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EMPIRE, STATE, AND NATION: MARLOWE, SHAKESPEARE, AND PEELE

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Abstract:

The paper focuses on passages that, within a context of national identity, enable us to clarify notions of empire, state, and nation in these three writers. In the course of working in this area, I believe I have uncovered an important public debate on the topic between Marlowe and Peele.

Keywords: *Elizabethan Age, drama, empire, state, nation*

1. State and Nation

Half way through Christopher Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris* (1593), Queen Catherine de Medici welcomes to France her son Henry of Anjou, newly crowned as King Henri III. Henry, having been offered and accepted the Polish crown by the electors of that country, had abandoned Poland for richer pickings:

> Welcome from Poland, Henry, once again,
> Welcome to France, thy father's royal seat;
> Here hast thou a country void of fears,
> A warlike people [courageous army[1]] to maintain thy right,
> A watchful senate for ordaining laws,
> A loving mother to preserve thy *state*, [2]
> And all things that a king may wish besides:
> All this and more hath Henry with his crown.
> (*The Massacre at Paris*, xiv.1-9; emphasis added)[3]

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[1] *OED*, people, 3b.

[2] "State" could, possibly, here mean the nobility or court (*OED*, sv 16) as in *Women Beware Women*, 1.3.83.

[3] Quotations from Marlowe are taken from Christopher Marlowe, *Plays*, ed. Roma Gill, (Oxford, 1971).

The references by the Queen to unspecified sources of disposable fortune, to a stable polity, to what Francis Bacon termed "the principal point of greatness in any state, … a race [group] of military men",[1] and to a law-making senate or "parliament", together anticipate text-book attributes of the modern "state". The lines thereby invoke Fernand Braudel's description of an "all-pervasive state", legitimated, as we shall see, by being used as a mould for national unity.[2] However, when the word "state" actually appears in the passage, it obviously refers to an order founded on Henry's condition of life or exalted *status*: there is a semantic swing between its modern and older meanings.

About twelve years later, however, Francis Bacon was to offer a radical new description of states as "great machines [that] move slowly":[3] the "state" of Henri III *is* a kind of mechanism but, equally, it is incarnate in the monarch. It is not yet either an entity *independent* of a ruler or an impersonal or tradition-shaped structure *represented* by the monarch.[4]

These citations confirm that, in the 1590's, a modern English state, defined by Quentin Skinner as "a form of public power separate from both the ruler and the ruled, and constituting the supreme political authority within a certain defined territory",[5] had not come into being.

Moreover, *The Massacre at Paris*, like so many texts by Marlowe and Shakespeare, reverses a primitivist myth, which dates back at least to Cicero,

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[1] All quotations in this essay have been silently modernised. Francis Bacon, "Of Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates [states]", *Essays*, ed. W. Aldis Wright (London, 1865), 121; the armies of England were much smaller than those of her European rivals: for the figures, see Mark Greengrass, "Introduction: Conquest and Coalescence", *Conquest and Coalescence: The Shaping of the State in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Mark Greengrass (London, 1991), 1-24 at p. 5. It is relevant that Bacon praises the organisation of the Polish army, the only one beside that of England to base its army on freemen equal in status to yeomen (123).

[2] For paradigm ideas, see Max Weber, *General Economic History*, trans. F.H. Knight (New York, 1961) and Fernand Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce*, Vol. 2 of *Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century*, trans. Siân Reynolds (London, 1982), 514-54.

[3] *The Advancement of Learning*, II.xxiii.1; for the word in Machiavelli, see Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. and trans. David Wootton (Indianapolis, Hackett Pub. Co., 1995), xxix**.**

[4] Compare Henry VIII who in 1543 said "we be informed by our judges that we at no time stand so highly in our estate royal as in the time of Parliament, wherein we as head and you as members are conjoined and knit together into one body politic" (G.R. Elton, (ed.), *The Tudor Constitution: Documents and Commentary* (Cambridge, 1972), 270); when Macbeth speaks of duties to Duncan's "throne and state" (1.4.25) the word has a similar dual meaning.

[5] Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought: The Age of Reformation*, Vol. 2 of 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1978), 353.

that states are created by nations. The following comes from the 1568 translation of Cicero's *De Officiis*:

> Certes … among our ancestors in old time, well-conditioned kings have been ordained for the end of enjoying justice. For, at the beginning, when the multitude was oppressed by them who had the greater power, for refuge they fled to some one excelling in virtue who, when he saved the weaker from injury [wrong], by pointing out [constituting] an equity, kept the highest with the lowest in difference of law.
> And the like cause there was of making laws as of kings: for evermore an equal right hath been sought, for otherwise it were not right. If they obtained the same at the hands of one just and good man, with him were they were contented; when that chanced not, laws were devised, which with all men always in one and a like voice should speak. Wherefore this is doubtless a clear case that they were wont to be chosen to govern, of whose justice the opinion of the multitude was great.[1]

As we watch the purging of Protestants we realise with a degree of quizzicality that we are watching a process of nation-building conducted by the "state", indeed the creation of what, from about the time of the First World War, came to be called a "nation-state".[2] Nations were instituted to create a "national interest",[3] a concept that almost always means, of course, the interest of statesmen. This self-legitimating notion is not *descriptive* but rather *instrumental*, an implement for political control.[4] In fact the modernity of the play is painful: like *The Jew of Malta*, it depicts the "cleansing" of religious dissidents as it brutally enacts the formula *cuius regio, eius religio* that was the informing principle of the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, and which we have been appalled to recognise as the formula for new state-creation in the Balkans.

It is in this context, I submit, that we should examine the famous interchange between MacMorris and Fluellen in *Henry V*:

> FLUELLEN Captain MacMorris, I think, look you, under your correction, there is not many of your nation –

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[1] Cicero, *Three Books of Duties*, trans. Nicholas Grimalde (London, 1568), ff. 88^{v}-89^{v}.

[2] *OED* offers the first use of the term in 1895.

[3] First recorded in *OED* in 1867.

[4] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca N.Y., 1983), argued that the formation of nation-states requires social mobility, lowered class barriers, rapid urbanisation, diversified but relatively open markets, and "sustained, frequent ... communication between strangers", 25, 34, 40-42. The history of the concept of the nation-state can be explored in Greengrass, *Conquest*, passim.

> MACMORRIS Of my nation? What ish my nation? Ish a villain and a bastard and a knave and a rascal? What ish my nation? Who talks of my nation? (*Henry V*, 3.3.61-5)

MacMorris registers the way that his nation has been destroyed by being occupied by the English state. Understanding the ideologies that create meanings for these words is, without a doubt, one of the most pressing tasks for Europeans today – without understanding the old Europe we cannot successfully bring the new one into being.

In *The Massacre* Marlowe offers us one instrument for the reinforcement of a nation, a common religion or culture. For some years, of course, it has been fashionable to speak of "writing the nation", of a deliberate top-down programme of nation-building in the age of Spenser and Shakespeare. I would submit that seldom do we see this process more radically defined than in *The Massacre at Paris.* Recently, however, an earlier emergent sense of "Englishess" has been identified, in the first half of the sixteenth century, [1] and this patriotism or, as Cathy Shrank defines it, this "rhetoric of English nationhood", was carefully nurtured by the Protestant Reformation.[2]

Shakespeare draws upon this tradition and, in contrast to Marlowe, offers a gamut of factors to shore up an emergent patriotism. In the case of England a further topic, that of territoriality, had presented itself: England, if Scotland and Wales were forgotten, could be celebrated as an island – often a poeticised "isle" – its topographical boundaries transmuted into sacral thresholds. In 1590 Spenser had celebrated Elizabeth as "Great Ladie of the greatest isle" (*F.Q.* I, Proem, 4). In *Richard II*, in Gaunt's dying speech "this happy breed" of men are perfectly accommodated by their "sceptered isle". And Shakespeare adds another topic, a history created by chivalric heroes. Together these compose a set of patriotic national values that is threatened by the King's blank charters. (Three hundred years later we see how national feeling has hardened into nationalism in Sir Henry Newbolt's 1898 collection of patriotic and heroic poems, *The Island Race*, which contains "Drake's Drum" and "Admirals All".)

Marlowe's play, although focussed on a specific recent event, the Massacre of St Bartholomew that took place under Charles IX at the instigation of the Queen and the Duke of Guise in 1572, also implicitly shows how patriotic and long-living Elizabethan dreads might also be harnessed for the building of

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[1] See Cathy Shrank, *Writing the Nation in Reformation England, 1530-1580*
(Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004), 2.

[2] However, the word "patriot" is not recorded by the *OED* until 1577; in
Volpone we hear of "Such as were known patriots, Sound lovers of their country" (4.1.95). "Patriotism" (first recorded in 1716) can be distinguished from "nationalism", a word significantly not recorded in the *OED* until 1798.

state and nation. Two categories of "others" were fit for this purpose. First, Italianate "statesmen" or "politicians" (the latter word was newly imported out of France[1]) and, second, what Marlowe called the "papal monarch" and his "popelings" eager to intervene in England's politics.[2] Popery stands for anarchy and savagery, for whoredom and for corruption.[3] Here is the protestant Henry of Navarre who could easily be a spokesman for an English interest:

> My lords, … in a quarrel just and right
> We undertake to manage these our wars
> Against the proud disturbers of the faith,
> I mean the **Guise**, the Pope, and King of Spain,
> Who set themselves to tread us under foot,
> And rent our true religion from this land … (xvi.1-6)

Marlowe's pantomime of the French Wars of Religion gleefully portrays a reign of terror, doubtless kindling memories of persecution under another catholic queen, Mary Tudor.

Across the channel, in Protestant England, the dominance of Protestantism was equally used to create enemies within. *Religious* difference could be used to create a rhetoric of *social* "disorder" that could be used by princes to legitimate their authority. The persecution of catholic priests was a political act as well as a religious one: Marlowe himself was probably involved, under Walsingham, in this activity. Later in *The Massacre*, Henri III, speaking after the death of the Guise, reminds the audience of uncivil discord generated by the divisions of Christendom:

> Did he not draw a sort of English priests
> From Douai to the seminary at Rheims,
> To hatch forth treason 'gainst their *natural* queen?
> (*Massacre*, xxii.100-3; emphasis added)

It was, of course, advantageous to the Tudor polity to be able to prosecute heretics as traitors. Protestantism nationalism created chauvinism: Henry's identification of the "natural" with the "national" in the phrase "their natural queen" evokes that kind of ethnic nationalism, another poison which still courses through the recent history of Europe.

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[1] George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London, 1589), 122.

[2] *The Massacre at Paris*, xviii, 16; xxi, 26.

[3] Peter Lake, "Anti-Popery: the structure of a prejudice", *Conflict in Early Stuart England*, ed. R. Cust and A. Hughes (1989), 72-106; for a full and complex reading of the play, see Julia Briggs, "Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*: A Reconsideration", *RES*, NS 34 (1983), 257-78.

The dramatic debate, however, is not centred solely on civil values: this is theatre in which actions are as important as words. To revert to the former scene: the political *hybris* of the brave Medicean court is shattered in a typically Marlovian manner. A score of lines after those quoted above we spy a Cutpurse snipping the gold buttons from Mugeroun's cloak. For his pains Mugeroun cuts off his ear:

> CUTPURSE O Lord, mine ear!
> MUGEROUN Come sir, give me my buttons, and here's your ear. (xiv.32-3)

Marlowe is here using the device of the interrupted ceremony to demonstrate that, while magistrates might propose, it is clowns that dispose.[1] In France and, by implication, in England, the state is weak and there are always enemies within. Later the court of France is destabilised yet further by the "standing" of Mugeroun – he is the minion of the Duchess of Guise (see xix, 1-12). About the same time Shakespeare opened his *Henry VI* sequence by exhibiting high rhetoric at the funeral of Henry V interrupted by messengers. Their plain speaking unwraps the fustian of England's courtiers and signals the beginning of the end of Lancastrian empire over the English provinces in France.[2]

2. The rhetoric of empire, state, and nation

What about that difficult word "empire" in the texts of the period? Close reading establishes a matrix of debate in those post-Armada years in which these texts – along with the early histories of Shakespeare – may be seen to be interrogating the writings of late Tudor apologists, in particular the propaganda written by Marlowe's fellow "university wit", George Peele. As well as creating mighty heroes, Marlowe, was, like the author of *Titus Andronicus*, committed to surveying the balance between power and authority. Marlowe's plays expand the political topics that exploded into his table talk: atheism, liberty of conscience (also associated with a modern state), male-male desire. Like Shakespeare, he anatomises the state and its institutions, thinks about how a monarch might achieve power in what was essentially still a feudal regime where he was only *primus inter pares*. His theme in *Tamburlaine* is the crossing

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[1] See Hereward T. Price on the motif of the interrupted ceremony in "Construction in Shakespeare", *University of Michigan Contributions in Modern Philology*, 17 (1951), 1-42.

[2] For an argument that this sequence was written by Marlowe's fellow "university wits" Greene and Peele, see Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987), 217. The pattern of my argument is at odds with their stylometric analysis.

of boundaries and the glorification of conquest, although it is a critical task to see whether, as did his principal English source, George Whetstone, he condones the topic or, in the manner of many contemporary humanists, holds it in abhorrence.[1] He implicitly set out the opposition of hegemony by possession against hegemony by right that was to be enlarged upon by Shakespeare in *King John* (1596?). He certainly laid open the horror spawned by contemporary alliances between religion and government.

Unlike Spenser, Drayton, and Shakespeare he does not *allegorise* the nation or "commonweal". Rendering these abstractions of nation or commonwealth through the rhetorical device of *prosopopeia* would give them a personality and thereby "naturalise" them – and is an inappropriate technique for an ironist.[2] The theatre of power in Marlowe is an empty space, waiting to be occupied by those who are strong enough. It is significant that most of his monarchs seize the crown or are, like Claudius in *Hamlet*, elected.

These displays of alternative origins for kingly power would have been anathema to the Tudors who legitimated their authority through *dynasty* – particularly when Shakespeare took up this Marlovian theme. George Peele, in a series of public poems written during years that span Marlowe's death, restated the dynastic case, presumably as part of a commission or in search of patronage. In 1595, the year of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, which dramatises a famous act of usurpation, we encounter Peele celebrating Accession:

> … that day whereon this queen
> Inaugured was and holily installed,
> Anointed of the highest King of kings,
> In her *hereditary royal right*
> Successively to sit enthronizèd.
> (*Anglorum Feriae*; emphasis added) [3]

Given that Elizabeth had been proclaimed illegitimate by Act of Parliament in 1536 and given that in his bull of 1570, *Regnans in Excelsis*, Pope Pius V had absolved all of her subjects from their oaths of allegiance, the

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[1] George Whetstone, *The English Mirror* (London, 1586), 78-83. Marlowe's translation of Lucan may be read as a contribution to this debate; see also Greengrass, 8.

[2] See Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood 1590-1612* (Cambridge, 1996), 13.

[3] Robert Greene and George Peele, *Dramatic and Poetical Works*, ed. Alexander Dyce (London, 1861), 596; for the marriage of poetry and statecraft in Peele's Accession Day poems see A.R. Braunmuller, *George Peele* (Boston, 1983), 12-22. Also
from the year of *Richard II*, [William Fiston]'s *The Estate of the German Empire with the Description of Germany* (London, 1595) begins with a full description of the elective processes of the Holy Roman Empire.

insistence of Peele's lines must have been registered by contemporaries.[1] They might also have thought wryly of the reasons for the execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587. Marlowe left Shakespeare to explore the mazes of Plantagenet and Tudor heredity, while Peele, oblivious to Marlowe's steely political realism, may have written *Edward III* (*c.* 1592), a romantic yarn of the winning of empire over the French.[2]

Empire

"Nation", "state", "empire" – modern readers of Marlowe and Shakespeare might be inclined to see a hierarchic relationship between these: nation (the people), state (the powers that be, ordained to order the nation's affairs), and empire (a collection of states or colonies subject to a hegemonic power). It might seem logical to explore these words in that hierarchic sequence, but we must think historically. The obvious place to begin is the Act of Appeals of 1533 (24 Henry VIII, c.12), the Tudor Declaration of Independence from papal Rome. In the preamble we read:

> Where by divers sundry old authentic histories and chronicles it is manifestly declared and expressed that *this realm of England is an empire* … governed by one supreme Head and King having the dignity and royal estate of the *imperial crown* of the same, unto whom a body politic, compact of all degrees of people divided in terms and by names of spirituality and temporality, be bounden and owe to bear next to God a natural and humble obedience…." (emphasis added)[3]

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[1] J.E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (St Albans, 1979 edn), 14; Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*, 410-18.

[2] There are fascinating conceits of empire in the text that centre around Edward's infatuation with his "emperor", the Countess of Salisbury (see 2.2.25-45). Peele is the least favoured candidate for authorship of this play among scholars who have applied stylometrics. However, thematically it seems much closer to the works of Peele than to the favoured candidates, Marlowe and the early Shakespeare. For a survey of scholarship, see William Shakespeare, *King Edward III*, ed. Giorgio Melchiori (Cambridge, 1998), 15n.

[3] Act of Appeals of 1533 (24 Henry VIII, c.12), quoted from G.R. Elton, (ed.), *The Tudor Constitution: Documents and Commentary* (Cambridge, 1972), 344; the same notion appears in the preamble to the Act of Dispensations of 1534 (25 Henry VIII, c.21), Elton, 351-2; for notions of empire see Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France. c.1500-c.1800* (New Haven, Yale UP, 1995), Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572-1651* (Cambridge, 1993), 127, and Nicholas Canny, "The Origins of Empire", *The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Nicholas Canny (Oxford, 1998), 1-33.

Thomas Cranmer and Edward Foxe, the presiding minds behind the Act, were engaging with a debate about the nature of monarchy. In order to reform the English polity and fashion an English nation it was necessary the next year to reconstitute or Erastianise the monarchy, to enable the king to regulate religion by making that "sovereign lord … supreme head in earth of the Church of England" [1] – of a national church. In this context of redefinition, the Act's "empire" is a particular species of monarchy or sovereign national state, a political *space* rather than an assemblage of *places*. The notion is implicit in the medieval phrase *rex imperator in regno suo*: a ruler was "emperor in his own kingdom".[2] In the words of the Act of Appeals, an "empire" might come into being if there was no "restraint or provocation [appeal] to any foreign princes or potentates".[3] In other words, empire did not entail colonisation in the Roman manner or rule over subject nations – THIS IS WHY, IN THE FIRST SUCCESSION ACT OF 1534, THE TRADITION HAVING BEEN INVENTED, IT WAS POSSIBLE TO REFER TO "THE LAWFUL KINGS AND EMPERORS OF THIS REALM".[4]

The Act of Appeals invoked other traditions: its sweeping gesture towards "old authentic histories and chronicles" does not refer to the long-vanished English empire in France (the losing of which was, in the *Tamburlaine* years, so tactlessly dramatised in Shakespeare's tales of Henry VI). Instead Henry's constitutionalists conjure Geoffrey of Monmouth's legend of Brutus and the Trojan ancestry of the House of Tudor – even though, as early as 1513, Polydore Vergil had demolished that myth of origin.[5] The tale of Brutus was perennial because it authenticated monarchical authority by virtue of descent:

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[1] *Act of Supremacy* of 1534 (26 Henry VIII**,** c. 1; for a review of opinion concerning whether or not the Henrician settlement constituted a "revolution" in government see Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 1985), chap. 2 and John Guy, "Thomas Cromwell and the Intellectual Origins of the Henrician Revolution", *Reassessing the Henrician Age: Humanism, Politics and Reform, 1500-1550*, ed. Alistair Fox and John Guy (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986), 151-78.

[2] Pagden, p. 12; see also Walter Ullman, "This Realm of England is an Empire", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 30 (1979), 175-203.

[3] Elton, *Tudor Constitution*, 344.

[4] *Ibid*, p. 7; See G.R. Elton, *England under the Tudors* (London, 1955), 160ff. and E. Lewis, *Medieval Political Ideas* (London, 1954), 449ff. Macbeth's obsession with "the imperial theme" (1.3.128) is part of a dream of occupying the throne of one country, Scotland.

[5] See Alan MacColl, "King Arthur and the making of an English Britain", *History Today*, 49.3 (1999), 7-13; Yates, 50; Collinson, "History" in Michael Hattaway, (ed.), *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture* (Oxford, 2000), 66. Locrine, son of Brut, destroys the Trojan hegemony in Britain — the story is dramatised in the play (ca. 1594) that bears his name. Richard Verstegan devotes *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence* (London, 1634) to the demolition of the myth.

Machiavelli, Marlowe, and Shakespeare surveyed alternative paths to power, through conquest and election.

Dynasty was therefore important, and the rebranding of the Tudor monarchs as emperors was a necessary fiction to authenticate the claim for independence from what was deprecatingly termed "the see of Rome". This Henrician rhetoric ran through the sixteenth century and must have been for Marlowe in the Tamburlaine years a kind of surround sound. In 1589 Puttenham praised Queen Elizabeth: "Your Majesty have showed yourself ... virtuous and worthy of *empire*."[1] Spenser dedicated his *Faerie Queene* to "The Most High, Mighty and Magnificent *Empress* Renowned for Piety, Virtue, and All Gracious Government: Elizabeth, by the Grace of God Queen of England France and Ireland and of Virginia".[2] He does not make her explicitly *Empress* of France or Virginia. The word is reverting to a designation of status not office. "Empire" in Spenser tends, in general, to be a *moral* virtue to set against savagery – although in that dedication Spenser may have been being gently provocative.

In some ways England in the age of Shakespeare resembled Britain in the post-war years: Shakespeare had alluded to the crusades, a kind of imperial venture, in *King John* and *Henry IV*, and had dramatised the loss of the English Empire in France. The fact that rival European nations, France and Spain, had united their territories made it apparent that England, which still did not control "the British Isles", could no longer look to rule in continental Europe. In 1962 Dean Acheson notoriously remarked that "Great Britain had lost an empire but had not yet found a role."[3] In 2001 John Gaddis acidly commented that "the United States retains an empire, but has in recent years lost a role."[4] So when in

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[1] Puttenham, 37. Puttenham's use of the word "majesty" is also meaningful: the Tudors imported the title to supplant "grace", a term of address that could be used for bishops as well as princes, and "highness". "It was not until the seventeenth century that 'your majesty' entirely superseded the other customary forms of address to the sovereign. Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth were often addressed as 'Your Grace' and 'Your Highness', and the latter alternates with 'Your Majesty' in the dedication of the Bible of 1611 to James I" (*OED*, "Majesty" 2; see Elton, 12). It may therefore be significant that "majesty" is the title with which Meander flatters Tamburlaine: "Your majesty shall shortly have your wish, / And ride in triumph through Persepolis". (*1 Tamburlaine*, 2.5.48-9).

[2] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas Roche, Jr (Harmondsworth, 1984), 38. **(**Further references cited in the text as *FQ.)* Spenser may be invoking Geoffrey of Monmouth's claim that Britons had colonised Ireland in the reign of King Arthur (see David Armitage, "Literature and Empire", *The Origins of Empire*, ed. Nicholas Canny (Oxford, 1998), 99-123, at 115-16).

[3] Douglas Brinkley, "Dean Acheston and the 'Special Relationship': The West Point Speech of December 1962", *Historical Journal*, 33 (1990), 599-608.

[4] http://comment.independent.co.uk/commentators/article253645.ece accessed 10 November, 2007.

1632 in *The Maid of Honour*, Massinger has Bertoldo resort to the topic of Elizabethan nostalgia, he is being gloriously imprecise:

> … look on England,
> The Empress of the European Isles …
> When did she flourish so as when she was
> The Mistress of the Ocean: her navies
> Putting a girdle round about the world.
> When the Iberian quaked, her worthies named,
> And the fair flower de luce grew pale, set [outshone] by
> The red rose and the white. (*The Maid of Honour*, [London, 1632], Sig. C1^{r})

I suggest that the map of the world found in Hugh Broughton's, *A Consent of Scripture*, (London, 1590), does suggest that England had an obvious role, that of establishing a new transatlantic empire to counter-balance the Popish empire, and spread good Protestant Christianity abroad.

As we might expect George Peele regularly dished up the imperial compliment, in the opening, for example, of *Polyhymnia*, also published in 1590, and written for the tilt on the thirty-third anniversary of Elizabeth's succession:

> Wherefore, when thirty-two were come and gone,
> Years of her reign, days of her country's peace,
> Elizabeth, *great empress of the world*,
> Britannia's Atlas, star of England's globe,
> That sways the massy sceptre of her land,
> And holds the royal reins of Albion. [1]

England, as Spenser had reminded his readers, had been named "Albion" by Brute.[2] Shakespeare, unlike Spenser, uses the word "empire" very sparingly and never in relation to an English empire.

Religious reformation therefore entailed national autonomy, which Peele's text proclaims but does not demonstrate. Henry's break with Rome not only furthered the king's divorce but also generated a reform of state ideology. It recategorised the monarchy and reconceptualised the Commonwealth, fomenting what Corrigan and Sayer term a "cultural revolution".[3] The political theology of the Act complements the Pauline metaphor of the body politic[4] – Shakespeare's favoured metaphor of state – with a political model. Yet both

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[1] Dyce, p. 569; there are other references to Elizabeth as empress on 588, 595.

[2] *FQ*, II.x.6.

[3] Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 1985).

[4] Key texts are Rom. 12 and 1 Cor.12.

Elizabeth and James continued to use metaphors of the *corpus mysticum* and the family to legitimate their authority: at her second parliament Elizabeth referred to herself as the mother to the nation,[1] and King James told the first English parliament convened after his succession, "I am the husband, and the whole isle is my lawful wife; I am the head, and it is my body; I am the shepherd, and it is my flock."[2] Marlowe never uses the notion of the body politic: his state is a more mechanistic affair.

The maintenance of autonomy also entailed the refurnishing of the image of the king by defining England against an "other", in particular by demonising the pope and the "empire Romania". [3] The creation of enemies to monarchical *imperium* is registered in countless anti-papist prints, and in the deployment of charismatic imagery in the iconic portraits of the Tudors. The iconography of Henry VIII and his daughter Elizabeth may have been part of an endeavour to *re-sacralise* the monarchy, but Marlowe's plays and Shakespeare's early histories are instruments of *desacralisation*, the challenging of one set of images with another created in the playhouses. The art of popular theatre contests the theatre of the state: Marlowe's kings are either wicked or weak (Edward II), the anti-types of the mystical icons reproduced on broadsheets, maps, and elaborate frontispieces.[4]

"Empire", therefore, is, in a Tudor context, a very complex word.[5] It was also, to a degree, tendentious, even dangerous, given that the more familiar modern meaning of a "nation" or "group of subject states" – inscribed in

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[1] T.E. Hartley, (ed.), *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I* (Leicester, 1981), I, 95.

[2] King James I, *The King's Majesty's Speech: as it was delivered ... in Parliament... on Monday the 19 day of March, 1603* (London., 1604). Sig. B1^{r}; in *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, 1599 James had written that "by the law of nature the king becomes a natural father to all his lieges at his coronation"; in a speech to parliament on 22 March, 1610 he referred to himself as "the politic father of his people" (King James, *Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge, 1994), 65 and 181).

[3] Part of the caption to an engraving portraying the "state of Rome" in Hugh Broughton, *A Consent of Scripture* (London, [1590]), Sig. F5^{r}; in the time of Marlowe and Shakespeare, of course, the papal state had established a kind of empire in Italy.

[4] For a survey of recent studies of the iconography of power see Kevin Sharpe, *Remapping Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000), 24-37.

[5] The word is so complex that it is difficult to agree with the opening statement of Claire McEachern in a work on Tudor nation-building: "In 1533, Henry VIII founded an English nation. This realm of England … is an 'empire'". (*The Poetics of English Nationhood 1590-1612* (Cambridge, 1996), 1). The implication here is that "empire" means "nation", which is problematic, and the voices of the writers she examines, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Drayton may have been in counterpoint with others, including Marlowe.

Tamburlaine's "map" – had been established well before Cranmer and Foxe redefined the monarchy. Unlike Tamburlaine or Bajazeth, neither Henry nor Elizabeth had what Marlowe pointedly called "contributory [tributary] kings".[1] In 1586 his source for *Tamburlaine* George Whetstone, having praised the actual empire of Tamburlaine, could celebrate Elizabeth only as a conqueror of moral adversaries:

> "A Sonnet of Triumph to England"
> Rejoice, the foes of thy welfare,
> The foes that made the former monarchs bow,
> Wrath, War, Discord, and Envy fettered are;
> Elizabeth, even with a laurel bow
> Hath vanquished them that foilèd Caesar's band.
> Upon thy ports, to fear thy foreign foe,
> Destruction stands with bloody sword in hand;
> Within thy coast in towns and country go
> Plenty and Peace, armed with hazel wand.
> Thy subjects true on milk and honey feed;
> Thy abjects false consume like flames of reed. [2]

In the reign of King James, when Shakespeare tactfully alluded to the notion in his allegory of empire *Cymbeline*, the notion is characteristically submerged in an elliptical conceit from nature as Imogen prepares to take the sleeping potion:

> Our courtiers say all's savage but at court.
> Experience, O thou disprov'st report!
> Th'imperious [imperial] seas breeds monsters; for the dish
> Poor tributary rivers as sweet fish. (*Cymbeline*, 4.2.33-6) [3]

Even "the British Isles" did not constitute an "empire": Wales, although believed to be inhabited by the descendants of the "ancient Britons", was to all intents and purposes "incorporated … under the imperial crown of this realm"[4],

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[1] *1 Tamb.*, 3.3.14; 4.4.110; see also*1 Tamb.*, 3.1.1-4, 3.1.22-6; empire-building is the theme of Greene's mish-mash of a play, *Alphonus, King of Arragon*, written shortly after *1 Tamburlaine* (see the reference to Tamburlaine in 4.3).

[2] George Whetstone, *The English Mirror* (London, 1586). Sig. Giij r.

[3] Presumably this means that food as good as that at court is to be found in the country.

[4] "Act of Union", 1532 (27 Henry VIII, c. 26); see Peter Roberts, "Tudor Wales, national identity, and the British inheritance", *British Consciousness and Identity: The Making of Britain, 1533-1707*, ed. Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts (Cambridge, CUP, 1998), 8-42.

its "prince" merely an honorary title for the heir to the English throne.[1] If Ireland was integrated it was not subdued, and Scotland was resolutely independent.[2] Queen Elizabeth could not have drawn a map that in any way resembled that of Tamburlaine. Giordano Bruno, who had been in England from 1584-6, testifies to this:

> Of Elizabeth I speak, who by her title and royal dignity is inferior to no other monarch in the world … If her earthly territory were a true reflection of the width and grandeur of her spirit, this great Amphitrite [wife of Poseidon] would bring far horizons within her girdle and enlarge the circumference of her dominion to include not only Britain and Ireland but some new world, as vast as the universal frame, where her all-powerful hand should have full scope to raise a united monarchy [i.e. empire].[3]

There was certainly no English empire in the modern sense of the word: Elizabeth, unlike Tamburlaine, would not have been able to appropriate that hymn well-known in the Victorian period (it derives from the Nevers Breviary):

> Conquering kings their titles take,
> From the lands they captive make.[4]

In the famous "imperial" painting of Elizabeth by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger (1592?), the Queen is shown standing not on a map of the world, nor of Europe, not even of "Britain" – the union of England and Scotland was over a century away – but of England.[5]

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[1] For a general survey, see chapter 13 of John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford, 1988).

[2] For claims that Scotland was part of an English empire, see Sir John Fortescue, *De laudibus legum Angliae*. (London, 1616), Notes, 6.

[3] Quoted in Frances A. Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1975), 85-6.

[4] Words from the Nevers Breviary of 1727, translated by John Chandler in 1837.

[5] Roy Strong, *The English Icon: Elizabethan and Jacobean Portraiture* (London, 1969), 289 and *Portraits of Queen Elizabeth* (Oxford, 1963), 75-6; for "Britain" in the reign of King James, see Jenny Wormald, "The Creation of Britain: Multiple Kingdoms or Core and Colonies?" *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 2 6th Series (1992), 175-94; the title-page of the 1613 edition of Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* calls it "A chorographical description of tracts, rivers, mountains, forests and other parts of this renowned isle of Great Britain".

Imperial Projects

If, however, there was under Elizabeth no "English empire" in the modern sense there was an Elizabethan imperial project. I shall deal with five propagandists whose writings span the years of Marlowe and the early Shakespeare. Conspicuous in this context is the magus John Dee who, from 1570, had been making proposals for geographic discovery, the building of a powerful navy as a "master-key … to open all locks that keep out or hinder this incomparable British Empire from enjoying … a yearly revenue",[1] and for the expansion of English influence in order to improve England's power and wealth and match its interest with that of Spain which was so obviously forging an empire by Tamburlainian conquest in New World. (The term "British Empire" may derive from Dee's relationships with Abraham Ortelius of Antwerp.[2]) The title-page to his *The British Monarchy*, the published part of *General and Rare Memorials Pertaining to the Perfect Art of Navigation*, (London, 1577) is an iconographic device that is later explained as containing a representation of "Respublica Britannica, on her knees very humbly and earnestly soliciting the most excellent royal majesty of our Elizabeth, sitting at the helm of this imperial monarchy, or rather at the helm of the imperial ship [labelled "Europe] of the most part of Christendom."[3] In an unpublished manuscript, "Brytannici Imperii Limites" (1576-8)[4] he details English claims to North America, from Florida to Newfoundland. In a printed petition to King James of 1604 asking for trial so that accusations of being a conjurer might be cleared, Dee wrote, "God ... make Your Majesty to be the most blessed and triumphant monarch, that ever this British Empire enjoyed".[5]

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[1] John Dee, *General and Rare Memorials Pertaining to the Perfect Art of Navigation* (London, 1577), 8; for a general survey see William H. Sherman, John Dee: *The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 148-200; for the imperial ambitions inscribed in the writings of Richard Hakluyt in the 1580s see Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: the Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago, 1992), 163-4; see also Roberts, 29-33.

[2] See Bruce Ward Henry, "John Dee, Humphrey Llwyd, and the Name 'British Empire'", *HLQ*, 35 (1971-2), 189-90.

[3] Dee, *Memorials*, 53; see Peter J. French, *John Dee: the World of an Elizabethan Magus* (London, 1972), 182-7; Lesley B. Cormack, "The Fashioning of an Empire: Geography and the State in Elizabethan England", *Geography and Empire*, ed. Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994), 1-30; Lesley B. Cormack, "Britannia Rules The Waves?: Images of Empire in Elizabethan England", *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 4.2 Special Issue 3 (1998), 1-20.

[4] British Library Additional MS. 59681; see Sherman, 182-92.

[5] *To the King's most Excellent Majesty* (London, 1604).

A few years later, in 1583, Sir George Peckham framed his *True Report of the late Discoveries taken in the Right of the Crown of England of the New Found Lands by ... Sir Humfrey Gilbert*, (London, 1583) as a manifesto for England's adventurers. The book is dedicated to Sir Thomas Walsingham and contains commendatory verses by England's heroes, including Sir Francis Drake, Sir John Hawkins, and Sir Martin Frobisher. In his contribution, The Lord Justice of Ireland, Sir William Pelham, urges England to emulate her triumphalist Spanish and French neighbours and "thrust among them for a share" of the wealth of the new world.[1] This may be the real agenda for this work, although there is a good measure of support for the high morality of empire, notably the conversion of savages.

The next year Richard Hakluyt wrote a work that has come to be known as the *Discourse of Western Planting* in which he likened the Spanish monarchy to the empire of Alexander the Great and accorded to Philip II (1556-98) the same title, *flagellum dei*, that Marlowe accorded Tamburlaine:

> And to say the truth, what nation, I pray you, of all Christendom loveth the Spaniard, *the scourge of all the world*, but from the teeth forward and for advantage? The Italians, which sometime were lords of the earth, in great part now brought under his vile yoke, do many ways show the utter mislike of their satirical arrogancy and insolencies, and in all the plays and commodities [convenient occasions] bring in the Spanish soldier as a ravisher of virgins and wives, and as the boasting Thraso and *miles gloriosus*: noting to the world their insupportable luxuriousness, excessive pride, and shameful vain-glory (emphasis added).[2]

In the synopsis to the work, like Tamburlaine, Hakluyt advocated the conquest of the "triple region" (*1 Tamburlaine*, 4.4.72), urging a "western voyage [that] will yield unto us all the commodities of Europe, Africa, and Asia, as far as we were wont to travel, and supply the wants of all our decayed trades".

From reading these texts various critical questions appropriate to readings of *Tamburlaine* arise. The writings indicate that an imperial mission for England was complex. It was variously mercantile-exploitative, civilising,[3] an

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[1] Sir George Peckham, *A True Report of the late Discoveries taken in the Right of the Crown of England of the New Found Lands by ... Sir Humfrey Gilbert* (London, 1583), Sig. *4^{r}.

[2] Richard Hakluyt, *The Original Writings and Correspondence of the Two Richard Hakluyts*, ed. E.G.R, Taylor, Vol. 76-7 of *Hakluyt Society Series II*, 2 vols. (London, 1935), II, 264; compare the description of Tamburlaine "a most puissant and mighty monarch and [who] (for his tyranny and terror in war) was termed the scourge of God" (*1 Tamb*., 1590, title-page).

[3] In this respect, see Jonson's *Masque of Blackness*, (1605), lines 184-224 and, for a subtle study of these issues in the 1620's, Michael Neill, "'Material Flames':

instrument of evangelising Protestantism,[1] or created simply to increase the stature of the English monarchy.

For Tamburlaine, war was not only a means of enhancing his power and glory but also an important instrument of state formation, a perception shared by Elizabeth who condoned military adventures in the Netherlands even if she was not prepared to finance them adequately.[2] In these years Shakespeare, in the "first tetralogy" was creating a different kind of myth of English nationhood by dramatising Henry Tudor's victory over Richard III thus healing the wounds the Wars of the Roses inflicted in the body politic. These plays, like *Tamburlaine*, indicate that a true English empire can come into being only by harnessing the forces that, in Michael Braddick's words, "shape the uses of political power rather than [through] the purposeful actions of individuals or groups".[3]

It is evident, therefore, that Marlovian theatrical discourse engages with the key claims of Henry VIII's Act of Appeals as well as many succeeding texts, not metaphorically but ironically, insisting upon a scrutinising of key terms. Cranmer and Foxe's act of state definition had become a tempting target, and Marlowe underscores the self-evident differences between realms and empires, differences that Henry's ministers had sought to obliterate. The Act of Appeals had spoken of "the authority and prerogative of the … imperial crown", and the Act of Supremacy of 1559, the first act of Elizabeth, referred to "the imperial crown of this realm".[4] When Tamburlaine is tempting Theridamus to defect to his cause, he invokes the one of constitutive laws of the second century Roman Empire:

> Forsake thy king and do but join with me
> And we will triumph over all the world.

Romance, Empire, and Mercantile Fantasy in John Fletcher's *Island Princess*", *Putting History to the Question* (New York, 2000), 311-38.

[1] Pagden, 35-7.

[2] See Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge, 1997) on war as instrument of state building. Guicciardini "emphasised that "all states" have their origin in violence, and that cruelty (such as killing soldiers rather than taking them prisoner) was correspondingly justified" (Tuck, 39).

[3] Michael J. Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England, c.1550-1700* (Cambridge, 2000) 1.

[4] Elton, 345 and 363; at Elvetham in her progress of 1591, Elizabeth received "a garland made in form of an imperial crown" that had been handed down by "Oberon, the Fairy King" (John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 vols. (London, 1783), III, 118).

The *Lex Rhodia* of the Emperor Antoninus Pius had transformed the "*imperator* into the 'Lord of all the World': '*dominus totius orbis*'".[1]

In short "empire" might be a valued term, but in Tudor England it was a myth, a myth used by Henry to authenticate his autonomy, a myth invoked by Marlowe in such a way that Elizabeth's *imperium* might have been questioned. The Henrican meaning of "empire" could only seem quaint and empty when Shakespeare and others started writing plays about Roman emperors and the conquest of other states. If I am right, *Tamburlaine* (along with Shakespeare's Henry VI plays with which it was contemporaneous) may have provoked censorship: on 12 November, 1589 the Privy Council had written to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Mayor of London, and Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels, asking them each to appoint someone to scrutinise all plays performed in and about the City of London because the players had taken "upon them to handle in their plays certain matters of Divinity and of State unfit to be suffered".[2]

This myth of empire must have been recognised by contemporaries beside Giordano Bruno, even those who were presumably paid to purvey it. In George Peele's address "To the Most Famous Generals of our English Forces by Land and Sea, Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake, Knights" which was printed in 1589 in the aftermath of the Armada, the poet seems to be saying, "Let's get real". Norris and Drake were attempting to place on the throne of Portugal the bastard Don Antonio who had taken refuge in England and who would therefore have owed fealty to Elizabeth. Peele contrasts their actual mission with those of heroes from popular drama:

> Bid all the lovely British dames adieu,
> That under many a standard well-advanced
> Have hid the sweet alarms and braves of love;
> Bid theatres and proud tragedians,
> Bid Mahomet, [Scipio], and mighty *Tamburlaine*
> King Charlemagne, Tom Stukeley,[3] and the rest,

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[1] Pagden, 23.

[2] Glynne Wickham, Herbert Berry, William Ingram, (ed.), *English Professional Theatre, 1530-1660* (Cambridge, 2000), 94; this order may, however refer to anti-Martinist plays or to seditious matter in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*: for censorship of the histories, see Janet Clare, *"Art Made Tongue-tied by Authority": Elizabethan and Jacobean Dramatic Censorship* (Manchester, 1990), 24-59; Richard Dutton, *Mastering the Revels:The Regulation and Censorship of English Renaissance Drama* (London, 1991).

[3] References are probably to a lost play by Peele, *The Turkish Mahomet* (1581-94), a lost *Scipio Africanus* (1580 – although this was performed by Paul's Boys at Court), and Peele's own *Battle of Alcazar* (1589) in which Captain Stukeley had appeared. The original text reads "Mahomet's Poo" which Fleay conjectures to be the

> Adieu. To arms, to arms, to glorious arms!
> With noble Norris and victorious Drake,
> Under the sanguine cross, brave England's badge,
> To propagate religious piety,
> And hew a passage with your *conquering swords*
> By land and sea, wherever Phoebus' eye,
> Th'eternal lamp of heaven lends us light [1] … (emphasis added)

Those first lines may be a rueful and ironic retraction of the figures Peele himself had celebrated in those Accession Day tilts. The reference to the "conquering swords" quotes from the Prologue to *1 Tamburlaine* – AND THERE MAY BE ECHOES OF *LOCRINE*.[2] We can therefore understand why in the age of Marlowe, although the English state was only coming into being, claims made could be made for empire even if that word had no material referent.

"poll" or brazen head through which the Prophet speaks in *Alphonus of Arragon.* This list may suggest an earlier date for the anonymous play *Charlemagne or the Distracted Emperor* which Harbage places between c. 1603 and 1622 (Alfred Harbage, (ed.), *Annals of English Drama 975-1700*, 3rd ed. (London, 1989), 90).

[1] Dyce, 449.

[2] See Dyce, 550n.