

THE ICONOCLASTIC THEATRE: TRANSGRESSION IN CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE'S *TAMBURLAINE*

*Prof. Emad A. ALQADUMI, Ph.D.

Abstract

This article examines Christopher Marlowe's iconoclasm as a dramatist by probing transgressive features in his Tamburlaine the Great, parts I and II. By depicting instances of excessive violence, from the perspective of this study, Marlowe flouts everything his society cherishes. His Tamburlaine demystifies religious doctrines and cultural relations; it challenges the official view of the universe and customary theatrical conventions of Renaissance drama. It destabilizes the norms and values of the Elizabethans and brings about a crisis between the Elizabethan audience and their own culture. Furthermore, Marlowe's experimentalism in Tamburlaine expands the imaginative representations to include areas never formerly visited, consequently creating an alternative reality for his audience and transforming the popular English theatre in an unprecedented manner.

Keywords: Drama, Christopher Marlowe, Elizabethan theatre, Literature, Iconoclasm

Introduction

Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great parts I and II* abound in transgressive features that reflect Marlowe's iconoclasm as a dramatist. The instances of insanity, sadism, masochism, violence, profanity, and lust for power that Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* depicts flout everything his society holds dear. In his plays in general, and *Tamburlaine* in particular, Marlowe destabilizes the norms and values of Elizabethan culture by demystifying religious doctrines, cultural relations, social hierarchy, and political institutions. Consequently, he brings about a crisis between the Elizabethan audience and their own culture. Nowhere in any other dramatist before, or even after, him can we see such a challenge to the official view and customary theatrical conventions of Renaissance drama. In my opinion, Marlowe was the first experimentalist dramatist whose theatre succeeded in expanding the

*Prof. Emad A. ALQADUMI, Ph.D. is of the Department of Languages and Translation, Taibah University, Madinah, Saudi Arabia
Email: Al_kadumi78@yahoo.com

imaginative representations to include areas never formerly visited. He also succeeded in transforming the popular English theatre in an unprecedented manner and creating an alternative reality for his audience. In late 1587, the first time *Tamburlaine* was produced by the Admiral's Men, Christopher Marlowe announced to his audience in the Prologue to his play that:

From jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits,
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine
Threatening the world with high astounding terms
And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.
(*Tamburlaine I*: Prologue 1–6)

Marlowe's declaration indicates his awareness of his originality; he scornfully dismisses "rhyming mother wits" and "clownage", he breaks with the established tradition of introducing supernatural elements in drama, and, finally, he avoids the moral messages which dramatist used to produce explicitly in their plays. By breaking the unspoken rules of his society and challenging the official and cultural view the Elizabethan social hierarchy, by violating the conventions of English drama and exploiting the powerful weapons of words to present the unthinkable on stage, and by introducing "the Scythian Tamburlaine" as emperor of the East, Marlowe rushed where other dramatists feared to tread. For the Elizabethans, the whole universe consisted of an order arranged in a highly hierarchized system ordained by God himself in accordance with his wisdom. This conception of order, as Tillyard informs us, "is taken for granted so much part of the collective mind of the people that it is hardly mentioned except in explicitly didactic passages" (7). It is illustrated in Raleigh's exposition:

... for that infinite wisdom of God, which hath distinguished his angels by degrees, which hath given greater and less light and beauty to heavenly bodies, which hath made differences between beasts and birds, created the eagle and the fly, the cedar and the shrub, and among stones given- the fairest tincture to the ruby and the quickest light to the diamond, hath also ordained kings, dukes or leaders of the people, magistrates, judges, and other degrees along men (Quoted in Tillyard 9).

The idea of an ordered universe divinely arranged in a highly hierarchized system ordained by God himself in accordance with his wisdom is referred as providence, and it receives its share of provocative and subversive interrogation in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. According to Christian providentialism, God created the world in accordance with a particular cosmic plan and encoded it with fundamental world-regulating laws. The notion provided an ideological reinforcement for monarchic absolutism and divine right. The Homily on Obedience, for example, exploits the notion of divine providence as a means of ratifying the existing Elizabethan social order by emphasizing how the departure from such an order involves a transgression to God's law, therefore, bringing havoc to the world. The Tudors and the Stuarts alike exploited the notion of providence in their claim that their rule was a consolidation of God's scheme for England. They regarded themselves as God's agents and heirs on earth. James I himself, exploited the notion to defend his claims for absolute rule against his rivals. Raleigh's conception is one of the clearest examples of the way in which the Elizabethans used to regard social order, not only as desirable but also as necessary.

Even those of modest intelligence among the Elizabethans, as Tillyard pinpoints, were familiar with this notion of providence (10). Shakespeare in his *Troilus and Cressida* reiterates the Elizabethan belief in the correspondence between an ideal and earthly order where the Heaven and the Earth observe degree, order, and rank while the glorious Sun, which is the heavenly king, corrects and discourages any evil dislocation of the planets to keep them, without reluctance, in the right position:

The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre
Observe degree priority and place
Insisture course proportion season form
Office and custom, in all line of order;
And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
In noble eminence enthron'd and spher'd.
Amidst the other, whose med'cinable eye
Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil
Anil posts like the commandment of a king,
Sans check, to good and bad (I. iii, 85-94).

Moreover, Shakespeare depicts the horror that may result from upsetting such an order; if the planets causing disorder become aligned with each other, their mischief becomes overwhelming resulting in disasters such as plagues, ill omen, mutiny, raging of seas, and winds, earthquakes, horrors, etc.:

But when the
 In evil mixture to disorder wander,
 What plagues and what portents, what mutiny,
 What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,
 Commotion in the winds, frights changes horrors,
 Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
 The unity and married calm of states
 Quite from their fixure. (I. iii, 95-102)

The instability of degree results in menacing the entire system, the disruption of communities, university degrees, societies in cities, peaceful commercial exchanges between countries, the monarchy etc. If degree is taken and the string is not tuned only discord and complete chaos would follow. Water would flood, the strong will rule over the weak, the violent son will murder his father, and force will be the law:

Oh, when degree is shak'd,
 Which is the ladder to all high designs,
 The enterprise is sick. How could communities,
 Degrees in schools and brotherhoods in cities,
 Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
 The primogenitive and due of birth,
 Prerogative of age, crowns sceptres laurels,
 But by degree stand in authentic place?
 Take but degree away, untune that string,
 And hark, what discord follows. Each thing meets
 In mere oppugnancy. The bounded waters
 Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores
 And make a sop of all this solid globe'
 Strength should be lord to imbecility,
 And the rude son should strike his father dead.
 This chaos, when degree is suffocate,
 Follows the choking. (I. iii, 103-119)

Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* was written in 1602, fifteen years after *Tamburlaine*. However, the view Shakespeare's play offers, unlike Marlowe's transgressive one, is completely compatible with the official view of order and hierarchy in Elizabethan England. In Shakespeare's picture, everything has an order and degree. The violation of degree, or the ideal order, in heaven is echoed by earthly disorder and civil war on earth. The higher and unifying power that keeps order and degree in check prevents disorder and the consequent terror.

This divinely ordered universe, the metaphysical scheme of things, requires constant divine surveillance and active intervention. Elizabethan playwrights, give and take few exceptions, conformed with this fundamentally Christian notion. In the sixteenth century, William

Perkins actually compared God to a jailer who watches over his prisoners: God doth watch over all men by a special providence. The master of a prison is known by this to have care over his prisoners; if he send keepers with them to watch them and to bring them home again in time convenient (quote in Jonathan Dollimore lxxvi).

The universe created in Tamburlaine is the anti-thesis of the providential philosophy officially promoted in Elizabethan England. Tamburlaine is a destructive force in the world imposing disorder and chaos and defying the boundaries divinely set for him. His ability to move between two distinctly detached social classes poses a challenge to the idea of a permanently fixed identity and, consequently, undermines long-established beliefs concerning social categories. By structuring the plot of the play around the basic contrast between a protagonist from base origins and his royal opponents, the dividing line between a king and a shepherd, nobility and vulgarity, heroism, and savagery becomes obscure and unstable.

During the Elizabethan age, chivalry and nobility, which were part of a long-established social institution started to lose power and weaken in the face of the rise of a new social class and new ideas and doubts. The enormous change in the way these categories were viewed is the result of the change in the social structure that created new uncertainties and consequently lead to the challenge of the idea of "The Great Chain of Being". It is no longer clear what makes a noble distinct from a savage or a shepherd from a king. In a complete transgression of their divine right as kings, Tamburlaine constantly degrades and ridicules his royal opponents. He rejoices in inflicting suffering and humiliation on conquered kings by, for example, using them as horses and footstools for his chariot and by harnessing and whipping them ruthlessly. The pleasure he takes in humiliating his opponents is evident in the mortifying treatment of Mycetes:

Tamburlaine : Is this your crown?
 Mycetes Ay. Didst thou ever see a fairer?
 Tamburlaine You will not sell it, will ye?
 Mycetes Such another word, and I will thee executed.
 Come give it me.
 Tamburlaine No. I take it prisoner.
 Mycetes You lie. I give it you
 Tamburlaine Then 'tis min' (Tamb., III, iv, 27-34).

Such an exchange reveals how everything is turned upside down in the play. The revered position of the monarch is debased while the debased position of the shepherd is revered. Despite their disdain for Tamburlaine's low origins, his opponents illicitly recognize his power and newly-established status. Cosroe for example, despite his despise

for Tamburlaine's low origin refers to his extraordinary power and ability to challenge heavenly order and deities (Tamb. I: II.vi.3–4). The view of order and providence promoted by the religious and political institutions was reinforced by the theatre. Marlowe's Tamburlaine's challenge to this view must have stimulated astonishment and ambition in the 1587 audience, especially in the lowly born, who were culturally programmed to believe that the hierarchical society in which they lived was divinely ordained. With *Tamburlaine*, they regarded, for the first time in their life as theatre-goers, an ambitious commoner refusing to accept his allotted role of a shepherd 'so base as Tamburlaine' becoming 'king and emperor of the earth' (Tamb I: V.i. 74). Such an encounter must have perplexed the audience as one of its fundamental categories had been upset. Nevertheless, instead of the troubling effect arousing from the disturbance of deep-rooted assumptions about class orthodoxies, such an encounter must have aroused a pleasant feeling in the lower classes among Elizabethan audience especially when they heard the base shepherd boast:

I hold the Fates fast bound in iron chains,
And with my hand turn Fortune's wheel about,
And sooner shall the sun fall from his sphere
Than Tamburlaine be slain or overcome. (Tamb I: I. ii. 173-4)

Despite his exploitation of religious rhetoric, along with antireligious one, it is difficult to pinpoint Tamburlaine's religious inclinations. His degradation of both Christianity and Islam problematizes any attempt to reach a clear-cut interpretation of the play or define his religious allegiances. Even the attempts to utilize the providential theory in explaining the play is undermined by the protagonist's blasphemous language and his rage against deities. In the play, the hierarchical social order and the religious beliefs of the audience that have been taken for granted become blurred and uncertain. For example, in act I scene II, Zenocrate who initially regards Tamburlaine as a 'shepherd'; later addresses him as 'lord', to which Tamburlaine replies: "I am a lord, for so my deeds shall prove; And yet a shepherd by my parentage" (Tamb I, I.ii.34-5). Such exchanges pose challenges to the Elizabethan signifying system as they reveal the instability of the boundary between 'shepherd' and 'lord'. Tamburlaine's attitude towards Zenocrate problematizes his character; his chivalric courting with her sharply contrasts with his attitude towards his opponents which, in return, subverts chivalric rules derived from the highly hierarchized religious Elizabethan social order which was structured in categories ascending until we reach the most powerful category, the monarch.

Tamburlaine's claim that his deeds shall prove him a lord subverts the Elizabethan conventions of lordship and chivalry that used to depend on class and not on deeds. During Elizabethan England, a chivalric and noble person could be easily distinguished from a peasant, a shepherd or a slave. These conceptions are challenged in Tamburlaine. Because they belonged to rigid social categories, no one from the lower classes could easily transgress his class upwards to a higher one. The view of chivalric ideals is being transgressed at many levels. Tamburlaine's world negates the world of the Great Chain of Being that dominated medieval thought. He has built his own world and asserted his independence and sovereignty by aiming high at "The sweet fruition of an earthly crown" (Tamb I: II.vii.27–9). He could cross the boundary of a "shepherd" and leap to that of "lord" showing the audience that this boundary, like any other cultural one, is neither closed nor final. The aristocratic social structure based on blood privilege is challenged by a system based on personal achievement. As Paul Whitfield White argues:

Tamburlaine's career shows how it is possible through extraordinary will-power, personal charisma, brute strength, and military strategy, to rise from a lowly shepherd to become emperor of the Eastern world. This challenges the basis on which European royalty justified and maintained their rule – divinely ordained succession through primogeniture—and it legitimates radical mobility through the social ranks, which was discouraged, if not condemned, by orthodox religious and political notions of place and social hierarchy. (72)

Tamburlaine who moves from the position of an outlaw to that of a lawgiver fires the imagination of the audiences and creates an alternative powerful world that negates, with its emotional and intellectual impact, the one in which they lived and which they viewed as the real and the only possible social structure. All this is further intensified by the emphasis on the fact that all the enemies of the protagonist are apostates; their hostility against his aspirations springs not merely from their desire to sustain their power and retain their thrones but from the enragement spawned by the arrogance and effrontery of the challenge someone so base as Tamburlaine poses (Simkin 83). Cosroe reflects such effrontery in his inquiry:

What means this devilish shepherd, to aspire
With such a giantly presumption,

To cast up hills against the face of heaven,
And dare the force of angry Jupiter? (Tamb I: II.vi.1–4)

In addition to the challenge of the conventional view of social hierarchy, and the consequent challenge to the political institution, the monarchy that derives its power from such a view, Tamburlaine also defies and transgresses religious conventions at all cultural levels. During the Elizabethan age, the link between social, political, military and religious institutions was inextricable. Being sanctioned as the 'Supreme Governess' of the Church of England and God's vice-regent, dissent and insubordination against Queen Elizabeth's law were regarded as legal crimes, sins against God, and, as the passage from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* above reveals, a threat to the social and natural order. The inextricability of religious, military, and political institutions is interrogated through the inversion and subversion of the deeply rooted and revered ideas. The impertinent representation of sacred iconography occurs with high frequency in Tamburlaine to the degree of challenging not only long established monarchies but deity itself.

Marlowe ironically inverts religious iconography. He, as G.B. Shaw rightly observes "played with the objects of men's reverence and worship as children play with toys" (215). In his Tamburlaine, he irreverently and blasphemously parodies the transubstantiation and transfiguration. The transubstantiation, where bread and wine become the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, is parodied in Tamburlaine's description of his soldiers drinking as "Filling their empty veins with airy wine/That, being concocted, turns to crimson blood" (Part II: III. ii. 108-9). The transfiguration, where the garments of Christ become brilliantly white, is parodied in Tamburlaine's revelation of his bright armor after ripping off his shepherd's weeds (Lisa Hopkins 116). This episode has also far-reaching implications as it shows how effortlessly identity can be refashioned; Tamburlaine's change of identity is a matter of taking off a garment replacing it with another.

Divine interventionism is an aspect of Christian providentialism where God inflicts punishment on individuals, communities and entire nations for the sins of the wicked. The punishment, which does not have to be strictly direct, may inflict the innocents along with the wicked without distinction. Retribution could operate through one of God's agents, mostly evil agents and tyrants acting as God's rods; the vicious tyrant unleashed against those who have sinned against God could undergo punishment by another evil agent. Hence, the sinful could be punished by the sinful, and a scourge could be punished by another scourge, where the latter becomes a scourge of a scourge (White 71). Retribution and interventionism used to have a wide-ranging

application in Elizabethan England. Any misfortune, within this scheme of thinking, could be subjected to providential and interventionist explanation. The Elizabethan theatre itself was subjected to this analysis, occurrences of the plague and the fall of the auditorium in 1583, for example, were regarded as acts of divine vengeance on people because of their failure to perform their religious duties at church instead of attending plays in the theatre. Ironically, retributive and providential explanation of events applies to Marlowe's untimely violent death; he was stabbed in a tavern fight. His murder was subjected to the interventionist providential analysis by Thomas Beard who claims in his *Theatre of God's Judgement* (1597) that Marlowe's death was "a manifest sign of God's judgement" on this blasphemous dramatist (quoted in Dollimore 87).

In their struggle against the Ottomans during the sixteenth century and earlier, the Europeans underwent several successive defeats. To explain these setbacks, the Europeans, in general, and the Elizabethans, in particular, developed a rationale based on the notion of providence; they deserved to be scourged. God must be angry with the Christian people for their grave sins. Those sins were interpreted differently by different sects. The Catholics attributed the defeat, including the loss of Constantinople, to the Christians lack of unity and refusal to become a single body. On the other hand, the Protestants adopted a different interpretation based on the notion of providence. The Christians defeat is the result of the false teaching of Catholicism and the Pope's worldly aspirations for power. Any war against the Turks should be fought under the command and banner of the apostates appointed by God to defend his Christendom, but not the Pope (Uygur 157).

This astute appropriation of the providential interpretation of events is simultaneously interrogated and undermined by Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. In *Tamburlaine II*, for example, the Turkish ruler who represents the Moslem empire, and King Sigismund who stands for Christian Europe make a binding truce. Sigismund vows "by Sweet Jesus Christ, I solemnly protest, / And vow to keep this peace inviolable" (Tamb II: I.ii.133–6). Being persuaded by employing divine retributive providence as a ground of argument that by breaking the truce he would be a scourge to untrustworthy Turks for their "foul blasphemous paganism" (Tamb II: II.i.53), Sigismund decides to seize the opportunity to do so. Ironically, after his defeat, despite the Turks' vulnerability, Sigismund uses the notion of retributive divine providence in explaining the defeat: "God hath thundered vengeance from on high, / For my accursed and hateful perjury" (Tamb II, II.i.32–3). Gazellus, a Turkish ally and advisor to Orcanes, refuses to attribute the defeat to the power of Christ. Unlike Sigismund, Gazellus refuses to regard the defeat

as an act of divine vengeance for breaking the oath. He undermines Sigismund's interpretation as he believes that the defeat is due to "the fortune of the wars ..., / Whose power is often proved a miracle" (Tamb II: II.i.31-2).

When the Turkish Emperor Bajazeth laid siege to Constantinople, the Europeans regarded him as the scourge of God, an evil agent sent to punish Christian Europe for its decadence. Following his defeat by Tamburlaine, the notion of divine providence was used to explain the defeat, Bajazeth and the Turks were infidels and they deserved God's retribution for their sins. Tamburlaine now became God's evil agent sent to punish the Turkish infidels and their emperor; he became the scourge of the scourge. Tamburlaine's exclamation that "There is a God, full of revenging wrath, ...Whose scourge I am, and him will I obey" (Part II: V.i. 181-2) appears to reiterate the historical narratives common during the Elizabethan age and which used to refer to Tamburlaine as the "scourge of God", a title the protagonist and his enemies repeatedly use throughout the play. Nevertheless, a meticulous reading of the play reveals that Tamburlaine's description of himself does not spring from honest belief in the idea of providence; his identification with the title does not stem from a sincere conviction that he is really a scourge of sinners. On the contrary, it indicates his desire to exploit one of the most powerful and destructive weapons available at the disposal of political and military leaders at that time, religion. By calling himself the scourge of God, Tamburlaine endows his brutalities, cruelties, voraciousness, egocentrism, and injustice with a divine aura. Every act of cruelty he performs is self-consciously carried out in the name of God.

Marlowe's approach to Violence, like his approach to his culture, is conspicuously iconoclastic and irreverent. This is found in *Tamburlaine the Great Part I and II*; the protagonist's insatiable lust for ravaging and dominion, his insanity, and his brutality are conspicuously revealed in his uncanny and excessive use of violence and inexorable murderous frenzy. "His spear, his shield, his horse, his armour, plumes/ And jetty feathers, menace death and hell ...Without respect of sex, degree or age, / He razeth all his foes with the fire and sword" (Part I: IV.i.61-3). Images of violence abound in both plays: "streets strewed with dissevered joints of men/and wounded bodies gasping yet for life" (Part I: V.ii.260-1). Tamburlaine unhesitatingly slaughters all the innocent virgins of Damascus, drowns women and children, he uses chained kings as horses to draw his chariot, he drowns the citizens of Babylon, and he has his son killed for his cowardice. Zabina and Bajazeth dash their brains out on cage bars. Olympia burns her son's and husband's bodies before cutting her

own throat. The oddity of these violent actions reflects a form of iconoclasm unprecedented before Marlowe in Elizabethan drama.

The process of accumulating material wealth and imperial power to Tamburlaine's store reinforces the anti-providentialist message of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine, Part I and II*. Vitkus believes "that there is no metaphysical, divine will that controls events, [since] there is no motive for Tamburlaine beyond the possession and control of a global network that will funnel wealth and commodities back to him (Vitkus 2008). For Greenblatt "Tamburlaine is a machine, a desiring machine that produces violence and death." Once set in motion it cannot slow down or change its course; it moves at the same frenzied pace until it finally stops" (Greenblatt 195). It is the protagonist's destiny to ruthlessly ravage and conquer, the frenzied pace at which he moves finally stops with his death.

Additionally, Tamburlaine's iconoclasm is evidenced in his boastful claim that "I hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains / And with my hand turn Fortune's wheel about" (Tamb. I: I.ii.174). His bragging to have power over the fate of men reflects the ravings of an individual's aspiration to raise himself to godlike status. Such iconoclasm becomes disconcertingly perceptible and reaches its climax in Tamburlaine's mischievous attitude to Islam. In his uninterrupted confrontation with religion, Tamburlaine sacrilegiously burns the Koran. Soon after this presumptuous challenge to the Moslems deity, he expresses a sudden discomfort and tells his soldiers "I feel myself distempered suddenly" (Part II: 215–16).

This point where Tamburlaine falls ill marks a new phase in the development of the tragic plot, peripeteia, a turning point or reversal of past fortune and success. While this reversal of the protagonist's past success adheres to the dramatic conventions of tragedy, the protagonist's reaction to it is excessively unconventional. The play violates an essential tragic plot element generally occurring near the end of the play, recognition, a point of no return where the protagonist realizes his own role in bringing about his own downfall and in which he moves from the state of ignorance to the state of knowledge no matter how devastating the crime and its outcome are.

The transgression of Natural Order is a characteristic common to tragedies in general. The tragic hero possesses a tragic flaw incompatible with his social order leading to his fall. Marlowe's challenge to his allotted social position and transgression of the hierarchical social universe, the harmonious scheme of things where smaller parts and larger ones fit in their positions and which the protagonist subverts in search for ultimate power, should, according to the conventions and norms of traditional tragedies, be severely punished. Yet, the sequence of the plot of the play after the reversal is, as we may rightly

expect in Marlowe's drama, unconventional. The play offers a new type of tragic hero whose reactions deviate from the very norms and conventions of Aristotelian tradition of tragedy.

Such realization, which the play lacks, adds up and enhances the impact of the tragic effect. Recognition ruins the protagonist's world, it intensifies the reversal of his past success and amplifies his catastrophic fall and destruction. While in traditional tragedies the protagonist recognizes his atrocities and, ultimately, denounces them and accepts the appalling consequences of his actions. In Tamburlaine nothing of this actually happens; repentance after reaching the point of no return is not a constituent element in the play. Even in his deathbed, Tamburlaine challenges his illness, the language of defiance and conquest prevails over the language of illness and remorse:

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

Tamburlaine raves in challenging and blasphemous outcries against gods and their attempts to dethrone him. His immediate collapse after the Koran burning episode without recognizing his role in bringing about his downfall is full of reminiscent implications as it could be interpreted as a divine punishment for his irreverence. Stephen Greenblatt is right to establish a causal link between the two events, Tamburlaine's sacrilegious setting fire to the Koran and his illness that takes place shortly after the profane action (Greenblatt 202). Marlowe's subversive representation of the Elizabethan notion of providentialism in particular and his culture in general reflect his rejection of the idea of a human identity as being conferred by a benign power. Tamburlaine's ascendance from a humble shepherd illustrates that because human identity is socially and culturally structured in a particular way, it can be restructured and refashioned. However, this restructuring does not occur by accepting the conventions of society but by transgressing them (Martin 71). Marlowe sees that human identity as established at those moments in which order, whether political, theological or sexual is transgressed.

Conclusion

Marlowe's theatrical iconoclasm is his means of shattering the restraints upon all social attempts of balance and control. Unlike most writers during the Elizabethan age, Shakespeare included, Marlowe

endeavors to undermine power and authority by revealing their deformities. In *Tamburlaine the Great*, Marlowe struggles to turn all that his culture holds dear and take for granted upside down. He approaches his culture as a malevolent rebel and insubordinate blasphemer. He transgresses and subverts his society's valued orthodoxies and venerates whatever his society despises and fears.

Works Cited

- Dollimore, Jonathan. *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*. Third Edition. New York: Macmillan, 2004. Print.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From Moore to Shakespeare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. Print.
- Hopkins, Lisa. *Christopher Marlowe, Renaissance Dramatist*. Edinburgh: University Press, 2008. Print.
- Martin, Mathew R. *Tragedy and Trauma in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe*. New York: Routledge, 2016. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *Troilus and Cressida*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1957. Print.
- Shaw, G. B. 'Dramatic Opinions and Essays'. *Marlowe: the Critical Heritage*, edited by Maclure Miller. London: Routledge, 2005. Print.
- Simkin, Stevie. *Marlowe: The Plays*. Hong Kong: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001. Print.
- Tillyard, E.M.W. *The Elizabethan World Picture*. 5th ed. London: Chatto and Windus, 1956. Print.
- Thornton, Mark (Ed.). *Tamburlaine the Great, in The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe*. London: Everyman, 1999. Print.
- Uygur, Ipek. *Tamburlaine the Great: "The Scourge and Wrath of God."* 14th International Language, Literature and Stylistics Symposium, Adnan Menderes University, The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd., 2014. Print.
- Vitkus, Daniel. *Turning Turk: English Theatre and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630*. New York: Palgrave, 2008. Print.
- White, Paul. "Marlowe and the Politics of Religion." *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*. Ed. Patrick Cheney. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Print.