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'Excessive individualism' and the confines of the theatre in Marlowe's plays

Jacob Burckhard writes in *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* that the 'fundamental vice of [the Renaissance] character was at the same time a condition of its greatness, namely, excessive individualism'.[1] In the phrase 'excessive individualism' we can identify the paradox which inhabits the protagonists of Christopher Marlowe's dramatic works; the sense of wanting to be more than oneself – to exceed the capabilities of the 'individual'. As remarked by Harry Levin in *The Overreacher*, Marlowe's 'protagonist is never Everyman, but always *l'uomo singolare*, the exceptional man'.[2] Marlowe's characterisations stand in direct contrast to the medieval 'Everyman' model as Tamburlaine, Barabas and Faustus all endeavour beyond their utmost abilities to be their *own* man. The dazzling singularity of Marlowe's antiheros is asserted to 'excessive' extremes in their determinations to fulfil their self-written destinies.

Exhibiting what Stephen Greenblatt calls a 'histrionic extremism'[3], Marlowe's protagonists are both physically and verbally larger than life, to the point where their spirited aspirations can no longer be contained by the world around them, nor indeed, by the stage they are confined to. Thus arises in the protagonists an alarmingly self-aware desire to take authorial rein over their own 'discourse' – discourses which become 'Tragicall' in the conclusion of this irresolvable ambition.

Fundamental to the protagonists' 'excessive individualism' is their determination to forge their own identities. Greenblatt writes of how the characters struggle to 'invent themselves'[4], likewise Thomas Healey describes how Tamburlaine 'exaggerate[s] himself into a heroic figure'[5]. The self-reflexive 'themselves' and 'himself' here are indicative of the characters taking upon themselves the responsibility of asserting their own identity. References to 'themselves' are reiterated throughout the plays through Marlowe's use of character names and personal pronouns, and these devices are most clear in *The Jew of Malta* and the *Tamburlaine* plays.

Consider Tamburlaine's initial meetings with both Zenocrate and Theridamas, with Zenocrate originally betrothed to someone else and Theridamas come to usurp Tamburlaine on behalf of Mycetes. Despite the initial barriers of opposition Tamburlaine seduces both characters into his support through mere assertion of his own identity. Having enquired as to whether Zenocrate is yet betrothed, she says 'I am, my lord – for so you do import.', to which he replies 'I am a lord, for so my

[1] Burckhard, Jacob, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, Start Publishing LCC (2013).
[2] Levin, Harry, *The Overreacher*, London: Faber and Faber (1965), p.43.
[3] Greenblatt, Stephen, *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (1980), p.214.
[4] *Ibid.*, p.212.
[5] Healey, Thomas, *Christopher Marlowe*, Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers Ltd (1994), p.6.

deeds shall prove' (*1 Tam*, 1.ii.33-4).[6] The obvious aural mirroring in this exchange serves to emphasise Tamburlaine's overwhelming individual presence and its effect on Zenocrate. Her speech is confused both in content and in syntax, bemusedly catching herself refer to a shepherd as a 'lord', with the line's three distinct clauses fragmenting the balance of the iambic pentameter. In contrast, Tamburlaine echoes her words to affirm his identity, ironing out her stammers with 'I am a lord', a certainty which extends into 'for so my deeds shall prove.' As 'for so you' turns into 'for so my', Tamburlaine linguistically redirects both Zenocrate's and the audience's focus exclusively towards him.

In *The Jew of Malta*, as noted by Greenblatt, Marlowe makes use of 'the figure of the Jew as a powerful rhetorical device'[7], yet further to this allows Barabas to both exemplify and remain distinct from the stereotype. Barabas not only embraces the branding that's been given to him, stating 'I, a Jew' (1.i.112)[8] and commanding, 'Go tell 'em the Jew of Malta sent thee, man.' (1.i.65) but takes charge of it by elevating himself above his fellow 'man', describing himself to be 'born to better chance / and framed of finer mould than common men' (1.ii.218-9). Barabas carves out an identity for himself which sets him apart, just as Faustus does when he decides in his first soliloquy that he no longer wants to be 'but Faustus, and a man' (1.i.23) [9]. Again, Barbaras' individuality comes to light particularly in his interactions with others. Like Tamburlaine Barabas' name distinguishes him as a separate, singular identity from the other 'men' and Jews around him. In the suggestion of renown 'Tush, who amongst 'em knows not Barabas' (1.i.66), the rising cretic rhythm 'Barabas' contrasts directly with ''em', which is not only abbreviated and derogatory, but the central unstressed fifth syllable, syntactically buried under the rest of the line.

In the sequence, 'But who comes here? [*Enter a [First] Merchant*] How now? / Barabas' (1.i.48) we observe the 48th line split into three, the metre disrupted with not only three separate clauses but also the First Merchant's entrance and then the transferral of the line to the new character. The consequent grammatical crescendo to 'Barabas' which completes the metre creates a rhythmic escalation of his singularity. This focus is only further exaggerated in the First Merchant' answering with 'Barabas''s identity rather than his own (that which is asked of him). Barabas' name, just like Tamburlaine's, verbally dominates the stage over all other identities. Similarly upon greeting Theridamas, Tamburlaine in proclaiming his individuality appears to not only assert his identity but

[6] Marlowe, Christopher, *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays* ed. Bevington and Rasmussen, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1995), 'Tamburlaine the Great, Part I', p. 9.
[7] Greenblatt, p.203
[8] Marlowe, *op. cit.*, 'The Jew of Malta', p. 256.
[9] Marlowe, *op. cit.,* 'The Tragical History of Doctors Faustus (A-Text)', p. 140. All citations henceforth refer to the A-Text.

also his own existence; 'Whom seek'st thou, Persian? I am Tamburlaine.' (*Tam 1*, 1.ii.153) In the answering of his own question and then the assertion of his *being* ('I am') Tamburlaine is here linguistically the maker of his own identity, and thus metaphorically births himself in this verbal self-forging of his own identity. Tamburlaine's identity is rhetorically enforced by the repetition of his name at the end of three consecutive lines across the characters' catechisms. The answers to all three questions lies in his name, and as 'The name of mighty Tamburlaine is spread' (*Tam 2*, 3.iv.66) throughout the two plays, the rising rhythm and masculine ending that it gives to each line set a precedent for the continued domination of Tamburlaine's presence.

Further to this, Marlowe's characters not only assert their 'excessive individualism' through powerful reiterations of their own identity, but also actively stand apart from their peers. Barabas stands in constant opposition to the cretic trisyllables denoting the other Jews, as can be seen in the sequence, '… countrymen? / … multitudes? / …to the Jews? / … Barabas' (1.i.141-4). The plurals here describe the other Jews as a flock indistinct from one another; only Barabas is named and thus granted 'individualism'. Throughout he sets himself apart from his supposed kin, remarking upon the 'simplicity of these base slaves' (1.ii.215). He refuses to be '[simple]', and where the others 'can [not] brook / The cruel handling of ourselves' (1.ii.175-6), Barabas refuses to be passive (a 'senseless lump of clay' (1.ii.217)). He resists inclusion; 'You were a multitude, and I but one' (1.ii.179). Similarly, the beginning of *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* sees Faustus actively stepping aside from the conventional scholars of the play, who like the Jews are unnamed. He ends his studies of 'Physic', thus bidding 'farewell' (1.i.26) to his alignment with their school, and the scholars are correct in their consequent premonition that 'nothing can reclaim him' (1.ii.35). Again, this separation from the rest comes out of a desire for empowerment, for after obtaining a command over necromancy he speaks of himself in the second person as if he were a God, 'do whatever Faustus shall command' (1.iii.37). Like Barabas, he too refuses to be a mere 'common [man]', and thus Marlowe makes pains to purposely distinguish them from not just their peers but their kin; 'brethren' (1.ii. 171) in *The Jew of Malta* and 'dear brethren' (1.ii.29) in *Faustus*.

In the light of the audience's existing preconceptions about the stereotypical Jew in *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas' refusal to be aligned with his kin is of course, especially significant. Despite the play's lack of titular eponymy which is otherwise characteristic of Marlowe, and despite Machiavell's prologue immediately preparing us for a character of cliché, we find that 'Barabas' emerges distinct in the play as not merely '*The Jew of Malta*' but his own self-made individual, remaining entirely in control of the persona projected upon him and thus both accepting and reclaiming his stereotype.

The sense of literal '*Self-fashioning'* in the plays prevails in the notion that the protagonists are their own makers, rejecting both biological and divine notions of creation in favour of a type of authorial regeneration. As Greenblatt remarks, 'we never see and scarcely hear of the hero's parents. Tamburlaine is the son of nameless "paltry" Scythians, Faustus of "parents base of stock", and Barabas, so far as we can tell, of no one at all.'[10] Despite being born a mere 'Scythian Shephearde', Tamburlaine takes it upon himself to transform into a 'mightye Monarque' (as described in the title page of its original editions), and we have already observed Tamburlaine taking the linguistic reigns over his own creation. In asserting his existence through words, 'I am Tamburlaine' (*Tam 1,* 1.ii.153), he seems to be *authoring* his own rebirth. Faustus too appears to write himself into being, as the Prologue's outline of his being 'born, his parents of base stock' seems immediately undermined in Faustus' own first line, 'Settle thy studies, Faustus, and begin' (1.i.1). The caesura 'Faustus' represents a syntactical break which lies between both the signification for the end of his previous life, 'Settle thy studies', and the 'begin'ning of the new identity which he *Self-Fashion*[s] through the decision to sell his soul. In his condemnation of the Latin inscription, '*Exhaereditare filium non potest patern*' ('A father cannot disinherit his son') (1.i.29) he expresses scorn at the nature of filial ties, and as he 'begin's alone in his own study Marlowe suggests that it is in fact Faustus who disinherits his father, or rather the notion of biological fatherhood in general. With Tamburlaine coming into his own through his 'high astounding terms' (*Tam 1,* Prologue, 5) and Faustus in 'his study' (Prologue, 28) attempting to fashion his own 'begin'ning, we get a sense of authorial self-creation; the characters write themselves into being. Even Barabas has made his own fortunes through his understanding of 'stratagem' (1.i.163) and his ability to create a legacy for himself out of 'nought' (1.ii.106).

The characters thus are exerting themselves beyond not only their biological heritages within the narrative, but also beyond the fictional confines of their status as characters. The protagonists pursue an authorial and directorial control over the play itself, creating an unsettling sense of meta-theatrical self-awareness.

For Tamburlaine and Barabas, an extra factor must be considered in the discussion of creation and regeneration; progeny. These two protagonists, through their children, have an opportunity to 'exc[eed]' their 'individualism' by the further means of living on through their offspring. Noting that both these characters 'kill their children without a trace of remorse', Greenblatt claims, 'in Marlowe [the family] is something to be neglected, despised, or violated.'[11] I would extend this to disclaim that this applies only should the protagonists' children not adhere to their father's word. It is with

[10] Greenblatt, *op. cit.*, p.212.
[11] Greenblatt, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

reluctance ('O, unhappy day!' (3.iv.26)) that Barabas resolves to murder his daughter, finding her 'False, credulous' and 'inconstant' (3.iv.27) to his own principles upon hearing word of her conversion. Equally, Tamburlaine declares Calyphas a 'traitor to my name' (*Tam 2*, 4.i.89) and 'sprung from some coward's loins / And not the issue of great Tamburlaine' (*Tam 2,* 1.iii.69-70). Once again the responsibility over one's 'name' is carried over to the next generation, and it is for Calyphas' defiance of this that Tamburlaine must murder him. Indeed Tamburlaine reacts to Celebinus' declamations of war with the response 'These words assure me, boy, thou art my son.' (*Tam 2*, 1.iii.58). One has to employ the appropriate 'words', 'Or else you are not sons of Tamburlaine' (*Tam 2*, 1.iii.64), and thus through his cowardice Calyphys in a sense literally writes himself out of his father's lineage. Equally, it is through a letter that Abigail reveals her betrayal of her father, and thus also 'writes' (3.4.v) herself into disownment.

Thus, the family's role is *not* 'to be neglected, despised, or violated', but to carry forth the father's identity after his death. Accordingly, only an inability to do so would necessitate '[violation]'. The importance of 'name' and 'words' again figures in the obliteration of the children, and in the continuation of our previous extended metaphor Tamburlaine and Barabas thus become not only authors of their current fortunes but editors of their future legacies.

Not only do the characters seem to be extending the limits of their own identities here beyond their 'individual' selves, but in their consideration for future generations we can identify a grappling with what Greenblatt terms '*theatrical* time'.[12] He discusses the term in relation to repetition; 'The pressure of the dramatic medium itself likewise underlies what we may call the *repetition compulsion* of Marlowe's heroes', 'the motivation is… the renewal of existence through repetition of the self-constituting act.'[13] Once again we have this idea of 'self-constituting'. The characters' repetitive actions, borne out of the insatiability of their ambitions, are in an effort to assert as much of their 'individualism' over the timeframe of the play as possible.

However, we can identify a struggle with 'theatrical time' also in the forward-driving momentum throughout the play and that same concern for the future which calls into concern the role of the next generation. Tamburlaine immediately asserts his lord status with 'for so my deeds shall prove'. Here begins a pattern in Marlowe of speech leading into 'deeds', once again demonstrating the active power of words in the plays; 'I speak it, and my words are oracles' (*Tam 1*, 3.iii.102). Tamburlaine's premonitions of the future are indicative of the dramatic momentum precipitated by

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 200.
[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 200-1.

the characters' ambitions, a sensation termed 'the Marlovian impetus' by Levin. [14] The determination of the character can be felt in his assertions of 'deeds' yet to come, 'For 'will' and 'shall' best fitteth Tamburlaine' (*Tam 1*, 3.iii.41). Similarly, Faustus declares an inability to accept the 'doctrine' of '*Che serà, sera,* / What will be, shall be?' (1.1.49). Here Faustus' frustration is borne out of a refusal to passively await one's own death, a desire to determine for himself what 'will' and 'shall' be; the same 'self-constituting' power of action that Tamburlaine wields throughout his plays. It is in this frustration that Faustus turns to 'necromancy' (1.i.52), attempting to transcend himself but also taking 'What will be' into his own hands, indicative of a discomfort with endings which is harboured by all the Marlovian protagonists.

Faustus of course tries to gain control of this anxiety in his decision to 'make' his own 'end immediately', in the 'deed of gift' (2.i.60-72), ominously echoing Christ's final words '*Consummatum est*. This bill is ended*'* (2.i.72-4). The character's desire to establish his own narrative in the attempt to 'write' (2.i.59) his own ending is once again manifested in the metaphor of authorship. Marjorie Garber writes accordingly of the tendency of Marlowe's heroes to be 'slain by their own handwriting, signatures, or seals'. [15]

In this case the element of blasphemy takes the self-sacrifice further, as by referencing Christ's last words (John 19:30), Faustus utilises not just any words but appropriated words of God to craft his own destiny. By antithetically likening his own 'falling' (Prologue, 23) to Christ's crucifixion, Faustus engenders a bastardisation of the Christian resurrection narrative. Whereas Christ sacrifices himself for the good of mankind, Faustus regenerates himself in the name of the devil as his 'fruitful plot for scholarism' becomes 'swoll'n …[with] self-conceit' (Prologue, 16-20).

Note the use of the word 'fruitful'; by indulging his lust for knowledge with this 'deed of gift', Faustus enacts a kind of metaphorical self-expulsion from Eden. He not only actively plucks at the fruit of knowledge, but literally conjures up 'a dish of ripe grapes', declaring it 'but a small matter' and encouraging the Duchess to 'taste on them' (4.ii.10-6). This serves as a clear allegory for the temptation of Eve, Faustus having crafted himself into a Satan figure, now spreading his influence over others. Parallels of Satan can also be seen in Tamburlaine, who verbally evokes the temptation in his seduction of Zenocrate, a scene which is subtly echoed later in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, to name but one of several comparisons that have been drawn between the two characters. Tamburlaine declares, 'Zenocrate, lovelier than the love of Jove', promising 'A hundred tartars shall attend on thee' (*Tam 1*, 1.ii.87-93), just as Satan refers to Eve, 'Fairest resemblance of thy Maker fair',

[14] Levin, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
[15] Garber, Marjorie, '"Here's Nothing Writ": Scribe, Script, and Circumscription in Marlowe's plays', *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 3, Renaissance Re-Visions (Oct., 1984), p.301

promising that she will be 'adored and served / By angels numberless'. [16] The characters appear not only to embrace, but spear-head, a fallen world in which they have sole charge over their own destiny.

In Marlowe's suggestions of extended Biblical metaphors, he not only places his protagonist self-creators in the position of God, but also gives them Satanic powers to take charge of their own fall and seduce others into their following. Laurie Maguire and Aleksandra Thostrup have said of Tamburlaine, 'materially, he is celestially and infernally mixed'.[17] Barabas too seems literally 'mould'ed of an un'common' substance, proclaiming to be 'finer… than common men' (1.ii.220) whilst arguably appearing both holier and more sinful than the Christians around him.

For Levin, Marlowe's protagonists 'are self-made men: and to the extent that they can disregard the canons of good and evil, they are supermen'.[18] The 'excessive individualism' of these characters manifests itself in superhuman qualities which align fully with neither God nor Satan, but express themselves in a way which is humanly powerful. Faustus refers to his intention to 'search all corners of the new-found world / For pleasant fruits' (1.i.86-7). The 'fruits' and 'new-found world' once again suggest the embracing of a non-divine world, and indeed Faustus encourages Mephistopheles to 'scorn those joys' of heaven in favour of 'manly fortitude' (1.iii.86). Equally Theridamas says, 'A god is not so glorious as a king. / … the pleasure they enjoy in heaven / Cannot compare with kingly joys in earth.' (*Tam 1*, 2.v.57-9). Further to this, Tamburlaine himself associates the theologically loaded phrase 'perfect bliss' not with heaven but 'The sweet fruition of an earthly crown', 'the ripest fruit of all' (*Tam 1*, 2.vii.27-9). Barabas too describes his gold as 'my bliss'; 'the first beginner of my bliss!' (2.i.50). The tragedy of the plays arises as the disconnect between the characters' 'perfect' ambitions and 'earthly' realities grows larger, when their 'excessive individualism' and its determinations for 'bliss' can no longer be accommodated by the human, and artificial, world in which they exist.

Levin expresses this disjunction through the issue of being 'Driven by an impetus towards infinity and faced with the limitations of the stage'.[19] The characters' ambitions cannot be contained by these 'limitations', and as the characters lose command over their own fortunes this can once more be examined in terms of authorial control. The 'limitations of the stage' are such that the characters'

[16] Milton, John, *Paradise Lost*, London: Penguin (2000), Book IX, (line 82)
[17] Maguire, Laurie and Aleksandra Thostrup, *Christopher Marlowe in Context* ed. Bartels and Smith, Cambridge University Press (2013), 'Marlowe and Character', p. 43.
[18] Levin, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

grand endeavours are presented through fragile written inscriptions, as seen in Faustus' 'deed of gift' and Tamburlaine's reference to maps.

Faustus's control over language unravels as his attempts to master the 'Lines, circles, signs, letters, and characters' (1.i.53) of necromancy progresses. In his signing of the 'deed of gift' his authorial power in fact depletes completely as he finds, 'My blood congeals, and I can write no more' (2.i.62). Not only does his ability to write break down, but he loses control over words altogether as they appear of their own agency over his body; 'But what is this inscription on mine arm?' (2.i.76), equally calling into question his ability to read; 'My senses are deceived; here is nothing writ. - / I see it plain. Here in this place is writ.' (2.i.79-80). Here we see a former scholar who has been entirely castrated of his former powers of literacy, ensuing in confusion and repetitions which jar and disrupt the natural metre of the verse. Faustus is made not only to rewrite his signature on the deed, but also later must reiterate his contract again, 'And with my blood again I will confirm / My former vow I made to Lucifer' (5.i.72), calling into further question the legitimacy of words, and serving as another example of Greenblatt's identified '*repetition compulsion*'; it would appear that Faustus' 'renewal of existence through repetition of the self-constituting act'[20] is beginning to fail. As stated by Garber, 'the play becomes a plot of simultaneous writing and unwriting – the more Faustus would write, the more "here's nothing writ"'.[21]

After taking the responsibility to write out this new necromantic identity for himself, Faustus has not gained command of 'Lines, circles, signs, letters and characters' but rather has lost his grip on language completely. The crisis of identity and the crisis of language further collude in his demise as his use of personal pronouns spiral out of control in his final soliloquy (5.ii.57-115). References to himself jump between 'Faustus', 'thou', 'I' and 'me' in what Maguire and Thostrup describe as a 'grammatical delirium'.[22] Faustus' speech here is heavily punctuated, exclamatory, and includes both hypermetric lines, catalectic lines and lines comprising of only two syllables ('No, no!' (5.ii.77), 'O God' (5.ii.90)). The scene switches from continuous dialogic prose to an incredibly metrically unstable verse form, and as Faustus himself begins to unravel so does his purchase over language appear to dissipate entirely. This leads to a final denunciation of authorial responsibility; 'I'll burn my books' (5.ii.115), though by this point it is, of course, too late.

Like Faustus, the power of Tamburlaine's authorship, which seemed so certain at the beginning of *Part 1*, is also called into question, and no longer stands as a tool of empowerment but precipitates confusion and eventually, helplessness. Tamburlaine decrees his ultimate goal as the acquisition of

[20] Greenblatt, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-1.
[21] Garber, *op. cit.*, p. 308.
[22] Maguire and Thostrup, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

an 'earthly crown', yet protests of the limited space on earth which he may conquer. He declares, 'I will confute those blind geographers /… / Excluding regions which I mean to trace, / And with this pen reduce them to a map' (*Tam 1*, 4.iv.78-81), naming all conquered regions 'After my name and thine, Zenocrate' (*Tam 1,* 4.iv.8183). Here the authorial metaphor is most clear, Tamburlaine inscribing with 'his pen' ('my sword') all his conquered lands into a 'map', marked with 'my name and thine'. The notions of authorship of the map and authorship of the world begin to struggle against Tamburlaine's geographical confines. This becomes clear when in his dying moments, the previously symbolic map appears anew as a mere physical prop, acting only as a reminder of 'how much / is left' (*Tam 2*, 5.iii.123-4) 'unconquerèd' (5.iii.150).

Tamburlaine says in his claims to his great 'name, / The scourge of God and terror of the world / I must apply myself to fit those terms' (*Tam 2*, 4.i.152-4). It is in this endless and impossible cycle of 'excessive' self-definition and over-reaching to 'fit' these 'terms' which is Tamburlaine's undoing; his mortal self cannot 'fit' the 'incorporeal spirit' which 'moves' within him (*Tam 2*, 4.i.113). Like Faustus, Tamburlaine weakens both physically and linguistically as his command over language and his 'high astounding terms' are undermined.

Barabas' loss of control over his narrative is expressed by more physical means. In his use of trick props ('*Giving a letter*' (2.iii.371-2), poisoned 'pot of rice' (3.iv.49)), secret asides to the audience and self-aware discussion of 'perform'ance ('So neatly plotted, and so well perform'd' (3.iii.3)), he appears to become increasingly more literally the stage-manager of his own life and of the play itself. This of course goes awry when he sets up the final scene, with '*hammer above, very busy,* [*and Carpenters to work with him*]' (5.v.1), only to ultimately fall to his death '*through a trap door*' (5.v.63-4) into his own cauldron in a darkly comedic final twist. Barabas who throughout assumes the roles of actor ('*Enter Barabas with a lute, disguised, [and a nosegay in his hat]*' (4.iv.28-9)) and surrogate playwright, has not only lost control of the play but is at total mercy to his other characters; 'Help, help me, Christians, help!' (5.v.64). Just as Faustus surrenders his 'books' at the end of his tragedy, Barabas gives up his authorial role with the final words, 'Tongue, curse thy fill and die!' (5.v.88).

The metatheatrical setting up of the final scene in *The Jew of Malta* and Tamburlaine's map motif recall the well known Elizabethan metaphor of 'the world as a stage'.[23] Greenblatt calls to mind Marlowe's concern about 'physical movement [and] the problem of its representation within the narrow confines of the theatre', for instance, the endless battles across distant lands are evoked not

[23] Garber, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

visually but verbally through 'imagin[ed] campaigns or hearing reports of gruelling marches'.[24] The wide expanse of the map across which Tamburlaine and his army traverse cannot be truly conveyed on stage. This problem of staging is paralleled in the spatial implications of Barabas' house being seized and transformed, him then later being thrown over the walls of the city, and Faustus existing in some sort of undefined purgatorial space after selling his soul ('this is hell, nor am I out of it' (1.iii.77)). The impossible reconciliation of the stage as a confined physical space as well as the scene of these characters' boundless ambitions creates an unsettling effect of 'transcendental homelessness' which Greenblatt declares 'grotesquely comic'[25]. The protagonists are not only confined as characters in a written narrative over which they have no control, but are also spatially confined by the stage itself. Indeed in contrast to the limited realities of the characters' situations, their grandiose ambitions can only bear elements of comic absurdity. As stated by Healey, 'Humanity's attempt to negotiate the world largely appears for Marlowe a type of black comic-tragedy'.[26]

He writes further, 'Marlowe's plays reflect a sense of expansion being experienced throughout Elizabethan society'.[27] This 'expansion' is identified more specifically by what Maguire and Thostrup call the 'expanding and complex Renaissance mind'[28], which in Marlowe's plays confuses the physical space of the stage, is embodied by the protagonists' ambitions and is ultimately unable to survive within the 'narrow confines of theatre'.[29]

Stephen Frosh writes of the 'infantile conflict between actual impotence and dreams of omnipotence', which Ian McAdam has identified in Marlowe's plays.[30] I would argue that Marlowe's protagonists do not harbour 'infantile' 'dreams' of omnipotence, but seem to genuinely exert an omnipotent power which expires only as a result of their mortal, spatial and metatheatrical confinement. These are figures of omnipotence trapped in impotent bodies, god-figures deigning to stay in human realms, and more pertinently, authors whose inability to determine the delineation of their own narratives results in their eventual extinction. Tamburlaine, Faustus and Barabas' 'excessive individualism' is exhibited in the plays through an increasingly desperate forging of one's identity, identities which become too 'excessive' for not only the confines of their fictional worlds but the confines of the stage.

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[24] Greenblatt, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
[25] Greenblatt, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-6.
[26] Healey, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[27] Healey, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
[28] Maguire and Thostrup, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
[29] Greenblatt, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
[30] McAdam, Ian, *The Irony of Identity: Self and Imagination in the Drama of Christopher Marlowe*, University of Delaware Press (1999), 'Introduction', p. 24.

As Garber writes, 'the act of writing or signing conveys, not just a struggle between contending characters, but a struggle for mastery of stage and text between the playwright and his inscribed characters'. [31] The protagonists' positions of authorship are necessarily undermined by the simple fact that they are characters, and thus cannot survive in what Greenblatt calls the 'struggle against extinction… the nothingness into which all characters fall at the end of a play'.[32] The assertion of their identity is an assertion of *existence*. However, despite the ultimate expression of 'excessive individualism' being the attempted metamorphosis from character to surrogate playwright, the tragedy lies in the inevitable narrative, spatial and temporal confines of the theatre wherein such 'individualism' cannot endure.

[31] Garber, *op. cit.*, p. 301.
[32] Greenblatt, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

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