

PEDRO MEXIA AND CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE REVISITED

«Yo, el rojo Tamorlán, tuve en mi abrazo
A la blanca Zanócrate de Egipto.»

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INTRODUCTION

When the Spanish gentleman Pedro Mexia wrote his *Silva de varia lección* in the first part of the sixteenth century he could not even suspect what his book might mean in the learned world¹. The *Silva*, published in Seville in 1542, was to become one of those works called to be read by many people and to influence many others. Among many other reasons I would underline two main factors that may account for the importance of Mexia's *Silva*: In the first place, the universality of the work itself, i.e. the great amount of information included that covers a very wide range of topics and interests. Secondly, the simple fact of its immediate translation to several languages such as French, German and Italian. The *Silva* was translated into French by Claude Gruget and Thomas Fortescue, after reading the French version, translated it into English. This translation was printed in London in 1571². Fortescue writes of the book he is translating:

«Especially for that I knewe it written, in three sunderie tonges, in the Spanish firste, by Petrus Mexia, a gentlemanne of Sivile, and thence doen into the Italian, and, laste into the Franche, by Claudius Grugette, late citizen of Paris³».

It was the English translation of 1571 the one that would probably exert the most decisive influence on Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*, since Fortescue's book was one of wide circulation in the England of the time.

¹ James Fitz Maurice Kelly, *Historia de la Literatura Española*, Madrid, Ruiz Hermanos, 1926, «La *Silva de varia lección* (es) una de las muchas derivaciones de los Apothegmata de Erasmo... Mexia no podía prever que su *Silva* engendraría una obra maestra: El *Tamburlaine* de Christopher Marlowe», p. 166.

² Claude Gruget, *Les diverses leçons de Pierre Messie*, Paris, 1552.

³ The *Foreste* or Collection of Histories, Imprinted at London by John Kingston for William Jones, 1571. There was a second edition in 1576.

The *Silva* was published by Juan Cromberger and is made up of a prologue, a proem and a preface, plus four parts, each of them divided into several chapters: The first part includes forty six chapters, the second part includes forty five chapters, the third part has thirty six chapters and the fourth part twenty two. The book is of encyclopaedic character showing knowledge of a wide variety of subjects such as literature, history, geography and biography. Mexia devoted a whole chapter to the figure of Tamburlaine⁴. This particular chapter, which is only nine pages long, passed to other books of the period. Thus, George Whetstone wrote a book called the *English Myrror*, published in 1586, and one of the chapters of «histories» is «Originall of Tamburlaines kingdome», and contains the same information as the *Silva* on the life of Tamburlaine⁵.

This is roughly the framework that can act as the starting point to deal with the long debated issue of Mexia's influence on Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*. Christopher Marlowe probably drafted the first part of *Tamburlaine* before he left Cambridge in 1587, and both parts of the play, as a whole, were produced in London in 1587. Besides, the play was printed in octavo and quarto editions from 1590 onwards. So, the play was written forty five years after Mexia's book came out and sixteen years after Fortescue's version was published⁶. There is a considerable span of time during which the history of Tamburlaine was read by many people and inspired different ideas.

THE PLAY

I will concentrate my attention on different elements that appear both in Mexia's *Silva* and Marlowe's play, especially in the first part, since the nature of the sources for the second part of the play is rather different and I will refer to the second part only occasionally⁷.

Now, I will go through several passages in Marlowe's play which bear resemblance to the chapter written by Mexia. These passages, whose direct source is Mexia's chapter, are connected with the humble origin of Tamburlaine, Tamburlaine's systematic attack upon caravans, the capture of Bajazeth, and the siege of Damascus.

In the play by Marlowe, Tamburlaine appears, part I, act I, sc. 2, and Zenocrate addresses him as «shepherd» and later on Tamburlaine says:

«I am a lord, for so my deeds shall prove, and yet a shepherd by my parents.» (p. I, act I, sc. 2).

⁴ *Silva de varia lección compuesta por el magnifico caballero Pedro Mexia*, Sevilla, 1542. I have consulted the edition published by Sociedad de Bibliófilos Españoles, Madrid, 1933, vol. I, part 2, chapter XXVIII, called «Del excelentísimo capitán y muy poderoso rey el Gran Tamerlán. De los reinos y provincias que conquistó; y de su disciplina y arte militar», pp. 413-421.

⁵ *The English Myrror. A Regard wherein all States may behold the Conquests of Envy*. Printed at London by I. Winder for G. Seton, 1586.

⁶ Cf. A. C. Baugh (ed.), *A Literary History of England*, vol. II, *The Renaissance* by Tucker Brooke and Mathias, Shaaber, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967, p. 515.

⁷ Cf. M. C. F. Dachin «En marge de la seconde partie de *Tamburlaine*», *Revue Germanique*, Jan-Fev. 1912, and also H. L. Gardner, «The second part of *Tamburlaine the Great*», *Modern Language Review*, XXXVII, 1942, pp. 18-24.

Pedro Mexia introduces Tamburlaine with these words:

«Y este es el gran Tamerlán, que con haber comenzado de ser un boyero, y otros dicen que de un pobre soldado, llegó a ser tan grande en señorío y victorias como aquel gran Alejandro, o muy poco menos que él⁸».

In the play, Zenocrate is travelling with some Median Lords when they are attacked by Tamburlaine. To punish him, the king of Persia sends troops. Tamburlaine exclaims:

«A thousand horsemen, we five hundred foot.»
(p. I, act. I, sc. 2)

Mexia writes that Tamburlaine used to attack caravans:

«Lo cual sabido por el rey de Persia mandó un capitán con mill de caballo a lo prender y deshacer»⁹.

The captain of the troop offered Tamburlaine his services as Mexia writes; and Marlowe writes a most poetic dialogue between the Persian captain and the Scythian shepherd.

Mexia speaks of Tamburlaine's origins and his early life as leader of a group of men. The episode between the Persian officer and Tamburlaine is also told, though Mexia does not mention either the name of the captain, Theridamas, or the names of Tamburlaine's friends, Techell and Usumcasane.

Another important character in the play is the Turkish emperor, Bajazeth, who was captured by Tamburlaine's men after falling with his horse, according to Mexia. Marlowe writes scene 1 in act IV depicting the fight between Tamburlaine and Bajazeth.

The whole passage in the *Silva* is worth quoting;

«El Bayaceto, peleando y sosteniendo el ímpetu de los contrarios y con mucho ánimo deteniendo y animando los suyos, cargando gran golpe de enemigos cayó con él su caballo, donde no pudiendo ser socorrido, fue preso y tomado vivo y así llevado en presencia del Tamerlán; el cual, gozando todo lo posible de la victoria, le hizo hacer muy fuertes cadenas y una jaula donde dormía de noche; y así aprisionado, cada vez que comía le hacía poner debajo la mesa como a lebre, y de lo que él echaba de la mesa le hacía comer, y que de sólo aquello se mantuviese. E cuando cabalgaba lo hacía traer que se abajase y pusiese de manera que, poniéndole el pie encima, subiese él en su caballo. Y en este tratamiento lo trujo y tuvo todos los días que vivió. E así lo traía por toda Asia la Menor sojuzgándole y

⁸ *Silva*, p. 413. Fortescue writes: «A poore labourer, or husbandman (or as other forme reporte) a common soldiar», p. 83. He describes Tamburlaine as a farmer, nor a shepherd. The words by Whetstone are rather similar: «A poore labourer or in the best degree a meane soldiour», p. 79.

⁹ *Silva*, p. 414.

conquistándole su tierra, porque lo viesén en aquel estado los que lo habían visto poderoso y en gran trono ¹⁰».

In the play by Marlowe, p. I, act IV, sc. 2, Bajazeth appears on the stage inside a cage and Tamburlaine calls him «my footstool». The punishment inflicted upon the Turkish emperor shows him as a beast inside a cage and Tamburlaine uses him as his footstool to get on his horse. These vexations described by Mexia are transcribed by Marlowe *verbatim*. What Marlowe alters is the way in which Bajazeth is fed, since Mexia writes that he ate under Tamburlaine's table, like a hound, and the play introduces a new character, Zabina, Bajazeth's queen, who is addressed by Tamburlaine with the following words:

«And thou, his wife, shall feed him with the scraps
My servitors shall bring thee from my board,
For he that gives him other food than this,
Shall sit by him and starve to death himself.
(p. I, act. IV, sc. 3)

Another episode in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* that is directly inspired in Mexia's book, is the siege of Damascus. Thus, in act. V, sc. 1, the governor of Damascus meets with «three or four citizens, and four virgins with branches of laurel in their hands». The virgins are taken to Tamburlaine's tent, but against the governor's predictions, he is not moved; on the contrary, he says to them:

«For there (at the point of his sword) sits Death.»
(p. I, act. V, sc. 2)

And a few lines later he cries:

«Away with them, I say, and shew them Death.»
(Ibidem.)

Damascus is finally taken, and the Soldan's life, Zenocrate's father, spared.

Mexia mentions a city under siege, whose authorities decided to open the gates and let go all the women and children, with olive branches:

«Porque, escribe el papa Pío, que habiendo puesto cerco sobre una muy fuerte ciudad, no habiendo querido entregarse ni en primero ni en segundo día, que eran los términos ya dichos, de recibir a misericordia, llegado al tercero los de la ciudad (confiando que usaría alguna piedad) abrieron sus puertas y echaron delante las mujeres y niños, todos con ropas blancas y ramos de olivas en las manos, dando todos voces que rompían el cielo pidiendo misericordia, que no hubiera a quien no moviera a ella. El Tamerlán, como los vio así venir, ninguna muestra hizo ni sentimiento de pie-

¹⁰ *Silva*, p. 417. The story of the cage was introduced by Pope Pius II, one of the sources quoted by Mexia. This is pointed out by U. M. Ellis Fermor in the introduction to *Tamburlaine the Great*, London, Methuen & Co., 1930. Another important source for the figure of Bajazeth can be Jean Bodin's *Six livres de la République*, Paris, 1576. (Cf. H. G. Dick, «Tamburlaine's sources once more», *Studies in Philology*, vol. XLVI, April, 1949, pp. 154-166).

dad, antes con su serenidad y semblante acostumbrado, que era de fiereza y crueldad, mandó a un escuadrón de gente de caballo que saliese a ellos, sin dejar ninguno a vida, los matasen a todos. Y después mandó derribar la ciudad por los cimientos e que no quedase en ella cosa enhiesta ¹¹».

Mexia does not mention the name of the city, only the action of the citizens and Tamburlaine's ruthless behaviour. Neither does Marlowe mention the reaction of a Genoese merchant who thought it a very cruel conduct and told Tamburlaine how he felt about it. Tamburlaine, out of anger, retorted:

«Tú debes pensar que yo soy hombre como los otros. Muy engañado están en ello, que no soy sino ira de Dios y destrucción del mundo; y no parezcas más ante mí si no quieres llevar el pago que merece tu atrevimiento ¹²».

This direct speech by Tamburlaine shows his main trait as a charismatic leader and, what I would call, a counter-messianic man, speaking out his true nature. This will appear in the play over again.

Mexia does speak of the siege of Damascus, but he does it in a different way:

«Dicen del Tamorlán que se holgaba cuando hallaba resistencia y fuerza y por mostrar más su poder y esfuerzo y prudencia y avisos, como le acaesció en la ciudad de Damasco, que habiéndola él entrado por fuerza, los más esforzados y mejores se retrajeron a una fortaleza tan fuerte que se tenía por imposible ser tomada; y, puesto que ellos venían en trato con él, él no quiso sino tomarlos por fuerza o que se diesen a merced. Y visto que no se podía combatir por su alteza y sitio, hizo en breves días edificar otra fortaleza junto a la otra, más alta y más fuerte que ella, y tal maña y diligencia puso, que nunca le pudieron estorbar su edificio, y desde allí, con ingenios e instrumentos de guerra, los combatió y apretó de tal manera, de noche y también de día, sin darles un sólo momento de descanso, que los tomó y entró por fuerza de armas ¹³».

Mexia tells the story of a nameless city whose women and children went out to implore pardon. And he also tells the siege of Damascus and how Tamburlaine conquered it. In Marlowe's play, both passages merge into one. Marlowe prefers to get a single episode to achieve a homogenous and dramatic air. Moreover, the exotic connotations of the name Damascus allow Marlowe to assign this name to the nameless city that suffered Tamburlaine's wrath.

The second part of the play tells the death of Zenocrate and finishes with the end of the Great Tamburlaine. Pedro Mexia writes that Tamburlaine retired to his native land at the end of his life, and left two sons who disagreed on many state matters, not being able to keep their father's empire:

«Estando así el Tamorlán en esta prosperidad y alteza, acabáronse sus días

¹¹ *Silva*, p. 419.

¹² *Silva*, p. 420.

¹³ *Silva*, pp. 418-419.

y murió, dejando dos hijos, no de tanto valor como su padre, según parece, pues así por la grande discordia que hubo entre los dos, como por su flaqueza y poquedad, no fueron para conservar el estado que heredaron, antes los fijos y nietos de Bayaceto, que era el gran Turco, su prisionero, sabiendo la muerte y la discordia de los hijos, pasaron en Asia y con su diligencia y ánimo, hallando aparejo en las voluntades, recobraron los bienes y reinos de sus pasados»¹⁴.

Marlowe speaks of three sons: Calyphas, Amyras and Celebinus. The addition of a third son may be due to a dramatic wish to introduce a new character.

These are the outstanding narrative elements that, appearing in the play written by Marlowe, are likely to have been taken from the book by Pedro Mexia, acting so, as direct source for the play.

It goes without saying that these facts are changed by Marlowe's pen to shape them into a dramatic text that makes up a whole play; that is why they cannot be exactly the same as they appear in the *Silva*; the latter being a chapter about historical characters and events, and the former a play. The main features are taken by Marlowe but, obviously, the stylistic setting requires a different language: Dialogues full of expressive sentences showing violence, courage and ruthlessness. It is not a narrative discourse but a dramatic one where different characters speak, kill, love, insult and die. So, the simple historical facts must be wrought with dramatic hands so as to give a play as final result. Otherwise, the category of literary genres would not be relevant at all.

I want to emphasize that what Christopher Marlowe does is write a play with two parts and five acts each. This requires a good amount of imaginative effort, specially if we think that Mexia's chapter on the Scythian emperor is only nine pages long. The main difference between this original source and the play, lies precisely here, since the former is mainly concerned with the history of a person and the latter is a whole dramatic text showing different characters and written with a splendid poetic sense and no little romantic atmosphere.

TAMBURLAINE THE GREAT

So far, I have tried to show several facts that illustrate the way in which Christopher Marlowe used the ideas expressed in the *Silva*. Now, I will turn to the main point in this general discussion of this source for *Tamburlaine*. After reading the play, one gets many impressions that may be summed up in words such as ambition, superiority or charisma, and many other concepts expressing several ideas connected with the remarkable personality of Tamburlaine the Great as a literary character. But one should not be misled by false images that intend to impose a particular view. What I mean is that many of the impressions the reader gets have a concrete origin, and I want to trace them back to the chapter by Pedro Mexia. I have already mentioned a certain charismatic halo that surrounds Tamburlaine. In Part. I, act. I, sc. 2, Techelles words are prophetic when he says:

¹⁴ *Silva*, pp. 420-421. In Marlowe's play, Tamburlaine dies as if controlling all the physical pain he is enduring and says farewell to his sons and friends: «For Tamburlaine, the scourge of God, must die.» (Part II, act. V, sc. 3).

«As princely lions, when they rouse themselves,
Stretching their paws, and threatening herds of beasts,
So in his armour looketh Tamburlaine.
Methinks I see Kings Kneeling at his feet,
And he with frowning brows and fiery looks
Spurning their crowns from off their captive heads.»

Tamburlaine is convinced of his own fate, too:

«For *will* and *shall* best fitteth Tamburlaine,
Whose smiling stars give him assured hope
Or martial triumph ere he meet his foes.
I that am termed the Scourge and Wrath of God...»
(p. I, act. 3, sc. 3)

He can also bequeath his powers; thus, in part II, act I, scene 2, he says to his heir, Celebinus:

«When I am old and cannot manage arms
Be thou the scourge and terror of the world.»

At the same time, his qualities are not ignored by his own enemies, who are quite aware of them; the Soldan of Egypt calls him:

«The scum of men, the hate and Scourge of God.»
(p. I, act. I, sc. 4)

The governor of Damascus, after saying several things, reconsiders his judgement about Tamburlaine:

«Still doth this man, or rather god of war...»
(p. I, act. V, sc. 1)

He is even compared to Mars by his own enemies.

Pedro Mexia speaks of Tamburlaine in a very neutral way, and his words do not express condemnation, they only describe him:

«Fue hijo de muy bajos y humildes padres, pero de muy buena y gentil disposición; hombre muy suelto y ligero, hábil y de gran juicio y entendimiento, que siempre, desde pobre y después de rico, tuvo altos y grandes pensamientos ¹⁵».

Going back to Marlowe's play, I would like to quote a passage of great interest; a messenger tells the Soldan:

¹⁵ Silva, p. 414. And also: «Era muy justiciero y liberal en extremo; honrador de los que le seguían y por eso amado y temido», p. 415. The epithet «Scourge of God» was coined by Whetstone, who spoke of Tamburlaine as «Flagellum Dei».

«Pleaseth your mightiness to understand,
His resolution far exceedeth all.
The first day when he pitcheth down his tents,
White is their hue, and on his silver crest,
A snowy feather spangled white he bears,
To signify the mildness of his mind,
That satiate with spoil, refuseth blood.
But when aurora mounts the second time,
As red as scarlet is his furniture;
Then must his kindled wrath be quench'e with blood,
Not sparing any that can manage arms.
But, if these threats move not to submission,
Black are his colours, black pavilion;
His spear, his shield, his horse, his armour, plumes,
And jetty feathers, menace death and hell;
Without respect of sex, degree, or age,
He razeth all his foes with fire and sword.»

(p. I, act. IV, sc. 2)

The messenger tells the systematic procedure followed by Tamburlaine before attacking a city.

Pedro Mexia refers to the same custom in his own narrative style:

«En sus conquistas y combates tenía esta costumbre, cuando asentaba sobre alguna ciudad: El primero día, luego que allegaba hacía que su tienda se pusiese blanca, por la cual significaba y era ya sabido, si aquel día se entregaban, que les otorgaba las vidas y hacienda. El segundo día hacía poner colorada la tienda; si aquel día quisieran darse, habían de morir todas las cabezas de casas y los demás eran perdonados. Pero si el segundo día no se querían dar, el tercero hacía un pabellón negro, que era cerrar la puerta a la clemencia, y a los que aquel día o de ahí en adelante eran tomados, no escapaba hombre ni mujer de cualquier edad que fuese a vida, y la ciudad se metía a saco y le hacía poner fuego y la destruía totalmente.»

(p. 419)

The first day the tent is white, the second, red, and on the third day there is a black pavilion (tent). Both Mexia and Marlowe use two different words to refer to the same thing. What Marlowe adds is the white feather on Tamburlaine's crest and his black attire.

This passage of the tents originated some discussion, since Fortescue writes in *The Forest*:

«An enseigne white (...) an other all redde
(...) the thirde all blacke.» (p. 86)

Whetstone, in the *Myrror*, writes something slightly different:

«The firste daye to raise a white tent (...)
a blacke tent which signified that the
gates of compassion were closed.» (p.80).

Fortescue's usage of «enseigne» may be due, I think, to the French translation of the Spanish word «pabellón», mistaken for «flag», «banner», which is another meaning of the word, but the one implied by Mexia is that of tent.

There is another possibility which was pointed out by Ethel Seaton¹⁶. This scholar claims that Marlowe travelled to France and went to Rheims, whose cathedral has a stained glass window dated 1516, depicting the take of Jerusalem by Vespasian, and there are three flags. Marlowe uses the word pavilion in the sense of tent, but he writes «colours» as well. Besides, the usage of pavilion in English, meaning flag, is not recorded by the O.E.D. till the eighteenth century.

Mexia's remark on Tamburlaine's behaviour is rather interesting to read, since it shows the well known trait of being sent by God:

«Por lo cual no se puede negar que este hombre no fuese muy cruel, puesto que tuviese muchas virtudes y excelencias; pero, es de creer que lo permitía Dios por pecados de los hombres y para castigar con la mano de aquél aquellos reyes y gentes. Y aun esto parece que él mismo lo dijo y se tenía por tal.»

(p. 419)

It can be clearly seen that the image of a terrible leader has precedents in Mexia's *Silva*, though the style is quite different. Tamburlaine, the born leader, the arrogant conqueror, has an obvious origin in the figure depicted by Mexia.

There is a final point I would like to mention in connection with Tamburlaine; this is the attitude towards Christian captives and their captors:

«I that am termed the Scourge and wrath of God,
The only fear and terror of the world,
Will first subdue the Turk, and then enlarge
Those Christian captives which you keep as slaves,
Burdening their bodies with your heavy chains,
And feeding them with thin and slender fare,
That naked row about the Terrene sea,
And, when they chance to breathe and rest a space
Are punish'd with bastones so grievously
That they lie panting on the galleys' side,
And strive for life at every stroke they give.

¹⁶ Ethel Seaton, «Fresh sources for Marlowe», *Review of English Studies*, vol. V, 1929, pp. 385-401.

These are the cruel pirates of Argier,
The damned train, the scum of Africa,
Inhabited with straggling runagates,
That make quick havoc of Christian blood.»
(p. I, act. III, sc. 1)

This passage showing Tamburlaine's magnanimity may be linked to the words of «wrath of God and destruction of the world» in the sense that shows his feeling against those who oppose God's will by punishing the Christians ¹⁷.

After having considered the different elements that make up the influence of Mexia's Silva on *Tamburlaine*, I think it necessary to devote a few lines to give some ideas about the historical figure underlying the literary character of Tamburlaine the Great. Moreover, there is still another reason for this since the historical figure of Tamburlaine is also linked to Spanish letters. In the early fifteenth century another Spanish gentleman, Ruy González de Clavijo, led the embassy of Henry III of Castile to the Great Tamburlaine ¹⁸. The real dimension of this Eastern emperor is justly appreciated in the Renaissance as the man «who rises from the ranks» and reaches the highest peak in power and history ¹⁹. What is more, there are several pieces of Spanish literature dealing with this character in the seventeenth century ²⁰.

González de Clavijo was received by Tamburlaine and the Spanish ambassador tells us about the origins of Tamburlaine, who was not a shepherd ²¹. He also mentions that Tamburlaine assaulted caravans in his early youth ²². González de Clavijo describes many exemplary punishments that show Tamburlaine's temper. This also appears in the play.

The play does not show the real physical figure of Tamburlaine, who was lame; this physical defect was the result of a fight when he tried to steal some rams. His right hand lacked two fingers, as well. He eventually married the wife of Emperor Caño (Khanum) after taking Samarkand, though according to Professor López Estrada his wife was the emperor's daughter.

I have already mentioned the figure of Bajazeth and the episode of the cage. García de Silva rejected this as false, in 1618, but Gonzalo Argote de Molina, who edited the relation of González de Clavijo in Seville in 1582, admits it as genuine. Actually, Tamburlaine defeated Bajazeth on 20th July 1402 and did not chain him, according to some historians. Tamburlaine, whose real name was Timur Lenk (lame), died in 1405, one year after the Castilian embassy visited him.

All these data may contain no literary interest. However, they should be taken into account to understand the literary perspective of such a character. Pedro Mexia

¹⁷ For the religious aspect of *Tamburlaine the Great*, cf., the introduction by J. B. Steane to *The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1969, 19-22.

¹⁸ *Embajada a Tamerlán. Estudio y edición de un manuscrito del siglo XV* por Francisco López Estrada, Madrid, C.S.I.C., 1943.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, p.X.

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. XVI.

²¹ «El padre de Tamerlán fue hombre hidalgo del linaje de los chacatais, pero de pequeño estado, de tres hasta cuatro hombres a caballo.» *Op. cit.*, p. 150.

²² *Ibid.*

does not mention the expedition of Gonzalez de Clavijo due to chronological reasons, since the relation was not published till 1582, as was previously said ²³.

The remarkable fact is the influence of the historical figure on works of literary value. Furthermore, the period in which the play was written, was quite prone to this type of regard: A remarkable man who performs outstanding feats, controlling armies and unsurmountable power, huge territories and vast dominions; all these ingredients cannot be missed at that time and the result is known. Whether the literary work adapts itself to the historical background or not, does not really matter. The important thing is what this historical background was to supply to the literary work. After all, if one happens to read the play with historical insight, one can always say «se non é vero é ben trovato.»

THE LITERARY CONTROVERSY ON THE SOURCES

In this section I will show some authorized opinions that will hopefully contribute to make clearer what I have been explaining up to now. Some of these opinions contain ideas that have already been mentioned in this paper, but there are other aspects that may shed light on the subject.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, George Ticknor wrote about the *Silva* commenting upon the different editions of this work, and mentions the English translation by Thomas Fortescue and another anonymous version dated 1613 ²⁴.

In 1883, C.H. Herford and A. Wagner published an article dealing with the main sources for Tamburlaine ²⁵.

The Spanish scholar Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo thinks the *Silva* the source from which Marlowe took historical elements for his play, but he also mentions another historical source that might also have been consulted by Marlowe, the Italian book by Petrus Perondino *Magni Tamerlanis Scyatharum Imperatoris Vita*, publishes in Florence in 1553 ²⁶.

John Garret Underhill writes that the *Silva* was well known in England in the second half of the sixteenth century, where it was quickly introduced because of a growing admiration for the Italian «novelle» ²⁷. This author stress that Fortescue wrote the *Forest* from a French version of an Italian translation, and remarks that the story of Tamburlaine also occurs in Newton's *History of the Saracens*, which could be a secondary influence ²⁸.

²³ For the historical aspect of Tamburlaine cf. Vambéry, *Geschicthe Transoxiansiens*, Stuttgart, 1872, and Charmoy, «Expédition de Timur contre Toktamych», in *Memoires de Academie de Sciences*, St. Petersburg, 1835. Tamburlaine, Timur, wrote a book on politics and tactics, *Teuzukat i emir Timur* (Timur's Institutions) translated from Farsi by Major Davy, in 1787, and from a Djagatai text by Major Howard in 1830.

²⁴ George Ticknor, *History of Spanish Literature*, Boston, Ticknor & Fields, 1863, pp. 11-12.

²⁵ C. H. Herford and A. Wagner, «The sources of Tamburlaine», *Academy*, 24, 1883. A. Wagner was the German editor of Marlowe in Heilbrone.

²⁶ Menéndez y Pelayo, *Los origenes de la novela*, Madrid, C. S. I. C., 1943, vol. 3, cap. IX, pp. 47-58.

²⁷ John Garret Underhill, *Spanish Literature in the England of the Tudors*, New York, MacMillan Company, Columbia University Press, 1899, p. 258.

²⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 256-257.

Ernest Faligan, studying the possible sources for *Tamburlaine*, writes that the capital work that must be considered at this respect of literary influence in addition to the *Silva*, is the book of Perondino ²⁹.

Ethel Seaton claims that Mexia and Perondino are Marlowe's accepted sources for *Tamburlaine*, though there are many personal nouns that are not found in these sources, and she continues «They (Mexia and Perondino) may be the chief source of the story of *Tamburlaine*, but they cannot supply the rich knowledge of Eastern history, geography and customs shown through the play ³⁰».

U. M. Ellis Fermor mentions over ten different authors that may have influenced Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*; he includes Mexia, Fregoso, Perondino, Primandayo and Bizarus. Ellis Fermor says that Mexia was a most important source and concludes: «But we cannot, I think, build upon this the assumption that Marlowe read the Spanish original, though there is nothing to prove that he did not ³¹».

Ellis Fermor emphasizes the moral character of Mexia's description and thinks that the only passage that takes us back to Mexia is the lament of Zenocrate (Part. I, act. V, scene 2) «which holds the very notes of the meditations upon the transitoriness of earthly glory that is the key to Mexia's interpretation and is otherwise disregarded by Marlowe ³²».

In my opinion, one of the most revolutionary ideas was expressed by I.C. Izard when this author denied the direct influence of the English version by Fortescue, *The Forest*, and defended the direct source of George Whetstone's *The English Myrror*: «The fact probably is that Marlowe had no knowledge of *The Forest* ³³». His words are quite clear: «In addition to Fortescue, Grudget (whom both Fortescue and Whetstone were translating) may be omitted as well as Mexia, who was Grudget's ultimate source ³⁴».

A few years later, P. A. Turner wrote a brief note demonstrating that Whetstone inspired his chapter on *Tamburlaine* in Mexia's chapter, after comparing both works ³⁵.

A very curious suggestion was proposed by H. G. Dick who hints the possibility of Marlowe's reading a manuscript by Knolle, published in 1603. This manuscript contained some ideas that might have inspired Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. This is nothing but a literary conjecture: Could Marlowe have met Knolle in the house of his mentors? Obviously, the answer is impossible to find ³⁶.

²⁹ Ernest Faligan, *De Marlovianis Fabulis*, Paris, Librairie Hachette, 1887: «Mexia liber hispane scriptus, paulo post in italiam et gallicam linguam translatus fuit, et deinde ex gallica in britanicam.» Faligan mentions Fortescue's translation and also Whetstone's version. He thinks that the love between *Tamburlaine* and Zenocrate can be compared to the romance between Amadis and Oriana.

³⁰ E. Seaton, «op. cit.», p. 393. Cf. also E. Seaton, «Marlowe's maps», in Clifford Leech (ed.), *Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Twentieth Century Views, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1964.

³¹ U. M. Ellis Fermor, *op. cit.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ I. C. Izard, «The principal source for Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*», *Modern Language Notes*, 1843, pp. 411-417.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ P. A. Turner «Sobre Pedro Mexia en Inglaterra», *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, 1949, III, pp. 275-278.

³⁶ H. C. Dick, «op. cit.», pp. 154-156.

The opinion of A. L. Rowse is that Whetstone's *Myrror* enticed Marlowe's interest on the topic³⁷.

All this shows different nuances and shades of the same problem, but on the whole all the authors handle the same elements.

CONCLUSION

Summing up, the main conclusion I can draw from everything I have been dealing with up to now, is that many of the narrative elements included in Mexia's chapter on Tamburlaine are used by Marlowe in the first part of *Tamburlaine the Great*, though the playwright changes some facts and adds new elements in order to achieve a dramatic discourse, leaving aside the moral contents underlying the *Silva* and providing the text with its characteristic poetic dimension.

The real historical genius has given way to the brilliant literary character. Besides, the real historical figure of Tamburlaine the Great, is dimly veiled and partly fictitious in Mexia's *Silva* as well, and the character vigorously drawn by Marlowe is also different to the one shown by historians, but at the same time Marlowe's Tamburlaine is rather similar to the Scythian emperor Mexia writes about.

As to the exact influence of Mexia on Marlowe, nothing can be definitely said; on the one hand it is quite certain that Mexia influenced the play by Marlowe, but, on the other, one cannot exactly assess whether Marlowe read the *Silva*, or got his ideas from Fortescue or Whetstone. The truth is that both the Spanish original and the English versions appear in the masterful Elizabethan play *Tamburlaine the Great*.

To conclude, the main differences between the *Silva* and *Tamburlaine* lie in the details previously mentioned, such as the number of sons of Tamburlaine, the episodes of the sieges of the cities, Bajazeth's capture and his life in captivity, and the episode of the Genoese merchant, which is not used by Marlowe at all, in spite of being the reason for Tamburlaine's confession of his real personality as «the wrath of God and destruction of the world».

In my opinion, the most important character introduced by Marlowe, is Zenocrate, since such a hero as Tamburlaine must have a wife; furthermore, this helps to create different dramatic situations, impossible to attain without a woman.

The apparition of other characters and episodes is a feature that marks the dramatic structure of the play as apposed to a historical or moral commentary.

The poetic genius of Christopher Marlowe and his literary ability as a wordsmith are quite plain in this play, where he succeeded in transforming a historical figure into a brilliant literary character, when Timur Lenk became *Tamburlaine the Great*³⁸

³⁷ A. L. Rowse, *Christopher Marlowe: A Biography*. London, MacMillan, 1964.

³⁸ It was Thomas Nashe who in his «Address to the gentlemen students of both universities», 1587, called Marlowe «Artifex Verborum», and judged him «a boy in years, a man in genius, and a God in ambition.» This is quoted by A. W. Verity, *Marlowe's Influence on Shakespeare's Earlier Style*. Cambridge, MacMillan, 1886.