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## Inferior Readings: The Transmigration of ‘Material’ in *Tamburlaine the Great*

For Randall McLeod

*The shaping hand of the modern tradition of editing the Tamburlaine plays suppresses the unruly materialism of the two plays in order to discipline their textual bodies, to impose upon them a pattern of meaning that, curiously for such blasphemous texts, tends towards abstraction and spirituality. The 1597 Marlowe, admittedly as much a figment of the imagination as the author who in 1590 presumably handed a manuscript to Richard Jones, might be skeptical. Marlowe’s ghost — or, more precisely, his ‘corrupt’ textual remains buried in the 1597 edition of Tamburlaine the Great — offers a spurious, fictional, and definitely erring authority to the unearthing or unleashing of the plays’ materialism.*

In 1597, had the ghost of Christopher Marlowe returned from ‘th’eternal clime’ (3.188)<sup>1</sup> where George Chapman sought him in 1598 and wandered down the streets of London, he might have found the experience somewhat disturbing, even for a spectral presence such as himself. If he had looked in at William Ponsonby’s bookshop at the Bishop’s Head in St Paul’s Churchyard, where, according to Thomas Thorpe, even as late as 1600 his ‘ghost’ could be ‘seen walk ... in (at the least) three or four sheets’,<sup>2</sup> he would have been able to pick up and peruse Jean Dubec-Crespin’s *The History of the Great Emperor Tamburlaine*, newly published. Still in St Paul’s, he might have stopped at Adam Islip’s printing house and bookstore, where he could have lost himself in another book published that year, Thomas Beard’s *The Theatre of God’s Judgements*. Finally, if from there he had strolled to the vicinity of St Andrew’s Church in Holborn, he might have entered Richard Jones’s printing house and bookshop at the Rose and Crown, where he could have thumbed the freshly printed octavo leaves of *Tamburlaine the Great, who, from the state of a shepherd in Scythia, by his rare and wonderful*

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conquests, became a most puissant and mighty monarch. As it was acted by the Right Honorable the Lord Admiral his servants. Each of these three moments in Marlowe's post-biography might have left him shaking his head. Having relied primarily on the portrait of Tamburlaine given in Thomas Fortescue's 1571 and George Whetstone's 1586 translations of Pedro Mexia's life of Tamburlaine (1542), Marlowe's mobile quintessence might not have recognized Dubec-Crespin's powerful yet crafty and remarkably merciful Central Asian conqueror. Had he flipped through Beard's lengthy volume long enough to read page 147, he might not have recognized himself in Beard's moralizing caricature of him as 'playmaker and a poet of scurrility'<sup>3</sup> whose sudden and violent end illustrated the inevitability of God's divine wrath poured out on atheists ancient and modern. And, if we follow modern editors of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays, Marlowe might not fully or with complete enthusiasm have recognized his own plays either. The two-play octavo volume certainly did not recognize him: like the 1590 and 1593 editions (also printed for and perhaps by Richard Jones),<sup>4</sup> and the two-volume quarto edition later printed by Edward White in 1605 and 1606, the 1597 edition does not acknowledge Marlowe as the plays' author on the title-page or elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the first edition to attribute the plays unequivocally to Marlowe is a modern one, Oxberry's 1820 edition. In his 1675 *Theatrum Poetarum* Edward Phillips attributes the plays to Thomas Newton.<sup>6</sup> Ironically, the *Tamburlaine* plays are the only plays of Marlowe that were printed during his lifetime, and they are also the only plays that do not acknowledge his authorship.

Even so, modern editors routinely dismiss the 1597 edition, and the 1593 and 1605/6 editions, as non-authoritative in relation to the first edition of 1590, over which the still-living Marlowe possibly exercised some control. The Oxford old-spelling edition, for example, declares that 'only the 1590 text has any substantive authority. Those of 1593 and 1597 derive independently from it. The text of 1605/6 derives from that of 1597' (xlvii). As Kirk Melnikoff details, however, the 'substantive' authority of the 1590 edition is based on ultimately conjectural assumptions regarding the provenance of the publisher Richard Jones's copy-text, the extent of the author's involvement in the publishing process, and the veracity of and motivation behind Jones's prefatory claim to have cut comic elements from the plays.<sup>7</sup> Melnikoff notes that, whether Jones's copy is assumed to be of theatrical provenance or authorial foul papers and whether Jones is assumed to have cut his copy significantly or not, nineteenth- and twentieth-century editors of the plays have minimized Jones's mediating role by constructing him 'as an active defender

of Marlowe's highbrow intentions'<sup>8</sup> or a 'cooperative and "virtuous"' publisher whose first, 1590, edition of the plays represents a 'faithful Marlovian offering'.<sup>9</sup> Within this framework, the 1597 edition may be derivative and, to the extent that it differs from the 1590 edition, corrupt. This essay's purpose is not to minimize the differences between the 1590 and 1597 editions or to argue that the 1597 edition has a greater claim to 'substantive' authority than the 1590 edition. On the contrary, the 1597 edition does differ from the first edition, and the second, in significant ways. Although not authoritative in the traditional editorial understanding of the term, however, these differences need not be dismissed as merely corruptions.

Like Doctor Faustus, I have conjured a spirit as the prelude to contesting authority, specifically the notion of authority by which modern editors of the plays routinely privilege the *Tamburlaine* plays' first edition, the 1590 octavo, as the copy-text. W.W. Greg's protest against the 'tyranny of the copy-text'<sup>10</sup> in favour of eclectic editing has long been absorbed into editorial theory and practice, but often in ways that re-establish the tyranny at the level of authorial intention, which is presumed to be best, if not perfectly, represented by the copy-text that the editor has chosen. In *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*, Jerome McGann observes that this editorial practice is 'based upon the idea that the original in such a series will be closest to the author's final intentions, will be least contaminated by nonauthorial interventions'.<sup>11</sup> According to McGann, however, this idea ignores the materiality of the text: 'a process of mediation is essential to literary production . . . literary works are only material things to the degree that they are social projects which seek to adapt and modify themselves circumstantially. As soon as an author utters or writes down his work, even for the first time, a mediation has to some degree come between or "interfered with" the original, "unmediated" text'.<sup>12</sup> The original is not free from corruption, and corruptions might possess a circumstantial value or significance. To view the text, as McGann does, from the perspective of its materiality is to require a rethinking of such common and seemingly trivial editorial practices as emendation. D.C. Greetham argues that 'the "rejected" readings' of supposedly corrupt versions of a text 'have at some time been accepted by some readers (scribes or compositors) as part of the text, and their status as variants is therefore only ever contingent, just as is the status of the accepted reading'.<sup>13</sup> Although they may be seeking to recover the ideal, authorial version of a text, then, modern editors are a part of the process of that text's material mediation; through the ideological patterns they establish with their rejection or acceptance of variant readings, modern

editors shape that text in ways that are as contingent and socially inflected as the corruptions they seek to eliminate. Examining the ‘ways in which their [Renaissance] texts are transformed, often disfigured, by the twentieth-century editorial processes to which they have been subjected’, Leah Marcus in *Unediting the Renaissance* warns against ‘the constricting hermeneutic knot by which the shaping hand of the editor is mistaken for the intent of the author, or for some lost, “perfect” version of the author’s creation’.<sup>14</sup> The shaping hand of the modern tradition of editing the *Tamburlaine* plays suppresses the unruly materialism of the two plays in order to discipline their textual bodies, to impose upon them a pattern of meaning that, curiously for such blasphemous texts, tends towards abstraction and spirituality. The 1597 Marlowe, admittedly as much a figment of the imagination as the author who in 1590 perhaps handed a manuscript to Richard Jones, might have been resistant to such tendencies. Marlowe’s ghost — or, more precisely, his ‘corrupt’ textual remains buried in the 1597 edition of *Tamburlaine the Great* — offers a spurious, fictional, and definitely erring authority to the unearthing or unleashing of the plays’ materialism.

This essay focuses on the 1597 octavo because it exhibits most radically the errant, materialist tendencies that oppose both the 1590 first edition and modern editorial predilections. Nonetheless, all three later early modern editions display the tendency towards the material, as the following example illustrates. In 1.3.3.273 of a recent edition<sup>15</sup> of *Tamburlaine Parts One and Two*, Tamburlaine invites his companions to celebrate their victory over Bajazeth with a ‘martial feast’. In 2.2 of the play’s second part, Orcanes plans ‘T’encounter with the cruel Tamburlaine’ (5), who ‘with the thunder of his martial tools / Makes earthquakes in the hearts of men and heaven’ (7–8). Later in the second part, Tamburlaine invokes his own ‘martial flesh’ (2.4.1.105) before killing his cowardly and effeminate son Calyphas. This edition, like all modern scholarly editions of which I am aware,<sup>16</sup> takes the 1590 octavo as its copy-text, and in each of the three instances ‘martial’ is the unemended reading. In the three later early modern printings of the play, however, an interesting series of variants occurs. In the 1593 octavo, Tamburlaine threatens earthquakes in the hearts of men and heaven with ‘material tools’. In the 1597 octavo, before killing his son, Tamburlaine invokes his ‘material flesh’. In the 1605/6 two-volume quarto edition, Tamburlaine invites his companions to a ‘material feast’. The first octavo’s authoritative ‘martial’ characterizes Tamburlaine’s violence as heroic, placing it in a framework of normative early modern cultural values within which Tamburlaine

can be admired. In contrast, the later, supposedly non-authoritative variant 'material' subtly emphasizes Tamburlaine's cruelty and 'atheism'. The 'martial' feast with which Tamburlaine celebrates his victory over Bajazeth is a fitting, decorous, and conventional conclusion to his martial success: 'Come bring them [the captives] in', Tamburlaine tells his comrades, 'and for this happy conquest / Triumph, and solemnize a martial feast' (272–3). What, however, is a 'material' feast? 'Material' is clearly an inferior or unsuitable choice in this context. Yet a 'material' feast is precisely what Tamburlaine's banquet several scenes later, in 4.4, provides. Tamburlaine and his men sadistically threaten to compel the starved Bajazeth to eat his wife and then himself. 'Dost thou think that Mahomet will suffer this?' (52), Tamburlaine's second-in-command Theridamas asks his companion Techelles, who replies "'Tis like he will, when he cannot let it' (53). The next course at this material feast is the famous 'second course of crowns' (105 sd), the material objects that constitute the goal of Tamburlaine's military endeavours. The 1606 variant extends the cruelty and atheism of this scene backwards in the text, like a seeping stain. Similarly, the 1593 variant subtly alters the way in which the lines in which it occurs characterize Tamburlaine: Orcanes is no longer preparing to encounter a heroic figure whose 'martial tools' create fear but, rather, an elemental force the materiality of whose tools is fully in keeping with the 'thunder' they create and the 'earthquakes' they provoke 'in the hearts of men and heaven'. Indeed, although the variant is non-authoritative, in this instance, I would argue, it gives a superior reading.

The third and most radical instance of the material variant occurs in the 1597 octavo. 'O Samarcanda, where I breathed first / And joyed the fire of this martial flesh, / Blush blush' (2.4.1.104–5), declaims the 1590 Tamburlaine before killing his son. 'Here Jove, receive his fainting soul again, / A form not meet to give that subject essence / Whose matter is the flesh of Tamburlaine' (110–12), he continues. 'Martial' codes Tamburlaine's flesh, informs it with the heroic symbolic values that Calyphas has violated, and so provides the justification for Tamburlaine's separation of his flesh from its indecorous union with his son's cowardly soul. The variant 'material' eliminates this justification, emphasizing not the coded but the corporeal nature of the flesh whose fire Tamburlaine enjoys. Based as they are on the first octavo, however, most modern editions not only do not adopt this variant but do not record it in their critical apparatus, and Tamburlaine's martial flesh stands uncontested.

A further, no less significant, example of the editorial suppression of the later editions' unruly materialism can be found in 3.2 of *Part Two*, in which Tamburlaine undertakes to teach his sons the 'rudiments of war' (54) after Zenocrate's funeral. Tamburlaine's sons must learn how 'to sleep upon the ground' (55), 'sustain the scorching heat and freezing cold' (57), and how to 'besiege a fort, to undermine a town' (60). When they have learned these skills, 'By plain and easy demonstration / I'll teach you how to make the water mount / That you may dry-foot march through lakes and pools' (84–6). Then, Tamburlaine tells his sons, 'are ye soldiers, / And worthy sons of Tamburlaine the Great' (91–2). This process of initiation into the martial fraternity of Tamburlaine's followers bears religious overtones in the asceticism it demands and in its echoes of the hardships and miracles — the parting of the Red Sea — experienced by the Old Testament Israelites during their nomadic journeying after leaving Egypt. Those religious overtones are, however, counterbalanced by the technical, materialist nature of what will be taught, the details of which Marlowe scholars have long recognized are drawn from Paul Ive's military manual *The Practice of Fortification* (1589).<sup>17</sup> If Tamburlaine will make the 'water mount', it will not be a miracle but a feat of engineering accomplished with the 'material tools' of the latest military technology. But, as Tamburlaine's son Calyphas remarks, 'this is dangerous to be done — / We may be slain or wounded ere we learn' (93–4). Calyphas's remark prompts Tamburlaine to demonstrate his lesson by wounding himself and inviting his sons to 'with your fingers search my wound / And in my blood wash all your hands at once' (126–7). 'A wound', Tamburlaine tells them,

is nothing be it ne'er so deep,  
 Blood is the god of war's rich livery.  
 Now look I like a soldier, and this wound  
 As great a grace and majesty to me,  
 As if a chair of gold enamellèd,  
 Enchased with diamonds, sapphires, rubies,  
 And fairest pearl of wealthy India,  
 Were mounted here under a canopy,  
 And I sat down clothed with the massy robe  
 That late adorned the Afric potentate  
 Whom I brought bound unto Damascus' walls.                   (115–25)

Like the lecture, the demonstration is at once ritualistic and materialist. It echoes both the Eucharist and Christ's appearance to his apostles after his resurrection. Yet, like the tools with which Tamburlaine will perform the miracle of parting water, the trappings — the chair of gold, the gems, the massy robe — with which Tamburlaine rhetorically surrounds the ritual are emphatically material, and they emphasize the materiality of the raw blood to which Tamburlaine compares them. The last item in Tamburlaine's list, the 'massy robe' taken from one of Tamburlaine's conquered victims, Bajazeth, encapsulates the passage's tension. On the one hand, it is another of Tamburlaine's 'sights of power' (1.5.2.412), and it directs the passage away from the material nature of the robe towards its symbolic significance. On the other hand, it is a 'massy' robe. The balance between the material and the symbolic is delicate in this passage, and a key variant at line 123 arguably plays a decisive role in determining which way the interpretive scales tip. The 1590 octavo reads 'the massy robe'. All later early editions read 'a massy robe'. The change seems slight. Nonetheless, the emendation of the definite to the indefinite article reduces the robe's symbolic significance and allows the emphasis to fall on its massy nature. 'A' robe is merely one more item in the list of material objects that precede it, and it generates the kind of anticlimax provoked by the 'an earthly crown' (1.2.7.29) with which Tamburlaine in *Part One* concludes his speech on the transcendent nature of human aspiration (12–29). The indefinite article tilts the interpretation of the passage towards the material. Most modern editions, however, follow their copy text and retain the definite article.<sup>18</sup>

In places, however, the 1590 octavo does require 'correction'. After all, although it is fewer degrees removed from the author and the truth than the later editions, it is still that one crucial degree removed and therefore, like all sublunary copies, subject to 'corruption'. The pattern of editorial choice here is interesting, though. It reveals the modern editorial practice of emendation to be a 'material' tool in the disciplining of the disorderly materialism of the later early modern editions. In 1.2.7, the newly minted and now defeated king of Persia, Cosroe, enters the stage dying. He proclaims

My bloodless body waxeth chill and cold  
 And with my blood my life slides through my wound.  
 My soul begins to take her flight to hell  
 And summons all my senses to depart.  
 The heat and moisture, which did feed each other

For want of nourishment to feed them both  
 Is dry and cold, and now doth ghastly death  
 With greedy talents gripe my bleeding heart,  
 And like a harpy tires on my life. (42–50)

The passage is a mixture of vague metaphysics and humours medical theory. The passage's key variant is in the last line. 'Harpy' is found only in the 1593 edition. All the other editions, including the first, read 'harper'. Harpy, with its mythological referent and its resonance with line 44's soul in flight, returns Cosroe's death lament to the metaphysical before it concludes with 'Theridamas and Tamburlaine, I die, / And fearful vengeance [another winged mythological creature] light upon you both' (52–3). Harper is the more difficult option (perhaps that's why the 1593 edition 'corrects' it), but it still makes sense: death, like a long-nailed harper, has seized Cosroe's heart and is plucking and snapping its strings, the strings of his life. The simile might seem contorted, perhaps even baroque, but crucially it redirects attention back to the material nature of death on which the passage focuses earlier: the blood, the senses, the heat and moisture, the heart and its snapping muscles. Not surprisingly, modern editors treat 'harper' as a corruption to be corrected.<sup>19</sup>

In 1.3.2, we find a similar editorial scenario that has produced tellingly different results. Bemoaning the fact that Tamburlaine is not paying her the attention he was wont to do before he became king of Persia, Zenocrate declares that her extreme passions might 'make me the ghastly counterfeit of death' (17). To this her counsellor Agydas replies 'Eternal heaven sooner be dissolved, / And all that pierceth Phoebe's silver eye, / Before such hap fall to Zenocrate' (18–20). In Zenocrate's response to Agydas's ornate and mythological if not metaphysical expression of dismay lies the variant on which I wish to focus:

Ah, life and soul, still hover in his breast,  
 And leave my body senseless as the earth,  
 Or else unite you to his life and soul,  
 That I may live and die with Tamburlaine. (21–4)

The variant is the 'you' of line 23. As with the harper / harpy scenario, here the 1590 edition and two of three of the other early editions offer one reading, while the other early edition offers another. The 1590, 1593, and 1605/6 editions read 'you'. The 1597 edition reads 'me'. Modern editors, however,



treat this reading not as a correction but as a corruption.<sup>20</sup> Conjecturally, the reason for that choice might be that, while it makes sense, the referent of 'me' in this passage would be not 'life and soul' but 'my body senseless as the earth'. It would give voice to a longing for carnal not metaphysical union, a longing that finds its fulfillment, not its violation, in Tamburlaine's necrophilia.

Modern editors even adopt variant readings found only in the latest of the early modern editions to bring the text to order. As she dies in 2.4 of *Part Two*, the 'divine Zenocrate' (17) shows herself fully aware of her mortal corporeality. She knows she is dying, she tells her distraught husband, because 'this frail and transitory flesh / Hath sucked the measure of that vital air / That feeds the body with his dated health' (43–5) and now 'waned with enforced and necessary change' (46). Tamburlaine cannot fully accept his wife's sublunary nature:

May never such a change transform my love,  
 In whose sweet being I repose my life,  
 Whose heavenly presence beautified with health  
 Gives light to Phoebus and the fixèd stars,  
 Whose absence makes the sun and moon as dark  
 As when opposed in one diameter  
 Their spheres are mounted on the serpent's head,  
 Or else descended to his winding train.  
 Live still my love and so conserve my life,  
 Or dying be the author of my death. (47–56)

In lines 47 to 54, Zenocrate's being — her presence and absence — is Olympian: Tamburlaine wishes her to be beyond change; if change occurs, it will be absolute, an eclipse. Like the gods, she is an astral influence. The antithesis of the concluding two lines, reinforced by the repetition of 'live' and 'life' and 'dying' and 'death', maintains the absoluteness of Zenocrate's being as well as its transcendent nature: she will be the 'author' of Tamburlaine's death. 'Author', however, is not the reading in the first octavo. The first octavo, along with the 1593 and 1597 octavos, reads 'anchor': 'Live still my love and so conserve my life, / Or dying be the anchor of my death'. Only the 1605/6 edition reads 'author'. 'Anchor' produces a much more materialist reading of Tamburlaine's distress than 'author'. As anchor rather than author of Tamburlaine's death, Zenocrate is a dead weight whose material links to Tamburlaine cause his death not remotely or absolutely, like a darkening

from above, but by dragging him down into an undifferentiated fluid by her sheer mass. With 'anchor', the concluding two lines complete the passage's downward trajectory: Zenocrate's being drops from 'heavenly presence' (49), down the serpent's 'winding train' (54), to plummet as a senseless piece of metal to the lightless ocean floor. With 'anchor', the passage eschews any form of transcendence and adumbrates Tamburlaine's refusal to bury Zenocrate's preserved corpse until he has died:

Though she be dead, yet let me think she lives,  
 And feed my mind that dies for want of her.  
 Where'er her soul be, thou shalt stay with me  
 Embalmed with cassia, ambergris, and myrrh. (1.2.4.127–30)

Zenocrate's simple corporeal presence here nourishes Tamburlaine. The location of her soul does not concern him. When he himself dies at the end of the play, his attitude remains unchanged. Having commanded the hearse containing Zenocrate's corpse to be brought in, he declares:

Now eyes, enjoy your latest benefit,  
 And when my soul hath virtue of your sight,  
 Pierce through the coffin and the sheet of gold  
 And glut your longings with a heaven of joy. (2.5.3.224–7)

The passage strikingly reverses the gesture towards transcendence that one might expect from a dying man. Tamburlaine locates his heaven in a coffin, the spiritual in the material, and exhorts his soul, once it has the virtue or power of a part of his body, to 'glut' itself or fill itself with the inevitably corrupt materiality that coffin contains. 'Anchor', then, is a completely viable reading in 2.2.4.56. Yet modern editors almost unanimously emend to the 1605/6 quarto's idiosyncratic 'author'.<sup>21</sup>

In certain cases, modern editors do not have the option of appealing to later editions to 'correct' the appearance of disorder in the authorized copy-text. In these cases, the later editions support the 1590 edition in its error. In the flitting match between Tamburlaine and Bajazeth in 3.3 of *Part One*, for example, Tamburlaine vaunts that 'Legions of spirits fleeing in the air / Direct our bullets and our weapons' points, / And make your strokes to wound the senseless air' (156–8). The editor of the modern edition from which I have just quoted has emended in two places the last line of the passage, which in all early editions reads 'And make our strokes to wound the senseless lure [1593 actually has 'lute']'. The nonsense of 'lure' (or 'lute')

demands conjectural emendation, and following Dyce's 1858 revised *Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe* modern editors have emended to 'air'. But this emendation generates a further demand for sense that has led most modern editors to emend 'our' to 'your'.<sup>22</sup> The double emendation sharpens the passage's antithetical structure, turning it into a forceful expression of the efficacy of Tamburlaine's weapons in contrast to the impotence of Turkish swords, whose strokes will be futile, will wound only air. Nonetheless, if one considers Tamburlaine's boast in act 5 of *Part One*, as he besieges Damascus, that 'Since I arrived with my triumphant host / Have swelling clouds drawn from wide gasping wounds / Been oft resolved in bloody purple showers' (396–8), retaining 'our' makes sense within the context of Tamburlaine's excessive desire to wound even the senseless elements of the natural world. The double emendation effaces Tamburlaine's assault on the elemental, the material.

A similar effacement occurs in the emendation that modern editors routinely make to 1.5.2.121, which occurs near the conclusion of Tamburlaine's famous meditation on beauty's potentially harmful effects on 'the soul of man' (1.5.2.116). In all four early editions, the line reads 'That which hath stopt the tempest of the Gods'. In most modern editions, the line is emended to 'That which hath stooped the topmost of the gods'.<sup>23</sup> The line's opening 'That' is beauty, and it has stopped or stooped at least one of the gods 'from the fiery-spangled veil of heaven / To feel the lovely warmth of shepherds' flames' (123). Beauty will not, however, stop or stoop Tamburlaine: 'I, thus conceiving and subduing both' (120), Tamburlaine declares, 'Shall give the world to note, for all my birth, / That virtue solely is the sum of glory' (125–6). Modern editors have found the passage in which this double emendation occurs difficult syntactically and semantically, and the emendation straightens out the line to fit in with the 'from' and 'to' with which the following lines begin and clarifies the image as a conventional allusion to Ovidian myths of the gods' philanderings with mortals. It also radically alters the nature of the 'virtue' that Tamburlaine is seeking to define through his comparison. With the double emendation, Tamburlaine's virtue is moral or metaphysical: in contrast to the most elevated of the gods, Tamburlaine can resist beauty's power to 'stoop' or debase, to force a descent from metaphysical heights that creates the slightly indecorous situation of a deity 'march[ing] in cottages of strewèd weeds' (124). Without the emendation, Tamburlaine's virtue is material: beauty might be able to calm the elemental rage of the gods and clear the 'fiery-spangled veil of heaven' (122), but it will not calm

or 'stop' Tamburlaine, however much it may 'beat on his conceits' (119). Here virtue is unstoppable force, precisely the unstoppable force that showed the beautiful virgins of Damascus Death at the beginning of the scene. As one modern editor who does retain the reading of the early editions puts it, the reading 'does make sense',<sup>24</sup> both in the immediate context of the surrounding passage and in the larger context of the scene in which it occurs. The modern double emendation effaces the radically materialist implications of Tamburlaine's redefinition of virtue to privilege its conventional moral and metaphysical aspects.

Equally telling is the emendation several modern editors make to the speech with which Cosroe in 2.6 of *Part One* concludes his address to his men before marching off to battle against Tamburlaine.<sup>25</sup> It reads, in the Oxford old-spelling edition whose copy-text is the 1590 octavo:

Then strike up Drum, and all the Starres that make  
The loathsome Circle of his dated life,  
Direct my weapon to his barbarous heart,  
That thus opposeth him against the Gods,  
And scornes the Powers that governe *Persea*. (36–40)

In a reworking of Tamburlaine's claim that 'gracious stars have promised at my birth' (1.2.91) the 'possession of the Persian crown' (90), Cosroe characterizes the astral influence that governs Tamburlaine's conquests as 'loathsome' and invokes its noxious power to favour his own force. As the Oxford edition's critical apparatus informs the reader, however, the 1590 edition, and the later early modern editions, have 'my' not 'his' in line 37: 'The loathsome circle of my dated life'. 'His' is a modern editorial intervention first made by J.P. Collier in the nineteenth century. Perhaps, one might argue, here at least is an example of a justified emendation. Why would Cosroe call the circle of *his own life* loathsome? Why would he, in effect, call down curses upon himself? That would truly be a slip of the tongue, or the pen, or the compositor's fingers. If so, could we not view this 'slip' as a kind of unconscious ripple backwards from other characters' later expressions of loathing for their servile lives? Just before he brains himself in 5.2 of *Part One*, Bajazeth provides an example of such an expression: 'O life more loathsome to my vexèd thoughts' (192), he cries. Upon seeing her dead husband, Zabina breaks into wild prose madness full of further half-sense before she too brains herself against the bars of Bajazeth's cage. As he dies from the wounds suffered in his battle with Tamburlaine, Cosroe himself confirms the perverse appropriateness of

his slip when he curses his 'untimely end' (2.7.6): his loathsome stars have indeed put an untimely end to his dated life. The Oxford old-spelling edition 'corrects' the 1590 octavo's mistake. Perhaps, however, the later early editions were unwilling to eliminate Cosroe's unconscious prolepsis here. Conjecturally, having read through the play, having taken in Bajazeth's intense self-loathing and having struggled with Zabina's prose madness, the play's early modern editors were unwilling to eliminate such material slips of the tongue, pen, or fingers.

If the unconscious of the early modern textual corpus of *Tamburlaine* must be disciplined, so too must the materiality of Tamburlaine's body, again even if this means 'correcting' all the early editions. The prime example of this tendency occurs in Menaphon's description of Tamburlaine to Cosroe in 1.2.1. The description is a lengthy blazon of this martial figure whom Menaphon so clearly admires. 'Of stature tall and straightly fashionèd' (8), it begins, and concludes by noting Tamburlaine's 'knot of amber hair, / Wrapped in curls as fierce Achilles' was, / On which the breath of heaven delights to play, / Making it dance with wanton majesty' (23–6) and 'His arms and fingers long and sinewy, / Betokening valour and excess of strength' (27–8). Menaphon's description is ambiguous: the reference to Achilles and his long and sinewy fingers clearly code Tamburlaine's flesh as martial, yet his amber hair has unsettling Petrarchan resonances that recode Tamburlaine as the material object of homoerotic desire. Tamburlaine himself finds precisely these references unsettling when viewing his three sons at the beginning of *Part Two*: 'methinks their looks are amorous', Tamburlaine observes, 'Not martial as the sons of Tamburlaine' (2.1.4.21–2). 'Their hair', he remarks, 'as white as milk and soft as down, / Which should be like the quills of porcupines, / As black as jet, and hard as iron or steel, / Bewrays they are too dainty for the wars' (25–8). And, crucially, 'Their fingers [appear] made to quaver on a lute, / Their arms to hang about a lady's neck' (29), not wield a curtle-axe. Calyphas, of course, lives up to his looks, and after murdering him Tamburlaine commands him to be buried by the concubines of the defeated Turks, 'For not a common soldier shall defile / His manly fingers with so faint a boy' (162–3). Fortunately, the only blazoned part of Tamburlaine that looks amorous is his hair, and the taint of erotic desire is contained by the reference to Achilles and the long and sinewy fingers. Or, at least, so modern editors would have it. In fact, in the first three early editions of the play, Tamburlaine's 'arms and fingers' are 'long and *snowy*'. The 1605/6 quarto goes further and emends the line to 'His armes long, his fingers snowy-white'.

All early editions of the play amplify the Petrarchan resonances of Tamburlaine's wanton amber hair. In contrast, modern editors, beginning again with Dyce in the nineteenth century, have sought to diminish those resonances by emending 'snowy' to 'sinewy'.<sup>26</sup> Tamburlaine's material body must conform to the codes of martial masculinity. As Leah Marcus contends, modern editions also emend that body into conformity with colonialist binaries: 'editors have tacitly discounted the overwhelming likelihood that Tamburlaine, whom we have tended to think of as the paradigmatic Islamic other for the English in the sixteenth century, might instead be defined by Marlowe as light-skinned, like the English themselves'.<sup>27</sup>

Tamburlaine's martial masculinity must also be heterosexual. Several examples scattered through the two parts of *Tamburlaine* suggest that the pattern of modern editorial emendation of the plays has diminished the homoerotic aspect of the masculinity of Tamburlaine and his comrades. To begin with a bad example, after he has crowned his three chief followers 'Kings of Argier, Morocco, and of Fez' (1.4.4.119), Tamburlaine urges them to 'Deserve these titles I bestow you with / By valour and by magnanimity' (124–5). The key variant occurs in line 125. Where the earliest two editions read 'magnanimity', the 1597 edition has 'magnamity'. 'Magnanimity' is clearly the 'correct' reading here: it reinforces the sense of the line and the passage in which it occurs, it preserves the metre, and is sanctioned by the copy-text.<sup>28</sup> If 'magnamity' is a word, moreover, it is Marlowe's invention. Yet, if we go back to this nonce word's Latin roots (*magnus*, 'great', and *amare*, 'to love') and consider it to mean 'great friendship' or 'great love', it too makes sense while directing the reader's attention to a quality that is perhaps less exalted than magnanimity but certainly no less crucial to Tamburlaine's men deserving and receiving their new crowns. They are Tamburlaine's great friends: 'two kings, the friends to Tamburlaine' (2.3.3.13) is how Theridamas presents himself and Techelles to the captain of Balsera, the town they besiege in 3.3 of *Part Two*. This friendship is not the same as an ethical duty. It implies a far greater emotional investment than duty and can be in opposition to it, as the early editions admit and modern editions seek to deny. In 1.2.3 Theridamas attempts to claim Techelles's and Usumcasane's support for Cosroe, who has joined up with Tamburlaine's forces against his brother Mycetes, king of Persia:

And these his [Tamburlaine's] two renownèd friends, my lord,

Would make one thrust and strive to be retained  
 In such a great degree of amity. (30–2)

Techelles replies, in lines with a variant found only in the 1605/6 edition but commonly adopted in modern editions, ‘With duty and with amity we yield / Our utmost service to the fair Cosroe’ (33–4).<sup>29</sup> Duty and amity, ethical obligation and love, are made to seem synonymous in these lines. The culprit here is the ‘and’ in line 33. The first three early editions read ‘not’: ‘with duty, not with amity, we yield’. Techelles’s antithesis draws a distinction that the rest of the play quickly substantiates: Tamburlaine and his men turn on and defeat Cosroe later in the play, making very clear the considerable difference between yielding in duty and yielding in amity.

‘Magnanimity’, its cognates, and its connotations, however, are not variants to which modern editorial practice has permitted any independence, as one final example will further illustrate. In 2.4.3, Tamburlaine gives to his common soldiers the ‘troops of harlots’ (82) that accompanied the defeated armies of Bajazeth’s son Callapine and his tributary kings. ‘Injurious tyrant, wilt thou so defame / The hateful fortunes of thy victory, / To exercise upon such guiltless dames / The violence of thy common soldiers’ lust?’ (77–80), the defeated king of Natolia protests. Tamburlaine replies: ‘Live continent then, ye slaves, and meet not me / With troops of harlots at your slothful heels’ (81–2). Tamburlaine’s reply characterizes the Turkish army as effeminized by their promiscuous heterosexuality; real soldiers contain their sexuality, are continent, by banishing women from their camp. ‘Continent’, however, is a modern editorial emendation first made, again in the nineteenth century, by Oxberry (1820). All the early modern editions of the play read ‘content’: ‘Live content’. The difference may be slight, but ‘continent’ implies a more forceful restraint of sexuality than ‘content’, a restraint of sexuality from inappropriate sexual partners in inappropriate situations, which in a nineteenth-century perspective would imply fellow soldiers in the camp as well as the troops of prostitutes following it. ‘Continent’ purges sex from the camp. ‘Content’ carries no such implications: it rejects neither sexuality in general nor the homoerotic potential of amity, but merely a form of heterosexuality. It also preserves the line’s metre. Nonetheless, most modern editions read ‘continent’.<sup>30</sup>

Marlowe’s two *Tamburlaine* plays are disturbing texts, even in the modern editions to which the reader today has access. They repeatedly stage violent assaults on human bodies and conventional Elizabethan ideas, and they

repeatedly deny and even ridicule attempts to transcend the brutal material world in which such assaults occur. Marlowe's contemporaries immediately recognized the plays' radical nature. In 1588, less than a year after the date usually given for the first performance of the second part, Robert Greene piously protested that he at least 'could not make my verses jet upon the stage in tragical buskins, every word filling the mouth like the faburden of Bow Bell, daring God out of heaven with that atheist Tamburlaine, or blaspheming with the mad priest of the sun'.<sup>31</sup> That daring mouth, or at least the presumed author of it, was stopped in 1593, as the informer Richard Baines wished it in a note to the Elizabethan government: 'all men in Christianity ought to endeavour that the mouth of so dangerous a member may be stopped',<sup>32</sup> he advised Elizabeth's privy counsel. In this article, I have taken that mouth as my counter-authoritative warrant for unearthing the inferior variants and the materialist readings they generate that transmigrate through the early editions of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays. These readings are contingent, certainly, and no doubt as speculative as those they seek to contest. Nonetheless, unstopping the mouths of the later early editions reveals the *Tamburlaine* plays to be messier, more richly textured, and more radical than the disciplined *Tamburlaine* plays of modern editorial tradition. Through the early editions' inferior variants, Marlowe's ghost continues to haunt the text of his plays even into the twenty-first century.

## Notes

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- 1 George Chapman and Christopher Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*, in *The Collected Poems of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Patrick Cheney and Brian Striar (Oxford, 2005).
- 2 Thomas Thorpe, 'To His Kind and True Friend, Edward Blount', *Lucan's First Book*, by Christopher Marlowe, *The Collected Poems of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Patrick Cheney and Brian Striar (Oxford, 2005). 3–4.
- 3 Thomas Beard, *The Theatre of God's Judgement* (London, 1597), K5r.
- 4 H.G. Aldis et al., *Dictionary of Printers and Booksellers in England, Scotland and Ireland, and of Foreign Printers of English Books 1557–1640* (1910; rpt, Mansfield Centre, CT, 2005) provides a useful summary of Jones's career as a printer and publisher. Recently, Sonia Massai in *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor* (Cambridge, 2007) has examined Jones's strategies as a publisher catering to the sophisticated literary market of the Inns of Court and argued that the variants introduced into 1593 and 1597 editions of the *Tamburlaine* plays were the products of Jones's conscious



editorial interventions rather than simple compositor's errors (81–7). W.W. Greg in *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration* (4 vols.; London, 1939) remarks that 'R. Jones, whose name appears as printer in the three earliest editions (a)–(c), did not, it is believed, himself own a press, but the actual printers of these editions have not been identified' (1.171). In 'Richard Jones (*fl.* 1564–1613): Elizabethan Printer, Bookseller and Publisher', *Analytical and Enumerative Bibliography* 12.3–4 (2001), 165, Kirk Melnikoff contests this assertion, claiming that 'evidence strongly suggests that Jones did indeed own and operate a printing press for much of his career'. 'With the exception of a three-year span from 1589 until 1593, self-printing remains the norm for Jones at his Holborn location' (156), Melnikoff states. See also Melnikoff's 'Jones's Pen and Marlowe's Socks: Richard Jones, Print Culture, and the Beginnings of English Dramatic Literature', *Studies in Philology* 102.2 (2005), 184–209, for an in-depth analysis of Jones's activities as a printer and publisher of dramatic texts. In 'The Printing of the Early Editions of Marlowe's Plays: *Tamburlaine* (1590), *The Massacre at Paris* (1592?), *Edward II* (1594), *Dido* (1594), *Doctor Faustus* (1604, 1616), *The Jew of Malta* (1633)', PhD thesis (Duke University, 1964; Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1977), 13, Robert Ford Welsh has suggested Thomas Orwin as the printer of the 1590 edition of the *Tamburlaine* plays.

- 5 In *Bibliography* W.W. Greg provides full bibliographical information for the four early editions (nos 94, 95).
- 6 Edward Phillips, *Theatrum Poetarum, Or a Complete Collection of the Poets* (London, 1675), 182. Cited in J.S. Cunningham ed. and intro., *Tamburlaine the Great*, by Christopher Marlowe (Manchester, 1981), 6, 8.
- 7 Kirk Melnikoff, 'Jones's Pen and Marlowe's Socks: Richard Jones, Print Culture, and the Beginnings of English Dramatic Literature', *Studies in Philology* 102.2 (2005), 185–7. In his prefatory 'To the Gentlemen Readers', 8–11, Jones states that 'I have (purposely) omitted and left out some fond and frivolous gestures, digressing (and in my poor opinion) far unmeet for the matter'.
- 8 Melnikoff, 'Jones's Pen and Marlowe's Socks', 185.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 186.
- 10 W.W. Greg, 'The Rationale of Copy-Text', Erick Kelleman (ed.), *Textual Editing and Criticism: An Introduction*, (New York and London, 2009), 143.
- 11 Jerome McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (1983; rpt, Charlottesville and London, 1992), 31.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 102.
- 13 D.C. Greetham, '[Textual] Criticism and Deconstruction', *Studies in Bibliography* 44 (1981), 6.

- 14 Leah S. Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton* (London and New York, 1996), 3.
- 15 The most recent New Mermaids edition: Anthony B. Dawson (ed.), *Tamburlaine Parts One and Two*, 2nd edn (New York and London, 1997). Unless otherwise specified, all quotations from a modern edition of the two plays are from this edition.
- 16 I have collated the following modern editions: David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (eds), *Tamburlaine the Great, Parts I and II, Christopher Marlowe: Doctor Faustus and Other Plays* (Oxford, 1995); Fredson Bowers (ed.), *Tamburlaine, The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1973); C.F. Tucker Brooke (ed.), *Tamburlaine and Tamburlaine, Part II* (Oxford, 1910); F. Cunningham (ed.), *Tamburlaine the Great. Parts I. & II., The Works of Christopher Marlowe* (London, 1889); J.S. Cunningham (ed.), *Tamburlaine the Great* (Manchester, 1981); Anthony B. Dawson (ed.), *Tamburlaine Parts One and Two* (London, 1997); Havelock Ellis (ed.), *Tamburlaine the Great, Christopher Marlowe* (London, nd); U.M. Ellis-Fermor (ed.), *Tamburlaine the Great in Two Parts* (1930; New York, 1966); David Fuller (ed.), *Tamburlaine the Great Parts I and II, The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe* (Oxford, 1998), vol. 5; John D. Jump (ed.), *Tamburlaine the Great Parts I and II* (Lincoln, 1967); Leo Kirschbaum (ed.), *1 Tamburlaine and 2 Tamburlaine, The Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Cleveland, 1962); Irving Ribner (ed.), *Tamburlaine: Part One and Tamburlaine: Part Two, The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (New York, 1963); M.R. Ridley (ed.), *The First Part of Tamburlaine the Great and The Second Part of Tamburlaine the Great, Marlowe's Plays and Poems* (New York, 1955); G. Robinson (ed.), *Tamberlaine the Great, — Part I and Tamberlaine the Great, — Part II, The Works of Christopher Marlowe* (London, 1826); Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey (eds), *Tamburlaine the Great, Part One and Tamburlaine the Great, Part Two, The Complete Plays* (London, 2003); J.B. Steane (ed.), *Tamburlaine the Great, The Complete Plays* (London, 1969); Edward Thomas (ed.), *The First Part of Tamburlaine the Great and The Second Part of Tamburlaine the Great, Marlowe's Plays* (London, 1909); Tatiana Wolff (ed.), *Tamburlaine the Great Parts I & II* (London, 1964). I have relied on Fuller's critical notes for Oxberry's 1820 edition and Dyce's 1850 and revised 1858 editions.
- 17 In *Christopher Marlowe: The Plays and Their Sources* (London and New York, 1994), 69–70, Vivian Thomas and William Tydeman conjecture that 'Marlowe may have been able to read both works [Ive's *Practice of Fortification* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*] in manuscript and hence incorporate certain passages into his text'.
- 18 Four modern editions emend to the indefinite article: Cunningham, Ellis, Robinson, and Thomas.

- 19 Of the modern editions collated for this article, only Bowers retains 'harper', and he glosses it thus: 'i.e., Harpy, as in O2'.
- 20 Thomas, interestingly, emends to 'us'. All other modern editions collated read 'you'.
- 21 Kirschbaum retains 'anchor'.
- 22 Ellis retains 'lure' but emends 'our' to 'your'. Cunningham, Thomas, Ridley, and Robinson emend 'lure' to 'light'. All other modern editions collated emend 'lure' to 'air'. Bowers, Brooke, Ellis-Fermor, Ribner, Robinson, Romany and Lindsey, and Wolff retain 'our'.
- 23 Eight of the modern editions collated retain the line unemended: Bevington and Rasmussen, Cunningham, Ellis-Fermor, Jump, Ribner, Robinson, Romany and Lindsey, and Wolff.
- 24 Cunningham (ed.) *Tamburlaine*, 202.
- 25 Ellis, Fuller, and Kirschbaum make this emendation.
- 26 Of the modern editions collated, only the nineteenth-century Robinson edition retains 'snowy'.
- 27 Leah S. Marcus, 'Textual Scholarship', Ann Hollinshead Hurley and Chanita Goodblatt (eds), *Women Editing/Editing Women: Early Modern Women Writers and the New Textualism* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2009), 87.
- 28 No modern edition adopts the 1597 variant.
- 29 All modern editions collated for this article adopt the 1605/6 variant.
- 30 Of the modern editions collated for this article, only Cunningham and Romany and Lindsey retain 'content'.
- 31 Robert Greene, *Perimedes the Blacksmith* (London, 1588), A3r.
- 32 Richard Baines, 'The Baines Note', in Constance Brown Kuriyama, *Christopher Marlowe: A Renaissance Life* (New York, 2002), 228.

