THE THEME OF THE EVIL IN MAN'S NATURE IN THE PLAYS OF CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

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THE THEME OF THE EVIL IN MAN'S NATURE IN THE PLAYS OF CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

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PREFACE

This paper offers a new theme for Marlowe's seven tragedies, one which I believe resolves what appeared to be inconsistencies in them. The tragedies seem to me to have a significance for the twentieth century that has not yet been fully realized. Studies of the plays in terms of ideologies have divided scholars; the study of Marlowe's ideas of the limitations of human nature I hope will prove more fruitful. Since the theme of the evil in man's nature applies to all the plays, I have devoted two chapters to consideration of the plays generally and only one to tracing the development of the theme in a single play--Tamburlaine, Part I. I am conscious of areas still to be explored.

I have been immeasurably assisted in the definition of this theme by Dr. David S. Berkeley, who was generous with books and ideas, time and thought. I am grateful, too, for Dr. William R. Wrays's patient insistence on clarity and simplicity and for his many helpful suggestions.

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CHAPTER ONE

A NEW THEME FOR MARLOWE'S PLAYS

The fundamental requirement of all human communications is surely that they make sense. Literature, though it transcends the adherence to logic of ordinary human exchanges, is nonetheless bound to some degree by this requirement: the plays of Christopher Marlowe meet it best when they are understood to depict the evil of man's nature. The importance of this theme does not lie on the surface of the plays, but neither is it especially cryptic. Taking into consideration the energy, the ingenuity, the imagination, and the massive learning that has characterized much of the scholarship of this century, particularly the scholarship since World War II, it is surprising that the line of thought that leads to Marlowe's judgment of man as tragically evil has not been unraveled earlier. There are special circumstances in modern criticism of Marlowe which may account for this oversight.

In 1925 Dr. Leslie Hotson published an account of his researches into the circumstances of the death of Marlowe. In retrospect, Hotson's slim volume assumes momentous stature. In spite of his matter-of-fact manner, we see him as a scholar-hero who, viewed most sympathetically, has some

Promethean characteristics: he creates; he brings light and truth. Viewed more moderately, Hotson is at least the equal of M. Dupin. The process he employed understandably stirs the imagination of scholars; the product equally engages scholarly minds. Hotson's researches showed Marlowe, the Puritan awful-example, the profligate and rake, who "euen cursed and blasphemed to his last gaspe," "stabd to death by a bawdy Seruing man, a riuall of his in his lewde loue," as the fabrication of Thomas Beard and Francis Meres, the one narrowly puritanical, the other ill-informed. In the light of Hotson's further discovery of a letter from the Privy Council excusing Marlowe's absence from Cambridge on the grounds of government service, requesting that he be awarded his M. A. degree without delay, and repudiating the gossip that he had deserted to Reims and Roman Catholicism, the clear outlines of Marlowe the unruly rebel deliquesced. The career begun at government fiat and ended in the presence of a government agent is touched enigmatically with the complexities of Elizabethan politics: we see both the extent to which our former view of Marlowe was a stereotype and the foolish oversimplification of such a view.

It is possible, however, that Hotson's researches have disproportionately colored subsequent criticism and that the influence of this tremendous gain in knowledge has not been entirely benign. The most direct result of it has been a continuation of biographical investigations. Hotson's discoveries provoked questions at every point. Extending the

available information about Marlowe's life has attracted the energies of twentieth century scholars to a degree that can best be appreciated when one realizes how long it was before there was any information at all about Marlowe's life. In 1820 James Broughton wrote to the parish church at Deptford and confirmed with evidence of his death the fact, grown dim in some quarters, that Marlowe had actually lived. Nearly a hundred years elapsed between that elementary piece of investigation and the identification of Marlowe's assailant; one hundred and five years passed before Hotson elaborated the brief reference in the Deptford parish records to the detailed account now at our disposal. But since 1925 William Urry[2] and Mark Eccles[3] have traced Marlowe in Canterbury, Cambridge, and London; Frederick Boas[4] and Tucker Brooke[5] have unearthed more documents; A. K. Gray[6] and Ethel Seaton[7] have produced cogent speculations; and John Bakeless has amassed both findings and speculations in a mammoth Tragical History of Christopher Marlowe.[8] These efforts, surely inspired by Hotson, are certainly commendable, but they are not specifically literary. If a demarcation between literature and literary history were respected, we would only be the richer for them, but unfortunately Hotson's discoveries seem to have so strengthened the interest in Marlowe's life that much of the criticism of this century has been marred by the influence of biographical data. Biography has intruded into interpretation or superseded interpretation, and the plays are looted for passages

that tend to confirm suppositious insights derived from documents. An extreme example of this surely reprehensible technique is a four hundredth anniversary book, In Search of Christopher Marlowe, by A. D. Wraight and Virginia Stern,[9] in which the plays are used to provide captions of photographs of Canterbury, Cambridge, and London. We have now only to wait for the technicolor version of the Marlowe story.

The example of The Lives of the English Poets reminds us of the unquestioned respectability of biography as a starting point for sound literary judgments; "The Life of Milton" reminds us, however, that even in the most judicious minds esthetic appraisal is easily distorted by biographical considerations. In Marlowe's case, the hazard of distortion is increased by the sensational character of the facts we have about him. In accounting for the biographical bias of the contemporary criticism we must reckon, too, on an occupational predilection: all those engaged in the study of literature must with one level of the mind love a good story. Marlowe's life makes one, not the less interesting for our fragmentary knowledge of it.

In addition to a regrettable biographical emphasis, there is also evident in the criticism of Marlowe a tendency to interpret literature subjectively and to make idiosyncratic responses the matter of critical commentary--a tendency still strong in England where perhaps the magnificent example of Coleridge produced a lingering conviction of the

suitability of such an approach. One may wonder, however, whether all these circumstances are sufficient to account for the limitations of the criticism of Marlowe, criticism which it is now quite common to denounce as inadequate. Clifford Leech, for example, in the introduction to a collection of critical essays devoted to Marlowe, assesses twentieth-century scholarship as having achieved only the promising beginnings of a sound estimate of Marlowe.[10] In the early pages of a perceptive study of Marlowe, The Overreacher, Harry Levin makes a sharper criticism. Commenting particularly on the intensified biographical research since the publication of Hotson's book, Levin says, with a play on words that casts some doubt on his earnestness, "Without ceasing to hope for unpredictable discoveries, we ought perhaps to admit that the inquest is over."[11] He goes on to say, with indubitable earnestness, that F. S. Boas' recent "interpretative synthesis. . . faithfully mirrored the state of Marlovian studies: the chapter devoted to one of the dubious characters who happened to be present when Marlowe was killed is actually longer than the chapter on Hero and Leander."[12] Similarly, Roy Battenhouse begins his book-length study of Tamburlaine with a statement of the deficiencies of existing works. He rejects "most modern interpretations. . . as markedly romantic" and cites F. S. Boas, John Ingram, Una Ellis-Fermor, and Philip Henderson as writing so as "virtually to abolish the distinction between drama and autobiography."[13] Those critics--Mario Praz, T.M.

Pearce, and John Bakeless--whom he distinguishes as not dominated by romanticism but still not free of the errors to which it leads, he calls "ruthlessly historical." In contrast to these opinions is Paul Kocher's statement at the beginning of his book, Christopher Marlowe: A Study of His Thought, Learning, and Character.[14] Kocher explicitly eschews reliance on the intuition of the critic and advocates instead forming an appreciation of "the dramatist's choice and treatment of sources. . . the background of the thought and custom of the period. . . the practice of other dramatists. . . the dramatist's own practice in the remainder of his work. . . his own personally held ideas. . . his manipulation of emphasis within the play."[15] Kocher differs from Leech, Levin, and Battenhouse by boldly accepting "the good gifts of the white witch of biography,"[16] but in spite of this divergence and in spite of the fact that his study is opposed in every detail to Battenhouse's so that the two books are poles apart in their conclusions, a more recent critic, J. B. Steane,[17] finds their methods identical: "Both studies. . . are based on what is, in its literal sense, a prejudice:. . . Kocher quotes unorthodox thinkers to support his theory about the Baines note; Battenhouse quotes orthodox moralists to support his interpretation. . . ."[18] Steane finds both displeasing: "The perversity of Battenhouse's conclusions only demonstrates the wrongness of Kocher's critical priorities and procedures."[19]

The dissatisfaction with existing criticism is carried

a step further by Irving Ribner in an article entitled "Marlowe and the Critics."[20] The biographical bias that pervades Marloviana is implicit in Ribner's conclusion: "If we examine the critical studies of the last fifty years, we find that they are not only remarkably few for a writer of such generally acknowledged stature, but that they reveal a state of confusion, with some critics seeing Marlowe in terms so radically different from those in which others view him that it is difficult to believe that all are writing about the same man."[21] Ribner reviews the most interesting of the contemporary critical theories, few of which are compatible, and comments particularly on the flat contradictions of Kocher and Battenhouse and their respective camps: "We cannot have a Marlowe who is on one hand a daring freethinker challenging the most widely accepted beliefs of his age, and on the other a pious orthodox Christian using the stage as a virtual pulpit for orthodox pronouncement."[22] The value of this statement is that it pinpoints the surprising polarization that has occurred in modern interpretations of Marlowe, but Ribner's bluntness should perhaps be qualified. Besides the atheist interpretation and the religious interpretation of the plays, many other specific instances of broadly divergent views may be adduced, some, of course, from the lunatic fringe of literature that has so enlivened Shakespeariana, but others from the solid center of scholarship. H.B. Charlton and R. D. Waller, for example, in the introduction to the Case edition of Edward II say of all the plays, "The

speeches do not have any marked intellectual quality. These heroes desire and suffer; they do not think."[23] This comment is hard to reconcile with Tucker Brooke's remark that the virtue Marlowe most esteemed was intelligence.[24] More directly opposed are the judgments of Philip Henderson and Ethel Seaton. In his book Christopher Marlowe, Philip Henderson comments, "It would seem, from the fragmentary nature of his work, that Marlowe was too rash and impatient by nature for careful scholarship, or even for prolonged application to any subject, though intellectually brilliant."[25] In tacit contrast, Ethel Seaton demonstrates that in Marlowe's use of Ortelius' Theatrum Orbis Terrarum "we find order for chaos, something of the delicate precision of the draughtsman for the crude formlessness of the impressionist."[26] Similarly, Levin credits to Marlowe innovations in verse and dramatic structure that altered the course of English drama,[27] but David Bevington thinks him so strongly influenced by the structure of the moralities that many of the plays are morally ambiguous, the traditional generic representation of moral conflict being incompatible with the realistic psychological development and secular context with which Marlowe fused it.[28] Other examples of contradictory opinions exist; their content does not seem so important as their variety and number.

So striking is the disparity of opinion about the plays that it seems reasonable to look for its cause beyond individual blindspots and changing tastes to qualities within

the plays themselves. In none of the instances of contradictory judgments is the disagreement inexplicable or the contradiction entire. A clear-cut division such as Ribner suggests does not really exist: one set of comments does not consistently appear with one reading, the other with its opposite; nor have all those writing about Marlowe attempted to distinguish in the plays an idea or a set of ideas that would explain otherwise puzzling qualities. Many critics--Steane is an instance--seem deliberately to have sidestepped the controversy. Nevertheless, the fact that many critics have made this attempt seems significant. First, on a very general level, it indicates the impression of intelligence which the plays convey. Evidently, sensitive reading produces respect for Marlowe's mind; evidently, the overall competence of the plays is so at odds with their inconsistencies that critics seek an interpretation which would encompass the inconsistencies. These attempts indicate, too, Marlowe's unmistakable sincerity. Marlowe is no facile craftsman like Wilde, for example, toying with emotions as with manners. The tone of the plays is more than intense: it is urgent. One senses in the books of Kocher and Levin, on the one hand, and of Battenhouse and Douglas Cole,[29] on the other, the same conviction: "He must mean something," and the same hope: "Perhaps this is it." The conviction earns our respect; the hopes are confounded. It would seem that Marlowe is among the dramatists who elaborate in all their plays a master theme. A wealth of scholarship and

ingenuity has been invested in the last few years to demonstrate as Marlowe's master theme either the lofty reaches of man's passionate nature or the dreadful consequences of sin. Because both readings derive from only part of the plays, both imply serious limitations in Marlowe as a dramatist; because one can only be demonstrated at the expense of the other, neither is convincing.

The cause of this critical impasse is not far to seek. It, too, can be traced to the plays, not to their effect of intelligence, nor to their intensity of tone, but to their subject matter. Again and again Marlowe dramatized the conflict between aspiration and limitation, between man's passions and God's laws. The almost universal tendency has been to assume that the weight of Marlowe's approval is behind one or the other of two irreconcilable forces. When Marlowe is thought to celebrate the splendor of human thought and energies, critics and scholars alike have ransacked their vocabularies in efforts to describe the soaring imagination of Marlovian heroes. These writers, to whom daring and intensity and triumphant imagination seem Marlowe's major theme, are, however, obliged to deplore elements of the plays as sensational, to characterize the plays as fragmentary, as immature. They note repetitions, unevenness, lack of humor, and an unpleasant taste for cruelty. The situation is reversed when Marlowe is interpreted according to the other school of thought. When the plays are read as a series of homiletic warnings--against lust,

against ambition, against avarice, against pride, against anger, even against blasphemy--these defects recede. Those to whom these moral lessons are most striking are inclined to defend the construction of the plays, to recognize in them the operation of inexorable logic, and to find in them a tough humor which has a precedent in the moralities. The sensational elements make the sermons more interesting; the cruelty which the heroes display is consistent with their function as case histories, that which is meted out to them is simple justice. Only the language of the plays and the heroic stature of the heroes are an embarrassment to those arguing the religious interpretation of the plays, for they seem to confuse the moral statements. The grandiloquence with which Dido, Tamburlaine, the Guise, Barabas, Edward, and Faustus are allowed to set forth their vices seems inappropriate. We seem to be invited simultaneously to admire these characters unrestrainedly and to recognize the inevitability of their piteous ends. Viewing the plays as moralities, we cannot do it. The moral scale seems mean; the moral framework proposed by Battenhouse and Cole seems too small: it makes the poetry extraneous.

A third way of reading the plays is possible: if Marlowe viewed man's aspirations to knowledge, to power, to wealth, on the one hand, and Christian injunctions to humility, to renunciation, to repentance, on the other hand, as immense forces of equal weight, as opposing verities, facts of existence that were irreconcilable, he might very well

have meant the conflict of man's instincts with God's ordinances to express a despairing recognition of the elements of man's nature which make inevitable the separation of man and God. The splendor of the passionate commitment of the heroes to their impious goals would be qualified from the first by irony; their recklessness parallels the hybris of Greek tragedy. We are not justified in believing that Marlowe himself challenges Christian morality: his characters do, acting upon instincts to love, to power, to wealth which are age-old and totally damned.

Understood in this way, Marlowe's plays embody the spirit of his age, but in a very complex way. Marlowe records, not the triumphant claims of man's interest in himself and his world which the magnificence of his heroes and their total abandonment to temporal preoccupations suggest, but rather the tension between the new interest and the old faith. The ambivalence we feel toward the main characters, which makes it impossible to accept the plays as simple moralities, has meaning. It derives from the imposition of the spirit of the age upon the backdrop of eternity. Renaissance secularism and Reformation spirituality clash. Battenhouse and those following him are mistaken in explicating the plays in terms of conventional theology, for Marlowe took into account a new element, the anthropocentric concerns of the century. His reiteration of God's justice was not the reaffirmation of medieval orthodoxy; it was a new and stronger endorsement of it under changed circumstances.

Man was both splendid and doomed, for his aspirations, defying immutable Divine order, were at best irrelevant to salvation, at worst, inimical to it. Marlowe might exult in the imagination, the passion man was capable of, but his admiration was shot with despair. Worldly pleasure, even in its most refined form, the airy spinning of the imagination, was dangerous: the impulses which led men to pursue it were the legacy of Adam's fall.

Adam's fall and its consequences, the subject of considerable theological dispute in the sixteenth century, is material to this interpretation of the plays. Assuming that in spite of restless speculations about the validity of revealed religion abundantly attested by Paul Kocher, Marlowe remained convinced of the existence of an omnipotent God who was all-good, the outcome of the plays, in every case except I Tamburlaine an unequivocal defeat for the main character, must be attributed to the evil in man. The plays can be seen to depict man in the grip of a terrible irony. His energy, his instincts, and above all, his mind tainted, he pursues his own destruction. If his energy is great, his instincts passionate, his vision superb, he pursues his destruction with exaltation: his doomed flights are Marlowe's subject. In Dido, both parts of Tamburlaine, and Faustus, the weight of the emphasis is on the magnificence, in The Jew of Malta, The Massacre at Paris, and Edward II, on the evil, of the characters; but the change in emphasis does not alter the thesis. In all the plays Marlowe might

be explicating the text from St. Paul: "Your glorying is not good" (I Cor. 5:6).

Instead of the sublimity of man's aspirations traditionally seen as Marlowe's theme and instead of the operation of Divine justice implied by Battenhouse, the sense of the evil in man has many claims to being the constant in Marlowe's plays around which he elaborated tentative attitudes toward life and God. The strongest of these claims is that the theme applies to all of the plays and to each play in its entirety. If the idea is tested as the center of Marlowe's thinking, the thrust of the action of the plays, which evolves from character, is seen to meet the force of the conclusions, which restates Divine authority. A continuous thought controls each play; the Marlovian hero's passionate longings, arising from his faulty heart, are for the wrong things; his course, determined by his faulty judgment, is in the wrong direction. The parabolas the fortunes of the heroes describe have import. Difficulties fall away and new beauties emerge when Marlowe is regarded as dramatizing the tragic complexity of the nature of man.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

[1]*The Death of Christopher Marlowe* (London, 1925).

[2]*Times Literary Supplement*, February 13, 1964, p. 136.

[3]*Christopher Marlowe in London* (Cambridge, Mass., 1934).

[4]Christopher Marlowe: *A Biographical and Critical Study* (Oxford, 1940).

[5]*The Life of Marlowe* (London, 1930).

[6]"Some Observations on Christopher Marlowe, Government Agent," *PMLA*, XLIII (1928), 682-7000.

[7]"Marlowe, Robert Poley, and the Tippings," *RES*, V (1929), 273-287.

[8]Cambridge, Mass., 1942.

[9]New York, 1965.

[10]*Marlowe* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1964), p. 9.

[11]*The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), p. ix.

[12]Ibid.

[13]*Marlowe's Tamburlaine: A Study in Renaissance Moral Philosophy* (Nashville, 1941), p. 1.

[14]Chapel Hill, 1946.

[15]Ibid., p. 4.

[16]Ibid., p. 5.

[17]*Marlowe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge, 1964).

[18]Ibid., p. 342.

[19]Ibid.

[20]*Tulane Drama Review*, VII, iv (Summer 1964), 211-224.

[21]Ibid., pp. 215-216.

[22]Ibid., p. 216.

[23]London, 1933, p. 59.

[24]"The Renaissance," A Literary History of England, ed. Albert C. Baugh (New York, 1948), p. 542.

[25]London, 1952, p. 11.

[26]"Marlowe's Map," Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Clifford Leech (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1964), p. 55.

[27]The Overreacher, pp. 10-15. See also Appendices, pp. 169-178, 186-189.

[28]From Mankind to Marlowe (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 217.

[29]Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe (Princeton, 1962).

CHAPTER TWO

RELEVANT CRITICAL OPINIONS

Although no one appears to have distinguished the centrality of the theme of man's tragically evil nature in the plays of Christopher Marlowe, some trends in recent criticism have prepared ground for the idea. An aura of genius has long hung about Marlowe; that insubstantial emanation has taken shape and been refined. A particular kind of intelligence is predicated by the interpretation of the plays as explicating the paradox that the best in man is also the worst in man and precisely that kind of intelligence is coming to be associated with Marlowe. The impression of a mind of undisciplined brilliance has given way to one of a mind that was trained and lucid, objective and bold. In place of dizzying inspiration, painstaking lucubrations are indicated by the Case editions of the plays,[1] for they show Marlowe to have used a wide range of sources with accuracy and skillful selection. A related appreciation of Marlowe's efforts to master his craft is also growing: although Frederick Boas' 1940 study is marred by the assumption that Marlowe's heroes express his own "tumultuous energies and aspirations,"[2] Boas is far from presenting a picture of a young poet pouring his own intemperate ambi-

tions into divinely molded iambs. He comments instead, apropos Marlowe's translation of Ovid's Elegies, "It was fortunate for Marlowe that his genius, in its plastic stage, went through the discipline involved in seeking to reproduce the technique of one of the most highly accomplished poetic craftsmen of the ancient world."[3]

The evidence in the Case editions of catholic reading and Boas' discussion of the conciseness of phrasing that Marlowe learned in translating thousands of lines of Latin make it unsurprising that Tucker Brooke in his treatment of Marlowe in A Literary History of England emphasizes Marlowe's scholarship. According to Brooke, "Few English poets--perhaps none but Spenser, Milton, and Browning--have so well vindicated the literary uses of academic knowledge."[4] Without challenging Brooke's observation, it might perhaps be added that allowing for a gap of almost two and a half centuries of scientific knowledge, there is something of the quality of Shelley in the imagination where Marlowe quarried innumerable images of the physical world and the processes of the physical world. As Alfred North Whitehead enabled us to see, Shelley simultaneously observes the abstractions of natural law and the concreteness of natural phenomena, his pleasure in one heightening his pleasure in the other. Whitehead quotes a stanza that Earth speaks in Act IV of Prometheus Unbound:

> I spin beneath my pyramid of night,
> Which points into the heavens,--dreaming delight,
> Murmuring victorious joy in my enchanted sleep;
> As a youth lulled in love-dreams faintly sighing,

> Under the shadow of his beauty lying,
> Which round his rest a watch of light and warmth
> doth keep.

In this stanza, as Whitehead pointed out, Shelley's knowledge of a geometric figure is the source of the image.[5] In just this way, abstract scientific knowledge is often transmuted into poetry in Marlowe's plays. An example is the passage in I Tamburlaine, famous on other grounds:

> Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend
> The wondrous architecture of the world,
> And measure every wandering planet's course,
> Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
> And always moving as the restless spheres,
> Wills us to wear ourselves and never rest,[6]

Although it should be noted that Marlowe's was the archaic astronomy of Ptolemy, knowledge of astronomy is the basis of this justification of ambition. Later, in the same play:

> Now hang our bloody colours by Damascus,
> Reflexing hues of blood upon their heads,
>
> (IV,iv,1-2)

is derived from knowledge which is now within the province of the science of optics. The problem passage in II Tamburlaine:

> Danubius' stream, that runs to Trebizon,
> Shall carry, wrapt within his scarlet waves,
> As martial presents to our friends at home,
> The slaughtered bodies of these Christians'
> The Terrene main, where in Danubius falls,
> Shall by this battle be the bloody sea;
> The wandering sailors of proud Italy
> Shall meet those Christians fleeting with the tide,
> Beating in heaps against their argosies,
>
> (I,i,33-41)

has been shown by Ethel Seaton[7] to represent accurately the behavior of the current of the Danube according to the opin-

ions of the sixteenth-century equivalents of oceanographers. Similar passages occur throughout the plays. We may conclude that Marlowe, like Shelley, had a strong scientific bent, not in the style of the modern experimenter--Thomas Edison comes to mind--but in the classical style of absorption in great generalizations. We see in his poetry one of the rare minds that move back and forth easily from the altitude of principles to their realization in details.

Short studies of specialized matters in modern Marlovian criticism demonstrate that Marlowe was fully capable of handling these details, no matter how subtle and complex. In fact, tracking these studies in learned journals, noting their variety of subject matter, and following the reasoning that shows a puzzling line or passage to be a succinct reference to an obscure area of Elizabethan knowledge persuade one that Marlowe was particularly attracted to subtle and complex ideas. These studies also engender respect for his exactitude: many apparent mistakes which were for generations attributed to a large carelessness in Marlowe have now been traced to a large ignorance in critics. In II Tamburlaine, for example, the location of Zanzibar on the west coast of Africa was observed with condescension until Ethel Seaton showed that the error was not Marlowe's but the sixteenth-century mapmaker's.[8] Similarly, the metaphor "My heart is like an anvil unto sorrow," in Edward II appears to be upside down if it is assumed that Marlowe meant that Edward's heart was thudding heavily upon an abstract grief.

In the article "Marlowe and Elizabethan Psychology," however, Carroll Camden explicates the line as an allusion to the Elizabethan belief that grief caused the blood to retreat from the extremities and to pound upon the heart.[9] Edward thus quite accurately describes his condition according to the physiology of Marlowe's age. Scholars have learned circumspection where Marlowe is concerned. Inaccurate comparisons, inconsistencies, loose ends of any sort are no longer casually assumed in Marlowe's plays. Rather, substantial acquaintance with the plays and with the commentary upon them causes one to echo Goethe, "Wie gross ist alles angelegt! "

Establishing Marlowe's intelligence and workmanship is not merely background for the development of the thesis that the plays present the tragedy of man's evil nature; it is the first piece of evidence in support of that thesis. Moral judgments, especially those in which the judge is implicated in the judgment, require objectivity. Marlowe's thoughtful reading, mastery of form, attention to detail, and consistency demonstrate objectivity. Thus, on the broadest level, the general acknowledgment of Marlowe's intellectual stature in contemporary criticism tends to confirm a thesis that interprets the plays as coherent, if paradoxical. Recognition of the clarity of Marlowe's mind does not, of course, lead inevitably to this particular thesis. There are several instances in which scholars grant Marlowe's intelligence and craftsmanship, even expound upon

them, and nonetheless offer interpretations of the plays that are incompatible with the thesis that the plays dramatize the tragedy of man's expressing his nature in pursuit of love and wealth and power and knowledge--worldly goals--reckless of divine sanctions. A representative few of these alternate interpretations must be dealt with. On the grounds of brilliance, Levin's The Overreacher claims attention, on the grounds of interest, Bevington's From Mankind to Marlowe, and on the grounds of explicit opposition to the moral interpretation of the plays, Kocher's Christopher Marlowe: A Study of His Thought, Learning, and Character.

The thesis of the first of these, The Overreacher, is not new: Marlowe has long been thought to embody the spirit of the Renaissance. As the title suggests, however, The Overreacher is concerned with Renaissance aspirations as Marlowe translated them into metaphor: Levin found the title in George Puttenham's "staunch endeavor to Anglicize rhetorical categories,"[10] and "the Ouer reacher" is Puttenham's definition of hyperbole. The application of the epithet to Marlowe in the title of the book is an extension of what is actually Levin's subject--the literary analysis of the plays, with emphasis on the boldness, freshness and concreteness of the imagery and innovations in dramatic construction. Levin's perceptions are acute; his relating of the plays to particular aspects of Renaissance thought and to the history of ideas is illuminating; his writing far exceeds the workaday prose in which scholarship is usually

couched; but perhaps because Levin is so fascinated by Marlowe's inspired presentation of Renaissance interests, he does not perceive Marlowe's reservations about those interests. Levin does not hesitate to characterize Marlowe as "Atheist, Machiavellian, and Epicurean" without balancing the characterization with the facts that Marlowe stayed deep enough within the fold of conventional Christianity to escape persecution in an era when many did not, and that he belonged to a century that was not converted, but scandalized, by Gentillet's redaction of Machiavelli. By Epicurean, Levin means primarily that Marlowe had an intense appreciation of and an appetite for beauty and sensation. His poetry undeniably expresses a love of beauty and an understanding of sensation, but there is no evidence that Marlowe ordered his life around hedonism. We have evidence that in his years at the King's School in Canterbury, if not at Cambridge, he experienced a regime of enforced asceticism. This experience may not have inculcated ascetic habits in the young Marlowe, but he would at least have been trained in a way of life that was not Epicurean in the popular sense. Full belief in the three doctrines Levin ascribes to him would be surprising: it would mark Marlowe as a man who had totally cast off the values he learned in childhood, more, as a man out of touch with the thought of his time except at the most extreme periphery of it. It seems much more likely that, though Marlowe may have been responsive to the spirit of religious inquiry, the political opportun-

ism, and the love of beautiful things which flourished in the Elizabethan era, he would have felt them, and with his characteristic lucidity, have understood them, to be in conflict with Christian morality. He had, after all, not merely been brought up in an atmosphere of conventional Christianity; he had also devoted six years to studies which included theology. The possibility exists that he was a complete rebel, in the style, perhaps, of Stephen Crane, but it is only a possibility, and against it we have the evidence of the plays. Levin perfunctorily dismisses the moral interpretation of the plays, but his own observations attest their moral strength. His conclusions time and again follow the line of thought Marlowe surely intended. For example, close to the end of his discussion of Tamburlaine Levin comments upon the success of revivals of Tamburlaine in this century because of our bitter and frequent experience of war. He adds immediately, "Not that his [Marlowe's] panorama, wide as it is, has room for moral compunction"; and he points out that in the plays only the weaklings Mycetes and Calyphas express a distaste for war. Only a few sentences later, however, Levin is acknowledging a "reverberation of irony," and as "a doubtful epitaph" for Tamburlaine he quotes Shelley's "Ozymandias."[11] Similarly, in the course of the chapter on Faustus, Levin says, "[Faustus] was, like Marlowe himself, that impenitent and willful miscreant whom Elizabethan preachers termed a scorner," a statement which is strikingly at odds with the

chapter title, "Science without Conscience," and with the whole focus of the chapter around the warning from Gargantua's letter to Pantagruel," "'science sans conscience . . . is but the ruin of the soul.' "[13] Levin explicitly denies Marlowe significant qualms about the new currents of thought forming in Elizabethan life, but his interpretations are rich with implicit recognition of Marlowe's ambivalence. The study as a whole, therefore, is not incompatible with the thesis advanced here.

In much the same way, Bevington's From Mankind to Marlowe, although it concludes with an evaluation of Marlowe as not entirely successful in freeing himself from the stylized, generalized presentation of temptation and sin that distinguished the moralities, contains much that testifies to Marlowe's skill as a dramatist. Postulating deliberate ambivalence in Marlowe rather than the incompetence Bevington ascribes to him, the book may easily be brought into line with the theme of the fallible nature of man. Bevington is primarily concerned with analyzing the structural elements of the moralities that arose from their development out of the mystery and miracle plays and were determined to a large extent by the size and limited facilities of the troupes that regularly performed them. He traces the emergence of professional itinerant troupes from the period when the guilds which had produced the great cycles of mysteries began to decline because of economic changes and because of the association of the plays with

Roman Catholicism. Since they were not tied to Scriptural sources, the moralities were more flexible vehicles than the mysteries: they could be used to promote the new religion and also to convey political and social satire. The new content, however, could naturally not be expected to compensate to the audience for the total disappearance of the spectacle and scope of the older plays, and the players resorted to various devices to give an illusion of adhering to the medieval inclusiveness, what Bevington calls "copiousness of detail," that characterized the mysteries and miracle plays. Chief among these devices was the practice of assigning each actor multiple roles. This practice profoundly affected the form of the plays since it called for successive or alternating appearances of characters and groups of characters. The scenes, so composed, quite naturally fell into patterns of contrast--players doubled as their opposites, virtues becoming vices, tempters, good counselors, and so forth. The episodes were also symmetrical: their participants corresponded exactly in number. The most interesting part of Bevington's discussion is his tracing of the slow development of these techniques. Soliloquies that inadequately masked stage waits, sudden, inexplicable departures of characters, and awkwardly conducted arguments in which the persons arguing never met marked the naive handling of the problems of juggling a small company. Marlowe converted the necessity of juggling--which in his case was probably not so pressing--into effective pageantry.

Bevington is concerned with proving the morality structure in Marlowe's plays: he must argue in a business-like way; totally convinced, we may allow ourselves to admire the choreographic skill with which Marlowe disposes his players. To Bevington's conclusion that Tamburlaine is riddled with ambiguity because "the question of causality and its important relation to dramatic structure seems to have been only imperfectly solved in Marlowe's own mind, and as a result the inherited linear structure is not perfectly adapted to his material,"[14] it may be proposed that Bevington has simply not discerned the complex of causes which Marlowe is concerned with presenting, nor does he see that their effect is not really ambiguous, but ironic. The same reasoning answers Bevington's detection of shortcomings in the other plays: when the plays are interpreted as the expression simultaneously of the best and the worst in man, the shortcomings disappear.

The ease with which the studies of Levin and Bevington can be reconciled with the thesis under discussion results from the fact that large parts of those books deal with matter that runs parallel to thematic interpretation. Kocher's book, however, centers on an idea which is diametrically opposed to the interpretation of the plays as moral dramatizations of the flawed nature of man. Kocher considers that Marlowe was engaged in a "crusade against Christianity."[15] Christian elements in the plays Kocher attributes to concessions to public opinion, pagan and free-thinking

elements to Marlowe's real beliefs. Kocher fails to convince for three main reasons: first, because it is hard to believe that the man who wrote, "See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!/ One drop of it would save my soul, half a drop: ah, my Christ! -"[16] was not working at the pitch of his imagination, and the lines, and others which could be quoted, reveal that imagination to be permeated with Christian conviction. Second, Kocher makes arbitrary pronouncements regarding what Marlowe meant and what he did not mean, what he consciously believed in and what found itself into the plays from the dormancy of his unconscious. Kocher's division of the contents of Marlowe's mind seems more convenient to his argument than plausible; his application of modern psychology is particularly unpersuasive, for the moral import of the plays is conveyed most strongly in the plots of the plays, and the plotting does not seem the product of a residue of religious training which Marlowe's intellect had thrown off while some layer of his mind still adhered to it with superstitious dread. The plotting has a daylight air.

Finally, Kocher does not seem credible because of the quality of his evidence, which consists chiefly of contemporary denunciations of Marlowe's "atheism," chiefly the Baines note. This document may accurately recapitulate Marlowe's notice of some "contrarieties out of the Bible," but the random and scurrilous blasphemies are more suggestive of an attempt to horrify his hearers than of a consid-

ered attack upon Christianity. There also seems to be a fault in the reasoning by which Kocher converts this note into evidence of serious objections to Christian doctrine. Kocher argues that the present form of the Baines note might have been determined by Baines' having jotted it hastily as Marlowe was speaking. He goes to some trouble to show that if the clauses are slightly rearranged, the document is the outline of a coherent and logical attack upon Christianity. With great ingenuity, Kocher reconstructs this coherent and logical attack, but in doing so he cannot retain each clause as a meaningful accusation. In just one example of a frequent practice,Kocher begins with the three separate statements, "That Christ was a bastard and his mother dishonest"; "That he was the son of a Carpenter, and that if the Jewes among whome he was borne did Crucify him theie best knew him and when he Cáme"; and "That the Angell Gabriell was baud to the holy ghost because he brought the salutation to Mary"-- the last of which appears much later in the original document than the other two. Of these three statements, Kocher creates this paraphrase:

> If the theological account of his conception through the Holy Ghost is to be credited, the Angel Gabriel was a bawd. But of course the account is trumped up. Christ was in fact a man like any other, and his claim of divine sonship was merely a humbug. He was either the bastard son of an adulterous union or else merely the legitimate son of a carpenter. The Jews, who knew him all of his life, were in the best position to realize his true origin and were justified in crucifying him. 17

Kocher's version tidies away the contradictions of the orig-

inal statement which offers three mutually exclusive accounts of the paternity of Christ, but while it reconciles the first and the second, it cancels the third. According to Kocher's version, Marlowe did not state, "That the Angell Gabriell was baud to the holy ghost," but rather observed that implication in the doctrine of the Annunciation, which he repudiated. The accurate report of the blasphemy as Kocher recreates it would be something like, "The Annunciation is a tasteless fable, for it attributes improper activities to an angel." That Baines cast it in its more sensational form seems to mark him as both obtuse and malicious because the one is as damning as the other taken out of context; as part of an argument, the second is more damning than the first because it makes sense.

Thus, even following Kocher's reconstruction, which considerably enhances the persuasiveness of the Baines note, the accuracy and good faith of the reporter come into question. The cogency of Kocher's reconstruction does the very thing his argument can least afford: it discredits Baines. Reluctantly one accepts the hypothesis that statements recorded hastily, perhaps surreptitiously, might be out of order, although surely it is more likely that such a record, however sketchy, would reflect the sequence in which the speaker introduced his ideas. When one is also invited to believe that Baines not only confused the separate items, but also suppressed or omitted relationships between ideas and substituted conclusions for the premises, the notion of

Baines' competence is destroyed. Loss of faith in Baines opens the door to a host of possibilities: that Marlowe was quoting for the purpose of refutation; that, drunk, he was treating the company to puzzling products of idle speculation; that he was baiting a Puritan, or that he was probing the orthodoxy of a suspected heretic. What is impossible to believe is that the Baines note is "the master key to the thought of Christopher Marlowe."[18] With his strongest evidence so unconvincing, Kocher fails to make his case, and the idea that the plays depict man's tragic perversion of his imagination and energy to evil ends does not seem significantly challenged.

One more book must be mentioned, not because like the studies of Levin, Bevington, and Kocher it offers evaluations of Marlowe which are incompatible with the thesis that the nature of man is the subject of the plays, but because it is entirely consistent with that thesis; and, indeed, although the specific idea is not broached, it is implicit in the work. The book is M. M. Mahood's Poetry and Humanism;[19] Miss Mahood undertakes a discussion of Marlowe in the course of an analysis of the destructive dialectic inherent in anthropocentric humanism and the avoidance of this dialectic in the "true humanism" of the great religious poets of the seventeenth century. Her interest in Marlowe is in his perception of the false course of Renaissance humanism. Her observation, "Through the course of the four great tragedies, the Marlowe hero shrinks in stature from

the titanic to the puny, and his worship of life gives place to that craving for death which is the final stage of a false humanism's dialectic,"[20] demonstrates the angle of her interest. In the course of her discussion of the plays, however, she shows a keen appreciation of the importance of the characterization in the plays and a delicate sensitivity to the imagery and allusions which add to those characterizations. In spite of its brevity, her treatment of Marlowe adds substantially to the insights of the longer work which recognizes the moral import of the plays, Battenhouse's Marlowe's Tamburlaine: A Study in Renaissance Moral Philosophy, a book upon which this study depends and which it is intended to refine. Although Battenhouse does not sufficiently emphasize the Renaissance spirit that suffuses Tamburlaine, his demonstration of the conformity of the play to widely held moral beliefs of the century is an indispensable foundation for the understanding of Marlowe. Not necessarily as a morality play in ten acts, as Battenhouse claims, but as ten acts shaped by moral premises, Tamburlaine is an important exhibit in the interpretation of Marlowe as concerned with presenting man's proclivity to evil. Though Battenhouse's work has not won wide acceptance, it opens a way to a just and fruitful appreciation of Marlowe as a dramatist. Battenhouse's conclusion that Marlowe must be regarded as a serious moral thinker is the starting point for this paper.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

[1]*The Works and Life of Christopher Marlowe*, general ed. R. H. Case (London, 1930-33), 6 Vols. All quotations from the plays in this paper will be taken from this edition, and after the first reference to each volume, act, scene, and line numbers of the plays will be given parenthetically in the text.

[2]*Christopher Marlowe: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Oxford, 1940), p. 76.

[3]Ibid., p. 42.

[4]"The Renaissance," *A Literary History*, p. 513.

[5]*Science and the Modern World* (New York, 1925), p. 86.

[6]*I Tamb.*, II,vii, 21-26, *Tamburlaine the Great*, ed. Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Works and Life of Christopher Marlowe* (London, 1930), II.

[7]"Marlowe's Map," pp. 53-54. Una Ellis-Fermor incorporates Seaton's explication in the notes to the play, *Tamb. the Great*, p. 185.

[8]"Marlowe's Map," p. 41.

[9]*PQ*, VIII (1929), 73-74.

[10]Levin, p. 23.

[11]Ibid., p. 54.

[12]Ibid., p. 132.

[13]Ibid., p. 108.

[14]Bevington, p. 217.

[15]Kocher, p. 69.

[16]*The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, V, ii, 150-151, ed. Frederick S. Boas, *The Works and Life of Christopher Marlowe* (London, 1932), V.

[17]Kocher, p. 37.

[18]Ibid., p. 33.

[19]New Haven, 1950.

[20]Mahood, p. 54.

CHAPTER THREE

PESSIMISM

It is as a moral thinker that Marlowe views man as evil. In the popular rather than the philosophical sense, the plays are pessimistic: they center on man's tragic inclination to evil. The first and most obvious evidence in support of this interpretation is that evil in a great many guises is present in the plays. Evil was, of course, also evident in many other Elizabethan plays, and in the pre-Elizabethan dramatic tradition Evil, in the shape of devils and vices, strutted, picturesque and Protean, in innumerable inn-yards. In the range, realism, and intensity of his portrayals, however, Marlowe easily outdistances his predecessors. Even when the list of vices and sins he depicts is limited to those that are most conspicuous in the plays, the list is a long one: jealousy, infatuation, lust, and love's betrayal in Dido, Queen of Carthage; robbery, treachery, tormenting of captives, murder, massacre, blasphemy, and sacrilege in the two parts of Tamburlaine; greed, hypocrisy, lust, malicious intrigue, poisoning, treachery, and mass murder in The Jew of Malta;not only murder, massacre, and treachery, but also adultery and homosexuality in The Massacre at Paris; homosexuality, neglect of high

office, greed, murder, and treason in Edward II; and, with many lesser vices, the ultimate sin, rejection of God, in The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus. It cannot be argued that Marlowe was simply feeding the taste for horror and bloodshed of the Elizabethan audience, for the plays do not simply contain occasional events that are exciting because of their wickedness. Rather, the plays are saturated with evil, and the crowded instances of evil lead almost inescapably to the identification of its source in man. From a general pessimism, we infer a particular one; from a view of life in which evil overbalances happiness, a view of man in which evil overbalances good.

The argument that Marlowe's preoccupation with sin and vice indicates a pessimistic view of man's nature is not new. Douglas Cole from the same starting point reaches the same conclusion. The length--274 pages--of Cole's book Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe indicates how persistent and extensive Marlowe's exploration of evil is. Cole traces the backgrounds of Marlowe's portrayal of suffering and evil and shows that Marlowe reworked conventions of the mystery plays, the moralities, the de casibus tradition, and the tragedies of Seneca. The bulk of the book is devoted to the analysis of the techniques with which Marlowe conveys the well-established themes, suffering and evil. In some ways, he is close to the convention: Cole shows, for example, that the formal lamentations of the victims and the outbursts of rage of the villains have

precedents in the speeches of characters in both the mystery and morality plays. Cole also finds distinctively Marlovian techniques in the representations of evil: the pervasive use of irony, sustained thematic imagery, repeated translation of verbal imagery into visual imagery, and characterization through suffering and sin. In a final chapter, Cole presents the opinion, unimpeachable, as it seems, that Marlowe's interpretation of suffering and evil is suggestive of the theological explanation that all loss and affliction are an aspect of poena damni. Furthermore, in Cole's words, ". . . in Marlowe's tragic vision the root of hostility, evil, and destruction lies in the will of man."[1] From the very narrow base of Marlowe's treatment of suffering, Cole arrives at what seems, with Mahood's, the most judicious of the appraisals of Marlowe. The concentration of Cole's study on suffering and evil is both its weakness and its strength: it leads him, for example, to wrench I Tamburlaine out of shape by emphasizing the plaints of the sufferers, and more seriously, to minimize the grandeur that invests the aspirations of Tamburlaine (and of all the Marlovian heroes). Singling out suffering and evil, however, does give Cole an opportunity for the intensive analysis of one of the elements of Marlowe's ambivalence, and his conclusion is welcome corroboration of the reasoning that associates Marlowe's portrayal of evil with a view of man as tragically fallible.

There are some general characteristics of Marlowe's

portrayal of evil that Cole does not discuss; they emerge from a comparison of Marlowe with Kyd. Marlowe's distance from Kyd is enormous. As many critics have pointed out Kyd's originality in dramaturgy is offset by his too lavish use of Senecan themes and incidents. It is also well known that where Kyd successfully fuses his novelties of technique with adapted motifs the result is spectacle, but where he is not in control, The Spanish Tragedy degenerates into sensationalism. Even in its strongest scenes, however, The Spanish Tragedy never offers an insight into life as it is or reflects life as it is, for the manifestations of evil in the play are not merely bizarre and exceptional; they are also arbitrary. In spite of the influence of Seneca, Kyd is much closer than Marlowe to the stylized vices of the morality plays whose names--Abominable Living in Lusty Juventus and Sensual Suggestion in The Conflict of Conscience, to mention only two--define and comprehend their motives. In The Spanish Tragedy, Viluppo might as well be named Envy: he is not characterized, but identified. The motives of Lorenzo, who is much more important to the plot, do not even have the simple clarity of Viluppo's. We surmise that the quarrel with Horatio over their joint captive, Baltazar, indicates and perhaps adds to a long-standing antipathy; we apprehend that Lorenzo's family pride, outraged once by his sister's marriage to Andrea, would spur him to desperate measures to prevent a second undistinguished marriage. It is necessary, however, to deduce

these motives. Lorenzo energetically and ruthlessly espouses Baltazar's courtship of his sister without making it clear why he does so. An even more serious flaw concerns Revenge's intervention in the affairs of the Spanish court on behalf of Andrea. In what seems a singularly clumsy anachronism, Andrea, a sixteenth-century Spanish gentleman whom one would firmly expect to be a Roman Catholic, descends to the classical underworld after his death. There, for no apparent reason, he is granted by Proserpine the extraordinary favor of the services of Revenge. Andrea was not murdered or betrayed, but killed in battle; revenge hardly seems called for. The episode establishes a very insubstantial basis for the action of the whole play.

No such weakness in establishing the causes of evil occurs in Marlowe's plays. Marlowe breaks free from the Senecan obsession with revenge: only in The Jew is revenge an important motive, and even there it is not the only motive. Instead of the simple identification of evil that sufficed as characterization in the moralities, Marlowe creates complexes of purposes and desires that reach the wellsprings of human personality. Although there are, as there are in The Spanish Tragedy, bizarre and exceptional inflictions of pain and reveling in vice in the Marlowe plays, they are never arbitrary. In Dido the only play in which the gods are relied upon to start the action, Dido, the victim of a domestic dispute on Olympus, responds to Cupid's touch with a wholly human passion. Marlowe's vil-

lains are motivated: even the most shadowy of them, the Duke de Guise, wins a measure of credence for his actions by showing for them both a practical aim--the crown of France--and a psychological bent consistent with that aim. Although, as Levin points out,[2] Barabas inordinately requites the confiscation of his wealth, his successive enterprises in evil may be seen as a chain reaction, the favorable outcome of each scheme precipitating its sequel. Certainly, as Barabas' machinations accelerate, he loses in credibility and becomes a monstrous caricature, but Barabas, even in his later stages, exhibits a kernel of truth about human behavior. Tamburlaine, Edward, and Faustus leave no doubt about the reasons for their actions, and although these reasons are anything but commonplace, they are comprehensible; indeed, they are expressed with such intensity that they capture the imagination. All of Marlowe's portrayals of evil, including the most exotic and extreme, have an element almost totally lacking in Kyd--a realistic quality.

Not only the careful delineation of motives gives Marlowe's portrayals of evil this realistic quality. The clarity and fullness of his conception and his fidelity to his imagined world makes that imagined world a meaningful extension of the real world. The world he creates is complex, and the characters are made up of startling combinations of traits--Tamburlaine, for example, is both magnanimous and bitterly cruel. Nevertheless, the reader's impression of Tamburlaine as a character--and surely the audience's im-

pression was the same--is not of incoherence, but of convincing unity. This impression may be partly because the evil in Tamburlaine's nature is based upon an idea that is discernible, consistent, and familiar. For example, the memorable cruelty of Tamburlaine's taunting the conquered and caged Bajazeth to eat his own flesh--or his wife's--while Tamburlaine himself is enjoying a banquet is an aspect of a notion of oriental viciousness like that Prince Hal, newly King Henry V, repudiated:

> This is the English, not the Turkish court;
> Not Amurath an Amurath succeeds,
> But Harry Harry.[3]

This notion, with a specific connotation of alien and depraved sexual mores, has been touched on by Bajazeth in his boast before the battle that Tamburlaine should be made ". . . a chaste and lustless eunuch,/ And in my sarell tend my concubines" (III, iii, 77-78). It is another form of the same notion, this time with the emphasis on unfathomable cruelty, that is exhibited in the piles of corpses and rivers of blood in both parts of Tamburlaine. This notion, although parts of it are demonstrably drawn from sixteenth-century European sources,[4] is curiously reminiscent of Herodotus. Not the characters but the setting determines the extremes of brutality, extremes we are familiar with from The Histories. It is, of course, most likely that the barbaric practices of the Middle East came to Marlowe only by tradition, but if so he seized upon the tradition with imaginative insight and held to it consistently.

The general climate of cruelty in Tamburlaine owes much to the legendary association of cruelty with the area where the play takes place, but Eugene Waith explains the cruelty and other anomalous traits in the character of Tamburlaine in terms of a more specific tradition--that of the Herculean hero.[5] Waith analyzes the characterizations of Hercules by Sophocles, Euripides, and Seneca and finds elements which are important in Tamburlaine. The Herculean heroes are avengers; as demi-gods, they are bound to the earth, but they identify themselves with the gods; they are "men of wrath"; they are cruel. Waith believes that "Hercules was often in Marlowe's mind as he wrote."[6] Certainly, Tamburlaine is Herculean, and Waith's explanation of his vices in terms of the conventional portraits of Hercules is interesting, but Waith seems to carry the comparison between Hercules and Tamburlaine too far. He relies partly on allusions to associate Hercules and Tamburlaine, but all the allusions in the plays do not bear out the identification of Tamburlaine with Hercules. For example, Tamburlaine once compares himself with "Clymene's brainsick son" (I Tamb., IV,ii,49), and the outstanding attribute of Clymene's son was his overestimation of the closeness of his relationship to divinity and an overestimation of his strength. These mistakes seem utterly foreign to the character of Hercules. Waith also argues that Tamburlaine's identification with a demi-god put him beyond the application of the moral judgment of the audience, and that except for a brief appeal to

pity in the last lines of Part II, the chief effect of the paradoxes of Tamburlaine's nature is to arouse wonder.[7] This interpretation robs the play of a great deal of its subtlety. A sounder view would seem to be that Marlowe borrowed what appealed to him in the Herculean hero to create a character of considerable moral complexity.

Waith's interpretation is most valuable because it shows Marlowe establishing a background for Tamburlaine which must have made him recognizable to at least the literarily sophisticated members of his audience. It was a technique used more obviously in Dido, Edward II, and Faustus, and its effect may have been to enhance the impression of realism as, to employ a homely comparison, gossip about a friend seems more real than gossip about a stranger.

The realism of Marlowe's portrayal of evil is important in the argument that the range and density of evil depicted in the plays indicates a view of man as innately evil. Obviously, introducing shocking events for their own sake as Kyd does in The Spanish Tragedy and as the young Shakespeare does in Titus Andronius tells us nothing more than that the playwright wishes to hold the attention of his audience. Just as obviously, Kyd's adoption of the theme of revenge and an attitude toward life from Seneca makes it impossible to analyze his interpretation of the evils found in life. Marlowe's avoidance of gratuitous incidents of a sensational cast and his portrayal of Renaissance ebullience makes it

seem that his portrayals of evil are drawn from life as it could be lived and from men as they seemed to him to be.

We have deduced from the pessimistic vision of life in his plays that Marlowe held a pessimistic view of man's nature: there is more immediate evidence. Excepting Tamburlaine, the procession of Marlowe's heroes is one of unusually flawed and fallible characters. The only claim of oafish Aeneas and wanton Dido, scheming Barabas, bloodthirsty Guise, degenerate Edward, and doomed Faustus to being "men better than other men" is the intensity with which they pursue their vices. The eminence of Marlowe's heroes is very unlike the eminence of the tragic hero that Aristotle set forth. Marlowe's characterizing his heroes so unflatteringly suggests strongly that Marlowe found men heavily tainted by evil. There is more evidence in support of this conclusion in the minor characters of the plays, for the heroes are surrounded to an unusual extent by the self-seeking, the treacherous, the credulous, and the corrupt. The isolation in evil that one findsin other great tragedies is missing. There is nothing in Marlowe comparable to Oedipus' piecemeal discovery of the facts of his birth while he is regarded with pity and pious horror by the chorus; there is no Macbeth, quickly outdistancing his wife in brutality; there is nothing like Hamlet's lonely struggle with suspicions so terrible that he is at first unwilling even to confide in Horatio. Undoubtedly, there is great dramatic effectiveness in focusing on a hero who is

slightly larger than life and who stands alone, either set apart from the innocent or in single opposition to the guilty, but there is also power in Marlowe's dramatizations of the blind pursuit of evil against backgrounds of folly and vice. If we understand Marlowe's subject to be the general evil of man, it is almost inevitable that he not depict his heroes as exceptions, but as examples, remarkable only for their concentration on evil. The wholesale corruption of the dramatis personae seems very persuasive of the interpretation of the plays as centering on evil in man's nature.

In one way, the presence of so many foolish and wicked people suggests the fifteenth century painting of Hell by Hieronymus Bosch, but the variety of evils is much more tightly controlled in the plays than in the painting. Marlowe treats well-defined areas in each play; there is order and significance in his evil characterizations. In Dido, for example, we recognize good, tight construction when Dido's hopeless love is repeated in Anna and Iarbas and the conflict between love and duty is repeated in Aeneas and Dido. These themes are not evil, however; in treating the evil in the play Marlowe exhibits more than routine competence in the craft of writing plays. Dido's humiliating infatuation, her reckless abandonment of royal dignity, and her futile attempts to buy Aeneas' love are all foreshadowed in the identical behavior of Jupiter with Ganymede at the beginning of the play. This episode and the

episode in which the old nurse experiences freakish sexual desire because of the nearness of Cupid, echoing Dido's passion, seem expressly designed to convey Marlowe's view of fallible humanity. The episodes are both outside the main action: they are analogs which ridicule Dido's frantic splendor and cruelly rob her of dignity. They generalize her scandalous behavior; she becomes a demonstration of universal weakness.

The subtle and perhaps excessively literary characterization of the hero in Tamburlaine complicates the analysis of the minor characters, who are not very important in this connection in any event. Tamburlaine requires a great deal of close study; for the moment it seems best to omit it from consideration. In contrast to Tamburlaine, in The Jew of Malta, The Massacre at Paris, and Edward II, the technique of tarring the minor characters with the same brush as the fallible hero is clear and significant. There are not, as in Dido, analogous incidents; almost the whole cast is corrupt. The themes of greed and"policy" are introduced in the opening scenes of The Jew very much as infatuation is introduced by Jupiter in the opening scene of Dido, but Ferneze who, with Barabas, represents cunning, remains in the play, exacerbating Barabas' hatred, motivating his plotting, and continuing to plot himself. The two corrupt monks carry on the themes of greed and hypocritical profession: Ithamore burlesques Barabas' claim to be a memorable villain and predicts Barabas' treachery to the city

by seeking to betray Barabas at the first opportunity. In The Massacre at Paris, even in its fragmentary condition, it is possible to see that some of the victims have displeasing traits which link them to the villains: Ramus at the moment of his martydom undertakes a quibbling recantation; Mugeroun is enjoying an adulterous liaison with the Duchess of Guise. Other minor characters are totally evil: the old Queen is a monster, not only in politics, but also in lack of family feeling; Charles is weak and treacherous; Henry III is happy only in the company of his minions; the band of murderers are unspeakably callous in performing the murders the Guise plans.

In the unrelieved grimness of Edward II we may have an indication of the kind of play that Marlowe originally intended The Massacre at Paris to be. Certainly, in Edward II vices are spread with an even hand among the cast. The dominant atmosphere of the first part of the play is not really abandonment to sensuality, but petulant bickering among characters ruled by pride and self-interest. Money is an insistent theme in this play: Gaveston, the Spencers, and Baldock flatter, scheme, and amuse the king with an eye to profit, although it should be noted that Gaveston always seems sincerely fond of the king, and both Spencers and Baldock come to be fond of him when they are established in his service. Not only the upstarts are concerned with money, however: Lancaster says rather obscurely that he will sell his lands to pay his soldiers before Gaveston

shall remain in England[8]; if he means that he will spend all he has in order to drive Gaveston out, his phrasing the threat in that way indicates a mind in which the thought of money is close to the surface. In clearer instances of greed, Mortimer insists on the king's paying his uncle's ransom; the mower betrays Edward for money, and Lightborn murders him for money. In the first three acts Edward alternates between lavish giving to his friends and lavish bribing of his enemies. His bribery reaches a climax immediately after he defeats Mortimer and the rebels when Spencer junior, acting for him, sends "English gold" to the king of France so that "Isabel shall make her plaints in vain"(III,iii,93). That lavish expenditure is Edward's last extravagant gesture. His next offer of a gift to anyone is his pathetic attempt to bribe Lightborn: "One jewel have I left; receive thou this"(V,v,83). This speech makes us realize that from first to last, it has been Edward's experience that everybody wants something from him. There is a slight indication that Edward himself is aware of the greed of those around him. When he explains his infatuation with Gaveston by saying, "He loves me more than all the world" (I,iv,77), the ambiguous ellipsis in the comparison hints at his doubt of the purity of Gaveston's motives. When after two lines, the speech continues, "You that be nobleborn should pity him" (I,iv,81) there seems to be an implication that he has recognized Gaveston's greed and excused it in his own mind as the inevitable fault of the low

born. Edward has tacitly acknowledged Gavestone's interest in personal wealth by loading him with lands and honors. It adds pathos to his already pathetic figure to understand that he is fully conscious of the greed that flaws Gaveston's devotion--a greed that the audience has known about since the first scene of the play.

Avarice, which the king is innocent of, is the most generally shared of the evils depicted in Edward II, but the sins of the king are also repeated in other characters. The sexual evil of the relationship between Edward and Gaveston is paralleled by the affair between Isabella and Mortimer. The unbridled anger, "the wrathful fury" of the king infects the barons as well. The treachery of Isabella and Edmund is rounded out by the treacherous murder of Gaveston, the murder of the murderer, Lightborn, and the betrayal of Matrevis. Edward II is much more than a play about a weak king; it is a play about weakness in mankind.

In Faustus as in Dido, The Jew, The Massacre and Edward II, Marlowe does not impose a doomed and desperate figure upon a background of moral order; the minor characters of Faustus are also examples of folly and vice. Valdes and Cornelius have gone a short way on the path that Faustus follows; Wagner and then Robin burlesque his absorption in magic and his passion for knowledge and power; the Pope and the Cardinals are trifling servants of God; Benvolio declares his independence of the devil on the grounds of drunkenness; the horse courser tries to get more

than his money's worth. There are only the Old Man, a group of students, and, of course, the Chorus to represent a society against which to measure Faustus' fall; they are offset by a fair representation of fools and sharpers.

It is rare in the plays for Marlowe to pit good against evil in anything like an equal contest: Abigail's is the piety of a victim; Navarre's accession is not a triumph of virtue but of opportunism. The young Edward III, however, is a "good" character; in him we are offered a resting place for our conviction of the right way for human beings to conduct themselves. His virtues are emphasized by the mistakes the other characters make about him: the king fears he will be corrupted by Isabella and Mortimer, but he is not. Mortimer believes that he has a schoolmaster's control over him, but he does not. The young Prince's vengeance upon his father's murderer contrasts with Edward II's immediate violation of his father's command in recalling Gaveston as soon as his father is dead. The contrast in filial loyalty is emphasized by the two funeral scenes: Edward II and Gaveston interrupt the Bishop of Coventry on the way to the obsequies of Edward's father, manhandle the Bishop and send him to jail; Edward III halts the funeral train to put Mortimer's head on his father's coffin. The boy's quiet resourcefulness contrasts throughout with Edward II's shrill ineffectiveness. For the first time in the Marlowe canon traditional values have a strong and consistent spokesman, and he is only a boy.

It is interesting to consider that Edward III's youth, which is both emphasized and exaggerated in the play, may have given Marlowe a theological basis for his characterization, for according to Calvin children were not yet depraved but only contained the "seeds of guilt." The point is undemonstrable, and the character may just as well be based on history as on theology. Marlowe's portrait is historically correct: Edward III was counted by the Tudors as a good king. No matter what background Marlowe drew on for his virtues, he is a welcome addition to the play, a relaxation of Marlowe's rule of evil. Indeed, the ending of the play has a reestablishment of order in the manner of Shakespearean tragedy.

Recognition of Marlowe's rule of evil is only the first step in understanding the complex view of man's nature that Marlowe seems to put forth in the plays, but it is the <u>important</u> first step.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

[1]Cole, p. 252.

[2]*The Overreacher*, p. 60.

[3]*King Henry IV, Part II*, V,ii,47-49.

[4]The definitive treatment of the sources of *Tamburlaine* is Una Ellis-Fermor's in the introduction to the play in the Case edition, pp. 17-52.

[5]Eugene Waith, *The Herculean Hero* (New York, 1962).

[6]Waith, p. 63.

[7]Ibid., p. 87

[8]*Edward II*, I,i,104-105, eds. H. B. Charlton and R. D. Waller, *The Works and Life of Christopher Marlowe* (London, 1933), VI.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARADOX

Although the literature we think of first in the sixteenth century--Utopia, The Defense of Poesy, The Shepheardes Calender, and The Faerie Queene--seems a resounding expression of optimism and of faith in life and love and man, Marlowe was not unique among sixteenth-century writers in depicting life as evil and man's nature as permeated with evil. Early in the century, in such a poem as "The Tunning of Elinour Rumming" Skelton satirizes the ugliness of humanity; in the Elizabethan period, Gascoigne occasionally sounds a gloomy note: "For whiles I mark this weak and wretched world. . . ."[1] In the light of Theodore Spencer's analysis of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries,[2] however, it is possible to see Marlowe as a precursor of a widespread pessimism rather than as an exceptional Elizabethan. He might have been deeply affected by any or all of the currents of thought that Spencer distinguishes as disturbing challenges to the optimistic medieval concept of world order--Protestantism, Copernican astronomy, Machiavellianism, and Montaigne's skepticism--although the influences of Copernicus and Montaigne upon Marlowe are purely speculative. As a friend of the mathematician and

astronomer, Thomas Harriott, he might have been introduced to contemporary pamphlets describing Copernican theories, but the astronomical images in the plays are based upon the Ptolemaic system. There is nothing in the plays suggestive of Montaigne, and it should be noted that Florio did not translate the Essais until 1603, but there is some reason to believe that Marlowe was accustomed to reading French,[3] and it is just possible that Montaigne's "Apology for Raymond Sebond" formed part of an intellectual background that did not find direct expression in the plays.

Protestantism and Machiavellianism do find expression in the plays and they are clearly of great importance, Machiavellianism of less importance than Protestantism. The casual identification of Marlowe as Machiavellian by Levin and other critics seems a mistake. Where Machiavellianism coincides with some Christian thinking is in the doctrine of the depravity of man; Machiavelli's cynicism about human nature runs parallel to an extreme view of the effects of original sin. It is possible to imagine that Marlowe found that cynicism compatible with his own concept of man as tragically inclined to evil, but when Marlowe treats Machiavellianism in the plays, he does not present it as admirable realism but as hypocrisy and scheming, more evidence of the evil in man. When Machiavel appears in person to introduce The Jew of Malta, his tone is assured and he sounds reasonable and persuasive as he makes such statements as:

> I count religion but a childish toy
> And hold there is no sin but ignorance.

and

> Many will talk of title to a crown:
> What right had Caesar to the empery?

4

Machiavel is present, however, to introduce Barabas and ask tolerance for him: "And let him not be entertain'd the worse/ Because he favors me" (ll. 34-35). Barabas' fate illustrates that Machiavel's ideas are not reasonable, but wicked. In the light of the play, the prologue in which Machiavel is allowed to express his views so plausibly is obviously satire. A similar, though much less significant satiric treatment of Machiavellianism, occurs in the character of Baldock in Edward II. Although Baldock is a minor character, he is particularly interesting. Because he says:

> My name is Baldock, and my gentry
> I fetcht from Oxford, not from heraldry,
>
> (II,ii,241-242)

it is inevitable that we think of Marlowe, the son of a shoemaker, who became a gentleman by graduating from Cambridge. A conversation between Spencer and Baldock depicts the usual scholar as a servile dependent of a nobleman:

> Then, Baldock, you must cast the scholar off,
> And learn to court it like a gentleman.
> Tis not a black coat and a little band,
> A velvet-cap'd cloak, fac'd before with serge
> And smelling to a nosegay all the day,
> Or holding of a napkin in your hand,
> Or saying of a long grace at a table's end,
> Or looking downward with your eyelids close,
> And saying, 'Truly, an't please your honour,"
> Can get you any favour with great men.5
>
> (II,i,31-41)

Spencer advises that Baldock assume Machiavellian ruthlessness, and Baldock assures him that he is quite capable of it and that he is not humble and pedantic, but "apt for any kind of villainy" (II,i,51). He is ready to model himself on the great men who, according to Spencer, are "proud, bold, pleasant, resolute,/ And now and then stab, as occasion serves" (II,i,42-43). These broad strokes of satire give us what seems an unmistakable indication of Marlowe's attitude toward actions based on Machiavellianism. He describes the actions satirically and denounces them as villainy.

The fourth of the challenges to medieval optimism that Spencer identifies in Shakespeare and the Nature of Man--the advent of Protestantism--is much more important in understanding the plays. Spencer points out that Christainity always embodies two concepts of man: one, that man, made in God's image, is the lord of the earth; the other, that by Adam's transgression, man is separated from God and condemned to wretchedness.[5] The Incarnation reconciles these two aspects of man's fate; man is assured of redemption and salvation. Protestantism, however, put difficulties in the way of salvation. Luther's sense of the magnificence of God led him to emphasize man's baseness. Even more relevant to Marlowe, Calvin, although he had a humanist's respect for the learning of the past, expounded an extreme view of the effect of the fall on man's faculties. Calvin considered man's reason and will so damaged by

Adam's disobedience that he easily fell victim to passion, his most base faculty. The doctrine, called "psychological enslavement," is succinctly expressed by Milton in Book IX of Paradise Lost:

> For Understanding ruled not, and the Will
> Heard not her lore, both in subjection now
> To sensual Appetite, who, from beneath
> Usurping over sovereign Reason, claimed
> Superior sway.[6]

Theodore Spencer, drawing upon Thomas Wright's The Passions of the Mind in General of 1604, gives an account of the process in which the part imagination plays is made clear. Spencer says that after the fall of man, ". . . action was dictated by imagination, a power which was lawless, and much lower than reason--one shared, in fact, by the beasts. Hence man is enslaved by passions, which are 'sensual motions of our appetitive faculty' aroused through imagination."[7]

It is surely more than coincidence that Marlowe's plays can be interpreted as precise demonstrations of this psychological explanation of man's inclination to evil. All of the plays show man ruled by passions and imagination; the characters are guided by imperfect reason and governed by infected will. As Peele perceived, Marlowe speaks for "the soules below," the fallen who are doomed by the effects of the fall on their minds. There is, however, an important dichotomy in Marlowe's representation of this psychology, for while the passions and imagination of his characters are ascendant, Marlowe portrays them not as base faculties,

but as glorious expressions of man's nature. In effect, Marlowe implicates himself in psychological enslavement by portraying his characters according to worldly standards so that their damning pursuits of love and power and wealth inspire admiration, even awe. Great dramatists, great writers generally, recognize the mixture of good and evil in humanity, but Marlowe is distinctive for he dramatizes two scales, two sets of values--the spiritual and the secular. By the application of secular values, Dido's love, Tamburlaine's invincibility, Barabas' esthetic appreciation of riches, the Guise's daring, Edward's constancy, and Faustus' quest for knowledge are seen to be noble. We admire them. By the application of spiritual values, however, the very same qualities are seen to be the triumphs of base faculties. Good and evil do not simply exist side by side in human nature in Marlowe's plays; good is evil, and evil is good. The refinement and extension of the sense of the evil in man's nature that we have seen in Marlowe's pessimism is a paradox.

Paradox was a familiar figure in the Renaissance. In her book Paradoxia Epidemica, Rosalie Colie remarks that paradoxes "occur in any period or place where intellectual speculation goes on. They tend to constellate, however, in a period, like the Renaissance, of intense intellectual activity, with many different ideas and systems in competition with one another." She continues that paradoxes coincide "with active speculation on the market of ideas."[8]

Marlowe is outside the scope of Miss Colie's book--she deals so exhaustively with paradoxes that are explicitly verbalized that one could hardly expect her to treat those merely dramatically implied--but her remarks about the Renaissance seem tailored for Marlowe. He depicts the conflict of the two strongest of the "ideas and systems in competition with one another" --the conflict between the Renaissance zest for life and the Reformation emphasis on the hereafter. Marlowe is also a bold thinker, "an active speculator on the market of ideas." Another point Miss Colie makes is illuminating: she describes paradoxes as "self-referential" and "profoundly self-critical": by glorifying passions and aspirations that he shows to be, sub specie aeternitatis, terrible errors, Marlowe implicates himself as surely as Epimenides the Cretan who said "All Cretans are liars." Thinking of Marlowe as self-denouncing like Epimenides, we have new insights. We can indulge in biographical speculation and wonder if Marlowe's ambivalence reflected a personality of sharply contradictory elements. This hypothesis would explain the conflict in contemporary references to him: Kyd's mention of "his rashness in attempting soden pryvie injuries to men"[9] and an unknown J. M.'s epithet, "kind Kit Marlowe."[10] There is another well-known contemporary denunciation of Marlowe, that of Greene, who warned, "I doubt not but you will look back with sorrow on your time past" and accused him of atheism and "pestilent Machiavellian policy,"[11] but Greene's comments are perhaps best

interpreted as expressions of jealousy and bitterness, defects in Greene's character rather than Marlowe's. In any event, there is no such harsh judgment in Edward Blunt's dedication of Hero and Leander to Sir Thomas Walsingham:

> Sir, we think not ourselves discharged of the duty we owe to our friend when we have brought the breathless body to the earth, for albeit the eye there taketh his ever farewell of that beloved object, yet the impression of the man that hath been dear unto us, living an after life in our memory, there putteth us in mind of farther obsequies due unto the deceased.[12]

Still in the realm of conjecture, the idea that Marlowe was deeply conscious of the paradoxical elements in his own character tends to support the tentative identification of a painting found in 1953 as a portrait of Marlowe. This painting is reproduced in In Search of Christopher Marlowe by A. D. Wraight, with photographs by Virginia Stern.[13] According to Wraight, the painting was found by a Cambridge undergraduate in a heap of rubbish created by workmen repairing the Master's Lodge at Corpus Christi. The inscription "Aetatis suae 21 1585" fits Marlowe's age. Wraight suggests that Marlowe might have had his portrait painted in the year he completed his B.A. and presented the portrait to the Master as many undergraduates did. Wraight accounts for its disappearance until 1953 by the speculation that after Marlowe's death made him notorious, the picture was hidden, as another painting of a disgraced graduate, one Henry Butts, who went insane, is known to have been hidden. Seeing Marlowe as a dealer in paradox strengthens the possibility that the portrait is his, for the motto "Quod me

Nutrit me Destruit" appears below the picture.[14] If we accept the identification of Marlowe as the subject of the portrait, we may take the motto as an indication that Marlowe was conscious from a very early age of the self-destructive conflict between man's nature and God's laws.

Such speculations are attractive but exceedingly tenuous. A far more profitable study is an analysis of the way Marlowe presented the paradox of man's nature in the plays. T.S. Eliot pointed out Marlowe's habit of reworking lines from play to play;[15] he might equally well have pointed out the tenacity with which Marlowe reworked the associations of the poetic powers we now call imagination, of ardor, love of beauty, courage, and ambition--all admirable traits--with arrogance, lawless passion, greed, cruelty, and blasphemy. The seven tragedies abundantly demonstrate these combinations. The magnificence of Dido's abandonment to love, the purity of Barabas' worship of gold, the ennobling soif de l'impossible of the Guise, the sublime ambition of Tamburlaine, the poignant constancy of Edward's love for Gaveston, the daring of Faustus' quest for power are all unforgettable. These qualities, however, all betray these possessors. They are indulged in excessively or they are directed toward the wrong ends: Dido is wanton; Barabas' outrage over the loss of his wealth leads him to wholesale murders; the Guise's "deep engender'd thoughts" bear fruit in assassination and massacre; Tamburlaine is treacherous and merciless; Edward's love is perverted; Faustus defies God.

Marlowe might have taken as his text any Christian warning about the futility of the pursuit of worldly goals or any Christian admonition to moderation, but he presents these traditional sentiments under new circumstances. The plays are fresh in thought and feeling: they are more than conventional moral examples. They have the immediacy of felt passion because Marlowe's ambivalence was so well balanced. Within the framework of Christian morality, Marlowe gave superlative expression to "the highest reaches of humaine wit."

It is precisely at this point that Battenhouse's interpretation of Tamburlaine proves unsatisfactory. In his discussion of Tamburlaine's passion,[16] Battenhouse seems very close to a sound interpretation that might illuminate all the plays, but in pointing out that the passions of Tamburlaine by Elizabethan standards would have been admirable if they had not flared into excesses and been misdirected and deluded, Battenhouse slights Tamburlaine's magnificence and sounds a platitudinous note that is quite wrong. He shows that moderation was urged commonly by Elizabethan moralists, that it was widely believed that man's chief pursuit should be the good of his soul, and the Elizabethans distinguished between divine and infernal inspiration. These facts do not surprise us; their very familiarity makes them seem unsuitable as the key to the meaning of Tamburlaine the Great.

Battenhouse's Tamburlaine has the artificiality of a construct, partly because of the organization of his study--

he analyzes various aspects of Renaissance moral philosophy and then interprets Tamburlaine in their light--but also because Battenhouse's discussion of Tamburlaine's magnificence is brief. This brevity may be inevitable, since Battenhouse presents another thesis, but the effect is of understatement of Tamburlaine's admirable qualities and of overemphasis of the moral import of the play. In terms of worldly success and in esthetic terms, Tamburlaine not only rouses our admiration; he also seems to express Marlowe's. He seems the product of an ambivalence Battenhouse does not allow for.

Battenhouse's moral bias is evident in his discussion of Tamburlaine as a Scourge of God, an idea that is important in his interpretation. He concludes, "Marlowe endows his hero with the gifts both spiritual and physical which are appropriate to a Scourge of God";[17] he believes Tamburlaine to be such a scourge as Calvin describes in A Commentary Upon the Prophecie of Isaiah, one of those tyrants whom God, "having used them as his vassals to correct his people. . . will visit their pride and arrogance."[18] The scourge idea is not inconsistent with the view of Tamburlaine's following his poet's imagination to a tragic end. Indeed, because Tamburlaine thinks the epithet a proud boast, its use adds irony. It is noticeable that when Tamburlaine first mentions the title he has heard it from others: he is unaware of any undesirable implications in the role. He says with assurance, "I that am term'd the Scourge and Wrath of God" (III,iii,44), but his enemies do not think it a flattering description. En

route to the rescue of his daughter, for example, the Soldan says that they march to put down

> A monster of five hundred thousand heads,
> Compact of rapine, piracy and spoil,
> The scum of men, the hate and scourge of God,
>
> (IV,iii,7-9)

The importance of Tamburlaine's ignorance of the damnation implicit in the function of the Scourge of God is not merely ironic; the area of Tamburlaine's ignorance is the area in which the action of the play takes place. God's high purpose is in the background; Tamburlaine's experience of it is the substance of the drama. Battenhouse offers us an interpretation in which Marlowe's conception of Tamburlaine would have been static; singling out the superb imagination that fired Tamburlaine's ambition, tracing its corruption, we can see Tamburlaine becoming the Scourge of God, or rather, see the characteristics of a scourge emerging. Discounting the strong element of ambivalence in the presentation of Tamburlaine, Battenhouse seems to argue that Marlowe makes a very familiar moral point. Isolating the quality which Tamburlaine follows too far and to the wrong ends, we can see Marlowe making use of a familiar moral point. He made use, indeed, of the whole framework of conventional morality, the broad outlines as well as the subtle points, but he added a new element to the stale formula: the spirit of the Renaissance. The conjunction of glorious aspiration and impious audacity in Tamburlaine is not sufficiently urged by Battenhouse: he discusses a play which Marlowe

could not have written.

Not only Tamburlaine, but all the plays, focus on passions which are both glorious and damning and thus on the paradox in man's nature. This focus is achieved first through the great speeches in which the passions are conveyed. The speeches scarcely need quoting: they constitute the most familiar and most magnificent poetry of the plays. When Aeneas responds to Dido's declaration of love, for example, Dido says:

> What more than Delian music do I hear,
> That calls my soul from forth his living seat
> To move unto the measures of delight?
>
> (III,iv,51-53)

Tamburlaine blends his wonder at Zenocrate's beauty into the first statement of his ambitions:

> I am a lord, for so my deeds shall prove,
> And yet a shepherd by my parentage.
> But lady, this fair face and heavenly hue
> Must grace his bed that conquers Asia,
> And means to be a terror to the world,
> Measuring the limits of his empery
> By east and west, as Phoebus doth his course.
>
> (I,ii,34-40)

The first appearance of Tamburlaine in Part II expresses felicity brought to an intense height:

> Now bright Zenocrate, the world's fair eye,
> Whose beams illuminate the lamps of heaven,
> Whose cheerful looks do clear the cloudy air,
> And clothe it in a crystal livery,
> Now rest thee here on fair Larissa plains,
> Where Egypt and the Turkish empire parts,
> Between thy sons, that shall be emperors,
> And every one commander of a world.
>
> (I,iv,1-8)

The Jew marvels at

> The wealthy Moor, that in the eastern rocks
> Without control can pick his riches up,
> And in his house heap pearl like pibble stones,
> Receive them free, and sell them by the weight!
> Bags of fiery opals, sapphires, amethysts,
> Jacinths, hard topaz, grass-green emeralds,
> Beauteous rubies, sparkling diamonds,
> And seld-seen costly stones of so great price,
> As one of them, indifferently rated,
> And of a caract of this quantity,
> May serve in peril of calamity,
> To ransom great kings from captivity.
>
> (I,i,21-32)

The Guise, plotting poisoning and assassination, earns our respect in one magnificent speech:

> That like I best, that flies beyond my reach.
> Set me to scale the high Pyramides,
> And thereon set the diadem of France;
> I'll either rend it with my nails to naught,
> Or mount the top with my aspiring wings,
> Although my downfall be the deepest hell.
> For this I wake, when others think I sleep,
> For this I wait, that scorns attendance else.
>
> (ii,42-49)

Edward does not establish his devotion to Gaveston as much by eloquence as by repetition in the early part of the play;

> I will have Gaveston; and you shall know
> What danger 'tis to stand against your king.
>
> (I,i,96-97)

and

> I cannot brook these haughty menaces;
> Am I a king, and must be overrul'd?
> Brother, display my ensigns in the field;
> I'll bandy with the barons and the earls,
> And either die, or live with Gaveston.
>
> (I,i,134-138)

Faustus has at his command a higher strain:

> O, what a world of profit and delight,
> Of power, of honour, and omnipotence,
> Is promised to the studious artizan!
> All things that move between the quiet poles
> Shall be at my command: emperors and kings
> Are but obeyed in their several provinces,
> Nor can they raise the wind, or rend the clouds;
> But his dominion that exceeds in this,
> Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man.
>
> (I,i,54-62)

These ringing lines convey passions that doom the characters. Paradox, very precisely formulated, is incorporated into the construction of the plays. In almost every case, the very quality that makes the character splendid is singled out as the cause of his tragic end. Admirable qualities in Marlowe's characters are not outweighed by an evil one; the most admirable quality is the evil one. This paradox is emphasized in the plots of the plays, in some cases by an explicit linking of the character's grandeur with his tragic fate, in every case by the ironic appropriateness of retribution. Marlowe translated the paradox of man's nature into a dramatic technique.

In Tamburlaine, particularly Part I, this technique is so subtle--and so interesting--that it seems wise to postpone consideration of Tamburlaine in favor of the plays in which Marlowe's portrayal of man's doomed brilliance is more forthright. The first of these plays, Dido, Queen of Carthage has surely been read with great attention since T. S. Eliot remarked that it was anunder-rated play,[19] but this attention does not appear to have been richly rewarded. It seems, certainly, to be an uneven play, and its source,

the Aeneid, committed Marlowe to unfamiliar values. In his last four plays, Marlowe offered counters to his audience that had a recognized significance. No one in the sixteenth century could have been unaware that Barabas' large-scale revenge, the Guise's ruthless slaughter, Edward's sacrifice of the peace of his kingdom for the pleasure of Gaveston's company, or Faustus' bargain with Mephistophilis violated fundamental moral laws. In Dido, however, Marlowe was adapting the virtues of another culture: the kind of chastity that the Vestal Virgins observed, duty in the Roman sense. These were virtues that might flatteringly be ascribed to Elizabeth, perhaps the intention of the play, but they were foreign to the moralities which Marlowe took as a starting point. Holding these virtues in mind clarifies the play. Dido's sin is capitulation to passion in spite of the fact that she is a queen. Before Cupid touched her with his dart she had been able to say:

> . . . the gods do know no wanton thought
> Had ever residence in Dido's breast
>
> (III,i,16-17)

These lines are heavily ironic: Dido's love springs full-grown into being in the same scene, and it drives Dido into reckless and wanton behavior. She forgets her royal bearing, she is careless of her country:

> So thou wouldst prove as true as Paris did,
> Would, as fair Troy was, Carthage might be sacked,
>
> (V,i,146-147)

Her desperate clinging to Aeneas so stimulates her imagina-

tion that she corrects its flourishes herself:

> The water, which our poets term a nymph,
> Why did it suffer thee to touch her breast,
> And shrunk not back, knowing my love was there?
> The water is an element, no nymph.
>
> (IV,iv,144-147)

When finally, Aeneas gone, she commits suicide, the beginning and end of her doomed passion are linked by the same words. Dido first declared her love for Aeneas in terms of fire: "Aeneas, O Aeneas, quench these flames" (III,iv,22); when she destroys herself, it is in "precious flame."

In Dido's case the intimate association of passion and punishment depends upon a cliché, the metaphoric use of fire for love. We can dismiss the possibility that it is accidental, however, for the same ironic pattern of cause and effect obtains in the treatment of Aeneas, although Aeneas' sin is not passion, but lack of it. Aeneas cherishes his role as a man of destiny and, above all, his reputation, but his consciousness of the role robs him of the power to make decisions and dulls his feelings. He is pius Aeneas only in the first scenes of the play, cheering his men, mourning Troy, suffering shock so profound at the sight of Priam's statue that he experiences hallucination. Even in the early part of the play, however, he displays an unctuous courtesy to Venus disguised as a Tyrian maid, the falseness of which is revealed by the stolid practicality of the line, "Gentle Achates, reach me the tinder box" (I,i,166). The promptness of his genealogical introduction

of himself to Venus is suggestive of his close association of himself with the gods and hence of his relative indifference to all claims but those the gods make upon him. This indifference appears as the adjunct of a lack of imagination so complete that it is brutalizing. The account of the sack of Troy is a masterpiece of characterization. Aeneas reveals a flair for dispassionate observation, but very little pity; only the most phlegmatic person could report with such accuracy and such devastatingly vivid words the murder of old Priam and the destruction of Troy. The speech is interesting, too, because it predicts the abandonment of Dido three separate times: Aeneas left his wife, then Cassandra, and finally Polyxena in the hands of the Greeks. It is not surprising that in his efforts to leave Dido he is petulant and indecisive. We apprehend that his concern for "fame's immortal house" and "bright honor's burnished hall" (IV,iii,8-9) is the only emotion Aeneas really feels; thus, it is ironically appropriate when for his weakness in succumbing to Dido he is made "famous through the world/For perjury and slaughter of a queen" (V,i,293-294).

The course of Barabas' admirable qualities through their corruption to the doom of Barabas in <u>The Jew of Malta</u> is within a much narrower range than the course of Dido's passion and is much more obvious than Aeneas' absorption in his divinely ordained role. His Jewishness must have limited the amount of admiration that Marlowe could hope to inspire for Barabas. In spite of his Jewishness, however,

in the early scenes Marlowe succeeds in making us--and presumably the Elizabethans--respect Barabas. In his counting house, Barabas has dignity. He talks with an esthetic appreciation of riches that must have roused the imagination of the spectators. He is competent in managing argosies and makes their contents and their routes almost as marvelous as he does the precious jewels. He is a dignified spokesman for both Jews and merchants:

> Rather had I, a Jew, be hated thus,
> Than pitied in a Christian poverty:
> For I can see no fruits in all their faith,
> But malice, falsehood, and excessive pride.
>
> (I,i,112-115)

Later in the same speech:

> I must confess we come not to be kings:
> That's not our fault: alas, our number's few,
> And crowns come either by succession,
> Or urged by force; and nothing violent,
> Oft have I heard tell, can be permanent.
>
> (I,i,127-131)

In his first speeches Barabas has made a strong enough claim on our sympathy so that we recognize as justifiable his indignation at the greed, hypocrisy, and "policy" of Ferneze. We are not immediately dismayed by his own resort to "policy"; we see with pleasure that he is not, after all, left penniless by the confiscation of his goods. His first strategem, aimed at the recovery of the wealth hidden in his house, is clever. Barabas' virtue, in fact, his humanly admirable, but humanly limited virtue, is this cleverness. Even more than his passionate appreciation of wealth, his intelligence distinguishes him. It is his in-

telligence that dooms him as Dido's passion and Aeneas' consciousness of his historical importance doom them. Barabas becomes fascinated by his ability to outsmart his enemies. He becomes an incessant plotter, and his plots are on a grander and grander scale. His plunging from his "dainty gallery" through the trap he had planned for Calymath is the culmination of a career in vice that rose from the virtue of intelligence.

No comparable neatness in plotting is observable in The Massacre at Paris. Indeed, the very corrupt text makes it difficult to make any observations about the play and makes it impossible to form any conclusions--except perhaps the one formed by its editor, H. S. Bennet. Bennet remarked, "Bad as the state of the text undoubtedly is, there is nothing about it that leads us to believe that, had we the perfect text, we should have a great play."[20] Even in the mutilated version of the play, however, there is an indication of the same relationship between the central character's greatness and his debasement that exists in the other plays. We know that the Guise's simultaneous virtue and vice is political ambition; we have as evidence not only his great soliloquy in scene two, but also the fact that he is referred to as "aspiring Guise" throughout the play. The Guise's ambition has evolved before the opening of the play into the policy of ruthlessly eliminating enemies, enemies which incidentally include all the Protestants in France. When the Guise himself is assassinated,

his death is referred to as the springing of his own trap. Henry III arranges the murder; we do not know what specific plans the Guise had made for the murder of Henry--although we do know that Henry had reason to fear and hate him. Neither do we know how the trap was particularly appropriate to the corrupted ambition of the Guise, nor if, in this sprawling play, it was particularly appropriate. What we do know is that Henry, having interviewed the three murderers he had procured, seeing all was in readiness, said:

> Come, Guise, and see thy traitorous guile outreached
> And perish in the pit thou mad'st for me.
>
> (xviii,31-32)

Although the Guise and, to a lesser extent, Barabas are more villains than heroes, at the beginnings of their careers they inspire admiration. The feelings and attributes that they embody can be interpreted as virtues gone astray. In Edward II, however, there are no such striking virtues; instead there are a few redeeming qualities in an array of vices. The terms of the paradox are turned upside down: Gaveston, Spencer, Baldock, Mortimer--all evil men--are shown to be able to meet death bravely; Edward, who had been bad-tempered and tactless as king, is patient and eloquent in his sufferings. The central vice cum virtue is Edward's love for Gaveston, which has Edward's persistence, intensity, and sincerity to recommend it. It is nonetheless a cause of evil: Edward's love for Gaveston precipitates dissension among the Barons; it alienates his wife; it empties England's treasury, brings on a war, and finally forces Ed-

ward's abdication and murder. The connection between that murder and Edward's love is shocking and direct. As William Empson pointed out, Lightborn's "braver way" is "an obscene parody" of the homosexuality of which Edward was guilty.[21] In Edward II, Marlowe probably touched the absolute in poetic justice; what is more, having mastered the technique, he immediately put it to use again, only a shade less brutally. In Faustus, which will be treated later, Faustus said:

> This word "damnation" terrifies not me,
> For I confound hell in Elysium:
> My ghost be with the old philosophers!
>
> (I,iii,61-63)

He is faced with visible proof of his error when Hell mouth gapes for him. Nemesis is vigilant.

The construction of the plays from Dido to Faustus--Tamburlaine, though not treated here, is not an exception--around the ennobling qualities of the central characters, the tracing of the corruption of those qualities, and the ultimate doom of those characters seems peculiar to Marlowe. The Marlovian hero does not have a tragic flaw; he has a tragic virtue. Paradox is made dramatic. It is, of course, a paradox that is weighted: man's aspirations, however splendid, arise out of his worldliness; their very existence demonstrates that man's equilibrium in a middle state between angel and animal is disturbed. Temporal pleasures and goals are the sources of the passionate energy Marlowe depicts. References to time scattered through the plays sound warnings of the transience of earthly joys.

Tamburlaine in exaltation, Faustus and Edward in despair wish to stop time. Tamburlaine imagines himself a second sun:

> . . .I, the chiefest lamp of all the earth,
> First rising in the east with mild aspect,
> But fixed now in the meridian line. . .
>
> (IV,ii,36-38)

Faustus says:

> Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven
> That time may cease, and midnight never come.
>
> (V,ii,140-141)

And Edward:

> Continue ever thou celestial sun;
> Let never silent night possess this clime:
> Stand still you watches of the element,
> All times and seasons, rest you at a stay.
>
> (V,i,64-67)

In a related idea, Dido believes she will find eternity in Aeneas' love:

> If he forsake me not, I never die;
> For in his looks I see eternity,
> And he'll make me immortal with a kiss.
>
> (IV,iv,121-124)

Barabas, appropriately enough, has no sense of eternity. When his wealth is confiscated, he wishes for oblivion:

> And henceforth wish for an eternal night,
> That clouds of darkness may inclose my flesh,
> And hide these extreme sorrows from mine eyes.
>
> (I,ii,194-196)

If there were no other evidence, the references to time in the plays would express Marlowe's sense of man's tragic failure to achieve an equilibrium between the material and

the spiritual. Not time, but eternity is the preoccupation of the secure Christian: Marlowe's characters are the world-bound. They remind us of Milton's devils, who, as David S. Berkeley[22] points out, unlike Adam and Eve, are very sensible of the passage of time. Time is limited for them; they hurry to accomplish what they can before the Last Judgment cuts off their activities. Marlowe's characters are not supernatural spirits, however, but men failing to achieve their spiritual lives. The consequences of their not maintaining the middle position is quite naturally stated in terms of time. Faustus shows the connection:

> All beasts are happy,
> For, when they die
> Their souls are soon dissolved in elements,
> But mine must live still to be plagued in hell.
>
> (V,ii,173-176)

Faustus' tragedy is immortality; at the other end of the scale is Tamburlaine, whose tragedy is mortality. Tamburlaine remains to be examined.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

[1]George Gascoigne, "The Steel Glass," printed in part in The Renaissance in England, ed. Hyder E. Rollins and Herschel Baker (Boston, 1954), p. 306.

[2]Theodore Spencer, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man, 2d ed. (New York, 1955).

[3]Ethel Seaton suggests that Belleforest's Cosmographie Universelle and Les Fleurs des hystoires de la terre Dorient, an account of the travels of an Armenian named Haytoun, were among Marlowe's sources for Tamburlaine. "Fresh Sources for Marlowe," RES, V (1929), 385-401.

[4]The Jew of Malta, Prologue, ll. 14-15 and 18-19, in the volume The Jew of Malta and The Massacre at Paris, ed. H.S. Bennet, The Works and Life of Christopher Marlowe (London, 1931), III.

[5]Charlton and Waller point out that this unflattering account of gentlemen-scholars is confirmed by lines in Joseph Hall's Virgidemiarum and by some of the portraits in Overbury's Characters and New Characters and in Earle's Microcosmographie, Edward II, p. 109.

[6]Paradise Lost, Bk. IX, ll. 1127-1131.

[7]Spencer, pp. 24-25.

[8]Rosalie Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox (Princeton, 1966), p. 33.

[9]Kyd's unsigned note to Puckering, reprinted in the appendixes to Tucker Brooke's The Life of Marlowe, The Works and Life of Christopher Marlowe (London, 1930), I.

[10]Quoted by Tucker Brooke, The Life of Marlowe, p. 80.

[11]Robert Greene, Greene's Groatsworth of Wit Bought with a Million of Repentance, printed in part in The Renaissance in England, p. 854.

[12]Blunt's dedication is printed with Hero and Leander, The Renaissance in England, p. 388.

[13]A. D. Wraight and Virginia Stern, In Search of Christopher Marlowe (New York, 1965), pp. 63-71.

[14]Wraight remarks that Gilbert Highet has not succeeded in tracing this quotation to its source. He points out the interesting similarity in the phrase "consum'd with that which it was nourished by" in Sonnet LXXIII.

[15]T.S. Eliot, "Christopher Marlowe;" Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 13-15.

[16]Roy Battenhouse, "Tamburlaine's Passions," Marlowe's Tamburlaine, pp. 226-239.

[17]Battenhouse, p. 244.

[18]Quoted by Battenhouse, p. 109.

[19]Eliot, p. 16.

[20]Introduction, The Massacre at Paris, p. 174.

[21]William Empson, "Two Proper Crimes," The Nation, CLXIII (1946), 444-445.

[22]David S. Berkeley, A Milton Guide (Stillwater, 1965), No. 46, p. 331.

CHAPTER FIVE

TRAGEDY IN THE FATE OF TAMBURLAINE

The hazard of thematic interpretation is that if we do not actually murder to dissect, we may nonetheless, following preconceived notions, badly mutilate and distort. Distortion seems to have been the fate of Tamburlaine. That this should be so is not surprising, for Tamburlaine, particularly Part I, is a complex play. That distorted interpretations should continue seems unnecessary, for close study reveals that the classical allusions in the plays are a clear guide to the meaning of the plays: the allusions show the progressive deterioration of Tamburlaine. This meaning is solidly in line with the interpretation of all the plays as depicting the tragic vulnerability of man to his own instincts.

Even without the guide that the classical allusions afford, it is not difficult to see that Tamburlaine, Part II develops the theme of deterioration. In Part II, the paradox has expanded; the tension is relaxed. Tamburlaine has already turned his magnificent gifts to "the sweet fruition of an earthly crown." He has betrayed and murdered: he is deluded and doomed. Over the whole play lies the ironic shadow of his ignorance of his situation. He is harnessed

to insatiable ambition as the captive princes are harnessed to his chariot. The triumphs throughout the play are hollow. Tamburlaine's obsession with conquest and slaughter has coarsened his character: his imagination leaves the material realm only in occasional bursts--when Zenocrate is dying, for example. He gives way to rages. Nemesis is closing in: he who had persuaded Theridamas to betray Mycetes in Part I is himself betrayed by Almeda; Bajazeth is long dead, but Bajazeth's son eludes him persistently and serves as a rallying point for attacks upon him. His own sons are disappointing: the references to Phaeton and Hippolytus in his valediction to the two who remain predict their ill fate as his successors. Above all, Tamburlaine, who thinks himself the lord of death, begins to suffer depredations through death. Zenocrate is taken from him; Olympia, beloved by his lieutenant Theridamas, rejects his love and tricks him into killing her; Calyphas proves unworthy and is despatched. Finally, Tamburlaine himself has a horrified vision of death coming for him:

> See, where my slave, the ugly monster death
> Shaking and quivering, pale and wan for fear,
> Stands aiming at me with his murdering dart,
> Who flies away at every glance I give,
> And, when I look away, comes stealing on!
> Villain, away, and hie thee to the field!
> I and mine army come to load thy bark
> With souls of thousand mangled carcasses.
> Look, where he goes! but, see, he comes again,
> Because I stay!
>
> (V,iii,67-76.)

The nature of this tragic recognition, that "Tamburlaine, the Scourge of God, must die," is unusual--Mahood remarks,

"Tamburlaine is the only drama I know in which the death of the hero constitutes the tragedy."[1] It is not ambiguous, however, and it is a clear dramatization of the retribution imposed upon the reckless expression of superhuman ambitions. Aspiration, so splendid in the Tamburlaine of Part I, has totally destroyed the Tamburlaine of Part II. The mixed grandeur and folly of Tamburlaine's nature are consummated.

The theme of man's paradoxical nature is much more tightly expressed in Part I of Tamburlaine. Good and evil are much more evenly balanced, perhaps because the young Tamburlaine was a figure of much greater personal significance to Marlowe than the later Tamburlaine. Even in Part I, however, tracing the classical allusions in the play enables us to see that Tamburlaine, like the central characters of the other plays, devotes his best qualities to the wrong ends. Like the other characters, his indulgence of his imagination and his passions brings upon him a condign doom. Indeed, Tamburlaine's punishment is a particularly bitter one: it involves his poet's imagination and his relations with all humanity. This doom seems conclusively demonstrated by classical allusions which, far from being random recollections of Ovid or importations from Senecan tragedies, are a system of references that characterize, that are integral to the plot, and that carry the theme of the play: they measure Tamburlaine's madness.

One finds, as one would expect, an acknowledgment of Marlowe's mastery of classical mythology in Douglas Bush's

Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition; but Bush's comment follows an analysis of Hero and Leander which is not entirely laudatory. He regrets the sensuous additions to Musaeus' poem; he regards as irrelevant Marlowe's mythopoetic addition of the Mercury incident.[2] In an article entitled "A Function of Myth in Hero and Leander"[3] Paul W. Miller disputes Bush's view, specifically his condemnation of the Mercury episode. Miller interprets Mercury's misdeeds as analogous to those of Leander and understands the parallel to emphasize the theme of futile defiance of inexorable powers. Although Miller's interpretation seems excessively grave, he has identified in Hero and Leander a coordination of myth and theme comparable to that which exists in Tamburlaine.

Other critics have touched upon the mythological allusions in Tamburlaine itself. Undertaking explications de texte from various angles, they have concurred in recognizing allusions to the gods as a technique of characterization. Donald Peet[4] has detected many standard Elizabethan rhetorical devices, particularly, of course, hyperbole; and, quoting Wilson's Arte of Rhetorique, he demonstrates that Tamburlaine's speeches often follow a pattern recommended for an effective exhortatory address. By arranging the episodes of the play as a series of debates, Marlowe made room for rhetorical flights, the references in which redound to the marvelous nature of the hero. In commenting not on rhetorical devices but on imagery in the play, Moody Prior makes a classification even more pertinent to the interpretation of

the play as culminating in Tamburlaine's madness:

> . . . the figures of speech which appear most frequently and which are used with most consistency are drawn from a limited and fairly definite range of categories--the gods of classical mythology, principally Jove; jewels, treasures, and precious stones and metals; stars, planets, and other heavenly bodies. . . . In their interplay, these images intensify markedly the impression of magnitude and are more responsible for the heroic character of the play than the increasingly glorious military triumphs of the hero.[5]

Two of the categories Prior distinguishes are actually more closely associated than he suggests: the stars, planets, and other heavenly bodies are almost inseparable from the Olympian imagery. Tamburlaine refers indiscriminately to the stars and to their personifications. Like the ancients, he peopled the sky.[6] In Part II he suggests that he himself may become a star:

> If Jove, esteeming me too good for earth,
> Raise me to match the fair Aldeboran.
>
> (IV,iii,60-61)

To separate the two classes of images is to make a distinction that was not clear-cut in Tamburlaine's mind.

Images dealing with natural phenomena, with wind and weather, particularly violent weather, and with geographical features are also closely related to the references to the gods. Tamburlaine refers to these phenomena from the point of view of a god. Throughout the play, for example, he predicts that the activities of his army will rival natural catastrophe. He introduces his lieutenants to Zenocrate:

> And these, that seem but silly country swains,
> May have the leading of so great an host
> As with their weight shall make the mountains quake,
> Even as when windy exhalations,
> Fighting for passage, tilt within the earth.
>
> (I,ii,47-51)

At the end of the play a reference to natural phenomena is not a metaphor. Tamburlaine, convinced of superhuman powers, asserts that he has horribly altered climate:

> And here in Afric, where it seldom rains,
> Since I arriv'd with my triumphant host,
> Have swelling clouds, drawn from wide gasping wounds,
> Been oft resolv'd in bloody purple showers.
>
> (V,ii,395-8)

The distances that Tamburlaine conceives are only consistent with an Olympian perspective. Geography in his imagination is global. He sees the world precisely as Phoebus sees it in daily circumnavigation, an arrangement of continents and oceans between frozen poles. Even before his madness Tamburlaine is able to look at the world with a god's eyes.

Although Prior's analysis of the classical allusions in Tamburlaine is more perceptive than the comments of earlier critics,[7] it seems that no one has yet formulated their exact relationship to the theme of the play. Prior concludes with an interpretation that does not entirely satisfy him. He regards the play as depicting "the progressive unfolding of Tamburlaine as a heroic figure, as a man of 'virtue'," [8] but he is unable to reconcile the dark side of Tamburlaine's character with this theme. He quite abruptly abandons the attempt: "It may well be that a consistent explanation of this play is out of the question." [9] Frank

Fieler, in a longer study, evolves a more comprehensive view of the role of the classical allusions, but his interpretations, although a consistent explanation, is not an entirely convincing one. The thesis of Fieler's monograph, Tamburlaine, Part I, and Its Audience,[10] is that the incidents in the life of the historical Timur Lane were well known to Elizabethans so that Marlowe was obliged to portray them with fidelity; Timur Lane, however, a thief, a low-born upstart impertinently proclaiming his nobility, a rebel against his king, a tyrant, and an impious heretic, would have been a thorough-going villain in Elizabethan eyes. To induce his audience to suspend their moral judgment, Marlowe effected the "apotheosis of a scoundrel"; he deliberately characterized Tamburlaine as a superhuman being in order to put him beyond the standards of human morality.

A fine scholarly knowledge of the sixteenth century is disposed to advantage in Fieler's interpretation of the play, but it is difficult to accept, as Fieler does, that the Christian humanism enunciated by Hooker, the prudent reflections of Elyot in The Boke Named the Governour, and the matter of Certayne Sermons or Homilies represent the sacrosanct and unanimous views of those Elizabethans who composed Marlowe's audience in the innyards. Indeed, the play itself is evidence of the great fascination the character of Tamburlaine, unembellished, had for at least one Elizabethan--Marlowe himself. He must surely have appreciated that the exaltation of Tamburlaine's person would have the effect of

putting him beyond the conventional moral standards of the Elizabethan audience, but to consider catering to Elizabethan morality his sole motivation in establishing Tamburlaine's magnificence is a mistake. One senses behind Fieler's theory an obtuse assumption that esthetic creation proceeds in the same way as esthetic analysis. Even so learned a poet as Marlowe is far more likely to have conceived his character intuitively than to have constructed him with deference to the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity. Tamburlaine has the wholeness of a character born in speculation suddenly illuminated by insight: his virtues and his vulnerability must have been inherent in Marlowe's original conception of him; the very intensity of the play militates against the theory that they were added to avoid outraging the moral sympathies of the audience.

Although it is disappointingly brief, M. M. Mahood's discussion of the classical allusions in the play is much more perceptive than Fieler's. Miss Mahood distinguishes an Orphic quality in Tamburlaine's lyricism in the early scenes of the play which is superseded by Titan imagery. She interprets Tamburlaine's lust for power as a desire for the specifically destructive powers of a god, and she considers it closely associated with the creative powers of a poet: ". . .Tamburlaine's exultation in the power to destroy is caused by a perversion of the power to create."[11] Her discussion includes a brief analysis of the light and dark imagery in Part II which is not relevant here except

insofar as it confirms the reading of the play as illustrating a tragic misdirection of energy.

Miss Mahood's discussion of Marlowe is part of a study of the failure of anthropocentric humanism and the triumph of religious humanism in the seventeenth century. With her eye on her larger subject, she hastily touches upon many points which in a study devoted to Marlowe need further development. There is perception that amounts almost to intuition in Miss Mahood's treatment--there is no explicit allusion to Orpheus in Tamburlaine, for example, but the interpretation of Tamburlaine as Orphic seems very sound. Perhaps her insight can be partly explained by the fact that unlike Fieler, Miss Mahood examines the classical allusions in order. Examined in the order in which they appear in the play, Tamburlaine's references to the gods indicate his increasing identification with them. His first references are mere boasts; he ultimately imagines himself a god. With his acts of brutality, the classical allusions in the play mark the stages of his descent into madness, a descent which is the ironic counterpoint to his uninterrupted triumphs. There are thus two movements in the play. The ascent of Tamburlaine, his invincibility against greater and greater odds, and his establishing himself as abundantly worthy of marriage to Zenocrate have distracted critics from observation of his descent. Boas, Bakeless, Levin, and Kocher[12] understand the theme of the play to concern man's glorious aspirations. The editor of the play in the Case

edition, Una Ellis-Fermor, agrees in the identification of this theme; perhaps having been infected by the hyperbole in the play, she declares even Tamburlaine's triumph inadequate to its expression, "often childishly at variance with it."[13] None of these readings is able to comprehend Tamburlaine's brutality: a corollary to the enunciation of lofty aspirations as the theme of the play is a denunciation of Tamburlaine's bombast, rant, and brutality. Basing their interpretations only on Tamburlaine's triumphant career, these critics do violence to Marlowe's careful integration of virtues and vices in the character. Tamburlaine's madness is intimately associated with his magnificence: a relationship of cause and effect obtains. It is the product of the flattery of his followers and the awe of his adversaries. His recognition of his obvious superiority to the first king he defeats, Mycetes, and his contempt for the treachery of the second, Cosroe, contribute to it. He is dehumanized by incessant slaughter. The most important cause of his madness, however, is the desire for glory and fame and power, a desire which is conveyed in his association of himself with the gods. Late in the play the allusions to the gods are symptoms of mania.

The interpretations which conclude that the play is flawed by lack of unity are revealed to be flawed interpretations. The theme of Tamburlaine is not the possibility of illimitable attainments but the dangerous loneliness of excellence, particularly the dangers of isolation amid the

splendors of a poet's imagination. Tamburlaine falls victim to his own oratory. The classical allusions, from being rhetorical devices, become assertions of Tamburlaine's belief in his own divinity. He is the tragic counterpart of Don Quixote, taking a body of legends for truth; the play portrays his growing absorption in them.

Infatuation with legend is touched on in the play by the foolish king Mycetes, many of whose speeches are in ironic contrast to Tamburlaine's. When Mycetes sets out with his generals to put down his brother's rebellion, one of his counselors assures him that the undisciplined rebels will succumb to his stratagem of littering the battlefield with gold and will turn on each other like the horde that sprang from the dragon's teeth. Mycetes' question, wistful and seemingly irrelevant as a child's:

> Was there such brethren, sweet Meander, say,
> That sprung of teeth of dragons venomous?
>
> (II,ii,51-52)

is actually very much to the point. Meander answers, "So poets say, my lord," and Mycetes goes on:

> And 'tis a pretty toy to be a poet.
> Well, well, Meander, thou art deeply read.
>
> (II,ii,54-55)

The striking line, "And 'tis a pretty toy to be a poet," has perhaps obscured the sense of the passage. Mycetes' comment is not pure admiration: he is questioning the wisdom of Meander's plan, and his remark exposes its dubious provenance. Meander's plan does in fact fail. Since the plan was

based on a myth and Tamburlaine's imagination is fed by mythology, the incident reflects upon Tamburlaine. There are two implications: the first is that Tamburlaine is greater than Meander--strategy derived from myths is successful for him. We have already seen Tamburlaine strewing the field with gold in order to impress Theridamas, and Theridamas was won over. The second implication, however, is that mythology is an unreliable guide in practical affairs. The failure of Meander's scheme undermines the source of Tamburlaine's inspiration. What seems Mycetes' gentle and resigned recognition of Meander's folly implies the same folly in Tamburlaine. Mycetes grasps the danger of basing actions on legends. Mycetes grows in wisdom as he fails in power; Tamburlaine takes the opposite course.

At the beginning of the play, Tamburlaine makes conventional rhetorical use of allusions to the gods and heroes of classical mythology in order to inspire his followers with confidence. That they are mere conventions we know because other characters, even those outside his orbit, make similar allusions in similar circumstances. Mycetes' inept exhortation to Theridamas is a parody in preview of Tamburlaine's high style:

> Thou shalt be leader of this thousand horse,
> Whose foaming gall with rage and high disdain
> Have sworn the death of wicked Tamburlaine.
> Go frowning forth, but come thou smiling home,
> As did Sir Paris with the Grecian dame.
>
> (I,i,62-66)

In departing from his wife before the battle with Tambur-

laine, Bajazeth assures her of his coming success with a crude blending of flattery and boasts:

> Zabina, mother of three braver boys
> Than Hercules, that in his infancy
> Did pash the jaws of serpents venomous,
> Whose hands are made to gripe a warlike lance,
> Their shoulders broad for complete armour fit,
> Their limbs more large and of a bigger size
> Than all the brats y-sprung from Typhon's loins;
> Who, when they come unto their father's age,
> Will batter turrets with their manly fists--
> Sit here upon this royal chair of state,
> And on thy head wear thy imperial crown,
> Until I bring this sturdy Tamburlaine
> And all his captains bound in captive chains.
>
> (III,iii,103-115)

The references to gods in Tamburlaine's early speeches are no more significant than Mycetes' reference to Paris or Bajazeth's to Hercules and Typhon. Tamburlaine's speeches differ from theirs only in quality: they reflect his superb imagination. He is, however, entirely conscious of their artificiality, and he comments on it in the first scene in which he appears. After the famous speech which begins, "Zenocrate, lovelier than the love of Jove" (I,ii,88), he remarks, "Techelles, women must be flattered" (I,ii,107).

Flattery is an exceptional use for his eloquence. Much more usually he is boasting to build the confidence of his men, to impress Zenocrate, or to win allies. He has confidence in his oratory: against the advice of his lieutenants he undertakes to persuade Theridamas to an alliance rather than fight. In these lines:

> Then shall we fight courageously with them?

Or look you I should play the orator:

(I,ii,128-9)

the phrase "I should play the orator" indicates the complete command Tamburlaine has over his rhetorical flights. They are not expressions of real ambitions, although they are colored by ambition. His speeches are calculated speeches of persuasion. Their effectiveness may actually be greater than Tamburlaine realizes because his listeners are affected not only by his words but also by "His looks[that] . . . menace heaven and dare the gods" (I,ii,156). One of his boasts appears to have rung hollow to Tamburlaine. When he says:

> Jove sometimes masked in a shepherd's weed,
> And by those steps that he hath scal'd the heavens,
> May we become immortal like the gods.
> Join with me now in this my mean estate,
> . . . . . .
> And when my name and honour shall be spread,
> As far as Boreas claps his brazen wings,
> Or fair Bootes sends his cheerful light,
> Thou shalt be competitor with me,
> And sit with Tamburlaine in all his majesty.

(I,ii,198-208)

Theridamas is won over by his promises and announces that not even Hermes could be more moving, but Tamburlaine feels compelled to add ambiguously:

> Nor are Apollo's oracles more true
> Than thou shalt find my vaunts substantial.

(I,i,211-212)

It is politic for Tamburlaine to induce his followers to forget that their situation is desperate at the beginning of the play, but he himself does not forget it. While he is

proclaiming that he

> . . . means to be a terror to the world,
> Measuring the limits of . . . empery
> By east and west, as Phoebus doth his course. . .
>
> (I,ii,38-40)

he is giving voice neither to plans nor to real hope but to the stuff of imagination. His real concern is to avoid capture by Theridamas, "since I love to live at liberty" (I,ii,26). Evidently his plan to use the spoils of his latest raid to win over Theridamas and his thousand horse has been formed before the scene opens. When a soldier announces that the thousand Persians are at hand, he takes practical steps: he arranges the treasure captured with Zenocrate to dazzle their eyes, and he arranges the contents of his imagination to dazzle their minds. Mycetes, in a simile in which he awkwardly characterizes himself as a goose,[14] has characterized Tamburlaine as a fox:

> . . . . . that Tamburlaine
> That, like a fox in midst of harvest-time,
> Doth prey upon my flocks of passengers,
> And, as I hear, doth mean to pull my plumes.
>
> (I,i,30-33)

Tamburlaine is cunning, and part of his cunning is in his choice of images and allusions.

We can see that in spite of the "dreaming prophecies" that he will be "monarch of the East"[15] on which his imagination has fed, Tamburlaine has no confidence in the event, for when he has won over Theridamas, he takes no steps to conquer the world, but, not even understanding his worth to Cosroe, he applies to be allowed to serve him:

> And doubt you not but, if you favor me
> And let my fortunes and my valour sway
> To some direction in your martial deeds,
> The world will strive with hosts of men at arms
> To swarm unto the ensign I support.
> The hosts of Xerxes, which by fame is said
> To drink the mighty Parthian Araris,
> Was but a handful to that we will have;
> Our quivering lances shaking in the air
> And bullets like Jove's dreadful thunderbolts
> Enrolled in flames and fiery smouldering mists
> Shall threat the gods more than Cyclopian wars;
> And with our sun-bright armour, as we march,
> We'll chase the stars from heaven and dim their eyes
> That stand and muse at our admired arms.
>
> (II,iii,10-24)

Tamburlaine's lieutenants follow him in offering their services to Cosroe, who not unnaturally accepts their offers. We know from the first scene of the second act that he is counting on the assistance of Tamburlaine in his attempt to overthrow his brother. He is not assured of success; seeing his doubt, Tamburlaine's hyperbolic estimate of the number of men he can raise is an instance of the loyal encouragement desirable in a young general. Cosroe, heartened, promises that when he is

> . . . solely emperor of Asia
> Then shall your needs and valours be advanced
> To rooms of honour and nobility.
>
> (II,iii,39-41)

Tamburlaine is content with that promise. His choice of words indicates that it represents the extent of his actual ambition:

> Then haste, Cosroe, to be king alone,
> That I with these my friends and all my men
> May triumph in our long expected fate.
>
> (II,iii,42-44)

Until his sudden decision to attack Cosroe after their victory over Mycetes, Tamburlaine has taken no steps to implement his visions of world domination. When Tamburlaine's imagination is caught by what is surely one of the memorable lines of English drama, "And ride in triumph through Persepolis" (II,v,50), he is betrayed by his superb imagination. He has played with the contents of his imagination like toys: suddenly the crowns, the treasure, the cities and lands quicken with the possibility of attainment. His imagination until that moment had been a tool at the service of practical aims, controlled and separate from his judgment. In this scene his judgment and imagination merge. To be a king is an old fantasy, but a new thought. His musing indicates that he had never actually contemplated being a king before. Nor, inspired as they had been by his boasts, had his followers ever believed they were real promises. They answer readily that it would be "passing brave to be a king/ And ride in triumph through Persepolis" (II,v,53-54), but they do not perceive the implication of his question. Theridamas, the one among them most experienced of courts, gives a lyrical description of the pleasures of power, but he says, "Nay, though I praise it, I can live without it" (II,v,66). Tamburlaine turns from him to the group:

> What says my other friends, will you be kings?
> Tech. I, if I could, with all my heart, my lord.
> Tamb. Why, that's well said, Techelles; so would I.
> And so would you, my masters, would you not?
> Usum. What then my lord?
> Tamb. Why then, Casane, shall we wish for ought
> The world affords in greatest novelty,
> And rest attemptless, faint and destitute?

> Methinks we should not. I am strongly mov'd,
> That if I should desire the Persian crown,
> I could attain it with a wondrous ease;
> And would not all our soldiers soon consent,
> If we should aim at such a dignity?
>
> (II,v,67-79)

The tone of this passage exposes the insubstantiality of all Tamburlaine's previous "working words." The men do not, at a signal from Tamburlaine, embark exultantly on an anticipated course; rather, the possibility of being kings is so remote from their expectations that they become stupid when it confronts them. Tamburlaine does not attempt to move them with boasts; he admits them to his calculations.

The sober tone of the passage, Tamburlaine's subdued language, and his friends' lagging comprehension all emphasize the significance of the step. We recognize dramatic retardation. In the course of Tamburlaine's ascent, however, the scene does not mark a departure from the expected course of the play: it is a smooth continuation of the series of victories. It is in connection with the deterioration motif that Tamburlaine's step has great significance. His treachery to Cosroe is the first stain on Tamburlaine's character that is dramatically presented. Much worse is to come. When he undertakes in reality the conquests he had plotted in dreams, he becomes brutal, vindictive, and arbitrary. The Tamburlaine who refuses, however sorrowfully, the formal application for mercy of the virgins of Damascus is an immense distance from the Tamburlaine who makes his first appearance comforting Zenocrate, "Come lady, let not

this appal your thoughts" (I,ii,1).

The brutalization of Tamburlaine is not a consequence of his military victories, but of his loss of a sense of community with mankind because of his growing identification of himself with the gods. When, by attacking Cosroe, he begins the translation into reality of the fantasies of his rhetorical flights, their entire content is retrospectively validated. In the same way that his boast that he will be a terror to the world hardens into a plan, his metaphorical associations of himself with the gods and heroes are replaced by assertions of his belief in his own divinity. Before the change, he has taken for granted the eventuality of his own death:

> Thus shall my heart be still combined with thine,
> Until our bodies turn to elements,
> And both our souls aspire celestial thrones.
>
> (I,ii,234-236)

After he has conquered Bajazeth he repudiates decline and death:

> For I, the chiefest lamp of all the earth,
> First rising in the east with mild aspect,
> But fixed now in the meridian line . . .
>
> (IV,ii,36-38)

When he claimed Jove's protection at the beginning of the play, the image he used shows that he considered himself, like all men, diminutive in stature in proportion to a god:

> And Jove himself will stretch his hand from heaven
> . . . . . and shield me safe from harm.
>
> (I,ii,179-180)

A much later image depicts, though not in physical terms,

his altered concept of his size in proportion to the gods. He no longer conceives of divine protection as sheltering him from inimical forces, but as restraining those forces, even to the point of destroying them in a cosmic conflagration. When Bajazeth begs heaven to poison him, Tamburlaine replies:

> The chiefest God, first mover of that sphere
> Enchas'd with thousands ever shining lamps,
> Will sooner burn the glorious frame of heaven
> Than it should so conspire my overthrow. . .
>
> (Iv,ii,8-11)

The process of Tamburlaine's infatuation is gradual. Between Act II and Act IV, he is in a condition that might be described as moderate mania. When he justifies his treachery to Cosroe by citing Jove's revolt against Ops, he is claiming the privilege of a god, a more intimate association than any of his earlier references. He is not entirely confident that the precedent vindicates him, for at the end of Act II, immediately after Cosroe's defeat, he shows some uneasiness:

> Though Mars himself, the angry god of arms,
> And all the earthly potentates conspire
> To dispossess me of this diadem,
> Yet will I wear it in despite of them,
> As great commander of this eastern world,
> If you but say that Tamburlaine shall reign.
>
> (II,vii,58-63)

It is also notable that in Act III, where he might announce a divine mandate, he only refers to the reputation of it: "I that am term'd the Scourge and Wrath of God" (III,iii,44). Parallel to the scene in Act II in which he enters upon his

delusion is a scene in Act IV in which he reveals himself totally claimed by it. The conquest of Bajazeth affected him powerfully. It confirmed him in his sense of his own divinity, and it indicated to him his supernatural function: he apprehended that he was to dispense death. The speech that contains:

> My sword struck fire from his coat of steel,
> Even in Bithynia, when I took this Turk. . .
>
> (IV,ii,41-42)

ends with lines that might mean Tamburlaine deliberately forces himself to his task:

> . . . 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. . .
>
> (IV,ii,53-55)

In any event, Tamburlaine is utterly abandoned to mania. The change is reflected in the action: his brutality is no longer offstage; throughout Act IV, he is intermittently engaged in humiliating his captives; he rejects Zenocrate's plea that he raise the siege of Damascus, defying the gods, not in reliance on friendship, as in the "Though Mars himself" speech, but in opposition to the claims of love:

> Zenocrate, were Egypt Jove's own land,
> Yet would I with my sword make Jove to stoop.
>
> (Iv,iv,75-76)

Between the triumphant crowning of his lieutenants at the end of Act IV and the crowning of Zenocrate, the fulfillment of his last and greatest ambition, at the end of Act V, Tamburlaine's behavior is markedly erratic. His ultimatum

to the citizens of Damascus is fantastically conveyed through the colors of his tents; he is inexplicably melancholy on the day of the black tents. His unfeeling slaughter of the virgins is followed by a puzzled acknowledgment that Zenocrate's beauty and sorrow still have the power to move him. Only Zenocrate does still evoke in him a human response. With mild pleasure and surprise he interprets the three bodies that come to his attention at the end of the play as suitable indications of his magnificence:

> . . . . . a sight of strange import,
> Emperors and kings lie breathless at my feet;
> The Turk and his great empress, as it seems,
> Left to themselves while we were at the fight,
> Have desperately despatched their slavish lives;
> With them Arabia too hath left his life:
> All sights of power to grace my victory.
> And such are objects fit for Tamburlaine,
> Wherein, as in a mirror, may be seen
> His honour, that consists in shedding blood
> When men presume to manage arms with him.
>
> (V,ii,405-416)

The casual interest of the phrase "as it seems" and the idle intellection in place of spontaneous emotion reflect an almost absolute atrophy of human sympathy. This series of actions demonstrates more than his indifference to the suffering of others; it shows his own motives to be infected with artificiality. His actions no longer evolve from genuine ambitions but from a search for modes of expression of his concept of his magnitude.

When they are understood to have double significance, the events of the play are anything but repetitious: their structure is faultless. The balance and coordination of the

plot when it is interpreted as a vehicle for the complex theme of the dangerous loneliness of the visionary, contrasted with the mechanical repetition of victories over increasingly powerful forces which conveys the single theme of Tamburlaine's triumphs, seem good evidence that Marlowe intended the more complex theme. There is an additional piece of evidence, an even clearer statement of Marlowe's intention: in an ironic piece of unconscious self-revelation, Tamburlaine characterizes himself as mad. The passage is the most significant of the classical allusions. Tamburlaine rather incoherently equates himself with Phaeton:

> But ere I march to wealthy Persia
> Or leave Damascus and th'Egyptian fields,
> As was the fame of Clymene's brainsick son
> That almost brent the axletree of heaven,
> So shall our swords, our lances and our shot
> Fill all the air. . .
>
> (IV,ii,47-52)

Phaeton's "brainsickness" did not consist in his determination to prove his divine parentage: he was not deluded in believing himself the son of Phoebus. His folly was in failing to realize that, in spite of Phoebus' acknowledgment of him, he was not a god. Phoebus specifically warned him, "Sors tua mortalis, non est mortale, quod optas,[16] but, enraptured perhaps, by his imagination of glory, he was deaf to the warning. His assumption of supernatural abilities had two consequences: the first was a devastation comparable to that wrought by Tamburlaine; the second was the intervention of the pater omnipotens, who hurled a thunderbolt, and Phaeton fell through the sky like a shooting star.

The correspondence which Tamburlaine points out implies the one that does not occur to him; the allusion is not merely descriptive, but also proleptic. Even those who understand the last scene of the play to depict the glorious fulfillment of soaring aspirations cannot believe in the permanence of Tamburlaine's eminence. The three bodies on the stage convey sufficiently to Zenocrate the transience of glory; only Tamburlaine, maddened by his delusion of immortality, does not sense his vulnerability. The play does not have a happy ending: rather, it fixes Tamburlaine at the moment of his perilous apogee.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

[1]Mahood, Poetry and Humanism, P. 60.

[2]Douglas Bush, Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition (Minneapolis, 1932), pp. 127-131.

[3]Paul W. Miller, "A Function of Myth in Hero and Leander," SP, L (1958), 158-167.

[4]Donald Peet, "The Rhetoric of Tamburlaine," ELH XXVI (1959), 137-155.

[5]Moody Prior, The Language of Tragedy (New York, 1947), p. 37. Prior also mentions images based upon the weather, but he separates them for some reason from the "principal ones."

[6]The classical world, of course, named constellations and stars for gods and heroes; Biblical references to the hosts of heaven, as David S. Berkeley points out, are sometimes to stars and planets and sometimes to angels. A Milton Guide, No. 43, p. 331.

[7]Tucker Brooke's comments on imagery in Tamburlaine, for example, were only numerical. "Marlowe's Versification and Style," SP, XIX (1922), 186-205.

[8]Prior, p. 37.

[9]Ibid., p. 44.

[10]Frank Fieler, Tamburlaine, Part I and Its Audience, University of Florida Monographs, No. 8 (Gainesville, 1961).

[11]Mahood, p. 59.

[12]Frederick Boas, Christopher Marlowe; John Bakeless, The Tragical History; Harry Levin, The Overreacher; Paul Kocher, Christopher Marlowe.

[13]Una Ellis-Fermor, Introduction, Tamb. the Great, p.58.

[14]Fieler points out the goose implied in Mycetes' speech. Tamburlaine and its Audience, p. 50.

[15]Tamburlaine's use of the phase "monarch of the East," anticipating Faustus' invocation of "Orientis princeps, Beëlzebub"(I,iii,17) ironically associates Tamburlaine with the Devil early in the play. Tamburlaine, of course, has no knowledge of the significance of the phrase.

[16]Metamorphoses, II, 56. Loeb Classical Library Edition.

CHAPTER SIX

MARLOWE AS A RENAISSANCE SPOKESMAN

Tamburlaine is the chief exhibit in both the religious and the atheist interpretations of Marlowe. It is also the chief exhibit in what might be called the psychological interpretation of the plays. Tamburlaine's mind destroys itself; Marlowe's pessimism, his appreciation of paradox in human nature is very precisely demonstrated. The addition of the evidence of Tamburlaine to the instances of evil and the paradoxes of characterization in the other plays seems to prove that the evil in man's nature is not only a theme in Marlowe's plays, but that it is the master theme.

An attractive feature of this interpretation is that in its broadest statement the theme of the tragic nature of man is independent of history. The theme at once unites Marlowe with writers from Aeschylus onward. At the same time, it derives from his particular epoch its intensity and its terms of reference. If one believes that formal history need not illuminate literature--and such literature as the novels of Jane Austen conduces to that belief--and if one yet hopes that literature will illuminate history, not methodically, nor with the impartiality of a historian, but in the areas it chances to touch, with an incomparable

incandescence, Marlowe answers one's expectations. Although Marlowe is an objective rather than a subjective playwright, his concentration on one theme and his development of it in seven tragedies have the effect of associating him with a well-defined set of ideas. In enunciating these ideas, Marlowe speaks for the Renaissance with a clear and distinctive voice.

He is first of all representative of his age in many ways unconnected with the particular theme of the nature of man. As a literary figure, he is a focus of the educational and cultural factors that contributed to the remarkable vitality and variety of Elizabethan letters. Above all, he so triumphantly solved the problem of an expressive English meter that it is difficult to think of him in connection with the fumbling search for it carried on by such people as William Warner and Sir Thomas Wyatt or with the argument for quantitative meter prosecuted with such striking naivete by Gabriel Harvey, William Webbe, and Thomas Campion. Not only in poetic matters, but also in drama Marlowe typifies important developments of the period. His very disregard of the classical unities has far more significance than Sackville and Norton's similar disregard in Gorboduc, for since it is convincingly argued by Bevington that the morality play was a genre of considerable complexity and that its form provided the pattern for Marlowe's plays, it is logical to suppose that Marlowe deliberately chose the English dramatic tradition for qualities--scope and flexi-

bility, perhaps--lacking in plays like Ralph Roister Doister that were fashioned on the classical model. His adaptation of the structure of the moralities combines the imported inspiration of the Renaissance with a native medieval art as in a parallel way did Spenser's adaptation of Chaucerian diction.

The circumstances that fostered the development of Marlowe and the trends he illustrates, interesting as they are, pale in comparison with the larger picture his plays afford of a period of self-conscious magnificence. Harry Levin's vivid comment, "With the coronation of Elizabeth, the scene was set for a national pageant in which the actual theater was to present a play-within-the-play,"[1] suggests the satisfaction with life as it was and the confidence of great things to come which commonly attach to the era. We are accustomed to think of Elizabethan exuberance, and we know that Elizabethan exuberance had many bases: a sense of England's history; growing knowledge of the world; independence from Rome; a strong, popular monarchy; the victorious struggle against Spain; and the appearance of national heroes after the model of the Italian uomo universale. These phenomena are not merely mirrored in Marlowe's plays: they are the very stuff of them; but they are framed in tragedy. Marlowe gives us a corrected view of the Renaissance. He shows us how, in at least one case, the gains were paid for by doubt and despair. When he assents in the Renaissance substitution of man for God as the fulcrum of experience--

but simultaneously--and very logically--carries out an inquiry into the nature of man and finds it wanting, he exhibits an ambivalence which gives us specific knowledge of a bleak counterpoise to what is commonly thought of as the Zeitgeist. Interestingly enough, this qualification of Renaissance optimism is consistent with the birth of the Renaissance, as Huizinga perceived it,[2] in the exhaustion and decadence of medieval institutions. Occupying center stage by default, man might be expected to reveal to the discerning eye a host of infirmities.

It is inevitable when considering the theme of man's fallibility in connection with Marlowe to be reminded of Calvin's belief that man's first disobedience and his consequent fall from grace brought about the blighting of each of his powers. We think of Calvin's extreme statement: man's reason, so far as it is concerned with knowledge of God, is "a light so smothered by clouds of darkness that it cannot shine forth to any good effect," and his will is "so enslaved by depraved lusts as to be incapable of one righteous desire."[3] Although Marlowe dramatizes this desperate condition, to associate Marlowe's plays with the specific influence of Calvin is purely speculative and not particularly persuasive. Henderson asserts that Calvinism spread rapidly through Cambridge in the sixties and seventies, the decades before Marlowe's attendance there.[4] Marlowe, however, shows no sign of being a convert; indeed, a less likely theocrat is hardly imaginable. Furthermore, the doc-

trine of total depravity was not limited to Calvin: John Jewel in his Pro Ecclesia Anglicana of 1562 rejected it for the Church of England, but it was part of the Lutheran creed and was strongly argued by the Dominicans at the Council of Trent. The idea was not the property of any one sect; it seems rather to have been very much in the air in the sixteenth century. Voicing it, Marlowe assumes the role of spokesman for the century in still another area.

It is also like the century that other influences may have contributed to Marlowe's view of man. H. B. Charlton demonstrates that the influence of Seneca colored Marlowe's characterizations.[5] Charlton's discussion is much more general than Waith's in The Herculean Hero, and it applies not only to Tamburlaine, but to all the plays. The qualities of Senecan tragedy that Charlton discusses--the central characters' ruinous absorption in their passions, their solitariness, their brooding, their dramatic declamations-- are obvious in Marlowe's heroes. The declamations alone, in fact, are exhaustively discussed in a book by Wolfgang Clemen.[6] Clemen classifies conventional set speeches by topic and by occasion and shows Elizabethan dramatists, particularly Marlowe, slowly discarding the mannered and artificial oration in favor of realistic dialogue. Other correspondences with Senecan heroes, especially Hercules, are noted by Battenhouse.[7] Besides finding many similarities between Tamburlaine and Hercules, Battenhouse distinguishes as chorus-like speeches of moral import delivered by characters other than

Tamburlaine. Battenhouse confirms what has been widely commented upon--that Marlowe follows Seneca in using the drama as a vehicle for moral philosophy. More fundamental, though less obvious, than all these similarities is the likeness between Marlowe's and Seneca's appraisal of man. With its pessimistic view of human nature as totally in the grip of vices which had to be systematically expunged, the latter-day Stoicism that Seneca set forth in the plays and more explicitly in the discourses is entirely consistent with what we have seen as Marlowe's thoughts. Scattered lines in Edward II seem as Stoic as Christian. Baldock, for example, says:

> Spencer, I see our souls are fleeted hence;
> We are deprived the sunshine of our life:
> Make for a new life, man; throw up thy eyes,
> And heart and hand to heaven's immortal throne,
> Pay nature's debt with cheerful countenance.
>
> (IV,vi,104-108)

W. D. Briggs glosses "fleeted" in this passage as the equivalent of "floated,"[8] a verb which is appropriate to describe the material soul postulated by Stoicism. The concept of death as an escape to a new life and the exhortation to equanimity are also familar Stoic doctrine. On the evidence of all the plays, though, Marlowe is clearly not committed to Stoicism in its entirety. Like Machiavellianism, it finds expression in some speeches, but only as ideas of the characters. The common denominator of Senecan stoicism and Machiavellian opportunism is Marlowe's cynical view of the nature of man. As he did with religious systems, Marlowe

seems to have extracted from these systems only the premises compatible with his own analysis and his own observations.

Considering that the plays are imbued with religious feeling and that Faustus poses teasingly the problem of predestination, there are few conspicuous allusions to any of the controverted dogmas of the century. One in The Massacre at Paris is Mountsorrell's brutal interruption of the praying Lutheran he is about to murder:

> Christ, villain!
> Why darest thou presume to call on Christ
> Without the intercession of some saint?
> Saint Jacobus, he's my saint. Pray to him.
>
> (vii,10-13)

Like the anachronistic protest in Edward II, "Why should a king be subject to a priest?" (I,iv,96 ff.) and the following denunciation of the superstitious "taper-lights" and the "antichristian churches" of "proud Rome," like the characterization of the monks in The Jew of Malta and of the Pope and Cardinals in Faustus, Mountsorrell's speech plays on anti-Catholic feeling in a way that might be termed routine in the period. It would be obtuse, of course, to look for a doctrinaire exposition of the creed of any particular sect in the work of a highly gifted writer, but Marlowe appears to have had very broad views in religion and philosophy. Battenhouse has shown that Tamburlaine conveys Elizabethan moral philosophy, but his observations concern only the most generally accepted tenets of Christianity. In the same way, Cole's demonstration that the suffering in the plays can be traced to divine retribution for the commission of sin hard-

ly limits Marlowe to a clearly defined religious viewpoint. The arguments of Battenhouse and Cole, moreover, are somewhat weakened by Kocher's enumeration of heresies, both blatant and recondite, in the speeches of the characters. Although Kocher appears to misuse this evidence in constructing his thesis, he emphasizes its existence; and its existence offsets the interpretations of Marlowe as the conventional product of a conventional training in theology. The conclusion that suggests itself most strongly is that the doctrine of the depravity of man did not have theoretical but imaginative truth to Marlowe. His conviction of man's self-destructive nature, though it may have been reinforced by his knowledge of the opinions of theologians and by other reading, was independent of doctrinal ramifications.

Marlowe's independence does not disqualify him as a representative of the conflict of Reformation spirituality and Renaissance secularism. On the contrary, it might distinguish him as all the more representative of a particular kind of mind: the stubbornly rational. Negative evidence suggests that Marlowe did not enjoy spiritual ease: only in its negative aspect does Marlowe dramatize the power of faith, although the doctrine of justification by faith was of enormous importance in Protestantism. It came as a fresh religious inspiration to Luther as he pondered Romans 1:16-17, and it became the foundation of the Reformation. It traveled early to England: when Henry VIII rejected most Lutheran doctrine in 1538, he retained the authority of

the Bible and justification by faith. In Calvin's more systematic and rigid theology, the importance of faith was amplified. Only the faithful, according to Calvin, were accessible to the grace of God; only among the faithful were the elect to be found. Faith effected man's union with Christ and consequently his redemption from original sin; faith also engendered sincere repentance and consequently forgiveness for sins committed in life.

In view of its importance, Marlowe's single treatment of faith is of great significance. Faustus lacks faith. He knows, but he does not believe. The problem is broached in puzzling lines at the beginning of Act II when Faustus is alone in his study contemplating his despair:

> O, something soundeth in mine ear,
> "Abjure this magic, turn to God again!"
> Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again.
> To God? he loves thee not. . .
>
> (II,i,7-10)

There are difficulties with pronouns in these lines because Faustus speaks of himself in three persons. The scene opens with his addressing himself in the second person: "Now, Faustus,/ Thou needs be damn'd." At the beginning of the quoted passage he shifts to the first: "mine ear"; in l. 8, to the third: "Faustus will turn to God again." This inconsistency makes it impossible to know whether the "he" in l. 10 refers to God and the "thee" to Faustus or the "he" to Faustus and the "thee" to God. In the lines immediately following Faustus renews his allegiance to the Devil:

> The God thou serv'st is thine own appetite,
> Wherein is fix'd the love of Belzebub:
> To him I'll build an altar and a church,
> And offer lukewarm blood of new-born babes.
>
> (11-14)

The pronouns in these lines make it seem likely that Faustus meant to declare his own indifference to God. On the other hand, Faustus had determined to return to God, and if the words "he loves thee not" are interpreted as his conviction of his exclusion from God's love they seem to explain the foundering of his impulse. The ambiguity is not of great significance, for the direction of love is not nearly so important as the fact that love is lacking. The importance of love is that it is irrational. In his attitude toward God, Faustus has no experience of it.

In place of love, an emotional relationship with God, Faustus has only reason, and this reason is intimately connected with his doom. Faustus does not decide against the study of theology because of disbelief in God, but because of a quick perception of the conclusion of the syllogism which consigns him to damnation. He translates from the Vulgate:

> The reward of sin is death. . .

and

> If we say that we have no sin,
> We deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us.

He concludes:

> Why, then, belike we must sin,
> And so consequently die:
> Ay, we must die an everlasting death.
>
> (I,i,40-47)

Faustus' contemplation of the study of divinity is his last pause before turning to necromancy and thus initiating the process of his damnation. His rejection of divinity is therefore crucial; it is also bitterly ironic, for in his reasoning he fails to take into account the grace of God. He is certainly aware of the grace of God--he is, after all, a divine and "sweetly can dispute/ In the heavenly matters of theology"--and he talks movingly of grace in the last act. He appears simply to have forgotten it, perhaps because, supervening upon reason, it is utterly alien to his mentality. Whatever the cause, he has no confidence in its application to him. His reliance on his imperfect reason is concomitant with his sensuality, the sensuality which leads him not only to choose an hour with Helen of Troy instead of eternal bliss, but also makes him fear above all things the rending and tearing of his flesh by devils. Faustus illustrates "the desire of pleasure and fear of grief, engraven in the most secret parts of our soul by our first corruption."[9] His wavering indicates the weakness of his will. His failure to understand divine grace indicates the limitation of his reason.

He is similarly unable to comprehend divine mercy. When one of the scholars exhorts him on the night of his death, "Remember God's mercies are infinite," he answers flatly, "But Faustus' offense can ne'er be pardoned (V,ii, 40-41). His reasons for this belief become apparent later in the scene: he confesses that he has abjured God, that

he has blasphemed God, and that he has defied God's command. In his mind these three sins seem to outweigh divine mercy, perhaps on a purely quantitative basis. In any event, he is incapable of imagining a suspension in the law of cause and effect. The supremacy of his reason adds poignancy to his last terrible scene. His imagination working at white heat, he desperately proposes alternatives to eternal damnation; one by one, they are rejected by his reason.

As reliance on reason is a positive element in Faustus' lack of faith, his inability to feel an assurance of God's love is a negative one. Even in his anguish, he is unable to achieve a sense of emotional conversion. It is a total and tragic deficiency, one before which he is helpless. All the references to despair in the play emphasize it; it comes to a climax in the last scene in which Faustus wavers. The Old Man, whose strong faith significantly protects him from both the disturbances of soul which Faustus experiences and the tearing to pieces by devils which Faustus fears, urges him for the last time to repent. When the Old Man tells him that he sees a hovering angel ready to pour upon him "a vial full of precious grace" as soon as Faustus shall "call for mercy, and avoid despair," Faustus, left alone, somberly admits his incapacity: "I do repent; and yet I do despair" (V,i,79). The damned syllogism has him in its chains.

Marlowe's portrayal in Faustus of a mind which was dominated by reason, which lacked the ability to experience faith appears to be an unmistakable exploration of the most

extreme statement of the theological doctrine of the depravity of man, but it is an exploration from a distinctive perspective. The perspective gives painful life to the doctrine as it applied to those doomed by it, and it opens on a broad vista. From Faustus we may infer the situation of living men in the sixteenth century whose temperaments prevented them from the intuitive perception of God. There is, after all, a significant distinction between intellectual acceptance and heart-felt belief. On the evidence of Faustus we may imagine men conscious of knowing only the skeleton of Protestantism, the reasoning, the logic, while they knew of the μετανοία which meant so much to Luther without experiencing anything like it themselves. We may imagine men acknowledging the justice of the blighting of man's nature at the time of the Fall, acquiescing in the Protestant distrust of the power of the Sacraments to reunite man and God, and yet feeling no assurance of salvation, nor any impulse to embark on a way of life that might lead to salvation. We see the Reformation bringing about a terrible sense of insufficiency.

In Faustus Marlowe identifies this insufficiency specifically as a lack of faith, in the plays as a group, as the perversity of man's nature. Taken altogether, the plays surely comprise a record of a hiatus in the confidence of rational men in mankind itself. In spite of Marlowe's fascination with geography, with astronomy, with myth and classical literature, with politics and history, he does not

exemplify the easy confluence of a multiplicity of worldly interests and an earnest seeking for religious truths that other Elizabethans--Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Walter Raleigh, for example--have made familiar. In the plays, rather, there is a conflict of opposites that yields the conviction of man's propensity for evil--the cost for some men of the Reformation. Marlowe opens the "windows into men's souls" that Queen Elizabeth forbade and reveals that the problems the English Reformation had sidestepped, the lack of sincere repentance that had shocked Luther in the confessional, the urgency of hewing from beneath medieval accretions the concentrated piety and whole-hearted faith that alone meant redemption, were not solved but in some cases were fomenting despair. Marlowe's dates seem significant. Only twenty years before his birth Heywood's The Four PP had appeared: half its cast was gone from England forever. Roman Catholicism, which had marked out sure steps to salvation--confession and absolution, pardons and indulgences, candles, prayers, all relatively tangible and undoubted for centuries as efficacious in reconciling man to God,--was fighting for its life in England. The Four PP is plotted around a joke: in a competition of liars a palmer wins by asserting that he has never known a shrewish woman. The play is a last echo of Chaucerian serenity, tolerant and shrewd and utterly matter-of-fact about the shortcomings of human nature. These shortcomings were apparently a jest that lost savor when the Catholic institutions that ensured salvation

crumbled, leaving each fallible man to face God alone. Luther, Calvin, and the Church of England held out the hope of redemption on other terms: Marlowe simply records the psychic shock of the loss.

Born too late to know a comfortable Catholic coming to terms with the evil in man's nature, Marlowe was born too soon for the great Protestant resolutions of the problem. The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, Hooker's firm incorporation of Christian humanism at the foundations of Anglicanism, was not published until the year of his death. The plays dramatize the senses and the mind as opposing the interests of the soul; Hooker re-established the claims to satisfaction of the senses and the mind but put a limit on man's aspirations by making them answerable to law, law which was discerned by man's unimpaired reason and validated by tradition, law, which although man-made, was analogous to divine law. In Hooker's treatise the dignity of much that Marlowe must have valued was restored: the classics, art and poetry, all lawful pleasure. Most important was Hooker's restatement of the competence of human reason in spiritual matters. There was another solution on the horizon, Puritanism, but it does not seem that Puritanism would have been as attractive to Marlowe as the Anglican compromise. He was, after all, a playwright, and the theater was under Puritan attack; he was also the associate of aristocrats and courtiers in an era when Puritans were officially derided for their "preposterous zeal." His un-

relieved absorption in the moral evil of which man was capable, however, gives him something of the air of a Puritan manqué; as such, he would have been too early for the great Puritan experiment in Godly living which postulated the sinfulness of man and made every action a conscious striving for grace. The corruptness of man's heart, which Marlowe seems to recognize with helplessness and despair, was also recognized by the Puritans, but they fought innate evil with vigor and vigilance. The thought in Marlowe's plays is dynamic, but it is within limits set so narrowly by the theme of man's nature that from the distance of almost four centuries, Marlowe seems fixed on the horns of a dilemma. Anglicanism demolished the dilemma; Puritanism seized one of its horns, but not in time for Marlowe.

The fixity has value for us, however. From one angle, Marlowe shows man caught, torn between two impulses--the worldly and the spiritual; from another, he shows a balance of those impulses. The tension is extreme. Faustus says:

> Scarce can I name salvation, faith, or heaven,
> But fearful echoes thunders in mine ears,
> "Faustus, thou art damn'd!" Then swords, and knives,
> Poison, guns, halters, and envenom'd steel
> Are laid before me to despatch myself;
> And long ere this I should have done the deed,
> Had not sweet pleasure conquer'd deep despair.
>
> (II,ii,19-25)

The precarious victory achieved in one consciousness adds a dimension to our knowledge of the era. More, with some slight modification, it adds to our knowledge of our own. Marlowe's understanding of the evil in man's nature is based

on Elizabethan religious and psychological ideas, but the problem he treated is timeless, and his portrayal of it makes it live. In a sense, he solved the problem he set himself: the paradox of evil's arising out of man's search for what is good is cancelled by the paradox inherent in tragedy, which makes pain and loss noble spectacles and the most poignant death immortality. Marlowe transcends his subject: the moral and the esthetic merge and we recognize not man's depravity but his magnificent vision.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

[1]Levin, p. 7.

[2]Johan Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages (London, 1924).

[3]Calvin, Institutes, trans. H. Beveridge (Edinburgh, 1845), Bk. II, Ch. ii, Sec. 12. Quoted by Spencer, p. 23.

[4]Henderson, Christopher Marlowe, p. 10.

[5]H. B. Charlton, The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy (Manchester, 1946).

[6]Wolfgang Clemen, English Tragedy before Shakespeare: The Development of Dramatic Speech, trans. T. S. Dorsch (New York, n. d.).

[7]Battenhouse, "The Influence of Seneca," Marlowe's Tamburlaine, pp. 193-205.

[8]W. D. Briggs, Notes, Marlowe's Edward II (London, 1914), p. 122.

[9]La Primaudaye, French Academy, trans. 1618, Bk. I, Ch. 3, p. 12. Quoted by Spencer, p. 25.

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