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THE PERFORMATIVE SUBLIME: WORKING WORDS AND MARTIAL OBSERVATIONS
IN *TAMBURLAINE THE GREAT, PART ONE*

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I argue for the importance of a “performative sublime” in Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine The Great, Part One* (1590). By the performative sublime, I mean the playwright’s use of a heightened or “sublime” language of terror and rapture to present characters who effect persuasion or change the outside world. The central figure is Tamburlaine himself; but, those he conquers also deploy the register of the sublime in opposition to him, especially Asian leaders such as Bajazeth, but also Tamburlaine’s future wife, Zenocrate. Particularly innovative are the Virgins of Damascus, for they combine the two principal kinds of gender dynamic from the other contests: they are pleading females, like Zenocrate, but they are national military opponents, like Bajezeth, and in the end the Virgins pay the tragic military price. In Marlowe’s pan-Asian contest of character, Tamburlaine’s use of the performative sublime proves valuable for understanding how a “Scythian Shepherd” who becomes a “Mighty Monarch” (1590 title page) uses language to rise to power, change the landscape, and secure a patrilinear line of political dominance for his sons. Yet Marlowe goes further, to show Tamburlaine committed to using language to deify the human, especially himself. Accordingly, Tamburlaine succeeds, not through military power, but through divine performative utterances that scholars have only recently begun to classify in terms of the sublime. By focusing on a neglected performative sublime in *1 Tamburlaine*, we understand the new model of theater for which Christopher Marlowe is renowned.

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Introduction

The Scythian Tamburlaine storms onto the Elizabethan stage, and with him Christopher Marlowe broke into the theater scene, not only as a poet-playwright, but as a literary revolutionary. *Tamburlaine The Great, Part One* (hereafter referred to as *Tamburlaine*) shaped the genre of tragedy for the stage and for the era, its echoes visible in the works of Shakespeare and other contemporaries. The “working words” of *Tamburlaine* have been of great interest to Marlowe scholars, notably Helen Watson-Williams, who in “The Power of Words: A Reading of *Tamburlaine the Great, Part One*” notes that in this play “words can be used as weapons, sufficient in themselves” (Watson-Williams A3). As yet, however, no one has studied *Tamburlaine*’s power of language in terms of a Western aesthetics that scholars are increasingly coming to recognize: the sublime.

This thesis will contribute to the academic conversation about the sublime in western literature. Notable work has been done by James Porter in *The Sublime in Antiquity*, as Porter explores the classical sublime in Greek and Roman rhetoric and literature before and after Longinus, who first theorized the sublime (probably in the first century A.D.). C. Stephen Jaeger focuses on the medieval sublime in the introduction to *Magnificence and the Sublime in Medieval Aesthetics*. Moreover, Caroline van Eck, Stijn Bussels, Maarten Delbeke, and Jürgen Pieters locate the Longinian sublime in the rhetoric, visual arts, architecture, and theater of the European early modern period more broadly. Work specifically on the sublime in Marlowe and *Tamburlaine* has been done by Patrick Cheney and Kimberly Benston. Cheney has published two books on the early modern sublime, one specifically on Marlowe, *Marlowe’s Republican*

Authorship: Lucan, Liberty, and the Sublime, and most recently *English Authorship and the Early Modern Sublime: Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson*. Benston covers the “Tamburlainian sublime” in his essay “Beauty’s Just Applause,” focusing on Tamburlaine’s function as a “tyrant-rhetor” (Benston 208). Missing from this criticism is discussion of the performative sublime in *Tamburlaine, Part One*, which this thesis aims to introduce into the conversation.

Cheney posits that Marlowe’s sublime language emphasizes the importance of ideas rather than things, a belief shared by Benston (Cheney, *English Authorship* 129). According to Cheney, Marlowe’s conception of

the image is not transcendent (or even immanent) but *literary* – not an abstraction but instead a weird phenomenon that jumps the gap between abstraction and concretion – and nowhere more weird than in the theatre, when the Marlovian actor impersonates an idea rather than a character: an image of a human, not the human itself. (130)

This explains the “tragic glass” in the Prologue to *Tamburlaine* – Marlowe puts an idea onstage rather than the actual history of Timur the Lame – and the playwright represents the image through the traditional language of the sublime, as indicated by the use of “high astounding terms” (Prologue 7, Cheney 135).

Benston argues that “Tamburlaine is a transcendently solipsistic poet of the Sublime” and while his work on the “Tamburlainian Sublime” focuses more on the rhetorical value of the sublime (Benston 207), he does not quite broach the issue of the performativity of Tamburlaine’s words. Benston calls Tamburlaine a “*tyrant-rhetor*” and indeed he is both a tyrant and a rhetorician, but Benston sees Tamburlaine’s use of language as a means of turning words into

“working instruments of desire,” and he identifies what he calls an “agonistic sublime” (Benston 207-208), by which he means a combative version. While the sublime language of Tamburlaine is indeed agonistic at times, it is constantly deifying as well. It is the power of sublime language to deify that Marlowe moves center stage in the title character of Tamburlaine.

What both Cheney and Benston, particularly the latter, point to is the idea of the performative sublime that *Tamburlaine* brings to the stage. Tamburlaine speaks things into being, and is able to do so by use of a heightened language that moves him from the lowly sphere of the human to the “stately tents of war” and the elevated status of godhood (Prologue 3).

The Performative Sublime Defined

The performative sublime runs parallel to the Longinian sublime as posited by Cheney in his monograph *English Authorship and the Early Modern Sublime* but is more rhetorical in nature, not simply representational. Cheney understands the sublime as centered around authorship, and he defines the sublime as “that quality of genius in great literary works which irresistibly delights, inspires, and overwhelms the reader” (Cheney 5). Longinus says in his treatise *On Sublimity* that “persuasion is on the whole something we can control, whereas amazement and wonder exert invincible power and force and get the better of every hearer” (Longinus 143). However, *Tamburlaine* exemplifies the idea that the sublime can in fact be persuasive – if not necessarily rhetorical – precisely *because* of that invincible force that overpowers everyone who hears it, as demonstrated by Tamburlaine’s success in talking his way through war. The performative sublime privileges language in the process of creating change, and once established, upholds the change it makes.

An understanding of the performative sublime relies on an understanding of both performativity and sublimity. The former is best understood through the theory of speech acts pioneered by J. L. Austin in *How to do things with Words*. Austin defines “performative utterances” as utterances that “do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constate anything at all, are not ‘true or false,’” wherein “the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action” (Austin 5-6). In short, the words make things happen. For the purposes of this thesis, the sublime can best be understood as Longinus defines it, as “a kind of eminence or excellence of discourse” (Longinus 143). He goes on to say that the sublime is “the source of distinction of the very greatest poets and prose writers and the means by which they have given eternal life to their own fame” (Longinus 143). Certainly, Tamburlaine meets both of these standards, and his language is precisely that which secures his fame and the tool that he will use to become a god, the process of which can perhaps best be described as “giving eternal life to one’s own fame.”

Markers of the Longinian sublime as identified by Porter include: “immense heights...or profound depths,” “sudden or extreme, often violent, motions or changes,” “limits revealed in their transgression,” “cosmic magnifications of non-cosmic events,” “unsurpassed qualities,” “lasting and everlasting qualities,” “uncontainable forces,” “natural, mythical, divine, or literary phenomena embodying any of the above” (Porter 51-53). Each of these criteria are met by Tamburlaine throughout the play, particularly elevation, unsurpassed qualities, and uncontainable forces, leading to the unequivocal definition of Tamburlaine as a sublime figure.

Perhaps most importantly, Tamburlaine is aware of the power that sublime language has and the power that performative language has. Tamburlaine’s ultimate project is to become a god and take not only earthly thrones but the throne of Jove himself, so that he is unstoppable in his conquests. By combining the performative and the sublime, he makes his performative

utterances work for him so that he can conquer Asia and eventually the heavens, while Marlowe, by writing these utterances in the first place, can create a sublime being and put him on stage.

I
Tamburlaine

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.
(Prologue 3-6).

The Prologue to *Tamburlaine* establishes a verbal function and the parameters of language for the rest of the play, which reflects the primacy of audition and hearing and which allies speech with actions. From this short opening speech, the audience knows what to expect from the play, both topically and structurally. The audience will *hear* the threats that Tamburlaine makes; this moment establishes the primacy of audition and hearing in the experience of the play. In "Marlowe and style" Russ McDonald explains the way that Marlowe's style of writing sounds, and what that means for the texts, in particular, *Tamburlaine*. McDonald cites Harry Levin's calculations of the structure of the text (15% of the lines begin with "and" and many end with a polysyllabic noun) to see that "the momentum and regularity thereby created lend a sense of inexorability appropriate to the Scythian's irresistible conquests" (McDonald 60). This internal structure helps push the lines forward, and pushes audiences to the edge of their seats (unless they are groundlings, who must stand, gripped, leaning forward) as they must listen carefully to catch every word of a sentence that amounts to a speeding bullet. The sheer unstoppable of Tamburlaine's language helps him in his conquests, because he, like his sentences, moves through space in such a way that he cannot be impeded. Audiences also

come to understand that Tamburlaine's speech acts are threats; Tamburlaine threatens "the world" not merely individual empires.

Clearly Marlowe refers to Tamburlaine's rise to power across nations, and a goal of conquering every kingdom on the globe, but he also suggests that Tamburlaine is a threat to the social hierarchy of the world – he is after all a shepherd by birth. The terms of his threats are "high" and "astounding," and this is precisely what sets him apart and elevates him out of the hills of Scythia – his command of the sublime language. Much like Marlowe's *Passionate Shepherd*, Tamburlaine makes language work for him, and uses it as a tool with which to attain physical things – the beloved, Zenocrate, or a crown. The Prologue also tells the audience that they will hear Tamburlaine "scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword" – but how can one hear that (Prologue 6): through the use of the performative sublime, a register both "high" and "astounding" that makes things happen. Tamburlaine's language becomes his sword; thus the "conquering sword" of the Prologue refers not to Tamburlaine's curtle-axe, but his very utterances.

In his address to Theridamas, Mycetes' general, Tamburlaine speaks in imperatives: "forsake thy king, and do but join with me," "Draw forth thy sword," "See how he rains down heaps of gold," before switching into the conditional, what may be *if* Theridamas chooses to join him (1.2.172,178, 183). This verbal device establishes Tamburlaine as the power player with the ability to grant power and riches to Theridamas, but he gives Theridamas the ultimate choice, even though the choice as presented by Tamburlaine is eternal glory or brutal death, and thus a foregone conclusion. This moment sets up Tamburlaine as a god that will give or take away in accordance with the obedience and praise given to him. Tamburlaine actually offers Theridamas

the chance to “become immortal like the gods” but uses the pronoun “we” so that Theridamas knows his immortality is dependent on his alliance with the Scythian conqueror (1.2.201).

In the same scene, Usumcasane, loyal general of Tamburlaine speaks of “conquering swords” and “fearful tongues” in the same sentence:

...Where kings shall crouch unto our conquering swords
 And hosts of soldiers stand amazed at us,
 When with their fearful tongues they shall confess,
 These are the men that all the world admires. (1.2.220-223)

The phrase “conquering sword,” as discussed above, has already come to mean “performative sublime language” in the vernacular of the play. Thus, Usumcasane’s use of “conquering sword” opposes the image of the “fearful tongues” of the soldiers – Tamburlaine’s language is superior to the low, quotidian language of his foes enabling him to conquer them. Theridamas then refers to the speech of Tamburlaine and the generals as “strong enchantments,” thus acknowledging the sublime power of their language but also their performative power. Enchantments are a simple way of understanding the performative – words are spoken and change reality, and here Theridamas recognizes that power in the sublime speech of Tamburlaine. Theridamas, swayed by the lofty images of “conquered kingdoms and cities sacked” as well as glory and power, and the sheer force of Tamburlaine’s sublime language – “Not Hermes, prolocutor to the gods, / Could use persuasions more pathetic”¹ – naturally accepts Tamburlaine’s offer to join him (1.2.210-211). Importantly, Theridamas recognizes Tamburlaine’s divine project by using

¹ Here, pathetic means “expressing or arising from passion or strong emotion” (*OED*).

Hermes, a divine ‘prolocutor,’ rather than another talented mortal rhetorician, and identifies Tamburlaine as a greater sublime speaker than a god.

Mycetes, King of Persia, provides a direct foil to Tamburlaine; he admits that his oratorical skills are subpar:

by heavens I swear,
 Aurora shall not peep out her doors
 But I will have Cosroë by the head
 And kill proud Tamburlaine with point of sword.
 Tell you the rest Meander; I have said. (2.2.9-13)

His oaths are ineffectual; they “misfire,” to use Austin’s terminology, because the conditions for their success are not met: the condition of course is the sublimity that is missing from Mycetes’ speech (2.2.9-13). The oath quoted above follows an ABAB rhyme scheme in the last four lines (doors/head/sword/said), whereas Tamburlaine’s language does not follow these conventions and rather relies upon the force generated by blank verse, enjambed lines, and a formula of three-syllable proper nouns ending lines begun with “and” (McDonald 60). Mycetes relies on his brother, Cosroe, as well as his counselor Meander to convey his meaning in inspirational terms – terms that will spur his generals into action in the same way that Tamburlaine does (“Tell you the rest Meander”); however, because that language inspires (read: sublime language) does not originate from Mycetes, he cannot expect to reap the benefits. Mycetes is linguistically impotent and thus easily toppled (2.2.13).

“Working Words”

In 2.3, Theridamas says to Cosroe, “You see, my lord, what working words [Tamburlaine] hath,” after Tamburlaine details what will happen should Cosroe join him (2.3.25). Tamburlaine uses the same structure as he used to woo Theridamas to his side: a conditional portrait of glory. Tamburlaine’s “working words” neither confirm nor deny Cosroe’s assumption that Tamburlaine will serve as Cosroe’s subordinate, allowing Cosroe to believe what he must believe in order to aid Tamburlaine’s forces in overthrowing Mycetes. By inspiring Cosroe to challenge his brother on his own account, Tamburlaine is able to save his army an entire battle and weaken the Persian army that they will engage – all through the use of the performative sublime. In this speech, as opposed to his earlier speeches, Tamburlaine challenges the gods rather than simply align himself with them. Where Longinus seems to see the sublime as consonant with religious faith, Marlowe explodes the idea. The speech begins with a divine sanction of Tamburlaine’s actions, “fates and oracles of heaven have sworn / To royalize the deeds of Tamburlaine,” though the divinity is notably not the gods themselves but rather their oracles, suggesting that the gods are not the arbiters of fate and are not in control of the heavens (2.3.7-8). Importantly, the fates and oracles have “sworn” to do this, making this image another instance of the performative sublime – “performative” because this type of speech act performs a function (here ensuring Tamburlaine’s success), and “sublime” due to the divine nature of the fates and oracles. The only direct mention of Jove in this speech compares the “bullets” of Tamburlaine’s army to “Jove’s dreadful thunderbolts” that will be used to “threat the gods”, effectively turning Jove’s own power against himself with the goal of “[chasing] the stars from heaven” (2.3.19-22).

Tamburlaine's mission as detailed in this speech now supersedes his earlier mission of an earthly crown – he seeks to run the gods out of heaven and install himself as the new god – a revolutionary idea and an aim that can only be accomplished (indeed that has already begun to be accomplished) through the use of performative sublime language. So, these words are “working words”; they are a challenge to Jove, who has so far been figured as a benevolent patron to Tamburlaine; and they are a challenge to all the heavens, while reaffirming the power of the fates, because that bolsters Tamburlaine's claim to ultimate power. Then, as he flourishes his curtle-axe, Tamburlaine compares his threatening weapon to lightening, figuring himself as Jove, and as he leaves with Techelles and Usumcasane, Tamburlaine says that the three of them are “more than needs to make an emperor” – exactly right, as their language rather than their armies are what win crowns (2.3.65). The word “make” here is particularly important: rather than unseating a king or conquering a kingdom, the warrior-leaders create a new empire, as well as crown its emperor. Tamburlaine is “made” with every performative utterance and sublime moment, constantly shifting, reaffirming, and deifying himself to become superhuman.

“Will You be Kings?”

Theridamas, in his discourse on kingship with Tamburlaine, Techelles, and Usumcasane, talks about the “virtues” of a crown – “life and death; / To ask, and have; command, and be obeyed” (2.5.60-61). While possibly applicable to the divine crown that Tamburlaine seeks, Theridamas is more concerned here with the earthly crown, and as he says, he “can live without it” (2.5.66). Importantly, these virtues are not only earthly or only divine; “to ask, and have”

particularly applies to Theridamas' understanding of the earthy crown and the command of the temporal realm over which one rules; however, "life and death" fit more with the godhood that Theridamas believes is "not so glorious as a king" (2.5.57). Tamburlaine decides that he will be a king ("half to be a god," in Usumcasane's words), perhaps in part because his comrades will not understand his ultimate project of deification, and asks if his companions will also be kings. Importantly, the verb here is "will" not "would" – it is not conditional, unlike the language that Tamburlaine uses when wooing his enemies to his side or to surrender. Techelles answers Tamburlaine's question in the conditional, that he "would, my lord" and Tamburlaine responds with a "would" as well (2.5.68-69). This provides him the opportunity to urge his generals to action, because, why should they dream of greatness idly, instead of taking action to gain the Persian crown, which he believes he could attain "with a wondrous ease" (2.5.77). "Wondrous" here alerts the reader to the sublime – the ease with which they will conquer will be wondrous because it will be attained through "wondrous" speech. Theridamas says that "with [their] persuasions," their men will rally behind them in their quest for "such a dignity" (2.5.79-80). Theridamas recognizes that it is the "wondrous" factor that persuades, and he knows from experience that Tamburlaine (and his generals) use persuasion as a tactic of war. Having now become one of those generals, Theridamas includes himself in the category of sublime persuaders.

Tamburlaine then refers to his charging on Cosroe's army as a "pretty jest, in faith, my friends" (2.5.90). "Jest" suggests that he views the attack as a game or a joke – both interesting performative structures that require a multitude of people, or an audience to be successful. However, jokes exist in a different performative function than do performative utterances – they

are intentionally misfires. Austin explains that the conditions must be correct for the success of a performative utterance – a wedding must take place in a church in front of a priest and a witness if the couple is to be considered truly married; but two actors might say the exact formula of “I do’s” in a theater, in front of an actor-priest, and an audience of witnesses, but the conditions (of a theater and a play) negate the performative power of the utterance, and confine it to the reality of the fiction (Austin 8). Here, Tamburlaine takes a similar approach to the action of his army. It will be a jest because it will be like sport – the outcome already fixed: he and his army will fight for the sake of fighting rather than to actually do anything; it is a theatrical move so that Cosroe will know that he has been deceived and dethroned in one fell swoop. “In faith,” however, turns that “jest” on its head as it becomes an oath, an oath that the battle will be a jest. Thus, the battle is guaranteed, and the outcome is guaranteed, and the jest being a jest is guaranteed, providing that Tamburlaine’s men have faith in him and the divine providence that he believes guides his every move. Theridamas is wary of the word “jest,” and says that Tamburlaine should not make so light of such a battle, to which Tamburlaine replies, “shalt thou see the Scythian Tamburlaine / Make but a jest to win the Persian crown” (2.5.98-99). Tamburlaine believes his own linguistic power to be a military power, so that he need not work to earn a crown, and he even stresses that it is a foreign crown that he will win with “wondrous ease,” acknowledging his role as a foreign conqueror as a means of further showing how bold he truly is (2.5.77).

As Cosroe dies and Tamburlaine seizes the Persian crown, he relates himself to Jove again – “what better precedent” – as a justification for having overthrown Cosroe. He expounds upon the human desire for upward mobility, in a speech that imagines a “climbing after knowledge infinite” and an understanding in the soul of the “wondrous architecture of the world”

as universal human experiences; and at the summit of this picture he leaves “the sweet fruition of an earthly crown” (2.7.21-29). This speech is particularly important to Benston, who calls it a “poem of annunciation...that is truly a will toward the vast *unknown* the poet means to colonize alone” (Benston 209, italics his). “Colonize” is perhaps an appropriate word here: already Tamburlaine has acknowledged that he is not Persian, and believes (and indeed makes) himself to be superior to those he conquers. However, he recognizes that he still needs the support of his generals and subjects, and importantly he needs to install himself through a public performance. He says that “Mars himself, the angry god of arms, / And all the earthly potentates” conspired to keep him from attaining the crown, but if the people (his generals along with “others”) “say that Tamburlaine shall reign,” he will “wear it in despite of them” (2.7.58-63). This illustrates the necessity of performative language in transfers of power: others must pronounce him king and support and sanction his kingship for his reign to hold up against scrutiny; and, because he understands the value of human beings in building his empire, he knows that giving his subjects this “choice” to install him will ensure that he keeps the crown (2.7.67). He even goes so far as to challenge the gods again, saying that with the proclamation of the people that he is king, the Persian crown “is more surer on my head / Than if the gods had held a parliament / And all pronounced me king of Persia” (2.7.65-67). Privileging the performative power of his people over that of the gods, Tamburlaine asserts that he has the power to fly in the face of the divine: he is a newly ordained deity, chosen by humans to lead them.

“Speak in that Mood”

After a conversation with the Basso, an emissary from Bajazeth, Theridamas says that Tamburlaine “shall rouse him out of Europe and pursue / His scattered army till they yield or die” (3.3.38-39). Tamburlaine applauds him for this speech, particularly his verbiage, saying,

Well said, Theridamas! Speak in that mood,
 For ‘will’ and ‘shall’ best fitteth Tamburlaine,
 Whose smiling stars gives him assurèd hope
 Of martial triumph ere he meet his foes. (3.3.40-43)

Here Tamburlaine dives into the grammar behind his success with the martial philosophy of the performative sublime: these verbs are “working words” in that they perform an action, they create a new reality, and they foretell Tamburlaine’s success. Here, the stars that Tamburlaine talks about are of course the divine fates that he constantly references as his benefactors, but they could also refer to those around him who also create a fate and a prophecy for Tamburlaine as they use the performative sublime to speak into being his success.

In the next line, Tamburlaine refers to himself as “I that am termed the scourge² and wrath of God”, an interesting phrase, and it is important to note that this reference to the deity is “God” rather than “gods,” referring to the God of Abraham, of Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike, though the rest of the speech focuses on the Christian prisoners of Bajazeth and what Tamburlaine plans to do with them (3.3.44). In Scripture that belongs to all of the Abrahamic

² “Scourge of God” was a moniker given to Attila the Hun, popularized by Leonardo Bruni in *The historie of Leonard Aretine* (1563) and would have been synonymous with him to contemporary audiences. Many of the historical and biographical details that Marlowe uses in his portrayal of Tamburlaine follow more closely the Hun than the Scythian, in what could be a conflation of the two for artistic effect.

religions, Job 9:23 says, “When the scourge slays suddenly, he scoffs at the despair of the innocent” (*New American Bible*, Job 9:23). This harkens back to Zenocrate’s earlier mention of the gods as “defenders of the innocent” that would not permit Tamburlaine to continue down his course of conquering kingdoms (1.2.68). If Tamburlaine’s course of action in killing innocents in his path to ruling Asia is this sudden slaying, the “trial” of the innocents, then the gods have failed to defend them, and Tamburlaine, the scourge that has slain them, will laugh, having surpassed the power of the gods. This allusion sets up Tamburlaine’s later interaction with the Virgins of Damascus, for whom he acts as judge and jury, while exporting the duty of execution to his men. It also of course challenges the classical gods yet again, by referring to the God that replaced them, in the same way that Tamburlaine aims to replace Jove.

“If outward habit judge the inward man”

Only after Marlowe’s emphasis on hearing in the Prologue is the audience invited to “view but his picture in this tragic glass” – the sight of Tamburlaine becoming secondary to his use of language (Prologue 7). The tragic glass as discussed by Cheney is a function of the sublimity of the text. Cheney identifies Zenocrate as a repeatedly idealized and imagined figure for Tamburlaine, who “turns her into a literary image” by speaking in the sublime register about her beauty (Cheney 134).

Early in the play, Techelles suggests that Tamburlaine and his generals make their “swords play the orators,” and rather than talk with their enemies, that they should take violent action to achieve their end (1.2.132). However, Tamburlaine returns to his own idea of “playing the orator” (1.2.129). This phrase recognizes the performative nature of his speech before we

actually hear him enacting it on the stage (1.2.129). In doing so, he tells his generals not to march on Mycetes' troops but to display their gold so "that their reflections may amaze the Persians" (1.2.140). This display is theatrical: putting on a show of wealth and strength as the background for a parley with the Persians allows Tamburlaine to control how he is perceived by his enemy; it also mimics the art of stage design, as his goal of "amazing" the enemy speaks to his use of the sublime as a tactic of war and persuasion. To amaze is to inspire the enemy to abandon their loyalties in favor of a new allegiance to a new god – Tamburlaine. The following exchange with Theridamas shows just how convincing this is, and he switches sides remarkably quickly.

Before the two speak to each other, they are impressed with the appearance of the other. Theridamas says of Tamburlaine: "His looks do menace heaven and dare the gods," after noting that Tamburlaine is "embellished" with gold (1.2.157,155). Tamburlaine's set design has been successful, setting the tone for his performance as discussed in the previous chapter. Similarly, Tamburlaine makes a judgement about Theridamas before the latter has a chance to speak his case: "Noble and mild this Persian seems to be, / If outward habit judge the inward man" (1.2.161-162). While here Tamburlaine does take Theridamas at his appearance, he remains cautious, using "if," because he himself has orchestrated his own appearance for theatrical persuasion. Yet in his address to Theridamas, Tamburlaine says that he sees not the "majesty" in Theridamas that he admits to Techelles, but "the folly of [his own] emperor" (1.2.167). By telling him this, and telling him that he should have a higher position than he does as "captain of a thousand horse," Tamburlaine not only flatters Theridamas, and emphasizes the *reality* of outward interpretation, implanting the idea that Tamburlaine's gold is a direct measure of him as

a man and as a leader. Tamburlaine also calls back to the gold in his speech, directing Theridamas, “See how [Jove] rains down heaps of gold in showers / As if he meant to give my soldiers pay” – here aligning himself with Jove and elevating himself above the human into the realm of the sublime, while saying that his conquering mission is sanctioned by the divine and thus inevitable (1.2.182-183). Theridamas is immediately “won with [Tamburlaine’s] words and conquered with [his] looks”: neither the one nor the other can work alone, but both in conjunction can sway even the loyal Theridamas, because they are both in the register of the performative sublime.

Menaphon’s blazon of Tamburlaine in 2.1 shows just how powerful the constructed sight of Tamburlaine is – he resembles Atlas and Achilles and his stature echoes his desire: “upwards and divine” (2.1.8). Tamburlaine’s divine desire is bolstered by divine support, as Menaphon says that in Tamburlaine’s eyes he sees “a heaven of heavenly bodies in their spheres / That guides his steps and actions to the throne” – again aligning Tamburlaine’s actions with divine providence or fate. Indeed, even “his lofty brows in folds ... figure death,” signifying the power that Tamburlaine has over Death himself. The word “figure” here means “to prefigure, foreshadow”; thus the very sight of Tamburlaine’s furrowed brow means that Death is soon to follow. This provides an extra-linguistic example of the performative sublime – Tamburlaine’s very body is the sublime text onto which is written the furrowed brow, which becomes the performative utterance that is “charged” by the sublimity of Tamburlaine’s body, becoming truth. Cosroe applauds Menaphon for his portrayal of “the face and personage of a wondrous man” – the word “wondrous” signaling the sublime, and in context referring to Tamburlaine as a sublime man. This fits with Menaphon’s description of the prefiguring power of Tamburlaine’s

very brow and the reading of Tamburlaine's body as a sublime text. Menaphon understands these conditions and acknowledges that "nature does strive...to make him famous in accomplished work," for he knows that Tamburlaine uses "persuasion" as a means of conquering his enemies; however, Menaphon fails to avoid defeat at the hands of the Scythian shepherd's sublime language (2.1.37).

The Persian Crown

MYCETES ...Come give it me.
TAMBURLAINE No. I took it prisoner.
MYCETES You lie. I gave it you.
TAMBURLAINE Then'tis mine.
MYCETES No, I mean I let you keep it
TAMBURLAINE Well, I mean you shall have it again.
 [Giving the crown]
 Here, take it for a while. I lend it thee
 Till I may see thee hemmed with armèd men
 Then shalt thou see me pull it from thy head
 Thou art no match for mighty Tamburlaine.
 (2.4.29-39).

Act 2, Scene 4 provides a bit of comic relief as Tamburlaine outwits the witless Mycetes, as they argue over who owns the Persian crown that Mycetes has tried unsuccessfully to hide during the battle. This not only lightens the mood, but shows just how unequally matched the two are – Mycetes cannot understand the logical turns that Tamburlaine moves through until it is too late. However, the important part of this scene lies in Tamburlaine's insistence that Mycetes keep the crown, but only so that he might be publicly dethroned. This speaks to Tamburlaine's theatrical nature, as well as his understanding of the performative. For his performative utterance

(the uncrowning of Mycetes) to be successful, it must be performed before witnesses, just as a coronation is witnessed. Not only will witnesses be able to speak to the truth of the act, but without an audience there can be no performance and with no performance no deed: the language becomes ineffective. Here, the “utterance” is not only language but the act of removing the crown from Mycetes’s head. However, Tamburlaine wants Mycetes to see himself dethroned, in a moment that suggests Tamburlaine wants Mycetes to see the performance, and see himself unmade in a reverse function to Tamburlaine’s ongoing construction of himself. The complex construction of “seeing” in this situation – Tamburlaine seeing Mycetes surrounded; Mycetes seeing Tamburlaine remove his crown; the “armed men seeing all of this”; and of course the implied and overarching spectators, the audience watching *Tamburlaine* (2.4.36). All of these eyes suggest that observation and public performance are essential parts creating meaning, and of performative language and actions. Austin also calls performative utterances “speech-acts” – this suggests that not only is speech itself an act, but that the action is equally important in shaping meaning. Tamburlaine’s project relies on this function of language as his words are the actions that allow him to conquer the east.

II Bajazeth

The emperor of Turkey flies in the same circles as Tamburlaine; he soars above his subjects in the same “restless spheres” that Tamburlaine describes in the scene preceding Bajazeth’s introduction at the top of Act Three. That Bajazeth’s introduction follows so closely on Tamburlaine’s crowning as King of Persia sets up Bajazeth as a vision both of what Tamburlaine might be and what he must do to become King. Bajazeth calls himself “the high and highest monarch of the world” and “wills and commands” Tamburlaine to contain himself to Persia, rather than “entreat” him, because to ask would give the relational power to Tamburlaine, and Bajazeth is the greater ruler (3.1.26-29). “High and highest” speaks to the sublimity of Bajazeth as a ruler, the word “high” is elevated, signifying the sublime. He uses the verb “will” in the sense of an intention – his “willing” *will* come to pass. Notably, at the moment of this conversation Bajazeth’s armies are laying siege to Constantinople – he is engaged in a similar project of conquest as Tamburlaine, and Tamburlaine aims to meet him at the gates of the city to both beat Bajazeth and win Constantinople.

In Act Three Scene Three, Tamburlaine uses the performative sublime to defeat the tepid performative sublime language of Bajazeth. Marlowe points to the performative power of naming when Bajazeth takes offense that Tamburlaine calls him by his name rather than his title: “He calls me Bajazeth, whom you call lord! / Note the presumption of this Scythian slave” (3.3.77-78). Title and decorum are incredibly important to the Turkish emperor, because they create the perception that others have of the named person; he says next that even the people tasked with leading his horses have “titles of dignity” (3.3.70-71). Due to the power that naming

has to make or unmake the referent, to “bluntly” call him by his name, is to strip him of his nobility, and to assert that Tamburlaine is an equal if not a superior. Tamburlaine then addresses Bajazeth as “Turk”, stripping him not only of his dignity and nobility, but his identity and personhood. This is a marked shift from the wooing language that prizes the individual identity that Tamburlaine has exhibited in earlier scenes with success, because Tamburlaine knows that the same flattery and performative sublime language will not work on Bajazeth, who is also conscious of language and how it functions.

If “‘will’ and ‘shall’ best fitteth Tamburlaine,” they also fit Bajazeth: the word “shall” is used 129 times in the play, a whopping 67 times by Tamburlaine, leaving just 53 for the rest of the company. Bajazeth comes in second with 13, while Cosroe comes in third with 10. Clearly, there is a link between performative language and power in the play. The tally shows that Bajazeth is the second-most conscious of the power of performative language to affect reality, but still much less so than Tamburlaine. Ironically, in the same scene Bajazeth praises the king of Argier for his suggestion to “leave words and let them feel your lances’ points,” saying to him, “well said” (3.3.91-93). This shows that Bajazeth prizes military action over Tamburlaine’s verbal warfare, while still prizing language and its power. Tamburlaine does not abandon his linguistic weapon; he tells his generals, “Fight all courageously, and be you kings! / I speak it, and my words are oracles” (3.3.101-102). He returns to the formula of conditional glory if his generals fight and win the battle, a formula that works to encourage them and remind them of what is at stake. The important shift here is that Tamburlaine has made himself and his words the oracles that secure his fate rather than the divine fates or stars that he has previously credited for his successes – here he makes himself divine.

After the battle, Marlowe stages a crucial moment when Tamburlaine asks, “who is conquerer,” forcing Bajazeth to declare him the victor – thus making Bajazeth use his authorial power to write Tamburlaine as superior militarily and linguistically (3.3.212). This is a crucial moment, because Bajazeth must concede verbally to Tamburlaine to make the transfer of power complete. While Bajazeth tries to console his wife, Zabina, by telling her that the armies of Greece and Africa will restore him to power, Tamburlaine shoots down this imagined restoration, as he says he will subdue those forces “And write [himself] great lord of Africa” (3.3.245). The word “write” here suggests a more permanent and graven declaration and installation of himself as emperor than even spoken words. He goes on to detail the lengths that he will rule, another reason that “write” makes sense here: a spoken declaration (while powerfully performative and potent) cannot be extended over large swaths of terrain, and communication through the written word is a large determinant of the success of an empire – if an emperor cannot communicate with the farthest reaches of his empire, he cannot be a true presence there and thus cannot keep the loyalty of the people and will inevitably lose the territory. “By this means” – the means of written communication of the same performative sublime language – will Tamburlaine “win the world at last” (3.3.260).

III Zenocrate

Zenocrate, the Egyptian princess and object of Tamburlaine's affections plays a crucial role in the play, not only as a political prisoner and later wife, but as the focal point of Tamburlaine's quest for power and his marital desire. Through interactions with Zenocrate and speeches about her, Tamburlaine exhibits a different kind of performative sublime language: rather than a martial sublime, the object of the marital sublime is to woo for the purpose of marriage and erotic desire. When she first meets the Scythian shepherd after being captured by him, she addresses him as "shepherd"; however, after hearing Tamburlaine refer to himself as a "greater man" than the "mighty Turk" (Bajazeth), she quickly calls him "my lord – for so you do import" (1.27-33). She realizes that he believes himself to be noble, and thus (perhaps as a matter of survival, perhaps as a matter of propriety) she must address him with the decorum which would beget talking to nobility. It is her verbalizing this that actually makes Tamburlaine a lord; she speaks it into being, and only then does Tamburlaine claim to be a lord "as [his] deeds shall prove" (1.2.34). This means that he has not yet proven himself worthy of the title, as he says his state still needs "men and kingdoms help to strengthen it," but because the title has been bestowed upon him by Zenocrate it is truth (1.2.29).

Tamburlaine goes on to say that Zenocrate must share his bed, because her beauty makes her a treasure fit for he who "conquers Asia", and that he will install her as "empress of the East" (1.2.37-45). Before he even mentions himself becoming emperor, he says that Zenocrate will be empress, demonstrating his model of persuasion and showing the object of that persuasion what she might enjoy should she submit to him. Zenocrate does not fall for it, and attempts to get out

of this sudden arrangement: “The gods, defenders of the innocent, / Will never prosper your intended drifts,” and she asks that Tamburlaine let her and her fellow travelers go, “Even as thou hop’st to be eternized / By living Asia’s mighty emperor” (1.2.68-73). Thus, it is she who puts Tamburlaine in the role of emperor of Asia, and she who uses the verb “eternized” – here Zenocrate outlines the goal that Tamburlaine spends the rest of the play seeking to achieve. She also sets up the gods as his challengers, forcing Tamburlaine later to turn away from Jove as he must attack the innocent to further his goals of eternalizing himself. In response to her invocation, Tamburlaine says that Zenocrate is “lovlier than the love of Jove”; by saying this, he claims himself to be better than Jove, that his love would be lovelier. This is his first challenge to the god.

Here, Tamburlaine also establishes the basis of his leadership. He says that “[Zenocrate’s] person is more worth to Tamburlaine / Than the possession of the Persian crown, / Which gracious starts have promised at my birth” (1.2.90-93). This sentence alone illustrates Tamburlaine’s model of kingship: he recognizes the dignity of the individual person (at least as far as to give their support to him), and he believes that he was promised the crown by the divine. The first of these two points is the reason that Tamburlaine is so successful an orator – he appeals to each individual’s desires and promises them whatever it is that he knows they want. His gift at reading people and seeing their interiority allows him to convince Theridamas and Cosroe to follow him, and he tells Techelles exactly how he wins over Zenocrate: “women must be flattered” (1.2.107). Not only does he see what they desire, but through his use of the performative sublime he can actually deliver on his promises. Zenocrate really does become empress of Asia and his generals really do become his regent kings. All of these things are made

possible by Tamburlaine's belief in his destiny, which itself was spoken into being by truly sublime forces – the stars. This promise is the ultimate example of the performative sublime, their speech-act creating the person and the power of Tamburlaine.

This sublimity Tamburlaine looks to share with Zenocrate, saying that she will be drawn by white stags to “the icy mountains' lofty tops”, and only after Tamburlaine has offered all of this and the crown of Asia to Zenocrate will he offer himself. Indeed, they are not married in the text of the play, but the very last scene shows Tamburlaine crowning Zenocrate. He kept his promise, and his nobility in this, as well as his conduct in refraining from sleeping with her until they are married. She comes to love him, as she tells Agydas in Act Three Scene Two, wishing to be his wife and “unite [her life and soul] to his life and soul, / That I may live and die with Tamburlaine”; calling him her “lordly love” (3.2.23-24, 49). She cites his oratorical skill as a reason that she loves him, as “his talk must sweeter than the Muses' song” directly answers Agydas' fear for her that “when [she] look for amorous discourse” Tamburlaine will only be able to answer in martial terms, about the men he has killed and “facts of war and blood” (3.2.44-50). The audience knows that this claim is not true, as Tamburlaine's speech has been the focus of the play and has been successful in winning kingdoms and generals, and as evidenced here, a bride. Zenocrate goes on to follow Tamburlaine's lead and challenges the gods, saying that were she to be married to Tamburlaine “higher would [she] rear [her] estimate / Than Juno, sister to the highest god” – her “estimate” meaning her self-worth – so Tamburlaine's earlier claim that she is worth more to him than the Persian crown becomes part of Zenocrate's understanding of herself – she values herself more knowing how much he values her (3.2.53-54). Yet having not yet been

made his wife, she remains fearful of losing his favor, which she tells Agydas is the source of her tears (3.2.65).

The stage directions dictate that Tamburlaine, having entered earlier and heard most of the conversation between Zenocrate and Agydas, “*takes [Zenocrate] away lovingly by the hand,*” while scowling at Agydas, but he does not speak as he leads his love offstage. Agydas, left onstage alone, has a brief soliloquy in which he says of Tamburlaine, “upon his brows was portrayed ugly death,” echoing Menaphon’s description of Tamburlaine earlier in the play. This proves to be true, and Techelles returns to present Agydas with a dagger, telling him that he knows what to do. Agydas does ascertain the meaning of the dagger, and kills himself. Thus, Tamburlaine’s brow figuring death brings it about here almost immediately, yet he does not need to say a word, more evidence of the sublime power of even his expressions to serve as performative utterances. Agydas does not need Techelles to tell him to commit suicide, but the very glowering look that Tamburlaine gave him as he left (along with the dagger) sends enough of a message to be considered a speech-act, especially because Agydas so decisively acts upon it – he does not have the power to negate the utterance. Of this command to suicide, Agydas says, “words are vain where working tools present / The naked action of my threatened end” (3.2.93-94). However, he misunderstands the way Tamburlaine works: words are his tool, but need not even be spoken aloud to have an effect; rather, if they are written upon the text of his body, figured in his brow, then they have the same power as a spoken threat. A threat of course takes on a unique role to Tamburlaine as well – he doesn’t make threats, he makes promises, as his threats inevitably come true because they are performative utterances, and because they are sublime.

IV

Virgins of Damascus

GOVERNOR We see his tents have now been alterèd
 With terrors to the last and cruell'st hue;
 His coal-black colours everywhere advanced
 Threaten our city with a general spoil;
 And if we should with common rites of arms
 Offer our safeties to his clemency,
 I fear the custom proper to his sword,
 Which he observes as parcel of his fame,
 Intending so to terrify the world,
 By any innovation or remorse
 Will never be dispensed with till our deaths. (5.1.7-17)

By Act Five, Tamburlaine has made his transition from Scythian shepherd to superhuman deity, as the governor of Damascus opens the scene by referring to him as “this man, or rather god of war” (5.1.1). As discussed above, the way that people refer to others in part creates the identity of the one being referred to; here the governor makes Tamburlaine a god by calling him, reinforcing the work that Tamburlaine has already done to usurp Jove and deify himself. The governor talks of the tents and “colours” that surround the city, now black as a symbol of Tamburlaine’s mercy having expired. The governor, now assured of the fall of Damascus to Tamburlaine’s forces, fears surrendering because of “the custom proper to [Tamburlaine’s] sword” which holds that once his colors change to black every last person will be put to death. This custom therefore is well-known and communicated to the governor in advance, and because Tamburlaine sees it as a part of what makes him who he is “parcel of his fame” he will not dispense with it. Yet the governor decides to send the virgins of Damascus to beg for mercy in

the hopes that their pathetic appeals will “melt his fury into some remorse” – that he will spare the lives of the Damascenes (5.1.22).

None of the virgins are named; rather they are differentiated in the script by numbers alone. They suffer the same fate as Bajazeth when Tamburlaine referred to him as “Turk” – their identities have been stripped from them, they are no longer individuals but moving parts of a whole as they are sent out like an arm waving in surrender. Because they have no individuality or interiority, there is nothing for Tamburlaine to grasp onto, and they are the more doomed for it. The First Virgin, upon hearing the governor’s plan to send her and the others out to Tamburlaine to throw themselves on his mercy reminds the governor that they indeed are human beings and individuals that he is casting out to certain death – “some made your wives, and some your children” – these women she says have been entreating their men to surrender, and it is due to the “obdurate” nature of the male leaders that the virgins must now go out to slaughter (5.1.27-28). While denied a name and an identity, the First Virgin refuses to absolve the governor of his guilt in the fall of the city. Indeed, she places the blame on the governor rather than Tamburlaine, whose customs have not changed and who was at first prepared to show mercy. The governor responds by telling her that the men considered the freedom and honor of the women just as much as their own when they declined to surrender earlier, and as such, now, the virgins should “do their part” to try and save the citizens – that they should “endure as [the men] the malice of [their] stars, / The wrath of Tamburlaine and the power of wars” or go to Tamburlaine and appeal for mercy (5.1.43-44). Again, the inevitability of Tamburlaine’s victory as a result of the “stars” emerges – however, in the negative for the

Damascenes – to the governor and the citizens the stars doom Damascus rather than empower Tamburlaine.

The Second Virgin resolves that they will plead for mercy on behalf of Damascus, as they “entreat / Grace to [their] words and pity to [their] looks,” so that they may be successful, and “through the eyes and ears of Tamburlaine / Convey events of mercy to his heart” (5.1.50-54). The first mistake that she makes with this strategy lies in her alignment of grace with words, and pity with looks. In the world of the play, language must be sublime to be effective, and graceful words are not, nor are piteous looks. The sublime in *Tamburlaine* is an “agonistic sublime”, as Benston identifies, and a sublimity of height, glory, and eternity. Grace and pity are not compatible with this system; they cannot generate the power necessary to effectively use performative language; and thus the virgins are already destined to fail: their words have no power. They are sent out without even the weapons of their words.

When they meet with Tamburlaine, his first word is “Alas!” (5.1.64). The stage directions note that he is “*all in black, and very melancholy*”. This exclamation and his demeanor suggest that he regrets what he knows he must do: regrets that the Damascenes did not surrender when given the chance, and that now he must slaughter with actual swords rather than the metaphorical “conquering sword” of his language. But, “they know [his] custom,” and as a result must suffer the consequences. “Custom” here means “ritual”, aligning Tamburlaine’s martial customs with religious customs. Were Tamburlaine to take pity on the virgins, he would negate his own performative utterances that spoke those customs into being, undermining the entire power structure that he has constructed.

The First Virgin addresses him in sublime terms, calling him

most happy king and emperor of the earth,
 Image of honour and nobility,
 For whom the powers divine have made the world
 And on whose throne the holy Graces sit,
 In whose sweet person is comprised the sum
 Of nature's skill and heavenly majesty. (5.1.74-79)

This description shows how the perception of Tamburlaine has so greatly shifted from his humble beginnings on the Scythian hillsides, while illustrating the sublimity of the body and person of Tamburlaine. The world was created for him to rule over, and his is the throne of heaven, upon which the “holy Graces” sit, meaning that even heaven was made for him to rule over. He is the “*image*” of honor and nobility: thus, the First Virgin participates in *phantasia*, or visualization creating a literary image as she visualizes Tamburlaine, once again his body becomes a text onto which she tries to write pity. If all of the “heavenly majesty” is contained within Tamburlaine, then he is not just any text but a religious text, returning to the idea of his “customs” as religious dogma, unchanging as it is right and just. She then implores him to pity Damascus, the elderly, the lovers, the virgins, and the children, who had no choice in the matter of the city’s surrender. She begs him to blame and punish the governor, not the innocents. Yet, as the scourge of God must, he does not have mercy, and cannot show mercy, for to do so would be to undermine himself as “sacred emperor,” as the First Virgin refers to him at the conclusion of her plea (5.1.99).

Tamburlaine then addresses the virgins to tell them that he cannot show them mercy. He says, “in vain ye labour to prevent / That which mine honour swears shall be performed,” hitting

upon the concept of honor that the First Virgin brought up at the beginning of her speech, but turning it on its head: honor to Tamburlaine is keeping his word, and executing that which he has said will happen (5.1.106-107). That his honor “swears” reiterates the importance he places on oaths; to break one would dishonor him. “Performed” speaks again to his particular brand of warfare: it is theatrical and performative, and through those virtues he can fashion himself as ever-greater. In a harrowing passage, Tamburlaine tells the virgins that “imperious Death” sits upon the slicing edge of his curtle-axe, “keeping his circuit”, but they do not see him – instead he commands that they be shown his “servant Death,” who sits upon the spears of Tamburlaine’s cavalry (5.1.111-118). Tamburlaine here makes himself master over Death, who assumes a role similar to that of Tamburlaine’s generals, holding court and being a king while answering to the ultimate higher power: Tamburlaine himself. After the virgins are led away to slaughter, Tamburlaine says that he would never have spared them, because his customs are immovable and the Damascenes chose not to accept “the offer of their lives,” even while knowing that Tamburlaine’s “customs are as peremptory / As wrathful planets, death, or destiny” (5.1.126-128). This reinforces the idea that Tamburlaine’s words are oracles, and that he is more powerful than the gods, while placing the responsibility for the slaughter of the Damascenes on the Damascenes themselves.

After the virgins are killed, their bodies are “hoisted up” on Damascus’s walls so that the citizens might see them and know that there will be no mercy. Such an exhibition of their “slaughtered carcasses” is grossly theatrical but again this serves the function of deifying Tamburlaine – he must be shown to be a man of his word, of “honor” in his understanding of honor, anyway.

V

Zenocrate Revisited

Tamburlaine's speech describing Zenocrate and grappling with issues of the limits of language and human power sums up his project and particularly the second mode of his performative sublime language: the marital sublime (5.135-190). This speech in particular demonstrates the way that Tamburlaine creates the "literary image" of Zenocrate: he "meditates and fetishizes Zenocrate as a neoplatonic object of beauty" (Starks 183). By imagining her "With hair disheveled" that "wip'st [her] watery cheeks," Tamburlaine takes the piteous sight of the virgins he has just put to death (the governor stakes his hope on their "blubbered cheeks") and envisions Zenocrate in a similar but sublime state (5.1.139). He begins his soliloquy by exclaiming, "Ah, fair Zenocrate! – divine Zenocrate," immediately elevating her and making her more than human by the use of "divine" (5.1.135). Zenocrate's tears stem from the same place as did the virgins, a desire to save themselves and their home, but to Tamburlaine Zenocrate's tears are sublime; he calls them "pearl in showers," and says Zenocrate "sprinklest sapphires" on her "shining face": they arise from her "passion for [her] country's love, / And fear to see [her] kingly father's harm" (5.1.142-143, 137-138). Her tears are the instructions that Beauty itself takes to "comment volumes with her ivory pen" – ears turned to beautiful words (5.1.144-146). This image of Zenocrate is literary not only in that she is an object of beauty but in that she creates literature from her tears. Beauty is "mother to the Muses", and the Muses are the source of great art in antiquity, so when Tamburlaine elevates Zenocrate two steps above them he places her in the highest position of artistic creation and inspiration, muse to the Muses. These tears and

the passion with which Zenocrate cries over Egypt's freedom and her father's life force

Tamburlaine to reconsider his martial plans:

The moon, the planets, and the meteors, light.
 There angels in their crystal armours fight
 A doubtful battle with my tempted thoughts
 For Egypt's freedom and the Sultan's life,
 His life that so consumes Zenocrate;
 Whose sorrows lay more siege unto my soul
 Than all my army to Damascus' walls. (5.1.150-156)

His "tempted thoughts" here are those of sparing Zenocrate's home and father; her sorrow moves him where the virgins could not, because he treats her as a subject of the marital sublime rather than the martial sublime. Marlowe illustrates Tamburlaine's internal struggle between following his customs or showing mercy for Zenocrate's sake in terms of a celestial battle, as he fights against his fate and divine destiny, which mandates that he kill the Sultan. This moment of mercy undoes the work that Tamburlaine has done previously to make himself the divine arbiter of his fate, resulting in a splitting of himself into divine and human, the humanity emerging from his only real bout with his conscience shown in the play, as he says, "neither Persia's sovereign nor the Turk / Troubled [his] senses with conceit of foil" (5.1.157-158). The battle is "doubtful" because the matter of contention is Tamburlaine's doubt – doubt in the strategies that have gotten him so far and by extension his destiny of conquering the world.

Tamburlaine then asks "what is beauty" and concludes that it cannot be captured by humans in its totality. He mimics the structure of his martial persuasions as he tries to

understand, using conditional scenarios as he tries to grasp an understanding of beauty through poetry:

If all the pens that ever poets held
 Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,
 And every sweetness that inspir'd their hearts,
 Their minds, and muses on admired themes. (5.1.161-164)

In this discourse on sublime poetry, the same language that Longinus uses to define the sublime Tamburlaine uses to create a perfect (sublime) condition; two of Longinus' sources of sublimity are great thoughts – “master's thoughts”, “admired themes” – and powerful emotions – “feeling”, “inspir'd...hearts” (Longinus 149). Of “poesy” itself, Tamburlaine says it is a mirror, in which “we perceive / The highest reaches of a human wit” (5.1.167-168). Both Cheney and Benston agree that Tamburlaine is a *poet* of the sublime, and thus by his own model reflects on his own language; he holds up a mirror to his generals, who see themselves reflected as kings, as well as to his enemies, who see themselves as weak leaders and the losers were a battle to take place. This mirror harkens back to the “tragic glass” of the Prologue, which has proven by the fifth act to show “the highest reaches of a human wit” and the human in question of course is Tamburlaine (Prologue 7, 5.1.168). But this is not a triumphant moment for poetry, as Tamburlaine, the great poet, laments that poetry can never fully capture the sublime because “one thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least” will always remain indescribable by human beings (5.1.172). The performative sublime has taken Tamburlaine as close to godhood as a mortal man could possibly go, but in this speech he recognizes the limitations of his species, while also recognizing how far he has come from the cottages of shepherds and the revolutionary

path he has forged, as he plans to “give the world to note... / That virtue solely is the sum of glory, / and fashions men with true nobility” (5.1.187-190).

Conclusion

After Tamburlaine's triumph in Egypt, he lauds his own victory and sublime power, returning to his goal of ousting Jove and taking his place as the highest of the gods after lamenting the limits of human expression in his previous soliloquy. He says that "the god of war resigns his room to [Tamburlaine], / Meaning to make [him] general of the world" (5.1.449-450). While general of the world is perhaps not as lofty a position as that of Jove, Tamburlaine continues by saying that Jove himself fears that Tamburlaine's "power should pull him from his throne", so, while Tamburlaine has not yet achieved this highest of goals, the highest throne in heaven is now in sight (5.1.452). He also brags that he commands the "Fatal Sisters" and "grisly Death" who do his bidding and have cut down "millions of souls" that

sit on the banks of Styx....

Hell and Elysium swarm with ghosts of men

That I have sent from sundry foughten fields

To spread my fame through hell and up to heaven. (5.1.453-466)

This command over Death is terrifying and impressive; however, it is the mastery of the Fates that truly speaks to the power that Tamburlaine has amassed: he reaffirms the divinity in himself that he questioned in his soliloquy. The shift that happens between those moments is crucial; Tamburlaine wins the battle, but that was never truly in question. The important difference is the presence of other people. In order for Tamburlaine to inspire complete loyalty; he must set himself up as a god, as already established. This moment illustrates beyond a shadow of a doubt that he is consciously using the performative sublime as a means to persuade others to follow him. Here the main object of persuasion is the Sultan, and this intensely agonistic and sublime

language that sets up Tamburlaine as the next lord of heaven has its desired effect: the Sultan praises him, even saying that he is “pleased with this [his] overthrow” (5.1.481).

Finally, having achieved his goal of becoming emperor of Asia and now (part of) Africa, Tamburlaine is finally ready to crown Zenocrate empress, and subsequently offer himself to her in marriage (marriage itself being an instance of performative language). As she sits upon her throne and is crowned, Tamburlaine sees “triumphs and trophies for [his] victories” “shadowing in her brows” (5.1.511-512).

Cheney says, “we might classify Zenocrate not only as Tamburlaine’s wife, but as a female figure for the divine image that the Marlovian male obsessively seeks” (Cheney 135). It is in her that Tamburlaine sees the divine; she is the beginning of artistic creation and marks the beginning of Marlowe’s own creation. Like Zenocrate, the performative sublime as developed here later emerges in his other works, most notably in *Doctor Faustus*, where Marlowe takes the performative sublime into the realm of the occult, trading Tamburlaine’s persuasive speech for incantations.

Tamburlaine the Great becomes great through the use of the performative sublime in his poetic discourse. In *Tamburlaine*, Marlowe stages the wondrous man’s ascent to power, but he also puts on the writing process as well. Tamburlaine constantly fashions himself anew to be a greater and more sublime leader and man, until he challenges the very throne of Jove as he takes Egypt. He is cognizant of the way in which performative language works, and the way the sublime works, and uses those two facets of language to change his landscape using only his words, a process made possible by the sublimity of those words. In this way, Tamburlaine is an author figure, specifically a Marlowe figure, as with this play Marlowe launches his career as a

professional poet-playwright emerging from relative obscurity, “conquering” the London stage with the sublime performativity of his “working words.”

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