patience. In away, her hopeful vision of a "second life" may carry certain symbolic implications.

Although hers is not an explicitly religious death, it would have satisfied Renaissance Christians; she is an exemplum of faith, patience, hope, and courage. Since there is no remedy, she bravely (one is tempted to say "manfully") goes to it, and dies during the playing of music, that Renaissance symbol of harmony.⁴⁴

Besides being depicted as a Goddess of beauty and love, Zenocrate is also depicted as an emblem of Deity. Significantly, her "divine" presence is associated with order and moral values against Tamburlaine's chaotic and evil nature. Her death, symbolically, represents an end of a union between two opposite forms of characters and two different ethical values. More importantly though, her death represents a challenge to Tamburlaine's quest of immortality; that is, his aspiration to gain "the celestial throne" and consequently, placing "himself in th' emperyeal heaven". In a speech, Tamburlaine, express his rage and anger against that challenge:

Proud fury and intolerable fit

⁴⁴. Spinrad, (1987), p.134.

That dares torment the body of my love

And *scourge the scourge of the immortal God!* (Emphasis Added) (*Tam. P.II, ActII, SceneIV*)

Tamburlaine's grave tragic flaw is his belief that he could overcome death merely through physical strength. In this speech, for instance, Tamburlaine's defiant rhetoric against death is very much similar to the ones against earthly rulers:

Casane and Theridamas, to arms!

Raise cavaleros higher than the clouds,

And with the cannon break the frame of heaven,

Batter the shining palace of the sun

And shiver all the starry firmament,

For amorous Jove hath snatched my love from hence,

Meaning to make her stately queen of heaven (*Tam.PII, Act.II, Scene.IV, 102-107*)

In the lines above, the protagonist vows revenge on Death in retaliation for the loss of his beloved Zenocrate. Ironically, Jove is no longer viewed by Tamburlaine as a heroic figure to be identified with, but rather depicted as antagonist against his will. Ironically, whereas, "Tamburlaine's self identification with the universal power of King Death goes virtually unchallenged"⁴⁵ throughout the first part of the play, his eventual death at the second part of the play may prove otherwise. Tamburlaine's sudden 'sickness' may mark a dramatic shift in his fortune. He is no longer able to wage military conquests against his enemies, nor winning further 'earthly crowns'. However, Tamburlaine stays defiant and vows revenge against Death.

⁴⁵. Neill, 1998, p.95

Also, as the play reaches its climax, Tamburlaine's defiance against mortality is furthermore asserted and modified, adding a new layer of complexity to the character. "Tamburlaine continually advertises the subversive and blasphemous nature of its plot, reminding the audience that what they are watching challenges a whole range of traditional beliefs and values"⁴⁶. Tamburlaine's act in keeping Zenocrate's body unburied could be viewed both as a subversive and blasphemous act in itself. Moreover, his order to destroy and sack the "cursed city" of Damascus in retaliation for the death of Zenocrate furthermore asserts his defiant image:

This cursed town will I consume with fire,
Because this place bereft me of my love.
The houses, burnt, will look as if they mourn'd;
And here will I set up her statua,
And march about it with my mourning camp,
Drooping and pining for Zenocrate. (*Tam.P.ii, Act.ii, Scene iv,137-42*)

However, Tamburlaine's attempt to bring Zenocrate back to life turns to be futile. He desperately challenges Death and vows more destruction and ravage. "But (Tamburlaine) cannot prolong Zenocrate's life. All he can do is to keep her corpse with him, "Embalm'd with cassia, ambergris, and myrrh" (Part 11, 11.iv.130), and by so doing pretend to have defeated death."⁴⁷

Thus, challenging death is one of the most significant themes of the play. Unlike most tragedies, *Tamburlaine* does not conform to Aristotelian or Elizabethan's convention of tragedy

⁴⁶.Hadfield, (2001), p.60.

⁴⁷ .Marlowe, Christopher, *Tamburlaine The Great: Parts 1 and 11*, Edit: Jump.Davies, John, USA, University of Nebraska Press, (1967), p.xx.

in which the emphasis is on the fall of a tragic hero due to some tragic flaw. In contrary, the play offers a new type of hero whose actions deviates from the very the norms and convention of Aristotelian tradition of tragic hero. The most ambivalent aspect of Tamburlaine's character, probably, is his defiant act against his own mortality. This subversive act by Tamburlaine, within the literary context, may also mark a radical shift regarding the concept of 'Death':

As Neill and Mullaney suggest, in the shifting, changing world of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, it is no longer possible to deal with death in a simple fashion. More specifically, it is no longer possible to contain the significance of death within the old religious, institutional framework. New ideas, new doubts, and new uncertainties undo the thinking that surrounds death and, with it, tragedy.⁴⁸

Tamburlaine's sudden illness may mark a reversal in the protagonist's fortune. Such shift in protagonist's fortune or *peripeteia* , as mentioned in Aristotle's *Poetic*, is a necessary element in the development of the plot of a tragedy . It also marks the final phase of the tragedy where the protagonist recognizes his follies and ultimately denouncing his acts. That is what one might expect to happen in *Tamburlaine*; that is, viewing the protagonist recognizing his grave mistakes and denouncing his atrocities. "There is, though, nothing here of the language of repentance or last minute deathbed confession which were to become stock resources of the drama (Neill 1997: 207). Instead, what we have is still the language of classical conquest, with death and the gods are the mortal enemy."⁴⁹ In other words, the play is not confined to the rise and fall or pride-fall pattern which is a basic element in morality or 'De Casibus tragedy'. Despite his fatal illness, Tamburlaine's rhetoric is as defiant as ever and he does not show any

⁴⁸. Dutton, Richard & Howard.E,Jean, *A Companion To Shakespeare's Works: The Tragedies*, Volume 1, Malden, MA and Oxford : Blackwell Publishing Ltd. (2003), p. 25.

⁴⁹.Dutton And Howard, (2003), p.27.

signs of weakness in facing his own mortality. In these lines, Tamburlaine challenges his bodily illness because it proves his human limitations and consequently contradicts the kind of god-like image he already constructed for himself:

What daring god torments my body thus,
And seeks to conquer mighty Tamburlaine?
Shall sickness prove me now to be a man,
That have been term'd the terror of the world?
Techelles and the rest, come, take your swords,
And threaten him whose hand afflicts my soul (*Tam.P.ii*, Act v, Scene.iii,45-50)

Similar to *Faustus*, Tamburlaine's tragedy lies in his inability to transcend his human limitations. In *Tamburlaine*, the protagonist's physical limitation may symbolize nature's constraints against his enormous ambition to gain the ultimate glory.

Also, like most tragedies, the protagonist's death signifies an end of his aspiration for further military conquests and more glories. This may indicate that the play in certain ways conforms to morality-play convention in having a tragic death at the end of the play. Even the protagonist himself implicitly refers to his decline in power and his near tragic end. This is clear when he laments himself for not being able to "pursue the field" after Callapine because his "martial strength is spent", and "in vain (*he*) strive(s) and rail(s) against those powers. Clearly "Tamburlaine's ambition receives a number of setbacks in Part 11 and that his defiance of Mohamed and burning of the other "superstitious books"(Part 11, V.I.172) bring down on him a divinely inflicted punishment".⁵⁰ So, in away, Tamburlaine's fatal illness and latter on his death

⁵⁰. Marlowe, Christopher. *Tamburlaine the Great, Part 1, 2*, Edit: Jump. D, John, Lincoln: University Of Nebraska

might be taken as a sign of divine retribution for his grave valiant acts. Even his death, somehow, is not projected as a heroic, and it is not the kind death one might expect from a 'Scourgey' and defiant figure such as Tamburlaine:

Although he has earlier claimed that "Sickness or death can never conquer me"(5.1.220), his deathbed raging is a form of denial and bargaining that violates the standards for a courageous death set forth in the death literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance alike.⁵¹

What is significant, however, is Tamburlaine's act of defiance in the face of his own mortality. When confronted with death, Tamburlaine, with defiant tone, expresses his rage and vows revenge on mortality:

Villain, away, and hie thee to the field!

I and mine army come to load thy back

With souls of thousand mangled carcasses,-- (Tam.PII, ActV,SceneIII)

In these lines, the protagonist challenges death just as he does against his enemies. Regardless of his weakened body, Tamburlaine still strives for more glories. "In dying, his own body is consumed with a fever which is expressive of his entire insatiable. But his dying is also seen as a breaking free of the fiery spirit from the body which to contain it"⁵² So, in certain way, Tamburlaine's defiance against his death may mark some heroic act.

To Tamburlaine, achieving immortality means keeping his legacy alive. This would only be achieved by the continuation of his unending conquests. One way is through instructing "his

Press, (1967) , p.xix

⁵¹. Spinrad, (1987), p. 139.

⁵². Henson & Cunningham, (1998) , 13.

worthy sons on how to manage his empire after him”⁵³ In these lines, the protagonist proves that he still desires for further military conquests and more glories:

Give me a map; then let me see how much

Is left for me to conquer all the world,

That theses, my boys, may finish all my wants.(*Tam.PII, ActV, Scene 111*)

Tamburlaine’s only regret is that he may die and leave his great military mission unaccomplished: “And shall I die, and this unconquered?” He, nevertheless, could maintain his legacy alive by instructing his faithful sons to continue his glorious path. Symbolically, this could also mean achieving immortality:

But sons, this subject, not of force enough

To hold the fiery spirit it contains,

Must part, imparting his impressions

By equal portions into both your breasts;

My flesh, divided in your precious shapes,

Shall still retain my spirit, though I die,

And live in all your seeds **immortality**.--(Emphasis Added) (*Tam.PII,ActV,Scene iii, 269-74*)

Tamburlaine’s coronation of his son is significant for different reason. Through this act, Tamburlaine could maintain his heroic legacy even after his death. This clearly contradicts morality- play tradition which so often ends with death ceremony of the villain. The ending of *Tamburlaine*, furthermore, is far from being tragic. The protagonist at the end of the play is not

⁵³. Edit : Jump, (1967), p.xx.

degraded in status nor conquered in military conquests. He even does not show any feelings of remorse or regret at the end of the play. More importantly, Tamburlaine does not show any sign of weakness when facing death but rather stays defiant as ever. Regardless of his physical weakness, Tamburlaine asserts his authority by commanding his sons and his loyal followers to continue his glorious path:

So, reign, my son; scourge and control those slaves,
Guiding thy chariot with thy father's hand.'
As precious is the charge thou undertak'st
As that which Clymene's brain-sick son did guide
When wandering Phoebe's ivory cheeks were scorched,
An all the earth, like Aetna, breathing fire:
Be warn'd by him, then; learn with awful eyes(*Tam.P.II,ActV,SceneIII*)

Ironically, Tamburlaine's death-defying act does not conform to Aristotelian or Elizabethan convention of tragic hero. In morality play, the audiences witness a fall of a tragic hero at the end of the play. This tragic end is necessary for the spectators to draw moral lessons from the protagonist's tragic flaw. Tamburlaine's (un)tragic end, however, does not provide the kind of moral lesson one might expect:

No longer merely a vehicle for moral lessons, tragedy in *Tamburlaine* aspires to move beyond a simple narrative of the fall of princes or tales of men overthrown by fortune. Indeed, as Wiggins(2000: 37) notes, that narrative of death does not happen. Tamburlaine is not overthrown and does not die at the end of the play, or at least the end of Part One.⁵⁴

Instigating complex and ambivalent responses is one of the main significant aspects of

⁵⁴. Dutton & Howard, (1998), p.26.

Marlowe's works. Overall, *Tamburlaine* creates "ambivalence in the response of his audience by intermingling non-judgmental aesthetic reactions with highly judgmental moral reactions"⁵⁵. The end of the play, in one way or another, subverts the ethos of morality plays because the main character does not experience a tragic death. Instead of instigating fear, the death-defying act rather stirs audience's admiration and affection. The audience would be amazed by the protagonist's quest of immortality and feel sympathetic to his desperate and futile attempt to overcome mortality. Tamburlaine death-defying act would certainly draw the audiences' admiration. However, Tamburlaine's shocking deathbed admission that he; "*the scourge of God, must die*", somehow, contradicts an early claim that: "sickness or death can never conquer me". This last moment tragic recognition, or *anagnorisis*, is to some extent compatible with the norms of morality tragedies in which the protagonist admits his follies and accepts his tragic fate, though not quite as evident as old classics. Furthermore, this last moment recognition or tragic admission by the protagonist is necessary in shifting the audience's response from mere affection and admiration into fear and pity:

For Aristotle, anagnorisis is a key element of plot in both tragedy and epic, together with 'peripeteia' (reversal) and 'pathos' (catastrophe). It generates pity and fear (*eleos* and *phobos*), which is the purpose of the mimesis inherent in tragedy, and it produces a 'shock' of surprise and emotion tied to wonder. It is - thus his own definition - a change from ignorance to knowledge (*gnosis*),..." (Yearbook of research in English and American Literature. Grabes, p.99).⁵⁶

⁵⁵. Edit: Deats, M., Sara & Lenker, T., Lagretta & Perry, G., Merry, *War And Words: Horror And Heroism In The Literature Of Warfare*, USA; Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Book (2004), p. 75.

⁵⁶. Edit: Grabes, Herbert & Diller, Jürgen-Hans, Isernhagen, Hartwig. *Real Yearbook of Research and American Literature*. Volume 7 (1990) Germany; Gulde, Turbingen: Narr, Gunter Narr Verlag (1991), p.99.

There is, somehow, inconsistency between the kind of heroic and defiant image of the protagonist being constructed through out both parts of the play and the sudden and unexpected tragic ending of the play, leaving the audience bewildered and even frustrated. This tragic ending may only serve to fulfill certain dramatic traditions, such as delivering a moral message by having the villain receiving divine retribution. Certainly, the sudden and (un)tragic ending would stir ambivalent responses, and, there is no easy way to determine whether such ending is tragic or not, or whether one should condemn the protagonist's acts or "applaud his fortune as (one) please!"

Some critics, such as Roy Battenhouse, argue that we are meant to condemn him and that the two plays 'offer one of the most grandly moral spectacles in the whole realm of English drama'. Others claim that audiences are invited to admire rather than to judge or condemn Tamburlaine. A third school of critics suggest that the plays were 'designed...to leave the audiences painfully suspended between admiration and disgust for Marlowe's protagonist'.⁵⁷

Determining the protagonist's character, hero or a villain, is also related to the nature of the play, The First Part asserts the heroic image of Tamburlaine. Ambivalently, The sudden shift in antagonist's fortune and his eventual death ambiguously is postponed until the very end of the Second Part. Some critics even doubted whether the two parts can be viewed as one play.

The first Part of *Tamburlaine* could be regarded as a complete play in itself. It can be read

⁵⁷. Keenan, (2008), p.102.

as a heroic prose or a 'pastoral romance'⁵⁸ for it begins with glorious conquests and ends with happy marriage and coronation ceremony. The heroic nature of the First Part is in clear contrast the tragic nature of the second part of *Tamburlaine*:

Modern critics, however, have been reluctant to second the play's claim to tragic status. Harry Levin states that "the First Part (of *Tamburlaine*) is not a tragedy; it is a heroic play or romantic drama", and latter critics have generally concurred. Other critics, such as Robert Egan and William Brown, have preferred the generic label "conqueror play". Tragedies may be trauma narratives but not all trauma narratives are tragedies, and while it may be a trauma narrative *Tamburlaine Part One* is decidedly not a tragedy according to modern criticism.⁵⁹

Ironically, while the first play asserts the heroic image of Tamburlaine, the second part would prove his villainous nature. The complexity of genre will complicate any attempt to determine the nature of the main character, a hero or a villain. Thus, Tamburlaine character is complex and can not be categorized within certain category; a hero or a villain. This indeterminacy and ambivalence of character is due to the contradictory and multifarious aspects of the character.

⁵⁸ . See for example Lisa Hopkins, *Christopher Marlowe, Renaissance Dramatist*, (UK; Edinburgh: Edinburgh university University Press, (2008),p.132. And See Christina Bacchilega and Danielle Marie Roemer, *Angela Carter and the fairy Tale* (Detroit, Michigan : Wayne State University Press(2001).p.111. Also See Joseph Sandy Cunningham, *Tamburlaine the Great*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University press (1999).p.40. And See Carmine Di Biase , *Travel and Translation in the Early Modern Period* , Amsterdam, Rodolpi (2006).p.255. See also Frances Wood, *The Silk Road : Two Thousand Years in the Heart of Asia*, Birkeley : University of California Press(2002).p.136.

⁵⁹ . Allard. R, James & Martin. R, Mathew. *Staging Pain, 1580-1800: Violence and Trauma in British Theater, England*; Farnham : Burlington, Ashgate Publishing Company, (2009), p.15.

Chapter Three

That act of individuality through transgression:

Marlowe employs the heroic image of the legendary Tamburlaine as the true embodiment of The New Renaissance Man. This already emphasized by some Renaissance historians. For Poggio Bracciolini, for instance, “Tamburlaine came to embody a new Renaissance idea”⁶⁰. Similar to *Faustus*, this play celebrates the protagonist’s free will and his sense of individuality. Marlowe’s plays mark a shift from the medieval morality play into new Renaissance dramas:

Marlowe’s tragedies are grounded in the Greek humanism that shaped Renaissance thought. Whereas medieval thought was grounded in morality and the pursuit of virtue, under the confidence that all of life was guided by divine providence, Renaissance thought gave expression to the freedom of will and the power of the individual to control his own destiny⁶¹.

Significantly, most of the play focuses on demonstrating the protagonist’s ability to master his own destiny. This is materialized in Tamburlaine’s ability to transcend his lower status and attain the highest glories. By affirming this, the play, in many ways, celebrate the Renaissance humanist’s optimistic view regarding man’s enormous potentialities.

Marlowe had been influenced by the writings of many Renaissance writers such as Pico, Machiavelli, and Ficino. For instance, Pico’s *The Oration on the Dignity of Man* “offered

⁶⁰ Ribner, Irvin, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, London; Routledge, 2005, First published in 1965, p.61

⁶¹ Myenhuis, E.Jacob, *Myth and Creative Process: Michael Ayrtton and the Myth of Daedalu, the Maze Maker*, Detroit; Wayne State university Press, 2003, p 48

Marlowe a spirited manifesto on behalf of human aspiration.”⁶² In his writings, “Pico offered a ringing statement of unlimited human potential: “To him it is granted to have whatever he chooses, to have whatever he will.”⁶³ Noticeably, some of these ideas reflected in Marlowe’s writings. In *Faustus*, for instance, the focus is on demonstrating the protagonist’s capability in mastering his own destiny, though he finally acknowledges the limitedness of his attempt. In *Tamburlaine*, as well, the author through the heroic figure of Tamburlaine parodies Pico’s emphasis on Man’s unlimited potentialities. This can be perceived in Tamburlaine’s constant shift of identities. “From his first entrance, Tamburlaine engages in a continuous act of self-creation.”⁶⁴ Such a process of identity shift is expressed by a “symbolic change of costume-rags into armour, shepherd into chivalric leader.”⁶⁵

Tamburlaine’s shift in character is evident in his contradictory attitudes; between chivalric and anti-chivalric. On different occasions, he demonstrates great ability in performing different roles. Certainly, Tamburlaine’s acting as romantic and chivalric hero contradicts his earlier attitudes. That kind of character transformation can be noticed through the different style of rhetoric used by the protagonist. The play’s courtly love rhetoric, for instance, provides a different side of Tamburlaine’s character. When he meets Zenocrate, for instance, Tamburlaine acts in a courtly manner and shows a great deal of nobility. That can be noticed in these lines:

⁶² Rasmussen, Eric And Bevington, M.David; Marlowe , Christopher, *Doctor Faustus A-and B-Texts*, Manchester; Manchester University Press, 1993, p 11

⁶³ Speilvogel, J.Jackson, *Western Civilization, Alternate Volume Since 1300*, Seventh Edition, Belmont, Thomson Wadsworth, p 352.

⁶⁴ Altman, B. Joe, *The Tudor Play of the mind: Rhetorical inquiry and the development of Elizabethan Drama*, Berkeley; University of California Press, 1978, p3 24

Come lady; let not this peal to your thoughts;

The Jewels and the treasure have ta'en

Shall be reserv'd, and you in better state

Than if you were arriv'd in Syria,

Tamburlaine uses different kinds of rhetoric for different purposes. When speaks to Zenocrate , he shows his noble and chivalric side of character. In the play, “love poetry becomes an alluring voice of failed resistance to material reality.”⁶⁶ Zenocrate may find it difficult resisting the seductive tone of Tamburlaine’s rhetoric. In the following lines, Tamburlaine offers a “series of promised pleasures”⁶⁷ if only the beloved Zenocrate will come and join him:

Thy garments shall be made of Median Silk,

Enchas'd with precious jewels of mine own,

More rich and valorous than Zenocrate's;

With milk-white harts upon an ivory sled

Thou shalt be drawn midst the frozen pools,

And scale the icy mountains' lofty tops,

Which with thy beauty will be soon resol'd

The seductive and persuasive tone of these lines echoes Marlowe’s *The Passionate*

⁶⁵ Henson And Cunningham, p. 25

⁶⁶ Henderson, E. Diana, *Passion Made Public: Elizabethan Lyric, gender, and performance*, Urbana; University of Illinois Press, 1995, p 121-123

⁶⁷ Ibid, 123

Shepherd. In this lyric poem, the speaker, similar to Tamburlaine, “presents a series of promised pleasures if the beloved will “Come live with me and be my love.”⁶⁸”

And I will make thee beds of roses

And a thousand fragment poises,

A cap of flowers, and a kirtle

Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle;’

Moreover, in *Tamburlaine*, love poetry is used as a substitute for unattainable objects. By promising a series of “alluring objects”, the protagonist is able to invoke Zenocrate’s imagination. Though reluctant in joining Tamburlaine at the beginning of the play, she yet proves to be powerful in resisting the various temptations by Tamburliane:

In spite of Agydas’s comic picture of Tamburliane, who, whether he looks for ‘ amorous discourse / will rattle forth his facts of war and blood’(One 3.2.44.5) (a joke that costs his life), Zenocrate ‘ digests ‘ her ‘rape’ (kidnapping) and returns his love.⁶⁹

In a certain way, love rhetoric, as an alluring object, becomes an essential expression of power since it is through such means Tamburlaine could assert his will over Zenocrate. Unlike Tamburlaine, whose character is related to excessive violence and power, Zenocrate’s character is depicted as a powerless figure and as an object of desire. “At her first appearance, Zenocrate looks like the heroine of romance, helpless, asking for pity for a silly maid’ in a ‘ distressed plight’, and Tamburlaine marshals magnificent Renaissance hyperbole to woo her.”⁷⁰The

⁶⁸ Ibid, p 123

⁶⁹ Henson And Cunningham, p 20

⁷⁰ Henson And Cunningham, p 19

contrast between the two characters is revealed in many ways. Zenocrate, in contrast to Tamburlaine, proves to be very passionate and very sympathetic towards those being victimized by Tamburlaine. She even becomes bewildered about the contradictory attitudes of Tamburlaine. “To Zenocrate , the sack of Damascus calls in questions nothing less than his love for her.”⁷¹ Zenocrate’s dilemma lies between her love for Tamburlaine and her moral obligation towards her family:

Now shame and duty, love and fear present
A thousand sorrows to my martyr’d soul.
Whom should I wish the fatal victory,
When my poor pleasures are divided thus,
And rack’d by duty from cursed heart?
My father and my first-betrothed love
Must fight against my life and present love; (Part 1, Act V, Scene 1)

However, Tamburlaine favours martial power than submitting to mere passion to Zenocrate ‘ Whose sorrows lay more siege unto (his) soul / Than all my army to Damascus’ walls.’ Tamburlaine’s immense ruthlessness is evident when he rejects Zenocrate’s plea to spare the city of Damascus from ravage and total destruction. Her “actual powerlessness, in spite of all praise, is demonstrated when she pleads: ‘ yet would you have some pity for my sake, / because it is my country’s, and my father’s’, to which Tamburlaine’s answers is ‘ Not for the world, Zenocrate, If I have sworn’.”^(72 P.1.4.2.123-5)

⁷¹ Cunningham, p.63

⁷² Cunningham And Henson, p.21

Whereas masculine power and martial honour are highly regarded by Tamburlaine, effeminate feelings and passionate desire, on the other hand, are considered to be un-heroic traits and must be suppressed. That complex relation between power and passion is ambivalently expressed in these lines :

But how unseemly is it for my sex,
My discipline of arms and chivalry,
My nature, and the terror of my name,
To harbor thoughts effeminate and faint! (*Tam*, Part ii, Act V, Scene ii, 111-14)

Tamburlaine, nevertheless, justifies his passionate love as a magnificent source of inspiration that would inflame his desire for more glorious conquests. For Tamburlaine, in other words, possessing Zenocrate's beauty becomes more an object of glory than an end in itself:

And every warrior that is raot with love
Of Fame, of valour, and of victory
I thus conceiving, and subduing both,
That which hath stoop'd the chiefest of the gods,
Even from the fiery---strangled veil of heaven,
To feel the lovely warmth of shepherd's flames,
And mask the cottages of strowed reeds,
Shall give the world to note, for all my birth,
That virtue solely is the sum of glory
And fashion men with nobility (*Tam*, Part 1,Act V, Scene ii, 117-27)

In this speech, the protagonist glorifies power over passion. He even views powers as the

true virtue that may 'fashion men with nobility'. It is Machiavellian virtue, "which has nothing to moral about it, for it exclusively designates the exceptional political ability and intellectual power of the Prince."⁷³ Parallel to Machiavellian Prince, Tamburlaine is a military hero who rises to power through the use of power. He may even be regarded as the most extreme example of Machiavellian hero: "he resembles nobody so much as Agathocles the Sicilian (11 Principe, Ch.8), both of them men who commit their excess out of a wanton delight in destructiveness."⁷⁴

Ambivalently, In Tamburlaine, power and martial justice are celebrated as the basic cornerstone of heroism and chivalry. The protagonist, on some occasion, affirms chivalric rules, while on other occasions, he subverts those rules. Certainly, there is a clear contrast between Tamburlaine's chivalric and courtly attitude towards Zenocrate and his brutal treatments of his opponents. Such contradictory attitudes by Tamburlaine arouse ambivalent reactions by other characters:

The Sultan had earlier disqualified him from the ranks of chivalry: after Tamburlaine's massacre of the inhabitants of Damascus, 'without respect of sex, degree, or age'..., the Sultan describes him as a 'Merciless villain, peasant / Of lawful arms or marital discipline.' Tamburlaine is not a gentleman, and he does not understand that slaughter has its own rules.⁷⁵

Ironically, though a Scythian shepherd, Tamburlaine is glorified as a chivalric and heroic figure, while those who have kingly status are shown as subject of sarcastic laughter. The first scene, for instance, provides an ironic and sarcastic contrast between the lowly born Tamburlaine

⁷³ Quoted in Mikko Lahtinen; Kolhi Kristina; Gareth Griffiths, *Politics and Philosophy: Nicolo Machiavelli and Louis Althusser's Aleatory Materialism*, Netherland; Leiden, Brill, Hotei Publishing, 2009, p 176

⁷⁴ Roe, Alan. John, *Shakespeare and Machiavelli*, Cambridge, 2002, p 197

⁷⁵ Cunningham And Henson, p.19

and highly status Mycetes. When challenged by Tamburlaine, Mycetes “evokes the laws of chivalry just as he is violating them by fleeing.”⁷⁶ In that scene, Mycetes vowed to win great battles against Tamburlaine. Ironically though, it is Tamburlaine, not Mycetes, who wins the last battle. So, the first scene ends by asserting the heroic image of Tamburlaine, and providing a humiliating image of Mycetes.

The play, through the contradictory attitudes of Tamburlaine and his opponents, constantly problematizes the ideals of cavalry and nobility. There is already a good deal of sarcastic laughter in the ironic contrast between Tamburlaine and Bajazseth. Again in that scene, Tamburlaine is glorified as chivalric leader while his opponent is degraded in status. But Tamburlaine’s latter attitudes; his brutal and humiliating attitude towards the caged Turkish leader are far from being heroic. Noticeably, such contradictory attitudes by the protagonist, especially his chivalric and anti-chivalric attitudes, evoke ambivalent responses in the audience. However, the more the spectators are drawn into admiration or even “sympathetic alignment with Tamburlaine, the more embarrassing is their realization that this is, in effect, complicity with a spirit of gloating atrocity and hubristic pride.”⁷⁷ So, across the play, the protagonist through his contradictory acts, asserts and subverts the convention of nobility and chivalry.

The protagonist’s constant assertion and subversion of the chivalric ideals is significant in many ways. Above all, it demonstrates the protagonist’s ability in transgressing his lower social position into a higher one. In other words, the protagonist through his transgressive acts

⁷⁶ Logan, A.Robert; Deats.Munson, Sara, *Marlowe’s Empery : Expanding his Critical Contexts*, London; Newark: University of Delaware Press, p 144

⁷⁷ Cunningham And Henson, p 28

complicates a whole set of notions regarding social categories. It is no longer clear what makes a good chivalric leader distinct from a non-chivalric one, and “what makes ‘nobility, as distinct from being a ‘peasant’, ‘villain’, ‘slave’ or Scythian shepherd.’”⁷⁸ Tamburlaine’s speech : ‘ Im a lord so my deeds may prove; / And yet a shepherd by my parentage..’, may provide a clear example of such paradoxical complexity. Through such complexity, the play, ironically, satirizes and ridicules the Elizabethan concepts of chivalry and courtly ideals:

An Elizabethan shepherd could not normally expect to become a gentleman, let it alone a lord: the rigidly stratified society of contemporary orthodoxy was organized as an ascending hierarchy of allegiance and responsibility, culminating in the immense and centralized might of the crown; peasants and aristocrats each had their place and were expected to remain in it, their lofty or lowly status defining the nature of their actions.⁷⁹

The play’s ambivalent dealing with the theme of chivalry “as a motif of romance and as a historical practice”⁸⁰ is significant. It signifies the radical changes chivalry as a political and social institution witnessed during the early modern era. It is during this period that new ideals such as chivalry or gentry disappeared or at least weakened while at the same time new ideas and conventions came to arise. “With the growth of commerce and industry, the feudal values of birth, military prowess, and a fixed hierarchy of lords and vassals decayed in favour of ambition and individual achievements.”⁸¹ So, Tamburlaine’s transgression of the chivalric and nobility

⁷⁸ Cunningham And Henson, p 16.

⁷⁹ Wiggins, Martin, *Shakespeare and the Drama*, Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2000, p 37.

⁸⁰ Quoted in D’Elden, Van. Cain; Akerhurst, R.F, *The Stranger in Medieval Society*, Minneapolis; University of Minnesota Press, 3 edition, 1998, p 63.

⁸¹ Jacob, R.James; Chase, Myma; Jaccob, C, Margaret; Perry, Marvin. *Western Civilization; ideas, politics, and society*, 9th Edition, Boston; Houghton Mifflin, 2009, p 298.

ideals should be understood within that changing historical context. Greenblatt in his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* reflects on such “Historical matrix”⁸²:

If we want to understand the historical matrix of Marlowe’s achievement, the analogue to Tamburlaine’s restlessness, aesthetic sensitivity, appetite, and violence, we might look not at the playwright’s literary sources, not even at the relentless power hunger of Tudor absolutism, but at the acquisitive energies of English merchants, entrepreneurs, and adventurers, promoters alike of trading companies and theatrical companies.⁸³

The protagonist’s transgression of various social roles, expressed in the constant change of identities, is a symbolic act of individuality or self-creation. Such transformation of identity begins from the early beginning of the play. In the early scene, the protagonist “appears as a shepherd who ‘means to be a terror of the world’. His first significant action is costume change: he throws aside his shepherd’s clothes and appears in full armour.”⁸⁴

The easiness by which Tamburlaine performs different identities is evident throughout the play. He is capable of mimicking what identity suits him; whether a chivalric or villain character. Through such symbolic acts of identity shifts, the protagonist demonstrates his ability in shaping his own destiny. By affirming the protagonist’s power over his own destiny, the play symbolically alludes to Renaissance ideas regarding man’s capacity in shaping his character according to his own free will. No one explained this better than Pico in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1463-1494):

⁸² See: Masten; Jeffery, Wall, Wendy, *Renaissance Drama 28, Drama and Performance studies*, Northwestern University Press, 1999, p 64.

⁸³ Greenblatt, Stephen, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1980, p.194.

⁸⁴ Womack, Peter, *English Renaissance Drama*, Oxford; Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006, p 136.

Man, said Pico, has the freedom to shape his own life. Pico has God say to man: “We have made you a creature” such that “you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer”⁸⁵.

Similar to *Faustus*, this play parodies Renaissance’s glorification of human potentialities, as expressed in the works of Pico, Bruno Machiavelli and Ficino. “Lucifer’s statement to Faustus in Doctor Faustus, ‘ though shalt turn theself into what shape thou wilt’, is ironically close to Pico⁸⁶’s premise concerning man’s unlimited potentialities. Significantly, both *Faustus* and *Tamburlaine* deliver a moral message about man’s unrestrained ambition. Both characters in these two plays undergo a process of transformation of character or *Becoming*. In *Tamburlaine*, that act of transformation of identity is expressed by the costume change or mimicking different roles. In other words, “the actor *becomes* the role; Tamburlaine becomes what his amour proclaims him to be. This symbolic act of transformation relates to the insistence in the play on heroism and address.⁸⁷” In *Faustus*, however, the protagonist’s symbolic transformation of character occurs not through the use of excessive power, as in *Tamburlaine*, but rather through the use of Magic. Not surprisingly, “one of the new and powerful Renaissance images of man was as the *magus*, the magician⁸⁸.” Clearly, the image of *magus* typifies man’s power and his unlimited potentialities. That kind of optimistic view regarding Man’s unlimited potentialities is expressed by Faustus:

⁸⁵ Perry, Marvin; Chase, Myra, Jacob, R. James; Jacob, C. Margaret, Jacob, R. James, *Western Civilization: Ideas, Politics, and Society*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2009, p 300

⁸⁶ Rasmussen And Bevington; David, p 11.

⁸⁷ Cunningham And Henson, p.25.

⁸⁸ Perry, Marvin; Chase; Myra; Jacob, C. Margaret; Jacob, R. James, *Western Civilization; Ideas, Politics, and Society*, Boston ; Houghton Mifflin Publishing Company, 2009, p.300.

O, what a world of profit and delight,
Of power, of honour, of omnipotence,
Is promised to the studious artisan

In the lines mentioned above, the emphasis is on Man's unique position in nature. This speech parallels another speech by Tamburlaine:

Nature that framed us of four elements,
Wearing within our beasts for regiment,
Death teach us all to have aspiring minds:
Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend,
The wondrous architecture of the world, (*Tam.* Part i, Act ii, Scene Vii, 18-22)

This speech seems more than of a Renaissance Faustian than the Scythian Tamburlaine. Here, again, Nature is celebrated as a source of inspiration and creativity. Such speech recalls the ideas expressed by many Renaissance writers regarding man's relation to nature. Central to these ideas was "the conception of a nature external to man, immanent and self-creating, a nature to be conquered by man through an infinite process."⁸⁹ However, just like Faustus, Tamburlaine evokes the laws of nature just as violating the same laws. In these lines, Tamburlaine's power exceeds the earthly limitations:

I hold Fate bound fast in iron chains,

And with my hand turn Fortune's wheel about

And sooner shall the sun fall from his sphere

⁸⁹ Heller, Agnes, *Renaissance Man*, London; Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1978, p 382.

Than Tamburlaine be slain or overcome. (*Tam*, Part 1, Act 1, Scene ii, 274-277)

The speech asserts the protagonist's will in mastering his own Fate than "accepting the place allotted to him in the hierarchical universe."⁹⁰ It recalls some of the most extreme ideas by some Renaissance thinkers during that era. Marlowe's Tamburlaine, "like the heroes of Machiavelli and Guicciardini, is the man who can master fortune and bend her to his will."⁹¹ These ideas, as expressed by Tamburlaine, represent a radical shift in the thinking of the Renaissance man regarding man's position in the hierarchical universe and his unlimited potentialities:

Renaissance thought and enlightenment rationality freed the individual from this great weight of history and tradition, at least in principle. No longer simply a small part of the medieval Great Chain of Being, the individual or human subject was reborn as sovereign or autonomous, ready and equipped to play a full part in the making of the world, but this time as a lead player⁹².

However, as in *Doctor Faustus*, this play is mainly "a critique of humanistic aspiration, not simply an endorsement of them."⁹³ Tamburlaine's sudden death, which puts an end to his strive to gain the ultimate glories, is symbolically presented as a result of his excessive ambition. Notably, the physician who treats Tamburlaine views his deteriorating health as a result of the disruption in the balance of the elements within his body:

⁹⁰ Rasmussen, Bevington And David, 1993, p 11.

⁹¹ Ribner, p.61

⁹² Huggins, Richard; Axford, Barrie, *Politics : an Introduction* 2 Ed., London; Routledge ; 2005, First published 1965, p 61.

⁹³ Rasmussen , Bevington And David, 1993, p 11.

Your veins are full of accidental heat
Whereby the moisture of your blood is dried,
The humidum and calor, which some hold
Is not a parcel of the elements (Tam, Part ii, Act V, Scene iii, 84-87)

Symbolically, Tamburlaine's sickened body, and latter his death, is projected as a result of his excessive desire for ultimate power. Such transgressive act consequently presented as a challenge against the laws of the hierarchical universe. The renaissance thinkers viewed the hierarchical universe as an organized system, and all smaller parts and units within that system are organized and regulated in harmonious and organized way:

The Renaissance body image manifested itself in a clearly defined outline, a sculptural form in which the proportions of the various parts to each other and to the whole defined harmonic relations that were replicas of the most general structural features of the cosmos⁹⁴.

Ironically, the play celebrates the protagonist's practice of Free will just as it renounces his excessive ambition in challenging Fate. Though "the hero could assert his will in opposition to fortune and triumph for a period; yet, finally he must be cut off by death."⁹⁵ So, the play's tragedy arises from the bitter contradiction between the early promise of great glories by the protagonist and his sudden and un- expected death, which symbolically asserts the limitation of his strive for ultimate glories. The message is clear; no matter how powerful and resilient a Man is, he is still chained by certain divine rules that cannot be broken.

Through such contradiction, the play satirically parodies the paradoxical relation between

⁹⁴ Ferguson, Harvie, *Modernity and Subjectivity; body , soul, spirit* , University of Virginia press, 2000, p 34.

⁹⁵ Ribner, 1965, p 61.

Man's free will and divinely pre-destination. Noticeably, "Renaissance is particularly intent upon establishing the freedom of the human spirit in opposition to Christian doctrines of divine predestination⁹⁶." This ambivalent ethical and philosophical theme is reflected in Marlowe's *Faustus*, as well as in Shakespeare's "*Hamlet* and *Macbeth*⁹⁷". However, in *Tamburlaine*, the emphasis is more on the protagonist's practicing of his free will, though through transgressive acts, than on his downfall, which surprisingly comes in un-tragic manner. Furthermore, through the trasgressive acts of the protagonist, the play raises moral and ethical questions regarding Man's unconstrained practice of Free will. Paradoxically though, the play, as in *Faustus*, raises more questions than delivering answers. What is clear, however, it delivers a critical discourse regarding Man's position in the changing world of the Renaissance England.

⁹⁶ Neibuhr, Reinhold, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian interpretation*, Volume 1: Human Nature, London, Westminster, John Konox Press, 1996, p 21.

⁹⁷ SEE : Moseley, C , *English Renaissance Drama : a Very Brief Introduction to Theatre and Theatres in Shakespeare's Time*, Tirril Hall, Humanities –Ebook .co.uk , 2008, p 54

Chapter Four:

The Complex Context of Making *Tamburlaine*

Understanding Renaissance drama would be incomplete without taking into account the socio-political religious contexts. Shakespeare's plays, for instance, should be viewed within its political context "in order to understand the ways in which his plays either subvert or contain the representation of power in his society."⁹⁸ Similarly, Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, "presents a complex personal drama interwoven with political intrigue and focused on social issues, in recognizable contemporary terms – and for that reason, distanced by being set in Iberia"⁹⁹. Marlowe's plays, as well, cannot be isolated from their socio-political context. His plays could be viewed both as a religious play and as political allegory reflecting on many different ambivalent issues during that time, depending on how the audiences at that or us as readers respond to them.

The play's most ambivalent aspect, probably, is its religious implications. *Tamburlaine* "is an extraordinary reorientation of the signs and conventions of religious drama and pageant, but it remains a drama presenting world by means of episodic scenic narrative."¹⁰⁰ Similar to the *Jew of Malta*, religious antagonism, especially between the Muslims and Christians, is a significant

⁹⁸ McGrail, Mary Ann, *Tyranny in Shakespeare*, Lanhan; Maryland, Lexington Books, 2001, p 3.

⁹⁹ Braunmuller, A.R, *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1990, 2003, p 208.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p 208.

theme of the play. There are various references to many historical events such as the takeover of Constantinople by the Muslim Turk. In certain way, the play glorifies the historical figure of Tamburlaine whose military conquests halted the Turkish advance and saved Constantinople, at least for a period of time, from falling into their hands. The heroic acts by Tamburlaine have been recognized by many historians. Daniel Riggs, for instance, pointed out, “that the God of Revelation sent Tamburlaine to rescue Constantinople from the Turks¹⁰¹”.

The religious antagonism between the Muslims and the Christians is depicted in the symbolic contrast between Bayzeth and Tamburlaine. In contrary to the heroic image of Tamburlaine, Bayzeth is portrayed as an arrogant and ruthless leader whose kingly status is gradually degraded. The audiences certainly were pleased by the imminent downfall of the Turkish leader. Such scene might have provided a “prophetic” vision about the near downfall of the Muslim empire. During that time, significantly, “prophesies of Turkish doom¹⁰²” were very popular among the people. It might have reflected the sense of fear and anxiety the European felt about the coming danger of the Muslim Turks:

Prophesies of Turkish doom expresses the collective desires and anxieties of the Europeans who were faced with the possibilities of their own unthinkable defeat at the hands of the Muslims. These desires acted out in Marlowe’s *Jew of Malta* as well as his *Tamburlaine* plays, all of which look back at historical episodes of Turkish defeat and offer to English audiences the delightful spectacle of Turkish humiliation¹⁰³.

¹⁰¹ Hopkins, Lisa, *The Cultural uses of the Caeser on the English Renaissance Stage, Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama*, Aldershot; Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008, p 5

¹⁰² Cunningham And Henson, Ed, 1998, p 2.

¹⁰³ Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, p56.

Tamburlaine's victory over Bayzeth, the act highly praised by the Christian "apologists"¹⁰⁴, may win him admiration for a period, yet his latter actions may prove otherwise. That kind of contradiction is also reflected in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. Besides, *Tamburlaine*'s shifting alliances raise questions about the extent of his religious alignment. It is unclear which Tamburlaine is on: The Muslim or Christian. Although his acts at some stage helped the Christian cause, yet his latter actions prove otherwise.

Some Renaissance historical accounts described the historical Tamburlaine as typical "representation of Ottoman 'turk.'"¹⁰⁵. There are many similarities between Marlowe's Tamburlaine and the fearful character of the Turkish conqueror depicted in numerous historical writings. Marlowe's depiction of Tamburlaine's figure may also reflect the common stereotypical assumptions about the Muslim Turk. The author may have used this fearful historical figure in order to raise awareness about the grave dangers posed by the Turkish conquerors.

Similar to *Faustus*, the play contains some implicit anti-Catholic elements, taking into consideration the growing anti-papal sentiment in England during that time. The scene in which Tamburlaine uses Bayzeth as his footstool "may carry a suggestion of an anti-papal nature"¹⁰⁶. The astounding, somehow "apocalyptic", rhetoric used by the protagonist may also bring into mind the kind of language used by many militant protestants during that period. Moreover, Tamburlaine's sacking of the ancient city of Babylon may also carry some symbolic meanings:

¹⁰⁴ SEE: Foakes, A. Reginald, *Shakespeare and Violence*, Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2003, p 38.

¹⁰⁵ Dimmock, Matthew, *New Turks : Dramatizing Islam and the Ottoman in early modern England*, Aldershot; Ashgate Publishing Limited, . 2005, p 136.

¹⁰⁶ Cunningham, 1999, p 46.

Babylon, for Londoners at the time would be biblical, and in particular would recall the references to Babylon in the *Book of Revelation*, a text that is so important for the protestant's typological reading of history within apocalyptic, providentialist framework.¹⁰⁷

However, the symbolic representation of Tamburlaine, in religious context, is still ambiguous and interminable. Tamburlaine's victory over bayzeth , the Muslim conqueror, "may implicitly assert "the claim of Christian apologists that in war the wicked may serve as instrument of God's punishment of sin"¹⁰⁸, yet, his latter actions would make that claim invalid. Tamburlaine's villainous acts, especially the destruction of the cities of Damascus and Babylon, prove that he is merely motivated by personal desire for power than serving a certain religious deity. There is a great deal of uncertainty about the role of deity or God in changing the course of the play. "God's presence or clear evidence of his interventions is never realized directly or directly felt in the world dominated by God's alleged "scourge", Tamburlaine.¹⁰⁹" So, in the absence of the role of divine power in the play , Tamburlaine becomes , at least till the end of Part One, the one who changes the course of the play. The sudden and expected death of Tamburlaine, which mysteriously happiness as a result of sickness furthermore complicates the issue of God's presence or clear evidence of his intervention in changing the course of the play.

As in *The Jew of Malta*, in this play both Islam and Christian faith are ridiculed and parodied satirically. Unlike most tragedies, the overreaching pride of the protagonist "is not punished by the hand of God; rather, the gods are silent, unlistening, asleep-passive and

¹⁰⁷ Vitkus, p.55

¹⁰⁸ Foakes, R. A, *Shakespeare and Violence*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 38.

¹⁰⁹ Vitkus, p 46.

unheeding at best; at worst, nonexistent¹¹⁰.”

The play reflects on the religious antagonism in different ways. The protagonist does not make it clear which religion he aligns himself with and which one he dismisses. On different occasions, for instance, the protagonist asserts and negates the existence of different deities. In these lines, for instance, the protagonist may assert the existence of certain deity:

There is a God, Full of revenging wrath,
From whom the thunder and the lightening breaks,
Whose scourge I am, and him will I obey.
So, Casane; fling them in the fire. (*Tam*, P ii, Act V, Scene I, 181-84)

However, in the next lines, the protagonist expresses his doubt and distrust in all kinds of deities:

Seek out godhead to adore-
The God that sits in heaven, **if any god**, (Emphasis Added)
For He is God, and none but he (*Tam*, P ii, Act V, Scene 1, 198-200)

Here, the protagonist shows uncertainty about the existence of ‘*any god*’. Through such kind of contradictions, the play problematizes the questions of religious alignment and religious conversion, which can be considered a significant theme of the play.

Some critics considered the play as anti-religious or “blasphemous” work. These critics make a connection between Marlowe’s works and his personal beliefs. Robert Green’s

¹¹⁰ Grande, Y. Troni, *Marlovian Tragedy: The play of Dilation*, London, Blaknell University Press; Associated University Press, 1999, p 66.

outstanding phrase “daring God out of Heaven with that Atheist Tamburlaine”, may intended to “characterize the whole play, and may imply that “ both Tamburlaine himself defies God and that he (along with Marlowe) *deserves* divine retribution.¹¹¹” Certainly, some of Marlowe’s controversial ideas are reflected in his literary works. Accordingly, Tamburlaine’s speeches in certain way may reflect some of these ideas.

Even though some of the speeches by Tamburlaine could be regarded as anti-religious; yet, it does not follow that the whole play is a “blasphemous” work. It is also difficult to make a literary judgment based on the author’s own beliefs. “Even if Marlowe was an atheist, he may have wanted to write an orthodox play¹¹²”. Marlowe must have been aware of the regulations and restrictions set by the state censorship authority. Nevertheless, it is difficult to determine whether *Tamburlaine* be considered a “blasphemous” work or not, taking into consideration the controversy surrounding the author’s personal views regarding religion.

Beyond its religious implications, the play may reflect on many controversial political issues during the Elizabethan period. Some critics already identified the political implications of some of Marlowe’s plays. Curtis C. Bright, for instance, reads Marlowe’s *Edward 11* “as a political allegory in which Gaveston and the Spencers stand for Burghley and, by analogy, King Edward for Queen Elizabeth.¹¹³” Bright furthermore argues that in both *Massacre of Paris* and *Edward 11* “ Marlowe began to use his knowledge not in the service of the Cecilian position but to pen subversive political allegory discernible as given aid and comfort to the Catholic

¹¹¹ Cunningham, p 22.

¹¹² Posner, A.Richard, *Law and Literature*, Harvard University Press, 3rd Revised Edition, 2009, p 307

¹¹³ Posner, p 307.

enemy.¹¹⁴,

In certain plays by Marlowe, significantly, there is an implicit allusion to England's Queen Elizabeth. *Dido Queen of Carthage*, for instance, "is a play that has Elizabeth I encoded –though much more faintly–in its protagonist¹¹⁵". In *Tamburlaine*, as well, there is covert allusion to Queen Elizabeth's character and her way of ruling. Through the contradictory attitude of *Tamburlaine*, be it heroic or anti-heroic, the ambivalent and contradictory character of Queen Elizabeth is both celebrated and ironically criticized as well.

Overall, *Tamburlaine* is a play about military conquest and demonstration of power. One must understand the complex political context of this play in order to be aware of its political implications. During the Elizabethan era, England faced internal religious strifes and external dangers such as the Spanish Armada.:

The armada years were a moment of great national sentiment. And the emotions generated by the current conflict are displaced onto the action of the play. Behind *Tamburlaine*, the upstart of central Asia lies the newly emergent England of Elizabeth. And behind Bajazeth, the emperor of Turkey lies the overwhelming imperial power of Spain¹¹⁶.

Since playhouses were the most effective mode of expression; heroic plays, especially the ones about heroism and military conquests gained enormous popularity. Such plays intended

¹¹⁴ Pitcher, John, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, Volume 12, London, Associated University Press, Inc, 1999, p 3336.

¹¹⁵ Jankowski, A. Theodora. *Women in power in the Early Modern Drama*, University of Illinois Press, 1992, p 133.

¹¹⁶ Zunder, William, *Elizabethan Marlowe: Writing and Culture in the English Renaissance*, Hull, University Press Limited, 1994, p 14

to stir national sentiment among the public. As many critics pointed out, "the 1580s and 1590s in England were a time when the theatre-going public displayed a seemingly unquenchable appetite for plays about military conquest."¹¹⁷ So, similar to other plays during that time, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* may have been written in order to fulfill the popular demand for heroism and military conquests.

Even though the historical setting of the play is not typically English one, yet, it mirrors the tumultuous political situation of England during that period. Moreover, "Tamburlaine on stage looked more recognizably English than Mongol."¹¹⁸ Even the play deals with issues related to the current situation of England such as religious antagonism and external military conquests.

The play's celebration of power and display of violence may have energized the audience's desire for heroism. This may also have provided an opportunity for the audience not only to enjoy the performance but also to identify with the hero:

In a period of almost continual wars involving England in some measures, the flamboyance of a theatrical spectacle that made war and violence exciting, and showed that everyone, a mere peasant, might become a hero, had enormous success.¹¹⁹

The play propagates militarism and the use of violence as the only means for heroism. In other words, power becomes the true virtue of a real warrior. In these lines, for instance, the protagonist demonstrates his pleasure in waging war and inflicting terror upon his victims:

¹¹⁷ Perry And Lenker; *Deats, war and words: Horror and Heroism in the Literature of Warfare*, p 298, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004, p 298.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 300

¹¹⁹ Foakes, 2003, p 38-39

So, shall our swords, our lances, and our shot
Fill all the air with fiery meteors.
Then, when the sky shall wax as red as blood,
It shall be said I made it red myself,
To make me think of naught but blood and war (*Tam*, P, Act iv, Scene ii, 51-55).

Much of Tamburlaine's heroic image, aside from the excessive use of violence, is constructed through the show of power and the display of physical strength." In this theatre, 'showing 'is power, and power lies in eloquence of gesture and the symbols of passion and of authority.¹²⁰' The protagonist even uses his rhetorical skill as a means to display his heroic martial characteristics. In these lines, for instance, the protagonist asserts his strong will by means of his rhetorical skill:

For *will* and *shall* best fitteth Tamburlaine,
Whose smiling stars give him assured hope
Of martial triumph ere he meet his foes.
I that am term'd the Scourge and Wrath of God,
The only fear and terror of the world, (*Tam*, P1, Act iii, Scene iii, 41-45).

Ironically, Tamburlaine's caring for the act of self-presentation; showing and displaying heroic images, recalls Queen Elizabeth's self-presentation tactics. It is widely assumed that " the power in the court of Queen Elizabeth—a monarch who presumably ruled with no standing army,

¹²⁰ Cunningham And Henson , 1998, p 25

police force, or secret service—was largely dependent on image-making strategies.¹²¹” Such strategies helped the Queen not only maintaining her power but also legitimizing her authority. So, “by framing Tamburlaine’s inaugural action as seductive self-presentation, the play parodies specifically Elizabethan methods of governance.¹²²” In fact, Elizabeth was well aware of the impact of her alluring and seductive images upon her subjects. In this speech, the Queen acknowledges the significance of ‘showing’ or performing certain roles in order to sustain her authority:

“(We) princes,” she told a deputies of Lords and commons shortly after *Tamburlaine* was produced, “ are set on stage, in the sight and view of all the wordly duly observed. The eyes of many behold our nations; a spot is soon spied in our garments, a blemish quickly noted in our doings.”

For Tamburlaine, the “act of self-presentation” or mimicking certain social roles is a deceptive measure used to conceal his true identity. This character, ambivalently, is not a descendant of a kingly line but rather a shepherd in disguise. So, by assuming different social roles, the protagonist becomes a subject of admiration as well as condemnation. To resist challenges against his ruling, Tamburlaine fashions a mythological image for himself. He is not only Jove, but The Scourge and Wrath of God, Moreover, Tamburlaine “believes himself invincible, and his alternately aggressive and seductive tactics persuade others, not only that he believes this but that he is.¹²³”

¹²¹ Pitcher, p 334.

¹²² Barbour, Tyler. Richmond, *Before Orientalism: London’s theatre of the East, 1576-1626*, Cambridge, Cambridge University press , 2003, p 54.

¹²³ Qouted in : Barbour, p 50.

However, as military ruler, Tamburlaine is faced with the dilemma between his “effeminate” passion for Zenocrate, (-stemmed from his Shepherds’ nature), and his masculine and martial desire for ultimate power. Yet, the protagonist, on different occasions, demonstrates his abilities to assume different social roles. Through such complexity, the play may implicitly allude to the complex character of Queen Elizabeth. As a military ruler, Queen Elizabeth “deployed multifarious identities to silence anxieties about her¹²⁴,” gender as well as her social background. She demonstrated great ability to perform or “show” different aspects of characters. “She was not only the blessed Virgin, but Deborah and Judith. She was purity and beauty, but she was also a warrior.¹²⁵”

Faced by many critics who questioned her authority, Elizabeth needed to prove that she could rule as good as any other male ruler. When needed, Elizabeth showed no reluctance in using force against his enemies. Heish in her essay, ‘*Queen Elizabeth 1 and the Persistence of Patriarchy*’, argues that:

Elizabeth needed, (...), to reinforce her power by negating her femininity; she could only secure her status as ruler by ‘transcending ‘the limitations of her sex, i.e. by repudiating it: ‘I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too¹²⁶

Significantly, Tamburlaine could also assert his status as a military ruler by “transcending the limitations of” his social class. He proudly asserted that in his speech: ‘ I am a .lord, for so my

¹²⁴ Alfar, L, Cristina, Leon, *Fantasies of Female Evil: the Dynamics of Gender and Power in Shakespearen Tragedy*, London; University of Delaware Press , 2003, p 58.

¹²⁵ Alfar, p 57.

¹²⁶ See: Alfar , *Fantasies of Female Evils*, p-53-58.

deeds shall prove / And yet a shepherd by my parentage.’ So, ironically, one may find a parallel between Tamburlaine’s attempts to transcend the limitations of his social status and Elizabeth’s about her gender.

The play, also, reflects on many controversial issues during Queen Elizabeth’s ruling. Tamburlaine’s way of consolidating of power recalls Elizabethan’s way of ruling. The many execution acts in the play (– justified by Tamburlaine as part of his military justice-) recalls Elizabeth’s similar acts during her ruling. Several acts in the play which show how different kings and queens are dethroned or crowned may carry symbolic implications. For instance, “the transfer of Zabina’s crown to Zenocrate and then to Tamburlaine¹²⁷ may carry significant political implications. The contrast between Zabina and Zenocrate; their conflict over the crown, may implicitly refer to the bitter strife between Queen Elizabeth and Mary Stuart over the English crown. Here, in these lines, the conflict over the crown is illustrated

Theridamas : Give her the crown, Turkess, you were best.

Zabina: Injurious villains, thieves, runagates,

How dare you thus abuse my majesty?

Theridamas: Here, madam, you are empress, she is none.

Theridamas: (*As Zenocrate crowns him*)

Not now, Theridamas, Her time is past.

The stage image of coronation and dethroning acts might have evoked conflicting responses by the audience during that time. “The words...her time is past’, would appear to refer to the

¹²⁷ Hadfield, Andrew, *Shakespeare and Republicanism*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p 60.

execution of Mary Stuart.¹²⁸ As if the play, through such scene, justifies the use of violence by Queen Elizabeth to consolidate her power. Moreover, the play may allude to England's political situation through the troubled state of Persia. Similar to the state of Persia, England during this period was tormented by internal and external strife. Marlowe through such political allegory may have warned the English public over the dangers faced the nation if the Queen not acted in a determined manner.

The play *may* also explore issues that were related to England's early colonial policies and its overseas explorations. Recent criticism "linked the relentless march of Tamburlaine with imperial conquest and with the expansion of English trade."¹²⁹ The play's imperial theme is to be traced in Tamburlaine's unsatisfied appetite for territorial conquests and unlimited glories.

Similar to other dramas written during that period, the play "exemplifies(s) the west's fascination with and distrust of the exotic East¹³⁰." Such dramas ironically offered a discursively constructed image of the Exotic East in opposition of the European West. In such dramas, the Oriental East is projected as a strange land filled with mystery and danger or as a place for adventure.

In *Tamburlaine*, the discursively geographical division between " East" and "West¹³¹" is drawn in a way that is consistent with the pro-orientalist and imperialist dominant discourse. The

¹²⁸ Ibid, p 60.

¹²⁹ Perry, p 309

¹³⁰ Banuham, Martin, *The Cambridge guide to Theatre*, The Edinburgh Building ; Cambridge ; Cambridge University Press, 1995, p.48.

¹³¹ See ; Barbour, p 56.

play through the unlimited power of the protagonist and his glorious conquests justifies military conquests and oversea explorations.. In these lines, for instance, Tamburlaine promises Theridamas fortune and glory if he joins him in his great military conquests:

If thou wilt stay with me, renowned man,
And lead thy thousand horse with my conduct,
Besides thy share of this Egyptian prize,
Those thousand horse shall sweat with martial spoil
Of conquer'd kingdoms and of cities sack'd
Both we will walk upon the lofty cliffs,
And Christian merchants, that with Russian Sea,
Shall vail to us as lords of all the lake.
Both we will reign as consuls of the earth,
And mighty kings shall be our senators, (

Here, the foreign land is depicted as a place of mystery and exotic riches. Through such exotic presentation, the play intended to evoke the audience's imagination. This may implicitly justify England's early colonial and its overseas explorations. The play's imperial theme is to be traced in Tamburlaine's heroic speeches, similar to this one:

I will confute those blind geographers
That make a triple region in the world,
Excluding regions which I meant to trace,
And with this pen reduce them to a map,
Calling the provinces, cities, and towns, (Tam, P1, Act iv, Scene iv, 81-85).

Tamburlaine's figure could also be viewed as a symbolic representation of the "Oriental

Other”. This mysterious figure; his strange outlook and his cruel attitudes might have instigated ambivalent responses by the audience. They were fascinated by his villainous acts just as denounced his lack of moral values. Marlowe may have used this figure in order to warn the English public against the danger of the oriental powers or legitimize England’s military dominance over the newly colonized nations. Emily Batels, in her book, referred to the ambiguous representation of oriental figures in the early modern literary texts:

...the demonization of Oriental rulers providing ‘a highly charged impetus for England’s own attempts to dominate the East’, whilst their valorization provided’ a model for admiration and imitation, shaming or schooling the English into supremacy, or providing an excuse for defeats¹³².”

Similar to *The Jew of Malta*, the play’s foreign; its complex socio-political context, implicitly, mirrors England’s political situation during that period. Marlowe used a foreign setting for certain purposes. He may have used a foreign setting in order to the play more acceptable for the state censorship authority. Paradoxically though, *Tamburlaine* may criticize England’s early colonial policies than glorifying it. Certain scenes in the play such as the massacre of the Virgins by Tamburlaine’s soldiers might have recalled the brutal attitudes of the colonial powers in the newly discovered colonies. Indeed, the play raises many moral and ethical questions regarding England or Europe’s early imperial and colonial activities.

The play, nevertheless, is far more complex than to be interpreted merely as pro-orientalist or not, or even whether to consider Tamburlaine character as a “popular hero or an imperialist tyrant.” In fact, the play is open to different, even contradictory interpretations. The play , nevertheless,

¹³² Quoted in : Bartles, C.Emily, *The Double Vision of the East: Imperial Self-Construction in Marlowe’s Tamburlaine*, Part One’ Renaissance Drama 23 , 1992, p 5

could be viewed as religious or political allegory, depending on how we consider its complex context.

Chapter Five

Conclusion:

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed the complexity of the play's protagonist. I have traced many aspects of complexities that are related to the character's dramatic function as well as its symbolic and allegorical implications. My approach was comprehensive and multi-faceted and it covered many different, even contradictory, interpretations of the play. It also examined the play's complex nature; whether it confined to the convention of the morality play or not

I conducted my critical approach in three chapters, and each one discussed certain complexity. The first chapter discussed the complexity related to the character's dramatic function, whether a hero or villain. The second chapter concerned with investigating the protagonist's symbolic aspect within the context of the Renaissance; whether the protagonist could be viewed as a symbolic depiction of the Renaissance hero or not. The third chapter, however, inquired the allegorical and symbolic aspects of the character within the larger sociopolitical and religious context of Elizabethan society.

The first chapter demonstrated how difficult it is to determine the dramatic function of the protagonist. This has a lot to do with the protagonist's contradictory characteristics. The protagonist demonstrates enormous ability in "showing" different aspects of character. This would complicate the audience's perception of the character and consequently judging his dramatic function; whether a hero or a villain.

Much of Tamburlaine's heroic image is constructed through the 'show' of power and the display of physical strength. By fashioning himself into different mythological heroic figures, he is able to consolidate his power over other characters. He is so often identified with a whole range of mythological heroic figures such as Jove, Hercules and Achilles. He even elevates himself to demi-god status. His claim to be the "Scourge and wrath of God" furthermore asserts his heroic and semi-divine image. However, on different occasions, the protagonist demonstrates anti-heroic traits, which further complicates the audience's responses. So, throughout the play, the audiences are faced with the difficulty on how to perceive or judge the character.

Moreover, unlike many other tragic heroes, Tamburlaine is not a descendant of noble origin, nor is his tragedy due to sudden shift in Fortune. He even attains his authority by means of villainous acts. The most villainous act by the protagonist is his defiance against his own mortality. Regardless of his weakened body, Tamburlaine still strives for more glories and even defying his own mortality.

Ambivalently, Tamburlaine's death-defying act may not accord with the Aristotelian or Elizabethan conventions of tragic heroes. In such tragedies, the tragic hero, when faced with his own mortality, recognizes his follies and painfully accepts his tragic fate. But Tamburlaine, in contrary to many tragic heroes, stays defiant till the end of the play. He even commands his faithful sons and loyal followers to continue his glorious conquests by conquering more territories. Even his death is far from being tragic one. The protagonist dies of old age and sickness and there is little indication to suggest that it happens due to divine retribution. Certainly, Tamburlaine's defying acts throughout this play may trigger ambivalent responses by the audience. They may denounce his villainous acts just as they may admire his heroic acts.

The play's 'generic identity' may add another layer of complexity. This has a lot to do with how to view the play; that is, whether we have one play or two plays. Some critics claim that Marlowe may have added Part 2 in order to fulfill the morality convention in having a tragic end at the end of the play, or merely to respond to the popular demand.

The first *part* of *Tamburlaine* asserts the heroic and glorious image of Tamburlaine. This part could be regarded a complete play in itself. It could be read as a heroic play or a pastoral romance or even as a comedy since it ends with ceremonial marriage.

Ironically, the eventual death of the protagonist is delayed till the end of the second part of the play. So, while the first part of the play may assert the heroic character of the protagonist, the second part, nevertheless, proves his villainous nature.

Beside its aesthetic significance, the protagonist's character may embody certain values and ideas prevalent during the Renaissance period. Marlowe may have employed the heroic image of the legendary Tamburlaine as true embodiment of The New Renaissance Man.

In *Tamburlaine*, as in *Faustus*, the emphasis is on demonstrating the protagonist's enormous ability in shaping his own destiny. This manifests itself in Tamburlaine's ability in transgressing his humble origin and attaining the highest status. Such act of transformation of character or identity is expressed through the symbolic change of social roles; a shepherd into a king or a warrior into a lover.

Through the contrast between Tamburlaine and his opponents, the play critically satirizes certain Elizabethan values and concepts. Ironically, though a shepherd, Tamburlaine is glorified as a heroic figure while those of highly status are degraded and humiliated. Thus, it is unclear

what makes a noble or chivalric character distinct from a shepherd or a king. Through such kind of complexity, the play satirizes Elizabethan concepts of social categories.

So, in many ways, the play asserts the protagonist's sense of individuality and his exercise of his free will. But such act of individuality is achieved through excessive use of power. Tamburlaine, in certain way, "resembles" the most "extreme example of Machiavellian" hero. Marlowe through such a villainous character may have satirized the most extreme ideas by Renaissance intellectuals such as such Pico, Poggio and Machiavelli.

However, while the protagonist could assert his "free will" for a period, yet he finally admits his limited power. The protagonist's eventual death could bring an end to his unlimited aspiration for power. The message is clear; no matter how powerful and resilient Man is, he is still "chained" by divine rules that cannot be broken. Through such complexity, the play questions certain controversial theological and philosophical issues such as Freedom of Will and Predestination. So, beyond its aesthetic aspect, the play through the complex character of Tamburlaine puts into question a Whole set of controversial ideas prevalent during the Renaissance period.

The play's complex context may also add another layer of complexity regarding how to define protagonist's character. Marlowe's play could be viewed both as a religious play and as a political allegory, reflecting many controversial religious and political issues of that period. The play, in certain way, glorifies the historical character of Tamburlaine whose military conquests for some time helped the Christian cause against the Muslim Turks during the Christian-Islam conflict. That kind of religious antagonism is evident in the symbolic contrast between Tamburlaine and Bayazeth.

Marlowe's Tamburlaine, however, similar to the historical figure, is ambivalent and contradictory. Tamburlaine's victory over Bayzeth, the act highly praised by the Christian apologists, may win him admiration; yet, his latter acts prove otherwise. Some Renaissance historical accounts even describe Tamburlaine as a typical representation of the Muslim Turk. There is already a parallel between Marlowe's Tamburlaine and the fearful and bloodthirsty Turkish figure depicted in many historical books. The dramatist may have employed the historical figure of Tamburlaine in his play in order to warn the public against the danger posed by the Ottoman Turks against the Western Christians, especially after the take-over of Constantinople by the Turks.

Similar to *Faustus*, the play may implicitly propagate some protestant ideas. For instance, the stage image of Tamburlaine using Bayazeth as "his footstool" may implicitly carry anti-papal meaning. There is, somehow, a similarity between the protagonist's astounding and apocalyptic rhetoric and the one used by militant Protestants during that era.

However, similar to the historical figure, Tamburlaine's religious alignment is unclear. It is difficult to assume which side Tamburlaine is on: the Christian or the Muslim. One may even argue that Tamburlaine's anti-divine or anti-religious attitude may mirror the author's own 'anti-religious' attitude towards religion, taking into account the author's controversial ideas towards religion.

The play also reflects on many political issues during Elizabethan period. At that time, England witnessed a deep political crisis. England as a newly Protestant state was threatened by Catholic Spain. The country also witnessed deep internal political crisis. So, like many other heroic plays during that time, *Tamburlaine* was set on stage in order to inspire loyalty and

patriotism among the general public.

The author may have employed the heroic character of Tamburlaine as an allusion to Queen Elizabeth's character. As if the play through the heroic character of Tamburlaine intends to glorify Queen Elizabeth's way of ruling and legitimize her method of consolidating power. In certain ways, Tamburlaine's excessive use of power for gaining the crowns may also allude to Elizabeth's Machiavellian method to consolidate her authority.

The play may also explore issues related to England's early colonial policies and its overseas exploration. The imperial theme is to be traced in Tamburlaine's unsatisfied appetite for territorial conquests. In a way, the play may serve England's pro-colonial and pro-imperial policy across the globe.

However, Tamburlaine's figure could also be viewed as symbolic representation of the 'Oriental' power. Marlowe may have employed such ambivalent, yet ruthless figure, in order to create awareness among the English public against The Oriental powers, especially the Muslim Turks. Such representation of the 'Other' may also intended to legitimize England's military dominance over the newly colonized colonies.

Paradoxically though, the play may criticize England's early colonial policies than glorifying it. Tamburlaine's violent and ruthless attitudes against his victims may have recalled similar acts committed by the early colonialist powers. The play through the ambivalent attitudes of the protagonist may raise many moral and ethical questions regarding England or Europe's early colonial and imperial policies.

However, the play is far more complex to be interpreted as pro-colonial or pro-colonial

ones. Consequently, it is difficult to assume whether Tamburlaine represents a popular national hero or ruthless imperial leader.

So, the play's character is complex and multifaceted in various aspects. This character is subject of different, even contradictory interpretations. The character's complexity is due to its aesthetic significance as well as its political and religious implications. So, it was necessary to apply a comprehensive and multifaceted approach in order to account for the different aspects of the character. Such broad and multifarious approach provided new perspectives regarding the protagonist's character and it also offers new possibilities for further interpretations. Such approach would also be useful to be applied to other literary works by Marlowe, or even other Renaissance dramatists.

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