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INTER-ACTING: MARLOWE AND SHAKESPEARE

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Introduction

The early works of Shakespeare are shot through and through with Marlowe, and Marlowe shows the influence of Shakespeare. Traditionally we have tended to think of Marlowe as Shakespeare's precursor, but it may be better to see the two playwrights as contemporaries pure and simple, engaged in creative conversation, or in a process that I have called "inter-acting," each one playing off, making fictions off, the other. Influence of course implies sequence, and it depends on a clear sense of dating. While influence studies have fallen out of fashion, primarily because their definitions of influence tend to be too tight and too specific, we can learn a great deal about a play by having a sense of what is in the air at the time, and what the received context of a given play happens to be. This is nowhere more evident than in the relatively small and constricted theatrical economy of London in the late sixteenth century, where theater people tended to know one another, kept an eye on what one another's companies were doing, and, no doubt, followed fashions. Interaction is of course a weasel word: I am frequently not entirely sure who is influencing whom.

As we look at the historical context of the late 1580s and early 1590s, our two playwrights are inevitably joined by others. A third writer stands out particularly -- the remarkable Thomas Kyd, author of *The Spanish Tragedy* -- remarkable because his play held the stage, more or less without interruption, until the 1640s, and because its complex and witty substance (even if, in modern parlance, it sometimes goes over the top) showed the way for the theatricality of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Two of the three were destined to die early -- Marlowe in 1593, who met an untimely end one evening in Deptford, and Kyd who died a year later, after his release from prison and torture in a case related to Marlowe. Marlowe's influence on Shakespeare does not reveal itself in obvious verbal parallels (though there are a few), but in Shakespeare's handling of the blank verse line, or in his treatment of the couplet in the poem *Venus and Adonis* (which I believe was written after Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*). Kyd's influence, or perhaps the interaction of Kyd and Shakespeare, shows itself in the organization of dramatic action, in the treatment of dramatic irony, and in an interest in the politics of human communication.

It is hard, for example, to see the three parts of *Henry VI* as creatively independent of *The Spanish Tragedy*, or Shakespeare's preoccupation with the self-consuming nature of drama independently of Kyd's tragedy before it. Equally, it is hard to imagine Marlowe's *Edward II* without Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays behind it.

Much of my argument will depend on assumptions about dating. I may be wrong. That is why this is a talk and not a scholarly paper.... It is the confession of someone who happens to be teaching Marlowe and Shakespeare at the moment and who is trying to make sense of the relationship between the two – and looking to his audience for guidance. Having, over the past several years, taught all of Shakespeare's plays in rough chronological sequence, I recently became interested in how Shakespeare got started – where the early plays came from. We do sometimes assume, especially in this country, that Shakespeare parachuted out of the sky in the early 1590s. I was eager to establish to my own satisfaction that this was not so, but I must say that I was not entirely prepared for the complexities that I got myself into.

Here is a likely sequence for Marlowe's plays.

- *The Tragedy of Dido* was probably written at Cambridge while Marlowe was still a student. The play, very much a verse exercise (and impressive in that regard), has about it the air of Marlowe's verse translations, probably done at this same time. Marlowe received his M.A. from Cambridge in 1587.
- *Tamburlaine* Parts I & II seem to have followed in quick succession in the fall of 1587, after Marlowe arrived in London.
- *Doctor Faustus* dates from sometime between 1588 and 1592. With its Latin tags and its set speeches, one is tempted to date it from 1590-91 or so, when Marlowe and Kyd were living together in London and Kyd may have been working on *The Spanish Tragedy*. (*The Spanish Tragedy* is really problematic as to date, with 1592, the date of its quarto publication, as *terminus ad quem*.)
- *The Jew of Malta* dates from sometime in 1589-90.
- *Edward II* dates from sometime between 1591 and 1593, probably towards the latter end of that period.
- *The Massacre at Paris* dates from 1593
- *Hero and Leander* was probably written during the period 1593 (publ. 1598).
- Marlowe died in 1593

Controversy also surrounds the dates of many of Shakespeare's plays, particularly the early ones, but a likely (though not inclusive) sequence would probably look something like the following:

- *Henry VI* Part 1-1590, Part 2-1590, Part 3-1591.
- *Richard III* sometime in 1591-92.
- *Titus Andronicus*, anywhere between 1589-94, but most likely 1591 or so.
- *King John* sometime between 1591 and 1598 (dating of this play is very problematic).
- (*Venus and Adonis* was published in 1593, the plague year).
- *Richard II* sometime in 1594-95.
- *The Merchant of Venice* probably 1596.
- *Henry IV* Parts 1 and 2, probably 1597.
- *Henry V*, perhaps 1599.

So this gives us the following sequence:

Tamburlaine → *Faustus* → *Jew of Malta* → *The Spanish Tragedy* → *Henry VI* → *Richard III* → *Titus Andronicus* → *Edward II* → *Massacre at Paris* → *Richard II* → *1 & 2 Henry IV* → *Henry V*.

There are of course other plays by other playwrights along the way, some of them of considerable importance in assessing who influenced whom and how:

- The anonymous *Woodstock*, perhaps after 2 Hy VI and before Ed II (Woodstock is the Gloucester whose death is so key an issue in RII)
- *The Troublesome Reign of King John* 1587-91
- *Edward III* 1590-95. This is claimed for Shakespeare by Eric Sams (1996), but the jury is still out. The play has real strengths.
- Peele's *Edward I* 1590-93

- *The True Tragedy of Richard III* 1591-94

The Nature of Elizabethan Theater

When I was first hired to teach English, I was hired into a spot labeled “nondramatic Renaissance English,” joining a colleague who was responsible for “Renaissance English drama.” The period was divided vertically between plays and poetry and we tended to study the two in isolation from one another. At a certain point I started to teach Shakespeare, but my particular scholarly calling always remained firmly nondramatic, not to say prosaic. It is only in recent years that I have begun fully to realize the artificiality of the distinction, indeed the extreme importance of understanding the close relationship between the dramatic poetry of the period and, particularly, its narrative poetry. One might say that the plays of the period emerge from narrative: Choruses come forward to tell us stories of two households in Verona, or of “the very casques / That did affright the air at Agincourt.” Fathers tell in careful detail of their search for lost sons, or provide their daughters with accounts of their past life that would cure deafness. When lovers meet, they form sonnets, and their lives unfurl from within this nondramatic form. Many of the plays of the period are, as it were, enactments of pre-existing poetic stories: poetry opens to reveal drama, erupts to produce acting.

In 1561, Sackville and Norton, in the presence of the Queen, arranged a production of their tragedy *Gorboduc*, a play modeled on Seneca and performed at the Inns of Court. What made this play so remarkable, quite apart from the obvious skill of its construction, was the fact that it was written in blank verse, a form hitherto used, as far as we know, only by the Earl of Surrey for his partial translation of the *Aeneid* and first printed just four years earlier in Tottel’s *Miscellany*. Surrey chose blank verse, derived in turn from Italian *versi sciolti*, “free lines,” or “unbound lines,” as the best way to represent in English the hexameters of the Latin original. In other words, blank verse was used to represent the highest flights of Latin verse – verse that was declaimed in schools and universities, where it was offered as providing the finest rhetorical models. Sackville and Norton made this epic, declamatory style the underpinning for their tragedy.

Declamation is the key. Like the arias in the operas of the 18th and 19th centuries, the plays of the age were built around, or gave great prominence to, grand set speeches. They were performed in spaces hardly models of acoustics, where the techniques of acting and the techniques of singing were near allied and projection was all. It was no accident, for example, that several of the children’s acting companies were associated with choirs, the Children of the Chapel Royal, for example. In all of this, there was little room for modulated and naturalistic detail, even in the public theaters of London, built for acting, but open to the sky. Stylized performance was the norm. Marlowe, learning from Sackville and Norton, was a master of the grandly staged speech.

Gorboduc tells the story of the collapse of rule that ensues when an aged king chooses to divide his kingdom between his two sons. While as a play it may lack a certain tension, it is a well-made work, perhaps most remarkable for the quality of the blank verse. Here, for example, is Gorboduc addressing the council he has brought together to announce the division of his kingdom. This is the first major speech of the play.

My lords, whose grave advice and faithful aid
 Have long upheld my honour and my realm,
 And brought me to this age from tender years,
 Guiding so great estate with great renown,
 Now more importeth me than erst to use
 Your faith and wisdom, whereby yet I reign:
 That when my death my life and rule shall cease,
 The kingdom yet may with unbroken course
 Have certain prince, by whose undoubted right
 Your wealth and peace may stand in quiet stay....

If Sackville's command of blank verse is remarkable, it is Marlowe's grand dramatic line that is the first and most arresting characteristic of *Tamburlaine*. Consider Tamburlaine's declaration of love for Zenocrate, the daughter of the Soldan of Egypt whom he has won in war.

Disdains Zenocrate to live with me?
 Or you, my lord, to be my followers?
 Think you I weigh this treasure more than you?
 Not all the gold in India's wealthy arms
 Shall buy the meanest soldier in my train.
 Zenocrate, lovelier than the love of Jove,
 Brighter than is the silver Rhodope,
 Fairer than whitest snow on Scythian hills,
 Thy person is more worth to Tamburlaine
 Than the possession of the Persian crown,
 Which gracious stars have promis'd at my birth.
 A hundred Tartars shall attend on thee,
 Mounted on steeds swifter than Pegasus;
 Thy garments shall be made of Median silk,
 Enchas'd with precious jewels of mine own,
 More rich and valurous than Zenocrate's;
 With milk-white harts upon an ivory sled
 Thou shalt be drawn amidst the frozen pools,
 And scale the icy mountains' lofty tops,
 Which with thy beauty will be soon resolv'd.

Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* begins not with one great set narrative speech, but with two: the ghost of Don Andrea recounts the events surrounding his own death, and, right after that, the Spanish General describes the battle in which the death took place.

When Hamlet asks the leading player to perform in that memorable scene in Act 2, it is a *speech* that the player delivers, a piece of narrative. Says Hamlet, "I heard thee speak me a speech once, but it was never acted, or if it was, not above once, for the play, I remember, pleased not the million: 'twas caviary to the general..." (2.2). In fact, the speech is a recounting of the Troy story – as though the Earl of Surrey's *Aeneid* is somehow coming to life again. It is a strong reminder that the connection between narrative declamation and dramatic presentation is close, indeed that the one derives from the other. It is not, then, that Egeon's huge speech at the beginning of *The Comedy of Errors* is a distraction, an awkward delay, in the action of the play, but that the play itself *emerges from* the narrative. It is not that *Romeo and Juliet* begins with the Chorus speaking a sonnet, but that the Chorus speaking a sonnet *produces* an entire play.

What I am suggesting, then, is that we reverse the position, in our thinking, of narrative and drama. It is not that drama contains narrative, but that narrative contains drama, which can emerge, like a child's pop-up book, from within the narrative.

So Latin hexameter equals blank verse, and blank verse equals hexameter. While he was at Cambridge, Marlowe probably worked on two projects (maybe more): his translation of the first book of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, and the *Tragedy of Dido*. Lucan was a Latin poet of the time of Nero, and his epic poem on the wars between Caesar and Pompey is his only work to survive. As Surrey had chosen blank verse for Virgil, so Marlowe chose it again for Lucan. Blank verse was increasingly the established form for high-flown and epic poetry. Following Sackville and Norton's use of it in *Gorboduc*, George Gascoigne's adaptation of Euripides, *Jocasta*, also in blank verse, was presented at Grays Inn, in the Inns of Court, in 1566, and appeared in print in 1587, the year Marlowe moved to London from Cambridge. *Dido* begins with a council of the gods, and in Act 2, sc. 1, Aeneas retells the story of Troy – in language and in incident remarkably similar to the speech of the Player in *Hamlet*.

So by the time Marlowe comes to *Tamburlaine*, his authoritative, public, declamatory voice is already a well established element in his poetic repertoire. The dramatic tradition *carries on the Latin classics in the English language*. We are dealing here with what is a crucial development in the establishment of cultural norms, the building of translated bridges from one literature to another, one culture to another. They go forward: Virgil becomes a precursor of Elizabethan tragedy; Ovid becomes a precursor of comedy. They also go backward: the cultural elite of London appropriates as its predecessors the great Greek and Roman authors. This translanguaging, this conversion and appropriation of one culture by another, is not my central topic, but it is one highly relevant to an understanding of the civic nature of Elizabethan drama and of the cultural construction of an Elizabethan identity.

Tamburlaine

The fact that we know a good deal about Marlowe makes him no easier to assess. Marlowe ran with a pretty dodgy crowd. Most of the information that we have about him is seriously biased in various ways. The denunciations of Marlowe on the basis of his alleged atheism are all tainted by the moral character of the informants or the circumstances under which they informed, and it is at least possible that they were colored by the experience of his plays, which are full of characters who have no allegiance to the status quo and can be regarded as outsiders and anti-establishment figures.

Much controversy swirls around Marlowe. To what extent is his biography relevant to his plays or his plays to his biography? Opinions differ. There are those who see his depiction of outsiders and overreachers as a mirror of his own life, and it does seem that his plays reflect a particular and consistent point of view about the world – a view of a world dominated above all by power, with little respect for received opinions or cultural assumptions, and a willingness to turn things on their heads. Thus it is the Christians who betray the Turks in *Tamburlaine*, not the other way round. As for the hero himself, he is too great, too larger-than-life, to be constrained by those things that constrain the rest of us. And it is precisely because his adversaries do not recognize this larger-than-life quality that they are overcome. In a sense, they are destroyed because of a lack of imagination, and we find ourselves sympathizing with Tamburlaine because the other people we meet in the play are at some level fundamentally dull, and ordinary, and conventional, and parts of the establishment. Only Zenocrate understands otherwise, but his conquest of her is made temporary by her death, which is in turn a premonition of Tamburlaine's own inability to overcome death: he is destroyed by his own mortality, and ultimately swallowed up by the mundane. The issue at the end of the play is whether his son can control his chariot as well as he:

The nature of thy chariot will not bear
A guide of baser temper than myself,
More than heaven's coach the pride of Phaeton.

Tamburlaine was Marlowe's first great success. Behind the two parts of *Tamburlaine* are the steppes: this Scythian peasant-turned-world-conqueror is out at the edge of the world. If we think of Elizabethan self-consciousness as determined in some measure by a kind of cultural jealousy – a wish to share in the conquest of the open frontiers to the west, we should not forget a strong impulse to look in the other direction, out to the Russian commonwealth and into Asia. Marlowe in effect creates a new-old center for the world, the Mediterranean and its ancient faiths. His story actually begins in maps: one of his sources were the maps of Ortelius. What if these maps could come alive? What if they were not just maps? What story would they tell? This is *Tamburlaine's* story – a story that is both evoked by maps and in a way defies them (there is, for example, a very significant point in the action in which Tamburlaine declares that known cities will be renamed in honor of his conquests).

Marlowe's play, then, is set in a distant time and out on the deserts of Asia. The world he depicts is both startlingly different and unsettlingly the same as the England of the 1580s. The very difference of this world makes it a mirror, or a metaphor, in which to see his own world. Tamburlaine is insatiable, plowing through the world with an acquisitive treachery and cruelty that (as with Richard III) one cannot help admiring. Says Greenblatt: "This is the voice of conquest, but it is also the voice of wants never finished and of transcendental homelessness." Tamburlaine is an outsider, a role that Marlowe, as is broadly recognized, seemed to relish.

It is a play of grand speeches, fairly primitive characterization, but remarkable poetry. This poetry takes Ovid and the classics as its starting point: and it comes across as the poetry of someone who knows and loves his classics. If the classics are a way to elevate English speech, they in effect become a way to elevate Tamburlaine's speech as well. There is an obvious paradox here. Why should this Scythian shepherd speak in the accents of Greece and Rome? Tamburlaine is made all the more exotic by the fact that he interlards his speeches with classical allusion and imagery: this peasant of the Caucasus uses the sophisticated language of classical Greece. There is, of course, midway between Tamburlaine the shepherd revolutionary and Marlowe's audience the mediating voice of Marlowe himself: this is Tamburlaine acted by Marlowe (not literally, of course, but figuratively), translated by Marlowe, into Marlowe's conception of the hero. The Elizabethan language that Tamburlaine speaks carries with it constant and sustained links with the transforming powers of classical literature, containing within it stories and ideas subversive of Elizabethan norms. So Tamburlaine's exoticism is heightened by a kind of geographical move to the center: from the Caucasus to Italy, which is also from England to Italy. Marlowe is not particularly interested in a Tamburlaine who demonstrates his Scythian origins in his speech: this Tamburlaine uses the classics as though to the manner born. Indeed the grand backdrop to Tamburlaine, the model for this world conqueror, as many have recognized, is Hercules the demigod, representative of the aspiring man of action.

Tamburlaine constantly defines himself in terms of the role he is playing (the scourge of God; the individual who is not subject to the normal limitations of other humans, whose power is almost supernatural). He is, says Thomas Edwards, "maddeningly invulnerable to irony." The strength of the play comes in large part from this singleness of purpose (though, before we get carried away, we might note that this un-ironic stance may derive in part from editorial cleaning-up at a later date).

Above all, *Tamburlaine* is highly unconventional, raising grand issues that most Englishmen of the day did not raise. Marlowe's reputation for "atheism" may have come about because he wrote about "atheist" characters, and people had difficulty telling the dancer from the dance. So it was easy to pin things on him.

At the same time, it is hard to call his plays politically subversive in any conventional sense: Tamburlaine is ultimately laid low; Faustus is destroyed because of lack of faith; at the end of *The Jew of Malta* the Christians are the winners. Indeed, Tamburlaine as scourge of God can

mean many things. Is Tamburlaine an active *flagrum*, whip, an agent sent by God to destroy God's decadent enemies? Is he a *pestis*, plague, rolling forward in unstoppable fashion but with a kind of passive unstoppable? Is he a *flagrum pro deo* or a *flagrum contra deum* – a scourge on behalf of God or a scourge against God? Is heaven or hell his master?

The influence of *Tamburlaine* was profound: it produced a number of imitations and numerous echoes embedded in other plays. Greene and Lodge's *A Looking Glass for London and England* (1587/91), for example, opens with Rasni, King of Nineveh, arriving on the stage triumphant from the defeat of Jeroboam, King of Jerusalem. Lodge's *The Wounds of Civil War* (1587/92) deals with the civil wars between Marius and Sulla, who appears in "his chair triumphant of gold, drawn by four Moors. George Peele goes back to the Old Testament for *The Love of King David and Fair Bethsabe, with the Tragedy of Absolon* (1587/92), another play imbued with the spirit of Tamburlaine, though it is unclear who is imitating whom. As for Shakespeare, the spirit of Tamburlaine lives on in Coriolanus and in Antony, and, in a certain hollow superficiality, in Hotspur in *I Henry IV*.

While Tamburlaine and Barabas (in *The Jew of Malta*) were playing in one place, Shakespeare started in another. Where Marlowe was at the edge of Christendom, in Malta or in the Caucasus, Shakespeare began right in the middle of English history. Where Marlowe examined the exotic, Shakespeare focused on the political. Above all, Shakespeare, perhaps prompted by, perhaps prompting, Kyd, focused on the ambiguous.

The History Play

Where Marlowe defied the conventions, Shakespeare wrote about English history and the dangers of weak rule – in effect explaining the reign of Richard III and the coming of the Tudors. He took Marlowe's story of Tamburlaine with its rise and defiant decline and wrote a sequence of plays focused on a different kind of decline and fall.

Henry VI Part 1 begins at the end – or rather the place where Shakespeare's major history plays will end. Says Bedford, mourning the death of Henry V:

Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!
Comets, importing change of times and states,
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky,
And with them scourge the bad revolting stars
That have consented unto Henry's death!

Amyras at the end of *Tamburlaine* Part 2 expresses similar sentiments:

Meet heaven and earth, and here let all things end,
For earth hath spent the pride of all her fruit,

And heaven consum'd his choicest living fire!
 Let earth and heaven his timeless death deplore,
 For both their worths will equal him no more.

The mode of describing Henry V makes him sound (here and in Gloucester and Exeter's speeches following Bedford's) like a dead Tamburlaine. We launch ourselves into a kind of choral lament for a dead hero – balanced, modulated, orchestrated.

The play's action begins when one of the characters – Gloucester, portrayed here as defender of values against the opportunistic Bishop of Winchester – suddenly brings the chorus to an end by questioning one of Winchester's assertions. Winchester's speech does indeed make Henry like Tamburlaine: he is for the French the scourge of God.

WINCHESTER

He was a king blessed of the King of Kings.
 Unto the French the dreadful Judgment Day
 So dreadful will not be as was his sight.
 The battles of the Lord of Hosts he fought;
 The church's prayers made him so prosperous

GLOUCESTER

The church! Where is it? Had not churchmen prayed,
 His thread of life had not so soon decayed.
 None do you like but an effeminate prince,
 Whom, like a schoolboy, you may overawe.

This formal sequence of speeches is interrupted by Gloucester's objection to something Winchester says – not a piece of action in itself, but a statement about a lack of solidarity: we start with words.

The messenger who arrives tells us about a lost France in an elaborate evocation of names reminiscent, in a different way, of those geographical evocations in *Tamburlaine*:

Sad tidings bring I to you out of France,
 Of loss, of slaughter, and discomfiture:
 Guienne, Champagne, Rheims, Orleans,
 Paris, Guisors, Poitiers, all are quite lost.

The decade of the 1580s was notable for a series of foreign policy adventures in France, the Netherlands, and Ireland, all of them desperately underfinanced, and for a rising sense of public fear (some would say paranoia) about foreign plots. Shakespeare identifies his play quite clearly with a particular political position: the Church has been subversive, and the failure in France comes from lack of men and money.

Shakespeare is the inheritor of *Gorboduc* here: a play about the evils of civil strife from early Britain is now adapted to the contemporary scene. (Shakespeare of course had other models too, among them *The Famous Victories of Henry V* from the mid-1580s.) As the play progresses it becomes clear that he is interested above all in the relationship between heroic action and political negotiation, and how the cultural and historical values of an aristocratic oligarchy are sustained (or collapse) in the context of the negotiation of power. The Henry VI plays move forward through a series of climactic episodes and scenes, though they lack the specificity of characterization and the sense of overall dramatic structure that will emerge in the later history plays.

Faustus and *The Jew of Malta*

Marlowe's interest is in the aspiring intellect, indeed in human aspiration generally. Shakespeare chooses instead to examine contemporary politics through the prism of an earlier reign: he takes a political position, and a fairly popular one. Spenser, in his anti-papal Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, published at about this same time, attempts something similar. While he draws heavily on the classics, setting his story in an epic frame, he domesticates classical themes for an English story.

Faustus like *Tamburlaine* pushes human aspirations to the limit and beyond. It picks up the Promethean theme – Prometheus who stole fire from the gods and was condemned to perpetual torment until rescued by Hercules – a step further. Whereas the two *Tamburlaine* plays deal with physical conquest, negated ultimately by *Tamburlaine*'s death (and whereas the better parallel to *Tamburlaine* is Hercules, figure of action), *Faustus* deals with intellectual conquest (and with Prometheus, figure of forbidden knowledge), achieved at the cost of the hero's soul. *Faustus* is the ultimate Marlovian overreacher, who, as *Tamburlaine* threatens to do, takes on God himself.

However, *Faustus*'s fundamental shortcoming is his inability to understand the power of God's grace. *Faustus* is tempted by the notion that only the palpable is "real," and that only the power of this world matters – that the power of the world beyond is an illusion. When he does think about the life beyond this life, he either rejects it as a fiction, or, lacking in faith, he is unable to believe that God and his mercy can or will save him.

In Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, the Red Cross Knight, accompanied by the good lady Una, enters the Wood of Error at the beginning of the poem, and falls into the hands of a Hermit, who, under the pretext of a religious life, in fact practices necromancy and tempts the Knight with lust. The Knight resists, and, after further adventures involving Duessa, a false witch representative of Rome, finds himself in the House of Pride, where he witnesses a procession of the Seven Deadly Sins. Later in the Book, after encountering the giant Orgoglio, another representative of pride, he falls into the clutches of an old man called Despair, who seeks to

convince him that he has no part in heavenly mercy. There are other adventures along the way, but these are the some of the more obvious links between the mode of argument of *Doctor Faustus* and the mode of argument of Spenser. This is a highly symbolic, almost allegorical play, at whose center is none the less the agony of a flesh and blood human being, Faustus himself.

Physical conquest is relatively easy to show on a stage. Also easy to show is the sin of pride, surely one of the characteristics of Tamburlaine, with his unwillingness to submit to the rules of god or man. Far more difficult is intellectual conquest of the kind described in this play, and the sin of despair that accompanies it. In fact, the play issues from Faustus's head: we begin the action with Faustus alone in his study, where he engages in a kind of dialogue of one: he asks himself as series of questions and provides the answers. This mode of presentation continues throughout the play. While other characters appear, to engage Faustus in conversation, their contribution to the dialogue often seems like an extension of Faustus's own cogitation. When Richard Burton and Nevill Coghill come to make a film of the play, they quite freely redistribute snatches of dialogue among the characters, doing very little damage to the fabric of the play in doing so.

The play, then, is essentially a huge monologue with extensions, focused on Faustus in his study. He begins with aspiration, but ends at dead midnight.... Along the way, the intellect of Faustus bifurcates into dialogue, or gallops off into comedy, only to come back to the solitary figure cogitating in his study. None of the other characters is developed except perhaps Mephostophilus, himself a tragic figure, and even this development is of most interest because of what it tells us about the mind of Faustus. This is an intellectual's play, with its Latin tags, figurative remnants perhaps of Cambridge Latin plays.

(The use of foreign languages in the plays of the period is a particularly interesting topic: Marlowe's use of Latin strikes me as fundamentally different from Kyd's for example – and Kyd uses the fact of the foreignness of language very specifically to create confusion in the play in his fourth act.)

Like *Tamburlaine*, *The Jew of Malta* deals with edges – Malta caught between Islam and Christianity, with the Jew holding the balance of economic power – if he can figure out how to exert it. Considerably greater attention is paid to characterization in this play, and it obviously has a somewhat smaller canvas to work on than *Tamburlaine*. Barabas, Abigail, Lodowick and others come across as relatively developed characters, and the action hinges on personal interactions of a kind that one does not find in a *Tamburlaine* or a *Faustus*. Barabas himself is of course the consummate actor, putting on a whole performance as he selects Ithamore at the slave market, or feigning confusion over Abigail's apparent conversion. This sense of acting a part, of putting on a grand show for the benefit of an audience, is a characteristic that we have met before in *Tamburlaine*.

Edward II

But there is nothing in these earlier plays that would cause us to predict the complexity of *Edward II*, surely one of the most remarkable plays of the age. What probably intervenes is the *Henry VI* plays. Henry himself is a weak king who retreats into an apolitical world – a place the person of the King cannot readily go. If *Henry VI* is the theme, *Edward II* is a variation, but a very different one.

Marlowe perhaps turns to English history because it seems to work for Shakespeare. But he does so, inevitably, on his own terms. Gaveston presents himself to Edward as a highly attractive, tempting, subversion, and this play, too, deals with going beyond the limits – in this case into homosexuality and a wanton disregard for the affairs of state. Edward does not understand the difference between private and public life, and Gaveston does not take long to show him how to subjugate the one (with its political continuity, power-sharing, protection of borders, procreation with a queen) to the other (an intense, exclusive, human relationship that shuts everything else out; disregard for the use of political power; sex).

A casualty of this, however, is the classics themselves: Gaveston's italianate dreams of masques start the action off, and the forward movement of the play implies a repudiation of the sunny classics: the sunlight of Gaveston's imagination is ultimately replaced by the darkness of a dungeon. Lightborn (a name to conjure with) replaces Gaveston – and the implied anal penetration of the King by a Gaveston steeped in things Italian becomes the anal penetration with a red-hot spit by Lightborn (who, we discover, has learned his lessons as a torturer also in Italy).

The early Shakespeare is in fact relatively bare of classical reference, compared with Marlowe. Even in overtly classical subjects, such as the poem *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare's interests lie elsewhere than in classical decoration. One has the impression that the classical dimension is in some sense a learned dimension with Shakespeare – developed between *Henry VI* and *Richard II*, emerging really in the "poetic" plays of the period 1593-96, *Love's Labors Lost*, *Richard II*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

But the symmetry of the play belies its complexity. Edward without Gaveston is successful – in the central portion of the play, where he drives out the forces of Mortimer. His problem is the fact that banishment does not remove people permanently (as Richard II discovers), and that he cannot come to terms with his enemies. If Gaveston's tragedy occupies the first part of the play, Mortimer's rise and fall occupies the latter portion.

Edward at the end is characterized above all by endurance, though not enough of it. His introspection at the time of abdication and beyond derives most particularly from Hy VI. Like *Faustus*, *Edward II* is a play about possession – about who owns the person of the hero. The Mephistophilus-Faustus relationship, translates itself into Edward and Gaveston. But there are other developed characters around them, especially Young Mortimer.

Edward II also carries forward a preoccupation with cruelty that begins in *Tamburlaine* and carries through to Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. One is tempted, in fact, to group *Edward II*, *Titus*, and *The Spanish Tragedy* together in this regard. The theme is derived of course from Seneca, especially *Thyestes*, in which a revenger feeds his brother's sons to his brother. Where *Titus* stands chronologically in relation to *Edward II* we do not know, but I am inclined to see it as influenced by Marlowe's interest in the dramatization of cruelty – a theme which of course also surfaces in the Henry VI plays.

Richard III

Richard III seems in a sense to mirror and respond to Marlowe: his phenomenal energy belongs to a Marlovian, and also a Senecan, world. The figure of Machiavel appears at the beginning of *The Jew of Malta*; here it is the hero himself who is a Machiavel. We begin the action with a statement, a self-introduction that blossoms into a play: "I'll show you how I am going to behave," says Richard, who returns from time to time to comment on the action. We have, then, an introductory speech that in a real sense *becomes* the play, with Richard playing a role not dissimilar from that of Don Andrea in *The Spanish Tragedy*, at least in the initial stages. (In fact, of course, as the play proceeds, Richard begins to lose control, and becomes entrapped in his play, so that he in effect loses contact with the audience.)

Richard II

But it is *Richard II* that seems to draw most on *Edward II*, and it does so in a very different way. Like *Henry VI* and *Edward II*, *Richard II* is an exploration of a weak king. Like Edward, Richard is profligate, and apparently negligent of his responsibilities. But, far from failing to pay attention to kingship, he believes passionately in his self-image. He believes in a fiction of kingship and does not understand the connection of symbol and power, believing that the one derives from the other, where in reality each derives from the other in a kind of feedback loop. He is, in short, an actor who believes that if he plays the part of king well enough he will succeed, failing to understand the significance of action, rather than the significance of words. His self-pity reminds us of Henry VI filtered through Edward II.

The Bolingbroke of *Richard II* becomes the cipher of the Henry IV plays, but the Henry IV plays look back to *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* of the mid-1580s – and *Henry V* emerges.

Henry V

This play, with its grand opening, takes off from *Henry VI*, which, as we have noticed, begins with the funeral of Henry V – but we are dealing now with a grand success of a king, on a scale

not seen anywhere else in the history plays. The mode is epic, the portrayal grandly Renaissance. The play draws attention to itself as a piece of acting – an attempt to make the stage a world. If we are reminded of Hy VI we are also emphatically reminded of Tamburlaine – and the wheel comes full circle to end the history plays (*Henry VIII* aside).

It is a play that announces emphatically its own fictionality – a characteristic brilliantly presented for us in the Laurence Olivier film, created in the final days of World War II, which takes us stage by stage from a fictional Globe Theater to the actual field of battle, the fiction dropping away and the “true” photography of real, as opposed to painted, fields assuming dominance. A more affirmative statement about the imaginary world of cinematography could hardly be imagined.

We have seen Choruses in other plays of Shakespeare, most notably in *Romeo and Juliet*. There, the Chorus ultimately slips away. Here it continues, each act being introduced by a chorus and the entire action ending with an epilogue spoken by the chorus. The play functions as an extension of a narrative poem (Daniel’s *Civil Wars* I-IV, on the Wars of the Roses, appeared in 1595; Drayton’s *Mortimeriados*, which later became *The Barons’ Wars* (1603) was published in 1596). Note also *Edward III*, already mentioned, dating from 1595 or before and dealing with an invasion of France (justified by application of the Salic law) and probably contributing in its inspiration to *Henry V*.

At Hampton Court there is a famous picture of Queen Elizabeth, holding an orb in her hand, confounding the three goddesses of the Judgment of Paris, Venus, Juno and Minerva. Juno, one sandal off, retreats from her with her hand up to shield her face; Minerva, clad in armor and carrying a banner, holds up her hand to defend herself; Venus, accompanied by Cupid, fixes her with a stony stare. Verses accompanying the picture describe the circumstances:

Adfuit Elizabeth, Juno perculsa refugit;
Obstipuit Pallas erubuitque Venus.

(Elizabeth present, Juno, beaten down, retreated;
Pallas Athena was bowed down and Venus blushed.)

The picture, once attributed to Hans Eworth and dating from 1569, in effect reverses the position of the human Elizabeth and the three goddesses: Elizabeth in her glory actually drives back the goddesses, whereas the normal assumption is that goddesses, representative of superlative virtues, define and govern the weaker manifestations of these virtues in the world.

Such association of monarchs with classical gods was part and parcel of the insignia of empire in the sixteenth century. The Italians were particularly fond of striking splendid medals, many of them the work of the finest artists of the period. They followed the practice of imperial Rome: a portrait head on one side and a symbol or device on the other. This combination is continued down to our own day in our coinage. The device often reflected a particular motto of the

individual whose profile appeared on the other side of the medal, or showed how this individual might be associated with gods or heroes. There is a medal struck in 1587 showing Elizabeth enthroned over the seven-headed apocalyptic beast and attended by representations of the Dutch provinces. Another, dating from 1602, shows her as Minerva, trampling a dragon underfoot, with her other foot resting on, of all things, a snail, probably representative of Spain.

I mention all of this because it is a useful gloss on the opening of *Henry V*, a play that presents us with the image of a strong monarch:

O for a muse of fire, that would ascend
 The brightest heaven of invention,
 A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
 And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
 Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
 Assume the port of Mars, and at his heels,
 Leashed in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire
 Crouch for employment.

As we know from our reading of Virgil or Milton, it is customary at the beginning of an epic to address the muse – to call for inspiration from the Muses. As the Chorus comes forward at the beginning of Shakespeare’s play, he begins by invoking the Muse: “O for a muse of fire....” We are presented here with an epic figure – and of course with a play that rises out of a narrative, like a pop-up book.

Even as the Chorus denies the possibility of telling the story, he is evoking it. *Henry V* was presented perhaps at the Theatre, perhaps at the Globe, which opened in 1599 and in its very title suggested the notion of a *Theatrum Mundi*, a theater of the world, or a “wooden O” into which in miniature the entire world might be crammed. So the Chorus’s description of what will not happen on this stage becomes an invitation for us to make it happen.

If a muse of fire were to ascend to heaven (we are reminded of Baroque ceilings), and reach the very pinnacle of poetic imagination – “the brightest heaven of invention,” we might then have an entire kingdom on the stage, our actors might themselves be princes (in other words, the princes might act the parts of princes – they would be themselves), and monarchs themselves might look on at this majestic scene (a “scene” that “swells” beyond its physical limitations). If princes act princes then “the warlike Harry” would appear as himself, with both halves of the comparison identical. He would in effect become a Mars, the god of war, with allegorical figures, represented perhaps by hounds, “at his heels” – Famine, Sword, Fire. These huge, all-powerful scourges are his servants: he moves through the world not like a human being, but like a god.

I am always reminded, when I hear these lines, of a medal depicting an armor-clad hero, recognizable as Henry V “like himself,” three leashed dogs at his heels, representative of Famine, Sword, and Fire. Like Elizabeth and the goddesses, the *particular* monarch has under

his control the *general* abstractions, in a reversal of normal metaphysics. And this medal, like other medals and other representations of heroes, can be seen as part and parcel of the iconography of empire. Not only do we enter this play through a tunnel of words (or perhaps a launching pad would be a better analogy), but we also pass through a kind of gallery of artistic images, an ornamental gatehouse, as we enter the play.

At Hampton Court, I might add, Cardinal Wolsey decorated his outer gatehouse and the inner one with terra cotta medallions of classical heroes. The guest arriving at Wolsey's great house passed through these two gateways on his way to the great hall and the inner receiving chambers. Such an experience, a passing through the insignia of a great man and his family, a procession past images of greatness, was part of the experience of encountering that individual.

The Harry we see here is Tamburlaine's heir, larger than life, in some sense more real than reality because he has been conjured up not just as a person, but as an epic figure, his power like a natural force in the world.

But pardon, gentles all,
 The flat unraised spirits that hath dared
 On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
 So great an object. Can this cockpit hold
 The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
 Within this wooden O the very casques
 That did affright the air at Agincourt?
 O pardon, since a crooked figure may
 Attest in little place a million,
 And let us ciphers to this great account,
 On your imaginary forces work.

This is ambition indeed, says the Chorus, that such "flat unraised spirits" wish to bring forth "so great an object." They do so on a raised scaffold, as though they naively suppose that unraised spirits can be raised by the simple expedient of lifting them up a bit. In truth, this is no more than a cockpit, a place where a cock fight is held. It is a wooden O, a mere circle – but as an O it is also a number, a cipher that can stand for something else: "a crooked figure may / Attest in little place a million," thus a zero rightly placed may go towards representing a million – if it follows a whole number. And of course "a crooked figure" may also be a small and inadequate figure on a stage, a poor actor, attesting thereby the existence of a million people.

Ciphers, then, we are, to "this great account," both a huge sum (where ciphers themselves make it greater, paradoxically) and also an elevated narrative. As ciphers we actors will work on the force of your imagination (and also of course "imaginary armies," conjured up by our imagination).

Suppose within the girdle of these walls

Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
 Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
 The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.
 Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.
 Into a thousand parts divide one man
 And make imaginary puissance.

The term “girdle” was commonly used to describe the walls of a town or a castle. Here it evokes, within the walls of the theater, the tall galleries rising on either side of the stage, or the tall cliffs that run along either side of the Strait of Calais separating England and France. The audience is called upon to “piece out,” to extend or supplement, the imperfections of the actors, and to apply that process of “piecing out” to the characters themselves, making a thousand soldiers out of one – a different kind of multiplication from the one just described in the reference to ciphers. The idea of extension implied in piecing out perhaps also suggests the extension of a kind of causeway over those perilous seas....

Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
 Printing their proud hoofs i'th' receiving earth.
 For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
 Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,
 Turning th'accomplishment of many years
 Into an hour-glass: for the which supply,
 Admit me Chorus to this history,
 Who prologue-like your humble patience pray,
 Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.

The horses *print* their hoofs in the *receiving* earth, as though stamping an image in clay, a clay that is ready and accepting of the image planted – like a medal stamped, or a story told to an eager audience.

“If wishes were horses, beggars would ride,” my mother used to say. Not only do our thoughts array kings in finery, but they also bring them on to the deck of the stage. These thoughts are not merely the means whereby we conjure up the image of horses, but they actually *become* the horses, carrying the kings “here and there, jumping o'er times,” thus moving not only from place to place (and, carrying on the image of close abutment, *jumping over* the things that separate them), but also from time to time, and, as we *turn* an hourglass, so the *accomplishment* (both completion and adornment) of years is reduced to hours and minutes.

I have dwelt at such length on the Chorus because the images it conveys to us will remain with us as the play progresses. The second act begins with a second chorus. As a muse of fire was called for in the first, so the second begins by declaring that “all the youth of England are on fire,” and that young men “follow the mirror of all Christian kings / With wingéd heels, as English Mercuries.” We have observed already in *Tamburlaine* the use of the image of the mirror,

and here again we find a conflation of ideal and reality as we move smoothly from the preparations for war to “the mirror of all Christian kings.”

The third act’s chorus is drawn up tight against Henry’s grand speech before Harfleur, which picks up on images from the first Chorus (“let the brow o’erwhelm it / As fearfully as doth a galléd rock / O’erhang and jutty his confounded base, / Swilled with the wild and wasteful ocean.” “I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips, / Straining upon the start.”). Henry’s speech becomes a kind of extension of the Chorus: we move from narrator smoothly into the fiction, like some mannerist painting extending beyond its frame

Let me go back and emphasize one other important point. To do so, I must backtrack. There are two quite distinct versions of the play – the Quarto version, 1600 and on, and the Folio version of 1623. The version of 1623 is more complete – or rather more extensive – than the Quartos. The First Quarto omits (a) all five Choruses, (b) the final Epilogue (with its allusion to the later loss of France), and (c) all of I.i., with its discussion of the Salic law, and the bishops’ motivation for the war. This may be a corrupted version of the play, or it may be an attempt to make the play briefer and less ambiguous, by downplaying possible base motives for the invasion of France and by cutting out the epilogue.

The 1623 version, our version, is deeply ambiguous: this is a play that constantly undercuts its ostensible message. As such, it is totally unlike *Tamburlaine*. If Marlowe affirms, Shakespeare is a poet of ambiguity. Indeed, at the very moment when Shakespeare is most affirmative of kingship, he sets up distorting mirrors that cause us to question the affirmation.

It is a deeply political play, in a context in which a critique of the monarchy would be poorly accepted by the powers that be. In this context, the positive allusion to Essex in the Chorus to the fifth act is still more confusing and compromising. The young Essex’s expedition, which returned to England in Sept. 1599, failed. Is it possible that the folio version was not acted and antedates the quarto versions, which were cut down to avoid giving offense? I believe that this is so.

The different versions of the play are in a way reflective of the difference of critical opinion on it. To look at the Olivier and Branagh versions is to see how differently it can be interpreted. It is a reminder also of the distance we have come from the singleness of a *Tamburlaine* to the deep complexities and ambiguities of the Shakespearean view of English history.

But behind these ambiguities are the echoes of voices – of entire plays talking to one another across the theaters of Bankside, as Elizabethan drama emerged and blossomed. Shakespeare never forgot his Marlowe. He came back to Marlovian themes in *Cymbeline*, and in another way in *Hamlet* and *Othello*, the one set on battlements overlooking a northern ocean and the other on the island of Cyprus where Christendom and Islam meet and touch in corrupting entanglement. Beyond the figure of *Tamburlaine*, beyond the figure of *Hamlet*, perhaps beyond

that of Othello, there is only banality: “We that are young / Shall never see so much nor live so long.”