

In Praise of Zenocrate: Mariolatry in *Tamburlaine the Great I and II*

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Religious practices during the Renaissance took many forms, both overt and covert. Through a careful analysis religious sentiments in the *Tamburlaine* plays and the iconographic display of Zenocrate's body in the play, I will attempt to elucidate the practice of Mariolatry during the reign of Elizabeth I. Christopher Marlowe uses his plays *Tamburlaine I* and *II* to reveal how the adoration of Elizabeth I by her subjects is rooted in the cult of the Virgin Mary and a growing nostalgia for Catholicism. Specifically, *Tamburlaine's* open intercession to Zenocrate offers a direct commentary on some Elizabethans' open adoration of Queen Elizabeth in conjunction with Marian concepts and imagery. Mariolatry encompasses a vast array of practices; for the purposes of this essay I will confine my discussion to the practices of adoration and intercession that inform contemporary attitudes towards Queen Elizabeth as well as *Tamburlaine's* treatment of Zenocrate. However, until recently, analysis of the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Renaissance drama, was conspicuously absent although several plays of the period demonstrate that Elizabeth was widely adored as virgin queen, mother of the nation, warrior icon, and colonizer.ⁱ

Just as Elizabethans—poets, writers, courtiers, colonizers, politicians and clergymen—devoted themselves to Elizabeth and attributed to her those titles traditionally bestowed upon Mary, so does *Tamburlaine* devote himself to, and lavish praise upon, Zenocrate. Both queens share similarities both in their roles as queens and in their association with Mary. Elizabethan poets such as Spenser and Raleigh paid homage to their queen with grandiose poems written in honor of her virginity and in gratitude for the gifts she bestowed on them. Similarly, Marlowe fills *Tamburlaine's* mouth with grandiose poetry and rhetoric heaped generously upon Zenocrate by her adoring husband. Moreover, in their open adoration of Zenocrate, *Tamburlaine's* followers, mainly soldiers and Arabiaⁱⁱ, imitate the courtiers and general citizenry who worshipped Elizabeth. *Tamburlaine's* war pattern--westward conquering trajectory—and his dynastic ambitions are comparable to Elizabeth's eastward colonialism, as she attempted to widen her empire across the Atlantic. One example of this is Zenocrate's body, often referred to by *Tamburlaine* as the source of his victory, parallels that of Elizabeth's body atop the map publicly displayed to military and civilian populations.ⁱⁱⁱ Marlowe positions *Tamburlaine* in two roles, worshipper and conqueror. *Tamburlaine* adores Zenocrate not only to glorify her but to glorify himself, for by investing her with Marian powers of inspiration and intercession he appropriates for himself the Marian iconography of conquering virgin, appropriated by Elizabeth. Using Zenocrate as his font of success in battle (I.V.i.507-16), *Tamburlaine* reflects upon an Elizabethan culture where Elizabeth was held up as an earthly saint and representative of the Virgin Mary. But, unlike Elizabeth, Marlowe allows Zenocrate to serve a unique role in the play. Her corpse "[E]mbalmed with cassia, ambergris, and myrrh,/ Not lapped in lead but in sheet of gold," is upon close inspection, an idolatrous, Mariological moment in the play for an audience that is conversant with the cult of the Virgin Mary. Marlowe's corporeal display on stage of a silent Zenocrate as Mary is confirmed as Cosroe implies: "...she that rules Rhamnrs' golden gates/ And makes a passage for all prosperous arms/ Shall make me solely emperor of Asia....(II.iii.37-39).

According to Mary Clayton, English Mariolatry has a history dating back to pre-Conquest England. Edmund Bishop too, comments on the spread of devotion to Mary from the end of the tenth century to the Conquest, while Rosemary Woolf goes so far as to say that England 'had not been of the chief originators in western Europe' of many forms of Marian piety, and Frank Barlow, too, remarks on the 'wave of devotion' to the Virgin in England in the tenth century.^{iv} Although not much is known about Mary from the Bible—she is mentioned only briefly in the Annunciation—the Marian cult in England has its roots in the introduction of Biblical exegesis by Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine who all encouraged devotion to Mary because they believed in her virginity *in partu* and *post partum*.

These three theologians believed in the power of Mary as an intercessor to her Son, Jesus on behalf of the faithful. Additionally, Mary's virginity is of great importance to Catholics because of her role as mother of Jesus and her continued status as a virgin.

During the early modern period a woman's virginity was seen as very important to her marriageability in light of patrilineage and chastity. The idea of praying to the Blessed Virgin Mary for protection from unchaste conduct became a part of Marian activity. Early modern Catholics, spurred by Dominican priests, promoted the Marian Psalter of Aves as a standard form of repetitive prayer for the faithful. Pope St. Pius V declared on October 7, 1571 that praying the holy rosary to the Virgin Mary would bring success to the suppliant. Early modern English Christians used the image of Mary as a font of chastity, promoting her material body and virginal ideology as a catalyst for female behavior and expectations. Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* is a dramatization of contemporary Elizabethan anxieties and religious beliefs, about forbidden Catholic practices with which the theater-going public would have been familiar. Marlowe's portrait of *Tamburlaine's* relationship with Zenocrate resembles the practices of some members of the Catholic Church, who openly adored the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Elizabeth, just as *Tamburlaine* worships Zenocrate. For an Elizabethan audience, Marlowe's play suggest and is consistent with blasphemous intent because Elizabeth as head of the English Church is adored covertly, while Zenocrate is overtly adored by *Tamburlaine* and his followers. Closet Catholics in a Protestant England would have been offended by Marlowe's insinuations of Mariolatry, while Protestants would openly deny that they were participating in any Catholic rituals.

For the Catholic Church, the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary features mostly in prayer and the liturgy. Both men and women pray to Mary for various reasons. Her intercession is sought when the individual has a need that he wants God to fill. With Mary's intercession to Christ her Son and to God the Father, the individual believes that his need will be fulfilled. Clayton explains that Mary figures prominently in the plan of redemption, and "[T]he idea of Mary's powers of intercession was introduced by Irenaeus of Lyons (ob202), who emphasizes her active participation in the redemption of mankind, and he also seems to have been the first to propose Mary's purification by the Holy Ghost at the Incarnation" (5). Jaroslav Pelikan suggests that Catholics believed that Mary was chosen by God to mediate between Himself and Christ on mankind's behalf. (132)

Mary stood as the Mediatrix between him and her son; in fact, God had chosen her for the specific task of pleading the cause of humanity before her Son. And so she was "the Mother of the kingdom of heaven, Mary, the Mother of God, my only refuge in every need" (132-3). Pelikan adds that the title "Mediatrix" speaks not only to Mary's 'history of salvation but also to her continuing position as intercessor between Christ and humanity, as the one whose "virginity we praise and whose humility we admire..." (132).

Even though Zenocrate bore *Tamburlaine* three sons, his preoccupation with Zenocrate's chastity is consistent with contemporary cultural and religious priorities such as female virginity and chastity. During its tenure as the principal church in England, the Catholic Church aggressively preached the importance of female chastity, a value retained by the Protestant Church. Such holdover vestiges of Catholicism make it natural that many Elizabethans continued to harbor ambivalence—resentment along with sentiment—for Catholicism, as is evidenced by charges and countercharges of Catholic spies and worshippers during this period. Stephen Greenblatt's describes early Protestantism as "fetishism of Scripture" (*Renaissance Self-fashioning* 94). Marlowe himself was accused of being a Papist and was defended by the Queen's Privy Council in order to receive his degree from Cambridge University. As Charles Nicholls explains in his essay 'Faithful Dealing: Marlowe and Elizabethan Intelligence Service,' in *Marlowe, History and Sexuality*:

So the accusation against Marlowe in 1587 is a serious one: that he is a malcontent young Catholic and that he plans to defect to the Catholic cause. The government's unequivocal answer is that he had 'no such intent' and that those who have broadcast these rumors are 'ignorant in th' affairs he went about' (23).

The frequency with which Elizabethans accused each other of Catholic leanings and practices showed the heightened preoccupation of some Elizabethans with Catholicism and its practices.^v

This pattern of behavior is not unique to the English. A similar dilemma developed in France where, according to Natalie Zemon Davis, 'The loss of the saints affected men and women equally. Reformed prayer could no longer be addressed to a woman, whereas the masculine identity of the Father and Son was kept intact' (*Society and Culture in Early Modern France* 88).

In Tamburlaine's open intercession to Zenocrate to be with him during his war mission, Marlowe stages an attempt to recapture the Catholic cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Protestant England had earlier denounced this following of Mary. As Pelikan writes:

The Countervailing force against what the Protestant Reformation was to construe as Mariolatry and as a diminution of the glory of Christ, the sole Mediator, was the recognition that she had been 'exalted through thy omnipotent Son, for the sake of thy glorious Son, by thy blessed Son,' as Anselm put it in one of his prayers. (133)

It is Mary that is exalted through such veneration. She is 'worshipped' as the ultimate virgin. In a similar manner Elizabethans, both male and female, 'worshipped' Elizabeth for her chastity.

While Elizabeth identified herself with the Protestant Church and England, she was also practicing a modified form of Catholicism in her private chapel. In fact, it is the English nostalgia for Papal practices that brought about these Marian practices among proclaimed Protestants during the early modern period. The idea of Elizabeth as mother of England and mother of the church meshes well with Mary as mother of all Christians.

Elizabeth has been described as the "only nurse and mother of the Church" (*Staging the Renaissance* 29). In spite of Parliament's hesitation about appointing a female Supreme Head of Church, a role created for the reigning monarch as head of the Church of England, out of concern for anticipated public objections to a female Supreme Head of the Church, Elizabeth assumed the role, changing the title to 'Supreme Governor'. This was one of the occasions when Elizabeth agreed to having her image sexed as male. According to Leonard Tennenhouse, "As the Church came to house the secular emblems of State, the queen's sexual body acquired the power of religious image" (Quoted in *Staging the Renaissance* 28). He adds: "Elizabeth also insisted upon identifying her body with England on the grounds she embodied the mystical power of the blood. Her natural body both contained and stood for this power" (*Staging the Renaissance* 27). Marlowe's Tamburlaine appropriated similar mystical powers to Zenocrate's body. He insisted that she brought him success through her presence along-side him on his conquests.

Tamburlaine I and *II* make social comment on Elizabethans' Marian sentiments. While many Englishmen followed the Church of England several others were ambivalent about their religious allegiance. As a result, many Englishmen were viewed by their fellow citizens as "closet Catholics." This was a dangerous religious stand, vehemently denied by those who found themselves in that position.

Elizabeth is viewed by some of her subjects, Marlowe in particular, as ostensible appropriating Mary's iconic body, when she is portrayed in the Ditchley Portrait c 1590, as 'she stands as an empress on the globe of the world, her feet planted on her realm of England' (*The Cult of Elizabeth* 154). As Lisa Jardine points out:

[I]t is likely that Elizabeth herself knowingly manipulated the emblems through which her court and counselors perceived her. In the later years of her reign this enabled her to retain control over her own political destiny by insisting on actual virginity (refusing to marry), where her ministers had used iconographic chastity to connote purity and strength. (178)

Elizabeth's refusal to marry was hailed by some Elizabethans as a saintly practice and she was equated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Yet, this equation could also be used to evoke nascent nostalgia for Catholicism, as evidenced in many of the poems, ballads and other written works of the time. One ballad written in praise of Elizabeth at her coronation reads: "Oh swete virgin pure./ longe may ye endure/To reigne over us in this land/ Four your workes do accord,/ ye are the handmaid of the lord/for he hath blessed you with his hand" (qtd. in *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen* 58).^{vi} Clearly, there is some allusion here to Elizabeth's select role as God's chosen maiden, a phrase linked to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Elizabeth and her advisors focused on and commanded loyalty from her subjects on rituals and ceremonies surrounding her virginity. Much pomp and splendor surrounding Elizabeth was created, developed and performed at state festivals, while at the same time re-focusing pre-Reformation loyalties and passion directed towards God, exclusively to the Queen as the Lord's Anointed (*The Cult of Elizabeth* 114). In fact, as Roy Strong points out: "[I]n no other country in Europe in the late sixteenth century was this refocusing so overt as in England, where there was an outright transference to the monarch' (*The Cult of Elizabeth* 114). It was Elizabeth who decided which religious images should be used and where they would be placed.

Leonard Tennenhouse writes: “[T]he identification of the queen’s sexual body with the political body was no less absolute than the iconic bonding of the political body to the sacred authority of the Church” (*Staging the Renaissance* 29). Strong argues that Elizabeth knowingly cultivated a Marian following, “[M]aking 17th November a holy day with a sermon and prayers would make the Queen ‘a god’” (*The Cult of Elizabeth* 125). He adds: “For Catholics, the cult of the Virgin Queen enshrined in her festival day seemed a deliberate attempt to supplant the pre-Reformation cult of the Virgin” (*The Cult of Elizabeth* 126). It is unclear what Marlowe’s purpose is in posturing Zenocrate as a mirror image of Elizabeth as Virgin Queen in his Tamburlaine plays. However, his portrayal of Mariolatry in the play suggests that Catholic practices were alive and well during the period, in Protestant England.

In late 1599 Church policy outlined the rules for idolatrous images in the Articles of Inquiry and the Royal Injunctions. The policy expressly forbade the use of images as used by Catholics for worship. However, nostalgia for these Catholic practices emerged during Elizabeth’s reign and through Elizabeth, Catholicism lived within Protestantism. Devout Catholics like Nicholas Sanders, writes that the Church of England was guilty of the same idolatry for which it condemned the Catholic Church. Sanders was a devout English Catholic exiled from England because of his insistence on practicing Catholicism. He was born into a staunch, wealthy Catholic family in Surrey and moved to Rome during the 1570s. He taught theology at the University of Louvain and later travelled to Spain to convince King Phillip II to depose Elizabeth I. Frustrated by Phillip’s reluctance, Sanders travelled to Ireland where he participated in the failed attempt to invade England and overthrow Elizabeth in 1579. He died soon after. Eamon Duffy explains:

Dislike of change, Catholic instincts, hope for a speedy restoration of the old ways, and Tudor thrift, combined to struggle against the instinctive obedience of well-schooled subjects, in a conflict not strong enough for resistance, but which ensured widespread inertia and concealment. (Duffy 571)

Elizabeth understood the rules of patriarchal games and she adroitly wooed the men in her circle, encouraging their cultivation of the Marian myth through their open adoration of her, paying homage to her in religious ways apart from royal practices. Sir Walter Raleigh and Robert Dudley, First Earl of Leicester, in particular, wrote poems that read like prayers to Elizabeth. Marlowe’s Tamburlaine inscribes this Elizabethan Marian ideology upon Zenocrate making her into a religious icon and paragon of virtue. He hails Zenocrate as a divine being whose presence, like Elizabeth’s, is a source of power for Tamburlaine the warrior. She is to Tamburlaine and his warriors what Elizabeth was to Walter Raleigh, Robert Dudley and other Elizabethan conquerors^{vii}.

Tamburlaine enters the play in the second scene of the first act and he brings the newly captured Zenocrate with him. His first words are addressed to her: Come lady, let not this appal your/ thoughts;/ The jewels and the treasure we have ta’en/ Shall be reserved, and you in better state/ Than if you were arrived in Syria....” (I, I.ii.1-5)

Like Elizabethans who distinguished their virgin queen as ‘other-realmly’ and mystical, Tamburlaine recognizes Zenocrate as a ‘lady’ of an ‘other’ realm with a ‘heavenly hue’ (1:2:36), and he portrays her as a superior being. As the play moves along, we begin to understand Zenocrate’s difference not in terms of race, but in terms of place – the heavenly realm. Marlowe seizes upon Elizabethan praise of Elizabeth’s chastity as justification for Mariolatry and he parallels Zenocrate’s virginity with similar Marian beliefs. By attributing to Zenocrate the powers to endow him with a conquering spirit, Marlowe’s portrayal of Tamburlaine suggests that Zenocrate has similar powers to Mary and those attributed to Elizabeth. The audience would have easily identified Tamburlaine’s queen Zenocrate as Elizabeth’s mirror image. Marlowe’s audience would also have been able to recognize Tamburlaine’s narrative trajectory, positioning him as an embodiment of English conquering ideology, substituting Tamburlaine for Elizabeth’s Raleigh. On the other hand, Greenblatt’s suggests that Tamburlaine’s behavior reflects “the acquisitive energies of English merchants” (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 198), which fits well with Tamburlaine’s restlessness and desire for power. Indeed, the Early modern merchant class sought to wrest power from the aristocracy through its accumulation of wealth.

Marlowe’s allusion to Elizabethan nostalgia for Catholicism corroborates sir Walter Raleigh’s suggestion in a poem he wrote in the 1590s, after his recent fall from Elizabeth’s favor, comparing Elizabeth’s court to a shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Walsingham: “As you came from the holy land/Of Walsingham/Mett you not with my true love/By the way as you came?” (*The Poems of Walter Raleigh* 22).

Conversant with the penalty for practicing Catholicism or propagation of that faith, Marlowe displays subversive behavior in writing the two Tamburlaine plays. His subterfuge in declaring Tamburlaine an atheist and then having him openly adore Zenocrate while creating a following after him reflects Marlowe's own attitude. He is at once overt and covert in his representation of Elizabethan nostalgia for Catholicism. This ambiguity is characteristic of Marlowe, whose religious leanings have yet to be clarified. As an Englishman, Marlowe is offering a portrait of Elizabethanism to his compatriots. This portrait of religious, political and social practices of the period depicted English audiences that were familiar with the ideas presented to them. Lisa Jardine notes that:

this transmutation of the queen into a multi-faceted emblem or icon is known as the 'cult of Elizabeth.' Over the forty-five years of Elizabeth's reign this cult grew in sophistication, until in the final years of the old queen's rule – years in which she was disfigured, bad-tempered and gout-ridden - the gap between reality and the masque-like fictions of her celebration must appear to us quite absurd (*Still Harping on Daughters* 173).

Roy Strong's account of Henry IV's response to seeing Elizabeth's portrait, which she sent to his sister Catherine of Navarre, corroborates Jardine's idea. Henry writes to Elizabeth that he is 'loath to part with it, for it is infused with some divine spirit, and he entreats her that he might be allowed to keep it' (27). Henry's request to keep Elizabeth's portrait because it is infused with divine powers, supports Marlowe's beliefs about Elizabeth's portrayal of herself as divine.

Like Henry, Tamburlaine, is reluctant to part with the portrait of the woman whom he adores and has exalted to a spiritual level. Zenocrate's 'fair face and heavenly hue' (1:2: 36) recalls the face of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Like Mary, Zenocrate is a betrothed bride, and is assumed to be virginal. As Lisa Jardine notes, "Tamburlaine persistently translates his queen, Zenocrate, into paragon of all virtues, divinity more than human, female personification of the good, using the strategies of the Elizabethan court poet" (*Still Harping on Daughters* 18). Tamburlaine instructs Zenocrate: Then sit thou down, divine Zenocrate,/And here we crown thee Queen of Persia/And all the/ kingdoms and dominions/That late the power of Tamburlaine subdu'd" (I, V.i.507-10). Tamburlaine's suggests here that Zenocrate is no mere mortal, but indeed a woman of great importance. In making her queen of all the kingdoms and dominions, Tamburlaine is making her the mirror image of Mary who is called the same names by Catholic followers. As the play proceeds Zenocrate becomes Tamburlaine's wife and bears him "three, I.iii.85). Marlowe's attempt at deifying Zenocrate emphasizes for an Elizabethan audience Elizabeth's attempts to deify herself since she is head of the Church of England. It is an ironic lament for the Catholic past, considering that Elizabeth is a Protestant and like Tamburlaine, has no need for such religious practices.

Elizabeth, as head of Church and State, embodied both religious and sexual imagery. Elizabeth's virginity stood at the center of this practice. Marlowe's covert mirroring of Elizabeth shows Zenocrate's chastity as never being questioned or endangered by Tamburlaine because his love for her is indulgent from the inception of their relationship, similar to some Elizabethans' unquestionable love for their queen. Zenocrate also remains in a virginal state in spite of bearing three sons, because she had only one husband during her life time, like Mary, who is revered as a virgin after giving birth to Christ. Since Marlowe is presenting Zenocrate as an earthly representation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, it is reasonable to assume that Zenocrate is virginal in the same way the Blessed Virgin Mary is after giving birth to Jesus. In addition, Tamburlaine exalts her as a woman beyond the reach of common mortals, and one 'lovelier than the love of Jove' (I, I.ii.87). She is at once, mortal and celestial, to be revered; not to be tarnished by illicit sex or word.

As Tamburlaine views Zenocrate, many Elizabethans gazed upon some of the woodcuts and engravings of their queen as cult images, in the same manner that Catholics gazed upon images of the Blessed Virgin in Catholic countries (Strong 31). Likewise, Tamburlaine and his followers gaze upon Zenocrate: 'The loveliest maid alive, / Fairer than rocks of pearl and precious stone, / The only paragon of Tamburlaine (I, III.iii.17-119). The rhetoric Marlowe invents for Tamburlaine is similar to Sir Phillip Sidney's song about Elizabeth, praising her as a saint on Accession Day, November 17th, 1570. Sidney writes, "Sing, Neighbours, sing; hear you not say/This Sabbath day/A Sabbath is reputed/ Of such a royal saint/ As all saints else confutes/ Is love without constraint?" (87).

Amazed by Tamburlaine's address to Zenocrate, Techelles asks him: 'What now? In love?' (1:2:106). Techelles is accustomed to Tamburlaine's bombastic, lofty war rhetoric so he is stunned by this new language of endearment. Others, like Agydas, adore Zenocrate in the same manner as do Tamburlaine and Techelles.

Agydas laments Zenocrate's poor judgment in choosing to love Tamburlaine. What he is not aware of is Tamburlaine's spiritual perception of Zenocrate. Like Agydas who also dies for Zenocrate, Arabia sees her as 'divine Zenocrate' (I.V.i. 419), as he succumbs to Tamburlaine's wrath. He is content to die for Zenocrate (not unlike some Elizabethan courtiers), for whom he took up arms, and for whom he lived, firmly believing that her sacred hands would 'close mine eyes' (I.V.i.433), and fulfill his last desire. Marlowe allows Arabia to show his pure and genuine love for Zenocrate in a manner that testifies to both adulation and mourning. In Zenocrate Marlowe creates a harmonious and generous balance between Elizabeth and Mary. Elizabeth was known to her subjects as Virgin Mother and Queen of the Church and realm. Strong's description of the English queen supports Marlowe's portrayal of her. Elizabeth's portrait in John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (W. no. 2), displayed in English cathedrals and churches during her reign, 'in which Elizabeth attended by the estates of the realm is displayed treading under a vanquished Pope clasping broken keys' (230). The sight of Elizabeth in this portrait evoked a sense of devotion in her subjects similar to that evoked in Arabia when he sees Zenocrate, and in Mariolaters when they kneel before Mary's statue.

When Zenocrate's father, the Soldan of Egypt, meets Tamburlaine initially, and inquires about the welfare of his daughter, Tamburlaine responds with words of adulation and devotion explaining, "her estate and person wants no pomp, you see,/And for all blot of foul in chastity,/ I record heaven, her heavenly self is clear/ Then let me find no further time to grace/ Her princely temples with the Persian crown" (I, V.i. 486-90). Her virtue intact, Tamburlaine endows Zenocrate with the female personification upon which the cult of the Virgin Mary is centered. She is courageous, virtuous and queenly.

Upon Zenocrate's death Tamburlaine and his sons dedicate various icons in memory of the 'saint.' Tamburlaine has her body embalmed and displayed for the faithful to worship. His son Celebinus requests that a record of her life be kept in full public view for posterity. He declares that a table should be set 'as a register/ Of all her virtues and perfections' (3:2:23-24). Finally Tamburlaine raises her picture to be 'gazed' upon by all. He refuses to bury her body adding 'Thou shalt not beautify Larissa plains,/ But keep within the circle of mine arms' (3:2:34-35). His refusal to bury Zenocrate is not without precedent.

According to some early modern theologians, as the mother of Christ, Mary received exceptional privileges. Mary Clayton explains:

The first family, which is represented in Syriac and Coptic, in a Greek text which is ascribed to John the Evangelist and in a Latin version known as *Transitus D*, recounts how the Virgin's incorruptible body was brought to paradise, where, surrounded by light and fragrantly scented, it was worshipped by the saints, while her soul was assumed into heaven. (Qtd. in *The Cult of the Virgin Mary* 8-9)

This ritual is a privilege accorded to the Blessed Virgin Mary because she is the mother of Christ.

Tamburlaine gives orders to embalm Zenocrate's corpse, intending to use her as inspiration, in order to continue his conquering of foreign lands. At the same time his followers paid homage to Zenocrate as was done to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Spanish conquerors took icons of the Blessed Virgin Mary with them to the battle fields in the New World, and early modern English soldiers needed Elizabeth's battlefield figure to motivate their conquering exploits. One of Marlowe's overriding themes in Tamburlaine is power over others and it is key that Tamburlaine find ways to enable him as a conqueror. Marlowe's repeated allusions to Zenocrate's divine state and capabilities indicate that Marlowe understood his countrymen's interest in Mariolatry and power.

In keeping with the old religious belief that Mary's body was assumed into heaven, Marlowe has Tamburlaine immortalize Zenocrate's material body, while alluding to the Christian belief that her soul is in heaven: 'Now walk the angels on the walls of heaven, / As sentinels to warn th'immortal souls / To entertain divine Zenocrate' (II, II.iv.15-17). Since her body remains a part of his entourage, Tamburlaine, like the Spanish soldiers in the New World who display Mary's image on the battlefield, uses the materiality of Zenocrate's body as an instrument of war success. He announces, "At every town and castle I besiege/ Thou shalt be set upon my royal tent,/ And when I meet an army in the field/ Those looks will shed such influence in my camp/ As if Bellona, goddess of the war,/Threw naked swords and sulphur balls of fire/ Upon the heads of all our enemies" (II, III.ii.36-42).

Marlowe incorporates colonial religious practices of the time in Tamburlaine's use of Zenocrate's body as an emblem of the glorification and successes of war. Lisa Hopkins suggests:

[T]hat Marlowe was interested in the questions of colonialism, foreignness and the relation of different nationalities to one another [is] suggested by the first of the heresies reported against him by Richard Baines, which critics are increasingly inclined to see as genuinely reflective of his thought: that ‘the Indians and many authors of antiquity have assuredly written above 16 thousand years ago, whereas Adam is proved to have lived within 6 thousand years’. (*Christopher Marlowe: A Literary Life* 51)

Earlier in the play Tamburlaine explains to Zenocrate, his war comrades, and his war prisoners present at the banquet, that Zenocrate’s presence means triumph for him (I, V.i.507-15). Marlowe may be alluding here to the Spanish Catholic soldiers’ practice of carrying a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary when they ventured to the battlefield in the Americas, and showing the statue to the Indians whom they conquered.

These soldiers won many of their battles in the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and they convinced the Indians that their superiority in battle was due to the power of the Virgin Mary.^{viii} Tamburlaine is using Zenocrate’s body in a similar manner, claiming that she strengthens him with her power from heaven. Marlowe thus aligns Zenocrate with the Blessed Virgin Mary who is the queen of peace, and the patron saint of Spanish soldiers. Tamburlaine is aligning Zenocrate with Mary.

Like Zenocrate, Elizabeth bears several of Mary’s ceremonial titles. Pointing to her Marian self-perception and the manner in which she is perceived by her subjects, Elizabeth described herself as God’s handmaid in a speech to the 1576 Parliament: ‘As for those rare and special benefits which for many years have followed and accompanied my happy reign, I attribute them to God alone, the Prince of rule, and count myself no better than His handmaid’ (*Elizabeth I: Collected Works* 169-70). She was described similarly in several prayer-books associated with her personal devotional use, such as Richard Day’s *Christian Prayers and Mediations* (1569), also known as ‘Queen Elizabeth’s Prayer Book, Day’s *A Booke of Christian Prayers* (1578), and the manuscript *Book of Devotions*. The epithet was consistently used to denote Elizabeth’s humble submission to her destiny as God’s instrument to advance the true faith, and was, therefore, again a distinctly Protestant appropriation of a Marian title. (Hackett 82)

For Tamburlaine, Zenocrate is like the Blessed Virgin Mary who is Queen of heaven and all the earth. He attributes to her all of his war conquests since he became her ‘follower.’ He adds, /As Juno, when the giants were suppressed/ That darted mountains at her brother Jove,/ So looks my love, shadowing in her brows/ Triumphs and trophies for my victories;/ Or as Latona’s daughter bent to arms,/ Adding more courage to my conquering mind’ (I, V.i.511-16). Her passing meant that Tamburlaine lost his wife, the mother of his children, his companion and warrior icon.

In Part II, Tamburlaine laments Zenocrate’s mortality as she lies ill while he simultaneously projects a mystical aura around her: ‘Black is the beauty of the brightest day! / The golden ball of heaven’s eternal fire.../ Zenocrate, that gave him light and life. (II, II.iv.1-8). Her vulnerability is obvious to him as she is about to be removed from the mortal realm. Zenocrate is represented in what Berry refers to as the pre-Renaissance tradition of spiritual and religious symbolism. (22) Her chastity, like that of Laura, is connected to her ability to influence love in both the Petrarchan and spiritual senses. Zenocrate is able to cross the threshold of mortality spiritually, not of her own volition but by means of her materiality. The men around Zenocrate unknowingly attribute to her Marian powers that she herself is not aware of, nor claims to be capable of possessing. She is asked to perform tasks such as defeating enemies and warding off death. Tamburlaine explains that her picture will be displayed in every town while he goes out to battle his enemies, “At every town and castle I besiege/ Thou shalt be set upon my royal tent,/ And when I meet an army in the field/ Those looks will shed such influence in my camp/ As if Bellona, goddess of the war,/ Threw naked swords and sulphur balls of fire/ Upon the heads of all our enemies” (II, III.ii.36-42). Arabia attributes to her the power to sweeten his wound and take away his life. (I,VI.418-33). Earlier, on crowning Zenocrate queen of Persia, Tamburlaine attributes to her heavenly powers that are identical to those attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary through Marian devotions and praise by Spanish conquerors. Marlowe appears to be actively participating in the documentation of religious activities and proscribed meaning of Elizabethan sentiment and nostalgia for the Papist past that he has been accused of promoting. Marlowe was accused of supporting and promoting Catholicism in Europe during his Cambridge College years. He denounced these accusations and the Earl of Walsingham, his patron secured support for his graduation from Cambridge when that institution refused to allow him to graduate because of his alleged Catholic sentiments.

Finally, Tamburlaine curses ‘Larissa’s plains’ (II, III.ii.34), blaming the location for Zenocrate’s demise. He then commissions a statue of Zenocrate and cultivates a group of followers who will mourn for her: ‘And here will I set up her statua / And march about it with my mourning camp / Drooping and pining for Zenocrate. (II, II.iv.140-2). He shows faith in Zenocrate’s alleged Marian powers even though she is dead, revealing another aspect of Elizabethans’ need for a Marian icon as evidenced under the pretext of a Scythian upstart shepherd’s preoccupation with colonization and conquering of uncharted territories.

Tamburlaine’s exaltation of Zenocrate plays on Elizabethan sentiments, as Marlowe projects on to the stage the ironies of a society longing for a Papist past that is at once banished and practiced in the adaptation to Elizabeth’s cult. This is clear. In the final act of the play Tamburlaine immortalizes Zenocrate, projecting the permanence of Mariolatry in the new Church of England in spite of Elizabeth’s overt disassociation from Catholic practices. Marlowe exposes Elizabethan Catholic practices that are disguised as devotion to their queen. Zenocrate is to Tamburlaine what Elizabeth was to her subjects. She is, as Jardine avers, ‘his goddess of inspiration, Diana, goddess of chastity and the hunt’ (*Still Harping on Daughters* 180). When she dies, Tamburlaine refuses to recognize this death as an intimation of mortality and once again metamorphoses his prostrate queen, silent on her death-bed of state, as she sat before silent on her coronation throne, into an icon of eternal promise.^{ix}

The mystery surrounding Marlowe’s religious affiliation and his propensity for writing unorthodox plays gives rise to much speculation about his work. Given the fact that England was in a state of flux during the Elizabethan period, Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine I* and *II* project a reflection upon prevailing social, religious and political attitudes. The linguistic opulence, poetic sensibility and religious consciousness of the brigand protagonist create a worldview that covertly resembles Elizabeth’s reign and the cult to which she subscribed. Marlowe succeeds in projecting to the forefront Elizabethans’ covert Marian practices disguised as homage to their iconoclast queen. At the same time, he uses Tamburlaine to reveal Elizabeth’s colonial conquering pattern and the audience’s complicity in such imperialist behavior.

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Notes

- ⁱ Elizabethans endowed their queen with the title of deliverer and the light; Thomas Holland described in her coronation in his 1599 Queen's Day sermon as "A day wherein our nation received a new light after a fearful and bloody Eclipse...a day wherein God gave a rare Phoenix to rule this land" (*The Cult of Elizabeth* 126). Roy Strong adds that, "The Queen's Accession Day was therefore deliberately built up as a great national festival, a day on which her subjects were reminded of their deliverance from the powers of darkness, on which a new era dawned for the English Church, a day on which the imperial cause triumphed over the papal" (Qtd. in *The Cult of Elizabeth* 126).
- ⁱⁱ In Tamburlaine I.V.i. 418-30, Arabia adores Zenocrate as a divine woman with the power to heal his pain, similar to the powers attributed to Elizabeth by Holland in his 1599 sermon on Queen's Day.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See Ditchley Portrait c1590, in *Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I*.
- ^{iv} Clayton, Mary. *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, (1990), pp. 1. Clayton also cites England as one of the major western European countries that participated in Marian piety.
- ^v There was a sense of longing for the past, Catholicism included, that some Elizabethans kept going back to. "Closet Catholics," people who covertly practiced the faith, feared Protestant backlash if discovered. As a result, many practicing Protestants were simultaneously "closet Catholics." This extended to the theatre; Paul Whitfield White suggests that "[S]ome of these plays continued to espouse Catholic teaching on transubstantiation, the veneration of saints, and the cult of the Virgin" (*in A New History of Early English Drama* 134).
- ^{vi} The *Angelus*, a prayer dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, refers to Mary as the "Handmaid of the Lord." The poem is emulating the *Angelus* and equating Elizabeth with Mary. She was portrayed in distinctively Marian terms, as the hand maid picked by God to lead the English nation into redemption and salvation.
- ^{vii} During the early modern period English explorers like Sir Walter Raleigh took with them icons of Elizabeth which they openly displayed. Such practices were supposed to bring them good luck and fortune. Spanish explorers used images of the Blessed Virgin Mary to intimidate the native Indians and force them into submission.
- ^{viii} According to Roy Strong, "[T]he actual wearing of the royal image in cameo form was, however, specifically an Elizabethan development (*Portraits of Queen Elizabeth* 128). He added that many of the engravings and paintings of Elizabeth were adorned in a similar manner to the engravings of the Virgin Mary in a Catholic country (31).
- ^{ix} See *Tamburlaine* (II,II.iv.15-17).