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## Christian Underscoring in *Tamburlaine the Great, Part II*

Written by  
**Jeff Dailey**

*Who could possibly maintain that instances of religious sentiment could be drawn from the profane and impious mind of a Tamerlane?*

This is the question asked in one of the sources Christopher Marlowe used as the basis for *Tamburlaine the Great, Part II* – Petrus Perodinus' *Magni Tamerlanis Scytharum Imperatoris Vita*<sup>1</sup> The same question could be asked of the play itself. Is there a religious message, however subtle, behind all the carnage that occurs onstage and off during the play's five acts? The play seems to contain little associated with spirituality, and what empathy contained in it is overshadowed by an excess of barbarism; the audience witnesses the destruction of armies and cities, the ravishing of Turkish concubines, suicide, filicide, and regicide. Tamburlaine himself not only kills his own son onstage, but also mutilates himself for the edification of his children and the entertainment of the audience.

*Tamburlaine, Part II* was first performed before November of 1587, and can be dated due to a reference in a letter by one Philip Gawdy to his father.<sup>2</sup> The following year, Robert Greene wrote an attack on Marlowe in the preface to his play *Perimedes the Blacksmith*, where he speaks about another playwright "daring God out of heaven with that Atheist Tamburlan."<sup>3</sup> This is one of many references to Marlowe's godlessness, comments that would continue well after his death.

None of us will know in this life whether or not Marlowe was an atheist, or even what his critics meant by that; as Charles Nicholl points out, atheism, in Elizabethan terms, "covered

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<sup>1</sup>Printed in Vivien Thomas and William Tydeman (eds.) *Christopher Marlowe: The Plays and their Sources* (Routledge, London and New York, 1994) p. 119

<sup>2</sup> "My L. Admyrall his men and players having a devyse in ther playe to tye one of their fellows to a poste and so shoote him to deathe, having borrowed their Callyvers one of the players handes swerved his peece being charged with bullett missed the fellowe he aymed at and killed a chyld, and a woman great with chyld forthwith, and hurt an other man in the head very soore." Quoted in Constance Brown Kuriyama *Christopher Marlowe: A Renaissance Life* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2002, p. 80).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in A.L. Rowse *Christopher Marlowe: His Life and Work* (Harper and Row, New York, 1964, p. 76)

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all forms of religious dissent that were not specifically Catholic or Puritan."<sup>4</sup> However, that *Tamburlaine, Part II* presents any non-Christian principles (apart from all the killing)<sup>5</sup> is very debatable.

Marlowe's dramas, and those of his contemporaries, form part of a theatrical continuum whose immediate predecessors were morality plays. While there are significant differences between the *Tamburlaine* plays and the allegorical content of plays such as *Everyman*, *Mankind*, and *The Castle of Perseverance*, it is a form that Marlowe was familiar with – his *Doctor Faustus* is a later work that more closely follows the older format<sup>6</sup> – and there are several moral/religious messages to be found amidst all the carnage of *Part II*. This becomes especially apparent when the plays are staged. Even in his earliest works, Marlowe demonstrates his mastery of theatrical timing. F. P. Wilson states that

When we read plays which we have no opportunity of seeing...we too often forget that the dramatist's lines were written to be spoken.<sup>7</sup>

And since, as the same author writes, "how many of us can boast that we are more than readers of *Tamburlaine*?"<sup>8</sup> it is easy to see how critics whose only acquaintance with Marlowe's text is in print can misunderstand his intentions.<sup>9</sup> This becomes apparent especially in the attack of distemper *Tamburlaine* feels after burning the Koran at the end of act five. As shown below, the amount of time that elapses between the burning and the illness' onset, which may not be apparent to readers, is critical to interpreting this scene. Another issue to be considered is the fact that, on those rare occasions when the two *Tamburlaine* plays are staged, they are almost

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Nicholl *The Reckoning* (revised edition) (Random House, London, 2002, p. 52)

<sup>5</sup> There are obvious connections between the audience approval of onstage murder in Elizabethan theatre with modern television programming.

<sup>6</sup> Although the only allegorical characters are the Seven Deadly Sins that appear briefly at Mephistophele's command, the overall structure of the play focuses on the moral changes in a single character, as in *Everyman* and similar works. However, in *Doctor Faustus* the character regresses in morality, and, after his demise, the audience is confronted with the consequences of impious actions.

<sup>7</sup> F.P. Wilson *Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, p. 29), quoted in A. L. Rowse, *op cit.* p. 74

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 33 and 75, respectively

<sup>9</sup> The author directed a production of *Tamburlaine the Great, Part II* at the American Theatre of Actors (ATA) in New York City in September 2003. All references to stagecraft in this article are based on experiences encountered in this production.

always severely edited into one evening's performance, with the greater number of cuts occurring in the episodes of *Part II*. Hence, even most of those critics who have seen a production of *Tamburlaine* have not experienced the script in its entirety.<sup>10</sup>

There are two specific places in *Tamburlaine the Great, Part II* where religion is the main topic. The first occurs in the subplot that is interwoven in the play's first two acts. Here, three Turkish sovereigns (Orcanes, Gazellus, and Uribassa) agree to an alliance with Sigismund, the King of Hungary, and his two generals (Frederick and Baldwin), in order to jointly combat the encroaching Tamburlaine. The Hungarians do this in spite of the fact that Orcanes previously besieged Vienna while Sigismund was Count of Palatine, and that respite only came from an ignominious surrender and payment of ransom. After signing a treaty and confirming it with prayers, respectively, to Christ and Mohammed,<sup>11</sup> the Hungarians decide to take advantage of the Turks' weakness (as they have sent their armies to counter Tamburlaine), and attack. Before doing so, Sigismund questions whether it is moral to do so, inasmuch as they have sworn a pact, but Baldwin assures him that Christians are not bound by promises with infidels.<sup>12</sup> When Orcanes hears about the Hungarians' treachery, he prays to Christ to revenge this perfidy. The battle takes place offstage, but, the triumphant Turks enter and announce that, in spite of their reduced numbers, they have defeated the Hungarians.

Why does Marlowe include this story in his play? It has nothing to do with the historical Timur-the-Lame, given that he was long dead by the battle of Varna, which took place in 1444.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The ATA production of *Tamburlaine the Great, Part II* was uncut. When the author directed *Part I*, also at ATA, in 1997, he cut only the four lines (II.i.23-26) that describe Tamburlaine's hair, as the actor playing the part did not have any.

<sup>11</sup> In his article "*Tamburlaine the Great* in Performance" in Sara Munson Deats and Robert Logan's *Marlowe's Empery* (University of Delaware Press, Newark, DE, 2002 p. 74), David Fuller describes how Peter Hall had the Christian kings make fun of the Turk's description of Mahomet's levitating casket, and then goes on to suggest that directors should have the Turks also ridicule the Christians during their prayers. However, since these two groups are intent on forming an alliance, having them mock each other's beliefs would not help them cement their new relationship as allies. In the American Theatre of Actors production, the author had the two groups act respectfully during their allies' respective prayers.

<sup>12</sup> *Tamburlaine the Great, Part II* II.i.28-41

<sup>13</sup> The battle of Varna (Bulgaria) resulted in the conquest of the Christian army under the command of King Vladislav of Poland and Hungary by the Turkish Sultan Murad II (called Amurath in Elizabethan sources). The Hungarians and Turks had agreed on a ten-year truce the year before, which was broken with the encouragement of Pope Eugene IV. Sigismund, the son of Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV, was Elector of Brandenburg prior to ascending the Hungarian throne through his marriage to Queen Mary of Hungary. He was King of Hungary when he led an army against the Ottoman Sultan Beyazid I in 1396, who defeated him in Nicopolis, also in Bulgaria.

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Marlowe took the events of the later battle and shifted them to Timur's lifetime (1336-1405), replacing one Hungarian monarch with another.

Additionally, Marlowe leaves out the villain of the story – Pope Eugene, even though he figures prominently in the sources as the instigator of the Hungarian's treachery.<sup>14</sup> Had he included mention of the perfidious pontiff, the story would have illustrated perfectly good Elizabethan anti-papal propaganda. Without Pope Eugene, however, on first appearance it seems that Marlowe has included an anti-Christian element in the play, for the Hungarians openly swear to Christ that they will adhere to their oath, and the playwright portrays them in a most unfavorable light.

The theme of the sub-plot is not an anti-Christian message, but rather a moral one. Marlowe departs from the message his sources imparted to warn all Christians that breaking a solemn oath is abjured by God. Here, God rules against those who have sworn falsely, even though life-long believers, in favor of the Turks, who quickly convert and call on Christ when they realize they have been betrayed.<sup>15</sup>

There is also a more covert theological message in this speech. By calling on Christ to help, Orcanes acknowledges Jesus' divinity, and, by extension, the Trinity. This is important for two reasons. In the future, Marlowe would be accused of Arianism. When Thomas Kyd was arrested, among the incriminating papers found was an "Arian treatise," which Kyd stated was Marlowe's. This treatise is actually a portion of a book countering non-Trinitarian ideas, specifically the confession of John Assheton, a priest arrested in 1549 for espousing non-Trinitarian views.<sup>16</sup> John Procteur, the author of *The Fal of the late Arrian*, published in the same year, took Assheton's list of beliefs and refuted them.

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<sup>14</sup> As in John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (London, 1684, vol.1, p. 840-841)

<sup>15</sup> *Tamburlaine the Great, Part II* II.ii.39-63

<sup>16</sup> Although Bakeless and Nicholl refer to Assheton as a Unitarian, this term did not exist until 1600, when it was used to refer to the state religion of Transylvania (Leonard George *Crimes of Perception* (Paragon House, New York, 1995 p. 316). As David Parke in *The Epic of Unitarianism* (Beacon Press, Boston, 195 p. 22) indicates, the term itself may refer to the oneness of God, or it may simply allude to the unification of the four official denominations into one new church. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, XIX, p. 77), it was not used in English until 1687. It eventually replaced other terms used to signify anti-Trinitarianism, which vary somewhat in meaning. Technically, Arianism (named after Arius, a 3<sup>rd</sup> century bishop who may or may not have held the beliefs ascribed to him) holds that, since Jesus was created by God the Father, He is inferior to the latter, although still divine. The principal form of anti-Trinitarianism in Marlowe's lifetime was Socinianism, named after Faustus Socinus, a 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian who believed that Jesus was an extraordinary human, not divine in nature. Unitarianism developed in eastern Europe in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries

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That copies of Assheton's beliefs were circulated in manuscript is apparent from Procteur's introduction, where he writes that

dyvers copies came into dyvers mens handes: And one was sent to me, from a frende of myne: Who required me to peruse the same, and to let him understand what I thought of it.<sup>17</sup>

Since Assheton had already confessed and recanted his heresy, perhaps he toned down the more egregious aspects of his anti-Trinitarianism, as what he lists as his (former) beliefs are not too far removed from orthodoxy, although even slight variance from Trinitarianism could get one executed at the time. He does state that "the nature devine is single, communicable to no creature," so that Jesus, being made "a creature," could not be divine. Also, that, since Jesus was a man, He was therefore

subject to the passions of man: as hunger, thyrst, weryness, and feare ... And to beleve forsothe that this nature subject to these infirmities and pasions is God or any parte of the devine essen: what it is wother but to make God mighty and of power of those parte, weake and impotent of the other parte, whiche thyng to thyngke, it were madnesse, & folly.

The manuscript found in Kyd's possession may have been a copy of Assheton's confession, or someone may have copied it anew out of Procteur's book.<sup>18</sup> John Bakeless points out that the copy is written in an italic hand, which can be more closely tied to Kyd (who was a scrivener by profession) or to Thomas Harriot,<sup>19</sup> rather than Marlowe. Given that Procteur's book and the manuscript copies of Assheton's confession were not uncommon in Elizabethan

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out of the teachings of both Socinus and Michael Servetus, a Spanish theologian who was executed in 1536. This type of Unitarianism is not the same as the more modern Unitarian Universalism, which allows for individual interpretations of who God is, but is what is known as Biblical Unitarianism, which is Christian in nature.

<sup>17</sup> Procteur *The Fal of the Late Arrian*, Preface (the book is not paginated in a systematic way). In the Preface, Procteur also states that he will not name the author of the heretical tract, "whom I wold be loathe to displeas, if he hath recanted that blasphemous oppinion, as one saye that he hathe."

<sup>18</sup> That one could copy just the Arian portions of the book without Procteur's rebuttals would be easy, as they are printed in different typefaces.

<sup>19</sup> A mathematician who was part of Sir Walter Raleigh's household and who was referred to as a "conjurer."

England,<sup>20</sup> Kyd's (or Marlowe's) possession of it should not, in itself, have attracted the attention of the authorities. Since Kyd was accused of fomenting dissent by means of xenophobic libels,<sup>21</sup> he was anxious, when arrested and tortured, of exonerating himself. The fact that Marlowe merely had to report to the Privy Council on a daily basis shows that the government did not consider him to be in the same category as Kyd, and it is possible that this requirement was put in place to help keep Marlowe's cover as a government agent, perhaps as he was the one who informed on Kyd in the first place.<sup>22</sup> After Marlowe's death, Kyd's elaboration on the former's atheism, merely corroborated his earlier accusation.<sup>23</sup>

Whether or not Marlowe was or became anti-Trinitarian, his inclusion of a divine Jesus in *Tamburlaine Part II* does not support that accusation. Had Christ not responded to Orcanes' appeal, then the accusations against Marlowe would have been better supported. As the play stands now, this scene clearly reinforces orthodox Christian theology.

The other religious (or anti-religious) moment in the play occurs in the fifth act. In the first scene, after ordering that the Kings of Trebizon and Soria be hanged, the Governor of Babylon shot,<sup>24</sup> and all the remaining inhabitants of the city drowned, Tamburlaine orders Usumcasane, one of his tributary kings:

#### **Tamburlaine**

Now *Casane*, wher's the Turkish *Alcaron*,  
And all the heapes of superstitious bookes,  
Found in the Temples of that Mahomet  
Whom I have thought a God they shal be burnt.

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<sup>20</sup> For example, Marlowe's schoolmaster at the King's School had a copy. The treatise text in the book is not an exact copy of handwritten copy that led to Kyd's arrest (now British Museum MS Harley 6848, f. 187-189). There are spelling differences between the two, and the copyist of the manuscript frequently writes out numbers that are written as Roman numerals in the book. For instance, the book has "vi of Deut," which is written as "sixt of Deut" in the manuscript. The surviving manuscript is incomplete, and the three sheets preserved in the British Library are bound in the wrong order.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholl *op cit.* p. 351-532

<sup>22</sup> George Buckley *Atheism in the English Renaissance* (Russell and Russell, New York, 1965) p. 127. It is possible that the manuscript was Marlowe's, and that he purposely incriminated Kyd as part of his duties as a spy.

<sup>23</sup> As does the denunciation of Richard Baines, whose report on Marlowe, prepared days before the playwright's death, echoes Kyd's accusations.

<sup>24</sup> See note 2, above

### Usumcasane

Here they are my Lord.

### Tamburlaine

Wel said, let there be a fire presently  
In vaine I see men worship *Mahomet*  
My sword hath sent millions of Turks to hell  
Slew all his Priests, his kinsmen, and his friends,  
And yet I live untoucht by *Mahomet*:  
There is a God full of revenging wrath,  
From whom the thunder and the lightning breaks,  
Whose Scourge I am, and him will I obey.  
So *Casane*, fling them in the fire.  
Now *Mahomet*, if thou have any power,  
Come downe thy selfe and worke a myracle,  
Thou art not woorthy to be worshipped,  
That suffers flames of fire to burne the writ  
Wherein the sum of thy religion rests.  
Why send'st thou not a furious whyrlwind downe,  
To blow thy *Alcaron* up to thy throne,  
Where men report, thou sitt'st by God himselfe,  
Or vengeance on the head of Tamburlain,  
That shakes his sword against thy majesty,  
And spurns the Abstracts of thy foolish lawes. Wel souldiers, *Mahomet* remains in  
hell,  
He cannot heare the voice of Tamburlain,  
Seeke out another Godhead to adore,  
The God that sits in heaven, if any God,  
For he is God alone, and none but he.<sup>25</sup>

This is the scene Greene referred to when he accused Marlowe of "daring God out of heaven,"<sup>26</sup> and it forms the cornerstone of his accusation of atheism against Marlowe. Later writers have expanded upon Greene's remarks. A. L. Rowse, for example, proclaims "...the inference is that Mahomet and the Koran, Christ and the Bible were interchangeable,"<sup>27</sup> and other critics have written similar interpretations.

But there is no reason for doing so. Marlowe is not ambiguous here. Although in certain places in this play, and more often in the first part, he, following the tradition in which playwrights did not name God directly, refers to the divine power as "Jove," or sometimes in

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<sup>25</sup> V.i.171-200

<sup>26</sup> See note 3, above

<sup>27</sup> *Op cit.* p. 73

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the plural as "the gods," that is not the case here. Here he diverges from tradition and calls God, "God."

This is actually an intensely Christian moment. Marlowe is exhibiting the powerlessness of Mohammedanism. Unlike many of the countries on the European mainland, the shores of England were far enough away from the Ottoman Empire to be relatively safe from the threat of Turkish invasion. But even given England's distance from Anatolia, there were many opportunities for Marlowe to learn about the Turks and their religion.<sup>28</sup>

As early as 1519, a pamphlet on Islam<sup>29</sup> appeared in London, published by Wynkyn de Worde (who also may have been its author). Although only ten pages long, de Worde does offer some information about the Turks' religion, and focuses mainly on the fact that Muslims do not believe in the divinity of Jesus (and, by extension, the Trinity), although they consider Him a prophet. Writing about Turkish reaction to Christian beliefs about Jesus, de Worde states:

Also whan men [i.e., Christians] spekethe of the fater and sone and holy ghost they saye that they are thre persons & not one god but they [Turks] scorne it...

And

And they [Turks] saye that suche a grete pphete wolde not deye such a shamefull dethe. For he dyde araise the deed and in this fals opynyon they accord with the secte of Manichee<sup>30</sup> & they saye that the crosse is a token of the devyll and that no man sholde worshpp it. And they byleve not that he is arysen from dethe into lyfe and they forsake.

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<sup>28</sup> As Nabil Matar in *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685* (Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 21 states: "Turk and Muslim were interchangeable terms in seventeenth-century England."

<sup>29</sup> *Here begynneth a lytell tratyse of the turkes law called Alcaron. And it also speketh of Machamet the Nygromacer*

<sup>30</sup> As Henry Chadwick in *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2001) p. 13 explains regarding Mani, the third century Persian who founded the Manichaean religion: "He [Mani] employed some biblical themes and terms, and allowed a redemptive role to Jesus – only he understood Jesus as a symbol of the plight of all humanity rather than as a historical person who walked the earth and was crucified. A quasi-divine redeemer could not in truth have been physically born or killed (an opinion anticipating Islamic doctrine); the crucifixion was no kind of actuality but a mere symbol for the suffering which is the universal human condition." De Worde's statement could also refer to the story that, when Mani was imprisoned and condemned to death (possibly by crucifixion), he simply left his body: "The Apostle of Light took off the warlike dress of the body and sat down in a ship of Light and received the divine garment, the diadem of Light and the beautiful garland. And in great joy he flew together with the Light-gods that are going to the right and to the left of him, with harp-sound and song of joy." Quoted in George, *op cit.* p. 197.

Even earlier than this, the bishop and philosopher Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), on direction of Pope Pius II, prepared a study of the Koran, *Cribratio Alcorani*, (*Sieving of the Koran*), written in 1460/61. Nicholas' analysis of the Koran and its creation showed that it was primarily a compilation of Jewish and Nestorian<sup>31</sup> material (mostly the former).<sup>32</sup> While there are no definitive records that Marlowe had access to Nicholas' collected works, which were published in Basle in 1565, he may have come across them during his student years, perhaps in the library of one his patrons, or even on one of his trips abroad – since Nicholas was papal legate to the Netherlands, copies of his works would more likely have been found there than in England. However, as Nicholas was a Roman Catholic cardinal, his writings were probably not too prevalent in any Protestant country, it is necessary to see if there are other means by which Marlowe could have been introduced to them.

One possibility, and a strong one, is that Marlowe became acquainted with Nicholas' work by Giordano Bruno, who was in England from 1583 to 1585. Bruno, who based his own philosophy on Nicholas', may have come in contact with Marlowe, and discussed religion and heresy with him. Although the evidence connecting Marlowe with Bruno is circumstantial, there is a lot of it. A close examination of the details and circumstances of both men's lives during this period shows there is a good possibility that Marlowe and Bruno knew each other.

First of all, Bruno was associated with Walter Raleigh's School of the Night, as was Marlowe, and they may have become acquainted with each other through the meetings of this secret society that examined magic and science – which, at that time, were almost synonymous. Marlowe had a close connection with Raleigh when first arriving in London after graduation from Cambridge. The courtier's playful "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd," written in response to Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" is one surviving relic of their

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<sup>31</sup> Nestorianism was the dominant type of Christianity in Arabia until Islamic attacks forced it further east. Nestorians minimized, but did not deny, Jesus' divinity. Nicholas believed the medieval legend that Mohammed was converted by a Christian monk, referred to as Sergius the Nestorian, and thus would have been baptized: "...because he [Mohammed] was a Christian, even though a Nestorian, assuredly he was baptized. For Nestorians embrace the Gospel and are baptized." Jasper Hopkins *Nicholas of Cusa's De Pace Fidei and Cribratio Alcorani: Translation and Analysis* (Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, 1990) p. 183.

<sup>32</sup> This analysis has been further confirmed in recent centuries. See, for instance, Abraham Geiger's "What Did Muhammed Borrow from Judaism?" (1898), W. St. Clair-Tisdall's *The Sources of Islam* (1901), Charles Torrey's "The Jewish Foundation of Islam" (1933), all three published in Ibn Warraq (ed.) *The Origins of the Koran* (Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY, 1998), and Patricia Crone and M. Cook's *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge University Press, 1980).

friendship. Some critics have even tried to show that the character Tamburlaine is based on Raleigh.<sup>33</sup> Given the amicable relationship between the two men, it is possible that Raleigh introduced Marlowe to the Italian philosopher who was favored with a royal audience.

An even stronger, but less easy to document, connection between Bruno and Marlowe may have resulted from the fact that it appears both worked as spies for Sir Francis Walsingham around the same time, with Bruno writing reports under the pseudonym "Henry Fagot."<sup>34</sup> Marlowe probably started spying in 1583, which is when he was absent for half a term from Cambridge, although he also missed seven weeks the previous academic year.<sup>35</sup> Bruno lived in London from 1583 through 1585, and possibly continued his espionage for the British from France in 1586.<sup>36</sup> That their paths may have crossed during these years is certainly a possibility.

There are several inferences that Marlowe knew Bruno in the B Text of *Doctor Faustus* – in fact too many in one place for it to be coincidental. First of all, the antipope is named "Bruno."<sup>37</sup> Given Giordano Bruno's tremendous antipathy towards the papacy,<sup>38</sup> associating his name with someone seeking to displace the supposedly legitimate pontiff is appropriate. When Bruno is first brought in, in chains, the pope tells his attendants "Cast down our footstool."<sup>39</sup> While this is similar to a line and situation from *Tamburlaine the Great, Part I*, where Tamburlaine uses Bajazeth as a footstool,<sup>40</sup> there is also a connection to the historical Bruno—in his *Le cena de le Ceneri (The Ash Wednesday Supper)*,<sup>41</sup> written in 1584, the character Gervasio tells the papal figure

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<sup>33</sup> A.D. Wraight and Virginia Stern *In Search of Christopher Marlowe* (Adam Hart, Chichester, 1993/reprint of 1965 edition) p. 134-135

<sup>34</sup> John Bossy in *Giordano Bruno and the Embassy Affair* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1992) documents at length all the evidence that indicates the distinct possibility that Bruno was the "Henry Fagot" who informed on the French ambassador (in whose home he was living) and other Roman Catholics.

<sup>35</sup> Rowse *op cit.* p. 26

<sup>36</sup> Bossy *op cit.* p. 62-71

<sup>37</sup> *Doctor Faustus* B Text III.i.88-200

<sup>38</sup> Bossy *op cit.* p. 156-164

<sup>39</sup> III.i.88

<sup>40</sup> *Tamburlaine the Great, Part I* IV.ii.1

<sup>41</sup> It is probable that some of the dialogue recorded in this work came from School of the Night sessions.

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Polyhimnio he is "servus servorum et scabellum pedum tuorum" ("the servant of your servants and the footstool under your feet").<sup>42</sup> Another connection exists in lines 183-184 of the same scene, where Faustus, speaking of Bruno, says,

He shall be streight condemn'd of heresie,  
And on a pile of Fagots burnt to death.

If the real Bruno chose his new surname "as a piece of black humour,"<sup>43</sup> Marlowe may have written this last line in the same spirit. Given the vagaries of Elizabethan orthography, there may be nothing in the parallels between Bruno's pen name and the reference to logs in the last line.<sup>44</sup> But if there is, Marlowe would have had to know of Bruno's pseudonym, either from the ex-monk himself or from Walsingham's circle, as it was a closely guarded secret that was not revealed until recent times.<sup>45</sup> Another Bruno connection comes earlier in the scene, when Faustus says he will

Restore this Bruno to his liberty,  
And beare him to the States of Germany.<sup>46</sup>

Which is where Bruno went, within a year of leaving England.<sup>47</sup> There may also be symbolism in the name of the pope, Adrian. Adrian VI, who reigned earlier in the sixteenth century, was, until the twentieth century, the only non-Italian pope, and he was Dutch. There was, in London during the 1580s and 1590s, considerable upheaval over the presence of many Dutch and Flemish immigrants, who were Protestant refugees from Spanish persecution.<sup>48</sup> Pope Adrian

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Bossy *op cit.* p. 116-117

<sup>43</sup> Bossy *op cit.* p. 142

<sup>44</sup> The capital letter and the single g and t

<sup>45</sup> If this scenario is correct, then it is evidence that Marlowe himself wrote the B text of *Doctor Faustus*, and the "additions" were not added by another poet.

<sup>46</sup> III.i.120-121

<sup>47</sup> Michael White *The Pope and the Heretic* (William Morrow, NY, 2002) p. 214

<sup>48</sup> Which, in 1587, incited someone, perhaps Thomas Kyd, to write the "Dutch Church Libels," which led to Marlowe's arrest.

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was also the tutor of the future emperor Charles V, who attempted to eliminate Protestantism in his realm.

It is certainly possible that Bruno and Marlowe met during the mid-1580s, and that they discussed religion, and that Bruno either told Marlowe about Nicholas of Cusa's writings on non-Christian religions or recommended that the playwright read them. Bruno, a Dominican monk, studied subjects and texts outside those allowed by his superiors, and was forced to escape his monastery when accused by a brother monk of heresy.<sup>49</sup> His writings indicate that he had an interest in non-Christian religions, especially those of ancient Egypt. And, echoing the charges levied against Marlowe, Bruno was also accused of anti-Trinitarianism at his trial before the Inquisition.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Bruno may have been another of Marlowe's sources for information about Islam, and his life story may also have inspired the playwright to use controversial religious themes in his dramas. Whether or not Marlowe held heretical views, he was accused of them, and religion and the conflict it can cause is a subject in most of his surviving plays.<sup>51</sup>

Sir Walter Raleigh himself may have been one of Marlowe's sources of information about the Middle East, as he had an interest in Turks and their religion. Although his monograph on the subject—*The life and death of Mahomet, the conquest of Spaine together with the rying and ruine of the Sarazen Empire*—was published posthumously in 1637, it is conceivable that his research into the subject went back many years and that it was discussed at the School of the Night gatherings.

Marlowe may also have had access to the Koran. The 12<sup>th</sup> century Latin translation by Robert of Ketton (upon which Nicholas of Cusa based his study), was published in Basle in 1542.<sup>52</sup>

Other publications, in both Latin and English, also described the beliefs of the Turks. Marlowe used some of these as sources for his *Tamburlaine* plays,<sup>53</sup> but there are many more.

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<sup>49</sup> White *op cit.* p. 8

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p. 91

<sup>51</sup> In addition to the *Tamburlaine* plays, *The Massacre at Paris*, *Doctor Faustus*, and *The Jew of Malta* all deal to a certain extent with religion.

<sup>52</sup> Margaret Bald *Banned Books: Literature Suppressed on Religious Grounds* (Facts on File, New York, 1998) p. 140

<sup>53</sup> Of the thirteen sources listed in Thomas and Tydeman, *op cit.*, ten deal with Turkish history and beliefs.

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These fall into several categories—accounts of Englishmen being captured by Turks after either being shipwrecked or attacked by pirates, travelogues by both adventurers and religious pilgrims to the Holy Land, accounts of battles, and trade/diplomatic communications.<sup>54</sup>

All of these resources, along with allusions to Turks in English literature and plays, not only provided sources for Marlowe, but also a frame of reference for his audience. They would have recognized the threat that Turks posed to Western Europe, and had no reason to interpret the characters and events of *Tamburlaine, Part II* in anything but a literal way.

Therefore, Tamburlaine's burning of the Koran is a sign of Christian power and victory. Mahomet does nothing to prevent it, although challenged by Tamburlaine to do so. Marlowe emphasizes Mahomet's inaction in the following scene,<sup>55</sup> in which the King of Amasia sees Mahomet in the sky, armed and ready to assist Callapine in his battle with Tamburlaine. Mahomet is therefore able to come to earth and interact with humans, but is unable or unwilling to stop Tamburlaine's affront.

Some directors and critics have tried to interpret the illness that afflicts Tamburlaine later in the scene as divine retribution for his actions. While it may appear when reading a synopsis of the play that this is possible, in performance it is not. Had Tamburlaine been struck down while he was daring Mahomet and burning the Koran, this might be an imaginable interpretation, but that is not what happens. Tamburlaine finishes the burning and then listens to Techelles tell him about the massacre of the Babylonians, before becoming ill.

The final three lines of Tamburlaine's speech during the book burning ("Seeke out another Godhead to adore,/The God that sits in heaven, if any God,/For he is God alone, and none but he") further clarify the Protestant Christian theme. By burning the Koran and publicly challenging Mahomet to stop him, Tamburlaine shows that Mohammedanism is powerless. Tamburlaine advises his soldiers to turn from this heretical faith, which relies on a prophet who is now in Hell, and to turn to God himself. By exhorting his followers to turn to God<sup>56</sup> directly, Tamburlaine negates all the heresies that plagued Elizabethan England – Roman Catholics, who relied on the intercession of priests, saints, and the Virgin Mary; anti-Trinitarians who held that

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<sup>54</sup> The Turkish Company was chartered in 1581 to explore trade with the Turkish empire (Matar *op cit.* p 21). Also in the 1580s, Queen Elizabeth asked Sultan Murat for naval assistance against the Spaniards, but he declined (*ibid.* p. 123).

<sup>55</sup> V.ii.30-35

<sup>56</sup> Who, by definition, consists of God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit

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Jesus was separate from God the Father; and also Puritans, by the very fact that God was mentioned on stage.<sup>57</sup>

The last two lines of Tamburlaine's speech are not as clear as they should be, because of the restraint of iambic pentameter. In the line,

The God that sits in heaven, if any god,

the "if" does not mean "if there is," but, rather, "if you are going to worship." This is apparent in the context of the next line, but can seem confusing when first seen or heard, especially as the audience does not expect the murderous Tamburlaine to encourage divine worship.

Tamburlaine's acknowledgment of God's divinity has unsettled at least one director – Peter Hall, in his production for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1976, altered the text to read:

The God that sits in heaven, if any god,  
Sits there alone, on earth there is none but me.<sup>58</sup>

But that is Sir Peter's message, not Marlowe's.

It would be foolish to attempt to defend *Tamburlaine the Great, Part II* as a work modeling Christian piety. It was entertainment for an audience who enjoyed death and destruction with their poetry, and a successful example of that genre. However, neither was it an incitement towards atheism (as defined by the Elizabethans). As shown, there are several orthodox Christian themes present in the two sections of the play that deal directly with religion.

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<sup>57</sup> The antonomasia "Wrath of God," used by Tamburlaine and his enemies to refer to him in both *Tamburlaine* plays would seem to imply a puritan influence, alluding to an angry deity anxious to punish sinful believers. However, it is found in several of the Continental sources (see, for instance, Thomas and Tydeman, *op cit.* p. 82 and 117) Marlowe drew upon that predate the rise in puritanism in England in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Steve Simkin *A Preface to Marlowe* (Pearson Editions, Harlowe, 2000) p. 95