"Fond and Frivolous Gestures": A Blocking Workshop on Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*

PASCALE AEBISCHER, AMBER ASH, JESSICA BOYD, AIMEE CANNING, NATASHA COOPER, NAOMI FREEDMAN, SOFIA GALLUCCI, ZOE HESLOP, CHARLIE NADIN, CHLOE PREEDY, PHYLLY RUSH, VICTORIA SPAREY AND CONNOR WEBSTER

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

Since 2012, second-year undergraduate English and students on the Combined Honours English and Drama programme at the University of Exeter have had the opportunity to take a course called "Theatrical Cultures." This eleven-week option builds on the first-year module "Rethinking Shakespeare," which includes two introductory weeks on theatre history and deconstructs some of the assumptions about how to study early modern drama that our students come equipped with after their secondary-school studies. "Theatrical Cultures" aims to provide students with an understanding of the types of plays and entertainments that were popular between the 1580s and the 1640s, with a view to opening an understanding of the period that is not centred on Shakespeare but that is deeply informed by theatre history. We encourage our students to reflect on how a performance by a specific group of people in a specific physical environment for an implied audience informs dramatic texts written for and within that context. Key to this is a recognition that using the first and second Globe playhouses as the template for performance venues obscures and distorts the effects early modern playwrights writing for other environments—whether the Banqueting Hall in Whitehall, the Inns of Court, or public playhouses like the Rose—were likely to achieve. Our teaching, then, is geared towards encouraging specificity in the analysis of particular plays and entertainments, including those associated with less studied performance spaces. The assessment of this learning has changed over the years. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, students wrote two essays and sat an exam, with questions that invited reflection on how plays of the students' choice related to their early modern performance environments. Since the pandemic, we have moved to a combination of a 24-hour "take-home" examination that still includes this type of question and a portfolio of video presentations and short pieces of writing that allow students to evidence their learning about performance spaces, how to use archival documents, the textual differences between two quartos of a single play, and how to attend to performance contexts when close reading extracts. Through the portfolio, then, our students are invited to use the methodologies they learn through lectures, seminars,

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supplementary audiovisual materials, guided reading, and the "blocking" workshop which is the focus of this essay.

In this essay, we share and reflect on our teaching of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine, Parts One* and *Two*, which examines the plays as productions by the Lord Admiral's Men in the Rose playhouse. We start by explaining the learning context for the blocking workshop we use as a practical teaching method. We then share the instructions for setting up the workshop for tutors and outline the "learning-by-doing" teaching methodology that involves placing the bodies of our students and the properties necessary to perform a scene within the dimensions of the first Rose stage.[1] The intended learning outcomes of the workshop include a practical understanding of the affordances of the early modern playhouse and the ability to translate this understanding into a critical interpretation of Marlowe's drama that is attuned to the emblematic power of stage images.[2] This, in turn, affords fresh insights into elements of the plays which, in performance in a Rose-like space, can, at times, undercut the seriousness of these tragedies with moments of bathos and physical comedy that offer an indication of some of the "fond and frivolous gestures" that Marlowe's publisher, Richard Jones, had sought to remove from the published text.[3]

The workshop's methodology is adaptable for other plays and playing spaces. Often, we have found that unanticipated learning is achieved from this spatially minded teaching approach, with students suggesting new ways of thinking about stage action and its meaning in Marlowe's plays as they deliver lines, wield swords and numerous crowns, and try to imagine how a chariot navigates the stage space available. As the pedagogical value of the workshop is best represented by giving the perspectives of students and tutors, we use the third section of the essay to evaluate reflections from tutor and student participants in the blocking workshop's live version. We also include the reflections of students who learned about those workshops through an online lecture during the pandemic, when no physical workshop was allowed. As their comments demonstrate, while physical participation in the

[1] More information about the first Rose can be found in Julian M. C. Bowsher, "The Rose and Its Stages," *Shakespeare Survey* 60 (2007): 36–80; Julian Bowsher and Pat Miller, *The Rose and The Globe—Playhouses of Shakespeare's Bankside, Southwark*: *Excavations 1988–90* (London: Museum of London Archaeology, 2009), 117–18; 122.

[2] Ruth Lunney, "Viewing the Sign," in *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition: Innovation in the English Drama before 1595* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 36–66.

[3] Richard Jones, "To the Gentlemen Readers: and Others that Take Pleasure in Reading Histories," in *Tamburlaine the Great*, by Christopher Marlowe (London: Richard Jones, 1590), A2$^{r–v}$. Early English Books Online, *ProQuest*, April 4, 2023, https://www.proquest.com/books/tamburlaine-great-who-scythian-shepheard-his/docview/2240880014/se-2. For ease of reader access, we have modernised spelling and typography (including numerals) when quoting from early modern sources throughout.

workshops was valued by the students who were involved with them, in a pandemic context it was possible for a richly illustrated lecture to perform some of the same work of fostering a spatially minded understanding of the plays. It should be stressed, however, that some of the learning outcomes presented in this essay as part of the workshop were themselves discovered through early iterations of the workshop, which functions as a tool through which we continue to learn about new aspects of the plays.

Learning Context

Student-led learning is key to the pedagogical approach of our "Theatrical Cultures" course. In preparation for each week, students work in "study groups" of three to six students to engage with a range of resources and archival material to enrich their analysis of early modern theatre. Study groups share and discuss findings in weekly seminars, as group members guide each other through the different resources that they encountered in the course of their preparation. When studying Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays, three study groups divide the labour involved in learning how to work with *Early English Books Online, Henslowe's Diary*, the *Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project*, and maps from Abraham Ortelius's *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* to discover aspects of the theatrical culture that informs the *Tamburlaine* plays.[4] This student-led research around which seminar discussions take place, in turn, acts to contextualise and complement the blocking workshop that is used in examining Marlowe. The research ground that is covered by study groups, and the resources used for learning about Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays, are outlined in this section.

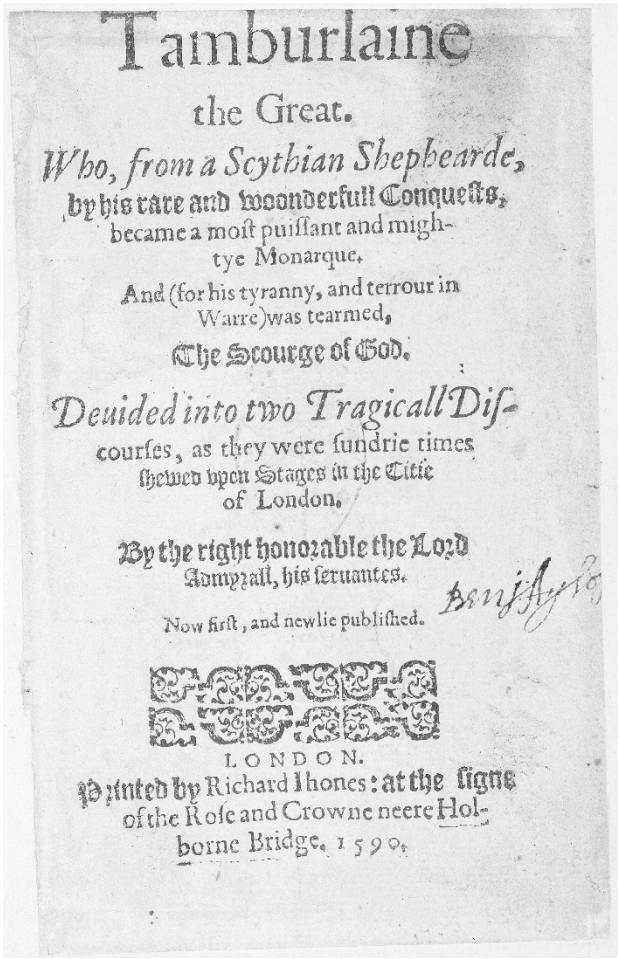
We instruct one study group to use *Early English Books Online* to locate and examine the title page and publisher's preface to the 1590 edition of *Tamburlaine* (see figure 1).[5] In reading the preface, students discover that alterations are acknowledged by Richard Jones, where the play's publisher describes how "fond and frivolous gestures" have been removed from the play in the printed copy.[6] Students thus confront evidence that indicates differences

[4] "Basic Search," Early English Books Online, *ProQuest*, April 4, 2023, https//www.proquest.com/eebo?accountid=10792/; Philip Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. R. A. Foakes, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); King's Digital Lab, King's College London, "Home," *The Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project*, April 4, 2023, https://henslowe-alleyn.org.uk; Abraham Ortelius, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (Antwerp: Aegidius Coppenius, 1570), *Internet Archive*, April 4, 2023, https://archive.org/details/theatrumorbister00orte/page/n3/mode/2up?view=theater.

[5] Many of our students first encounter EEBO in their first year of study as part of an exercise and assessment on the "Rethinking Shakespeare" module which requires them to edit a short scene of *King Lear*, using the EEBO Quarto and Folio texts as a starting point. Students are also able to access support for their EEBO searches from the University librarians or their seminar tutors, whom they can consult during office hours.

[6] Jones, "To the Gentlemen Readers," A2^{r}.

between the performance and textual histories of the play and evaluate what can and cannot be accessed in considering textual material as evidence regarding performance history. The study group also examine the use of typefaces on this earliest edition of the play and consider how information is provided and prioritised on the titlepage. We use details such as the representation of Tamburlaine's character, plot descriptions, and the absence of Marlowe's name to think about what this tells us about responses to the early staging of the play. For comparison, students also find other editions of *Tamburlaine* by using the search features of *Early English Books Online* and evaluate the evidence of title pages in order to explore developments in the play's early print history.



Tamburlaine

the Great.

Who, from a Scythian Shepheard,
by his rare and woonderfull Conquests,
became a moſt puiſſant and mighty Monarque.
And (for his tyranny, and terrour in Warre) was tearmed,
The Scourge of God.

Deuided into two Tragicall Diſcourſes, as they were ſundrie times ſhewed vpon Stages in the Citie of London.

By the right honorable the Lord Admyrall, his ſeruantes.

Now firſt, and newlie publiſhed.

LONDON.
Printed by Richard Iones: at the ſigne of the Roſe and Crowne neere Holborne Bridge. 1590.

Figure 1: Title page to the 1590 edition of Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine the Great (London: Richard Jones, 1590), A1^{r}. Reproduced from The Huntington Library's copy. RB 136105, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.[7]

[7] We are grateful to The Huntington Library's Curator of Rare Books, Stephen Tabor, for kindly providing this image.

The second study group gather information about Edward Alleyn and Philip Henslowe to develop an understanding of the Lord Admiral's Men as a theatre company. Students access the materials available through the *Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project* and link their findings to what can be learned about the Lord Admiral's Men, particularly the roles of Alleyn and Henslowe, and the London-based theatre industry of the 1590s. This context provides the backdrop to exploring Henslowe's *Diary*. We ask the students to examine lists of receipts from performances between 1591 and 1596 and consider lists of costumes and props. These lists include items that are clearly linked to *Tamburlaine*, such as the "breeches of crimson velvet," "bridle," and "coat with copper lace" that are recorded for the title character, alongside other relevant items such as "1 cage," "2 marchpanes," "3 imperial crowns; 1 plain crown," various black suits, coats, and a "Moor's coat."[8] Students enjoy identifying items that are relevant to, and needed for, the staging of the *Tamburlaine* plays and find details that enrich their understanding of the properties used in the play.

We furthermore direct this study group to consider evidence regarding the company's spending and compare Henslowe's costings on different sorts of items. This allows the students to demonstrate understanding of relative expenditure in theatrical contexts and spot, for example, that the outlay for costumes is considerably more than that given for purchasing plays. The study group evaluates its sources to gain a clearer sense of the business and material factors involved in theatrical productions and establish Alleyn's significance among the Lord Admiral's Men. Combining this evidence with what they learned from a lecture that provides evidence of Alleyn's large stature, trademark stride, and overwhelming impact on his audience, students can, moreover, begin to imagine Alleyn as a formidable figure in the role of Tamburlaine, and picture the effect of Alleyn's use of particular items of costume and properties listed in the company's inventories.[9]

The third study group broadens the contextual framing of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays to think through the relationships between the England Marlowe and his audience inhabited and the rest of the world. This group is directed to the ongoing *MEMOs (Medieval and Early Modern Orients)* project for up-to-date research and background information to help inform their findings.[10] The main task for the group, however, is to report back on an

[8] Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, 322, 320, 321, 319, 320, 321.
[9] On Alleyn's stature, see S. P. Cerasano, "Tamburlaine and Edward Alleyn's Ring," *Shakespeare Survey* 47 (1994): 178. Audience responses to Alleyn are for instance referenced in Joseph Hall's "Satire III," in *Virgidemiarum Sixe Books* (London: John Harrison for Robert Dexter, 1602), 1:6–7, http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A71323.0001.001.
[10] Lubaaba Al-Azami, Samera Hassan, Aisha Hussain, and Hassana Moosa, "Home," *Medieval and Early Modern Orients* (Corpovisuals), April 4, 2023, https://memorients.com.

investigation of Belgian cartographer Ortelius's atlas, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, which contains one of the first recognisably "modern" maps of the world and the map we know Marlowe used when writing *Tamburlaine.*[11] Students explore the maps in the atlas, turning pages by using the arrows on the website, and try to find as many of the places mentioned in *Tamburlaine* as possible, focusing on Ortelius's maps of the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Africa (including the map which places Zanzibar on the wrong side of Africa: a mistake that Marlowe reproduces in Act 1 Scene 3 of *Tamburlaine, Part Two*).[12] Students use this information to evaluate what Marlowe's view and knowledge of the world indicates about his dramatic geography. For example, students might consider the way a concentration of interest and detail in Ortelius's work seems to relate to waterways and areas associated with trade, or instances where Ortelius's embellishments, such as the inclusion of sea monsters, may intersect with how geographical space and cultural constructions of national identities are theatrically mapped within the *Tamburlaine* plays.

It is against this backdrop of thinking about a range of evidence and approaches to Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays, and scaffolded by a lecture that furthermore draws attention to the play's generic instability and to the fact that on 14 August 1590 it was entered in the Stationer's Register as "The twooe com*m*icall discourses of Tomberlein the Cithian shepparde,"[13] that students participate in a blocking workshop in which they examine Marlowe's stagecraft. Here, students can walk through scenes that make use of theatrical space, properties, and physical bodies to explore how stage action, Marlowe's language, character exchanges, and the spatial dimensions of the Rose expand an understanding of how meanings may have been made through Marlowe's plays.

Tamburlaine, Parts One and *Two*: A Blocking Workshop

In order to reproduce the 90-minute blocking workshop, here we list the equipment and properties required for the workshop and outline the key intended learning outcomes. The scenes we use are *Tamburlaine, Part One*, Act 3 Scene 3, as the pivotal scene in which Tamburlaine wins the battle against Bajazeth; and *Tamburlaine, Part Two,* Act 5 Scene 3, which involves the play's second chariot scene and sees emblematic staging meet the complications of chariot manoeuvres on a small stage. The workshop encourages students to lift the play text off the page and work within the limitations of the stage space of the Rose,

[11] Ortelius, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*; Ethel Seaton, "Marlowe's Map," *Essays and Studies* 10 (1924): 13–35.
[12] See *T2* 1.3.194–95.
[13] *Database of Early English Playbooks* (DEEP), "Tamburlaine". http://deep.sas.upenn.edu/search.php

placing bodies on that stage, to particularly suggest how learning-by-doing offers a sense of those "fond and frivolous gestures" removed for the high-brow printed legacy of the play.[14] Some of these amusing and provocative features of Marlowe's play can, we propose, still be appreciated in the way that grandiose moments, left untroubled on the page, become undercut by staging practicalities and physical comedy.

You will need:

- A tape measure to measure the lozenge-shaped stage, which is 5m deep and 8.2m wide at the widest point (the following diagram includes the surrounding auditorium – and is not to scale!).[15]

- Masking tape or equivalent to mark up the dimensions of the Rose stage.[16]
- 3 or so rapiers (or 120cm-long sticks).[17]
- 5 crowns.
- 1 Ortelius map (use an A3 piece of paper or a blank rolled-up poster.).
- Printouts of the scenes.
- 2 chairs for thrones.
- 1 wheelie chair or equivalent as the 'chariot' (Remember to cast two students as the kings who get to pull the chariot).

Scene Blocking: *Tamburlaine, Part One,* Act 3 Scene 3

Students are asked to examine the scene in which Tamburlaine wins the battle against Bajazeth. However, blocking the scene makes it clear that you cannot choreograph a proper battle on the Rose stage. Philip Sidney may condescendingly suggest that this is common stage practice in his *Defence of Poesy*, where he notes how "in the meantime two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field?," but this scene's use of "four swords and bucklers" causes clear

[14] Jones, "To the Gentlemen Readers," A2^{r}.
[15] Bowsher, "The Rose and Its Stages," 40.
[16] We have also used pre-measured string for mapping out the stage in order to reduce waste.
[17] Approximately, blade lengths for swords in early modern England were 102cm (40.5 inches), based on the Elizabethan proclamation of 6 May 1562 that "her majesty's pleasure is that no man shall… wear any sword, rapier, or any weapon in their stead, passing the length of one yard and half a quarter of blade at the uttermost." Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, *Tudor Royal Proclamations* (London: Yale University Press, 1969), 2:191. An extra 18–20 cm are needed for the handle to get a fair impression of the reach of a sword at full lunge.

complications with the number of actors on the stage of the Rose.[18] Any combat involving swords between antagonists the size of Alleyn, whose lunge with an outstretched arm and a proper sword would have filled half the stage, must have felt genuinely dangerous in the cramped space not just to the actors but also to the people in the yard below.

With the use of weapons onstage being quite dangerous, what Marlowe does instead is bring on two thrones: one for Tamburlaine, and one for Bajazeth. Given the shallowness of the stage, these are most likely set down on either side of it. The stage is crowded: Tamburlaine has come on with six named characters and "*others*," who probably enter from one stage door in the hierarchical order of the stage direction; Bajazeth has matched this with at least seven followers, presumably entering from the opposite stage door.[19] There are therefore *at least* sixteen bodies crowding the stage at that point (roughly one body per metre of stage width, standing in two rows). This is an impossibly large group of people to organise meaningfully on a stage, so the stage needs to be cleared as quickly as possible. Marlowe does this by getting the two male antagonists to each give his crown and throne to his wife or betrothed before exiting the stage space and leaving behind Zabina and Zenocrate on their thrones, each with her maid. A side-effect of this action is that the crowns and thrones, as symbols of regal power, begin to look transferrable: a symbol of the body politic that is detachable from the body natural that wears it.[20] But now, at least, the stage image is much more manageable, and through the exact parallel set-up of women on thrones, their maids, and their words suggests a balance of power between the opposing sides. While the women fight a war of words, trumpets and warlike noises offstage (which we ask the offstage students to produce) gesture in the direction of the physical war being fought out of sight.

The battle concludes with a quick appearance, exit, and reappearance of Bajazeth and Tamburlaine: "BAJAZETH *flies [across the stage]*, *and he* [TAMBURLAINE] *pursues him [offstage]. The battle short, and they [re-]enter. Bajazeth is overcome.*" (*T1* 3.3.211 SD). Since it appears especially dangerous to have a swordfight on the Rose stage, with what would have been two boys sitting on thrones on either side of the stage and two further boys

[18] Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy,* in *Sidney's "The Defence of Poesy" and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism,* ed. Gavin Alexander (London: Penguin, 2004), 45.
[19] Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine, Part One,* in *Tamburlaine the Great*, ed. J. S. Cunningham and Eithne Henson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 3.3.0 SD. Edition hereafter cited parenthetically as *T1*.
[20] The various ways in which Marlowe's Tamburlaine makes crowns "ridiculous" (42), and the provocative connotations that this dramatic action might have historically possessed given the affinities between Marlowe's "course of crowns" and specifically *English* coronation practices (35), are discussed further by Lisa Hopkins in "Marlowe's Game of Crowns," *Textus: English Studies in Italy* 36.2 (2023): 33–54, esp. 35–46. We are grateful to Andrew Duxfield for sharing a copy of this article with us.

standing behind the thrones, Marlowe seems to have come up with a chase: Bajazeth erupts from one of the side doors, runs around the two thrones along the edge of the stage pursued by Tamburlaine, and exits through the second side door. Behind the scenes, there is brief battle noise before the two men come on again, with Bajazeth now in Tamburlaine's power.

At this point we may still think that the ridiculousness of the chase is unintentional, but what follows seems to reiterate the comedy of the scene as characters squabble over crowns. In the play, Tamburlaine speaks passionately about how his supreme ambition is "the sweet fruition of an earthly crown" (*T1* 2.7.29). Crowns are enormously important in *Tamburlaine*, both as physical objects and as symbols of power, and yet in Act 3, Scene 3, the physical comedy suggests that Marlowe does not quite take them as seriously as his hero does. As Chloe has suggested, Marlowe often appears to challenge and devalue the symbolism of crowns in his plays,[21] and this tendency to problematise the crown's signification of monarchical power appears upheld in blocking the action of this scene. Having secured Bajazeth's crown, Techelles, Theridamas and Usumcasane come on stage, each also bearing a crown, and Tamburlaine asks for them to "Deliver them into my treasury" (*T1* 3.3.217). His followers hand Tamburlaine their crowns or, more unceremoniously and therefore less likely, must deposit them on the floor, as nothing in the text indicates the presence of a "treasury" (*T1* 3.3.217). In the blocking workshop, this is where we start to really get to the heart of the play's debunking of Tamburlaine's aspiration to rule, as with his two hands he must hold three crowns and Zenocrate promptly offers him another one: "Now let me offer to my gracious lord / His royal crown again" (*T1* 3.3.218-19). No wonder that Tamburlaine refuses: he has run out of hands.

Instead, Tamburlaine asks Zenocrate to take Zabina's crown off her. However, Zabina refuses, leading to an undignified, farcical scuffle between the two women in which, in the end, Theridamas has to intervene to take the crown off Zabina and give it to Zenocrate. Zenocrate is now wearing Tamburlaine's crown and holding another crown in her hands. There is no indication in the rest of the scene of what Zenocrate does with the spare crown, but it is clear that between the two of them, Zenocrate and Tamburlaine are juggling no fewer than five crowns. Not surprisingly, workshops of this scene with our students invariably result in chaos and hilarity.

[21] Chloe K. Preedy, "(De)valuing the Crown the Crown in *Tamburlaine*, *Dido Queen of Carthage*, and *Edward II*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 54, no. 2 (2014): 259–77.

In examining the use of crowns in this scene, students can evaluate the use of the property throughout the play. For example, the use of crowns in *Part One*, Act 3 Scene 3 both recalls Mycetes hiding of his crown in Act 2 Scene 4 and prepares us for Act 4 Scene 4, in which Tamburlaine is served two "*course[s] of crowns*" as part of his banquet (*T1* 4.4.111 SD). Here the transformation of the symbol of supreme power into a marchpane (marzipan-like) artefact to be eaten—quite possibly alongside the "2 marchpanes" listed as company properties in Henslowe's *Diary*—is the culmination of the play's inflationary attitude vis-à-vis kingship as something to be consumed without it ever satisfying the appetite.[22]

Scene Blocking: *Tamburlaine, Part Two,* Act 5 Scene 3

When blocking this scene in which Tamburlaine arrives triumphant on a chariot pulled by captured kings, students are asked to try out how Tamburlaine's chariot navigates the stage of the Rose. The workshop participants think through the implications of the playhouse's affordances, testing the possible staging of the scene and considering the movement of characters and properties, especially in relation to the room required to move an early modern four-wheel chariot in the ways the script demands in exits and entrances.

The implicit and explicit stage directions for Act 5 Scene 3 involve Tamburlaine's two surviving sons, at least two physicians, and Tamburlaine, with his chariot drawn by (editors have assumed) the most recently conquered Kings of Natolia and Jerusalem, joining Theridamas, Techelles and Usumcasane who are already on the stage. We once more have a very crowded space, with at least ten bodies plus a chariot and what Tamburlaine calls his "fatal chair," which must be brought on—perhaps separately—at some point in the scene.[23] The chariot is equipped with a seat, as several play-text references specify. Those references accord with surviving images of early modern regal chariots, most notably that of Elizabeth I's golden chariot, which also provides evidence of wheels located on the outside of the chariot body, thus restricting manoeuvrability.[24] Tamburlaine is only directly said to take a seat once he is already on stage, when he settles on his chair after stating that he "cannot stand" (*T2* 5.3.50). However, as current undergraduate Connor Webster observed, it is possible that Alleyn has already had to seat himself in the chariot in order to enter through the comparatively low stage doors: an interpretation that might result in additional comedy

[22] Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, 319.
[23] Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine, Part Two,* in *Tamburlaine the Great*, ed. J. S. Cunningham and Eithne Henson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 5.3.212. Edition hereafter cited parenthetically as *T2*.
[24] "Elizabeth I in a golden chariot" (1570). British Library, Sloane 1832, fol. 7v–8, *British Library*, April 14, 2023, https://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/large104117.html.

during this scene, if audiences observe the supposedly inexhaustible warrior repeatedly sitting down. As the scene continues, an alarm is heard "*within*" (*T2* 5.3.101 SD); a messenger comes to tell Tamburlaine of Callapine's attack; and Tamburlaine turns his chariot around, goes backstage to win the battle against Callapine, and reappears victorious: "*Alarm.* TAMBURLAINE *goes in* [, *riding his chariot*,] *and comes out again with all the rest.*" (*T2* 5.3.115 SD) We know Tamburlaine is doing this manoeuvre on the chariot because of his order "Draw, you slaves! / In spite of Death I will go show my face" (*T2* 5.3.114-15).

On the page, this appears to be a straightforward scene of triumph and power. However, the size of the Rose stage causes a few technical issues that problematise such a reading. The archaeologist in charge of the Rose dig, Julian Bowsher, hypothesises that "The angled *scaenae frons*, or back wall, of the first Rose stage clearly allowed for a central opening—such as might be used for Tamburlaine's chariot—as well as side doors."[25] That clearly makes sense as a visual image: a wide opening big enough to make a hugely impressive entrance, with Tamburlaine at the height of his power centre-stage. Modern directors have drawn the same conclusion and stage this entrance as coming from a central opening in the rear of the stage.[26] Similarly, if students try this out in a performance space the size of the Rose, they will quickly figure out that it is certainly possible to come out of the "discovery space" opening in the centre of the stage in this way (figure 2).[27] Yet if they bear in mind that Zenocrate's hearse will also be prominently displayed at the point at which the chariot makes its final exit, that this chariot must be large enough to include a seat and be drawn by men "*with bits in their mouths*" (*T2* 4.3.0 SD), as the earlier stage direction specifies, and that it will have a limited range of wheel movement, there is no way to go back into the tiring house without an undignified parking manoeuvre (figure 3).

[25] Bowsher and Miller, *The Rose and The Globe,* 119.
[26] This was how the scene was staged by Michael Boyd for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2018.
[27] Figures 2-4 are loosely based on the plans of the Rose included in Bowsher's "The Rose and Its Stages".

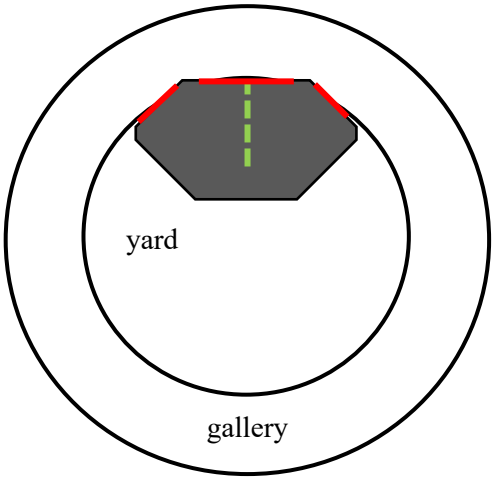


Figure 2: Entering Centre-Stage

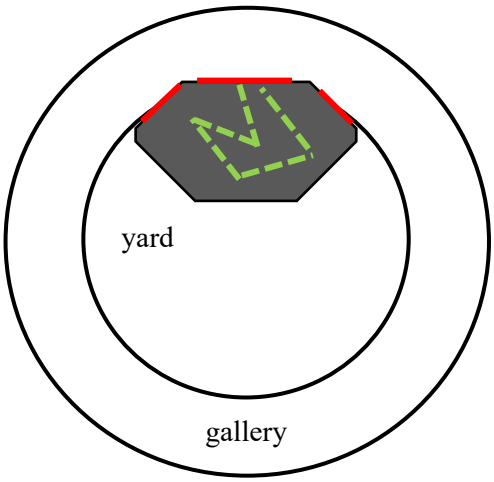


Figure 3: Chariot Reversals

As we worked out with our students, you have to go back and forth in the limited space as you desperately try not to go over the edge of the stage, mindful that that edge comes with a 1.7m drop down onto the audience.[28] Modelling an entrance from the discovery space in order to exit via a side door creates similar problems, with the kings straining to pull the chariot to turn a full right angle without swinging the back end of the chariot into the audience, the central stage space not affording a comfortable turning circle for a chariot that would have had a fixed axle. The only way in which you can get the chariot on and off the stage without needing to reverse or threatening to topple into the yard is by using not the

[28] Bowsher, "The Stages of The Rose," 42.

central opening but one of the side doors, so that you can ride across the stage in a semi-circle to exit through the opposite side door (figure 4).

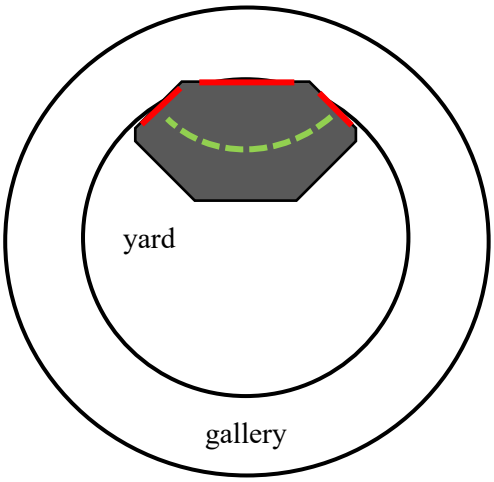


Figure 4: Effective Manoeuvre

Once Tamburlaine has left and returned to the stage in Act 5 Scene 3, a map is brought on, and Tamburlaine details all his conquests, interacting with the stage property to point out that there is a whole area of the world that is not yet conquered. This property is likely to be a large copy of the map of the world in Ortelius's *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, with which students have become familiar through the study group work described above. What we have here, then, is probably an action by Tamburlaine that points to America as the unconquered territory which, on Ortelius's map, is remarkably empty of signs of trade routes and exploration. With this reference, his auditors are suddenly no longer the people on stage, but the audience in the Rose theatre, who are being enjoined to go and conquer this new world. The desire for conquest which throughout the plays was associated with Tamburlaine now becomes an English desire for conquest, as the Rose audience is made complicit in Tamburlaine's lust for ever more power, ever more lands. Tamburlaine then asks his eldest son to assume the imperial crown and scourge and mount the chariot while he finally declares that he will sit down instead on a chair, Zenocrate's hearse is brought on and set down next to Tamburlaine's chair, and Tamburlaine dies. The play ends with a general "*Exeunt*" in which chariot, hearse, and dead Tamburlaine are somehow taken offstage in a procession (*T2* 5.3.254 SD).

There are several consequences that Tamburlaine's entrance from a side door suggest for the final scene of *Tamburlaine, Part Two*. While the discovery space is often

hypothesised to have been a larger opening, the height of the side doors was probably close to that of a standard early modern hall doorway. So, in order for Alleyn's exceptionally tall Tamburlaine to enter standing on his chariot, the chariot must have been narrow enough to pass through the side door and Alleyn must have sat, bent down, or crouched to pass through the opening when entering and exiting, perhaps immediately taking the ruler of the world down a peg if he had to bow to the audience on his way onto the stage. Moreover, if Alleyn wanted to take a centre-stage position for his speeches from the height of his chariot, the chariot would have had to be side-on to the audience at the front of the stage. That becomes problematic in terms of sightlines, as his chariot would, for the "understanders" in the yard,[29] have then blocked out the view of all the rest of the characters upstage and led to a highly socially stratified "understanding" of the final scene that disadvantaged the poorer members of the audience and privileged more wealthy viewers seated in the upper gallery. Intriguingly, the production of such an audience-dividing spectacle at the end of two plays that track the ascent of a shepherd to the position of "emperor of the threefold world" (*T2* 3.4.118) might also begin to gesture in the direction of the publisher's address to "gentlemen readers" and his disdain for the "graced deformities" of the Admiral's Men's performances.[30]

However you staged the ending of *Tamburlaine*, *Part Two*, at least a third of the audience would not have seen Tamburlaine dying next to Zenocrate's hearse, as the chariot with Amyras on it blocked their view. The most obviously functional, if inelegant, solution we found was for Tamburlaine to only advance onto the stage enough for the chariot to be fully on it and stop there, about one third through the semi-circle the chariot must travel. The man who in *Tamburlaine, Part One* decrees that his and Zenocrate's location should be the new centre of the universe (*T1* 4.4.79–86) is literally de-centred by the constraints of his stage and made to lower his body position or bow his head. At the highest point in his life's trajectory, in the manner of the revolutions of Fortune's wheel which he brags are under his control (*T1* 1.2.174), he is physically brought low as he first has to crouch or sit down on his chariot (*T2* 5.3.51–53), and then descends yet further onto his "fatal chair" (*T2* 5.3.212).

For someone who has been using a king as his footstool, this is a clearly meaningful decline which is underlined by Usumcasane's outburst:

> Blush, heaven, to lose the honour of thy name,
> To see thy footstool set upon thy head…
> For if he die, thy glory is disgraced,

[29] William N. West, "Understanding in the Elizabethan Theaters," *Renaissance Drama* 35 (2006): 114, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4191744.
[30] Jones, "To the Gentlemen Readers," A2^{r}.

> Earth droops and says that hell in heaven is placed.
> (*T2* 5.3.28–29; 5.3.40–41).

If Tamburlaine, on the Rose stage, is more absurd and awkward than he seems on the page, what we have learned through our workshops would suggest that the physical comedy and undercutting of heroism generated by the protagonist's struggles to juggle multitudes of crowns or park his chariot might be precisely some of the "fond and frivolous gestures" that worked so well for Marlowe's popular audience, the "vain-conceited fondlings" about whom his publisher was so derisive.[31] What those "fondlings" saw was that the overreacher was always straining against limits, whether geographical, as with unconquered America, or physical, as with having to juggle multiple crowns or to negotiate the height of a stage door, thus generating scene after scene of humour at the character's expense.

Reflections on the Workshop Experience

We have all had the chance to participate individually in the "Theatrical Cultures" blocking workshop on one or more occasions during the ten years that this session has run, whether as workshop leaders or student contributors. Between February and April 2023, we jointly considered how the insight we consequently gained into the traces of Marlowe's "fond and frivolous gestures" that survive in the published text of *Tamburlaine the Great* might have enriched our understanding of Marlowe's plays,[32] early modern theatrical culture more broadly, or our experience of studying English literature. Some of us have been involved in workshop sessions that took place during the current academic year, in autumn 2022, while others are remembering an experience from up to five years ago; still others participated in a virtual equivalent of the live workshop in autumn 2020, during a COVID-related lockdown period. Despite the different teaching and learning contexts in which we encountered the blocking workshop, however, we found that certain aspects stood out.

Firstly, the bathetic and comic performance moments described above invited an extended reconsideration of *Tamburlaine*'s generic status and thematic concerns. For current undergraduate Zoe Heslop, blocking *Part One*'s Act 3 Scene 3 brought the number of changes that occur in relation to the crown properties into sharp focus. That realisation might prompt students to reassess Marlowe's dramatic depiction of monarchical power. As former student Amber Ash wrote in an essay for the module:

[31] Jones, "To the Gentlemen Readers," A2^{r}.
[32] Jones, "To the Gentlemen Readers," A2^{r}.

> The excessive use of these properties serves to distort the emblematic image of the crown, to the point that it sacrifices its divine status, and becomes just another trivial prop in the petty politics of men. Consequently, the stability of the crown and the notion that its authority comes from God are challenged, forcing the audience to question what legitimacy really is, how it is obtained, and how far Tamburlaine's claim to power conforms to these ideas.[33]

During our discussion, Phylly Rush agreed that the onstage movements of the crown properties can draw attention to the transferrals of power that occur, especially if each crown that Tamburlaine removes is sequentially replaced on his head by the next. As students are confronted with a series of related decisions about how the person playing Tamburlaine should respond, debating whether the multiple crowns should be fitted on the student's head, stacked up their arm, or otherwise distributed around their body, it is equally possible that Tamburlaine's previously "overarching mythographic" status will be compromised by his comic overloading. Naomi Freedman observed that you might even wonder "how much Tamburlaine was a character to be taken seriously," and whether "he was comically large rather than impressively large." Although Alleyn is today most often identified with heroic or tragic parts, several of the roles associated with him incorporate comic aspects, including those of Barabas in Marlowe's later *Jew of Malta*, Cleanthes in *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, and King Edgar in the comedy *A Knack to Know a Knave*, so such questioning provides an opportunity to reconsider the early modern acting experience.[34] Burdening each other with crowns also provided students with a more "visceral" insight into the attributes that early modern players might have required, in a way that could complement discussions of Evelyn Tribble and former "Theatrical Cultures" student Harry McCarthy's recent research into performers' skills and stagecraft.[35] Naomi wondered whether crowns feature so prominently in *Tamburlaine* because, despite such challenges, they are easier to manage than other stage properties that might represent the protagonist's gain, such as chests of gold: a crown, after all, can be looped over a player's arm and carried around onstage. At the same

[33] Reproduced with the permission of student contributor Amber Ash.
[34] On Alleyn's possible comic roles, see John H. Astington, *Actors and Acting in Shakespeare's Time: The Art of Stage Playing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 108–11; also S. P. Cerasano, "Edward Alleyn, the New Model Actor, and the Rise of the Celebrity in the 1590s," *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 18 (2005): 49–50.
[35] Natasha Cooper, verbal contribution; Evelyn Tribble, *Early Modern Actors and Shakespeare's Theatre: Thinking with the Body* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Harry R. McCarthy, *Boy Actors in Early Modern England: Skill and Stagecraft in the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). Harry was a student on the "Theatrical Cultures" module in 2012, and his research now informs how the module is taught to current undergraduates.

time, Zoe recalled that the student playing Tamburlaine in their workshop commented on how heavy our plastic crowns felt when they were all hung on one arm, and how it became uncomfortable to stay in that position, with the effort to present a powerful warrior persona presumably requiring Alleyn, when using metal crowns, to endure a certain amount of physical pressure and discomfort. Indeed, while our workshops suggested that such juggling with crowns could prompt laughter, Naomi registered that an actor wearing two golden diadems around each arm might equally look very impressive, indicating how experimenting with the use of stage properties might encourage wider critical engagement with and debates about *Tamburlaine*. Because Naomi had previously studied Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, she was also struck by how the more comic interpretation of *Tamburlaine* that students encountered in the blocking workshop was reminiscent of *Doctor Faustus* in that both plays feature what we might describe today as a form of Marlovian "slapstick comedy." Ultimately, as she suggested, there is the potential to understand *Tamburlaine* as a "completely different kind of play" from the lofty tragedy about "the stately tent of War" proclaimed by the Prologue (*T1*, Prologue, l. 3). Such conclusions potentially bely Richard Jones's self-proclaimed efforts to purge the published 1590 play-text of farcical elements, inviting us to reassess the generic labels placed on early modern drama.

Another outcome of this approach was that it reinforced students' consciousness of early modern theatrical culture's variety. As Charlie Nadin put it, blocking *Tamburlaine* emphasised that Marlowe is not Shakespeare, allowing participants to challenge monolithic assumptions about early modern drama. With reference to the narrow critique of contemporary commercial drama that occurs in Sidney's *Defence*, Charlie argued that a better understanding of Marlowe's dramaturgy reinforces the idea that contemporary audience members might be expected to perform different kinds of "imaginative work" at the various plays they experienced. For Charlie, this approach can in turn help those studying early modern theatrical culture for the first time to critically evaluate the contemporary significance of Sidney's proclaimed Neoclassicist preference for what we might describe as a more "grounded" form of dramatic practice. Students' awareness of the "grandeur and utter excess" of Marlowe's plays, as realised through the blocking workshop's emphasis on multiple and accumulating objects, led to an enhanced appreciation of the latter's distinctive style that is likely to be especially helpful for those whose only prior knowledge of early modern drama comes from studying Shakespeare.

Charlie's response also hints at what else the "Theatrical Cultures" blocking exercises might reveal about the stylistic and thematic concerns that inform Marlowe's two

Tamburlaine plays. In particular, Connor proposed that the requirement for at least some students to take on multiple roles in the episodes we blocked illuminated the significance of repetition within Marlowe's dramatic narrative. Where the plays' dialogue presents a protagonist who defeats army after army, accumulating land and wealth as he goes, Connor observed that the performative realisation of such triumphs must have "imposed significant representational demands on a playing company," most likely resulting in a similar compromise whereby "the same players [were] coming back and playing each army." Audience members may in turn have related this "recycling" of performers to Marlowe's narrative emphasis on circularity and recurrent actions, enriching the apparent tension between progress and stagnation that will culminate with Tamburlaine's onstage demise. Yet Connor added that the use of stage properties such as crowns could also speak to such tensions, signalling Tamburlaine's progressive accumulation of wealth and status even as the conquering actions that contribute to his success are forced into offstage space by practical considerations. That is, Connor argued, the materiality of these onstage objects testifies visually to Tamburlaine's achievements and hint at a teleological advance that challenges the underlying circularity of his geographical (and dramaturgical) movements. This interest in material culture and travel is something that Connor will be pursuing in greater depth next year, as he undertakes postgraduate research into the performative significance of the East India Company's vessels as alternative, maritime stage spaces.

Sofia Gallucci, who completed the "Theatrical Cultures" course several years ago, was similarly intrigued by how the blocking workshop might illuminate the dramatic interplay between the events and objects of Marlowe's plays. Noting that "the battle is obviously an event that takes place, whereas crowns and a chariot are objects and material things that exist within the stage space," Sofia asserted that it is "really helpful to map out the stage space of the Rose… because it tells you actually what it looked like for an audience member and… how the theatrical event actually materialised." For Aimee Canning, a self-described visual learner, being able to see the Rose stage mapped out on the ground was an especially helpful mnemonic aid; Zoe added that the workshop was a "turning point" in her understanding of the staging context for Marlowe's drama. Other students agreed that such visual mapping enabled them to appreciate the Rose's limited size, especially in contrast to the expectations that those familiar with present-day theatres might possess. For instance, Natasha Cooper observed that "in a modern theatre, you'd think, oh, a chariot comes on, it … exits all different ways, and it's actually quite small compared to the stage"; being confronted with the

size of the Rose thus gave students a striking appreciation of how early modern performance conditions differed from those they might be more familiar with today.

Moreover, while Natasha gained this experience visually through an online lecture, students who participated in an in-person workshop session found themselves even more alert to the resulting dynamics between the onstage players and those observing them. Jessica Boyd registered how easy it would be for someone to get hurt when weapons were used in such a confined space, which could prompt a more personal appreciation of early modern playgoing accounts such as Philip Gawdy's 1587 description of a stage shooting accident—probably during a performance of *Tamburlaine Part Two*—that "killed a child, and a woman great with child forthwith, and hurt another man in the head very sore."[36] Meanwhile, Connor observed that the alternating experience of being both an observer and a performer during the workshop provided fresh insight into the actor-audience dynamics that Jonathan Walker discusses in *Sight Unscene: The Offstage in English Renaissance Drama* (2017).[37] Applying Walker's argument that the architecture of the early modern playhouses encouraged audience members to view each other as well as the stage action to the workshop, Connor posited that the spectators might have become Tamburlaine's rivals in his pursuit of material success, as lavish audience costume vied with lavish audience member costume within the environs of the Rose playhouse. This insight was prompted by the fact that all participants in the workshop shared the same light, as they would have at an open-air playhouse, and by the resulting sense of communal participation that students experienced.

The actor-audience dynamics that students experienced during the blocking workshop of course differed from those of the early modern playhouse in several important ways, especially since many students doubled as spectators and performers. Nonetheless, the responses of the participants suggests that such activities can be a useful way into thinking about not only the thematic concerns and dramaturgy of a specific play or plays, such as Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, but also early modern theatrical experience more broadly. Looking beyond Marlowe's plays, we were collectively struck by how important such exercises can be in allowing students of English literature to appreciate drama *as drama*. Naomi, who worked as a tutor after graduating before starting her current career as a literary agent, noted that those studying early modern plays at all levels can struggle in part because many are "not

[36] Philip Gawdy, "To his Father [16 November 1587]," in *Letters of Philip Gawdy*, ed. Isaac Herbert Jeayes (London: Nicholls, 1906), 23.
[37] Jonathan Walker, *Sight Unscene: The Offstage in English Renaissance Drama* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 19-20.

taught to imagine things on the stage and how they would be staged." She found that high-school pupils often benefitted from being taught plays in a way that, like the "Theatrical Cultures" blocking exercises, reflected and foregrounded their dramatic context: once students appreciated that "plays are meant to be performed," it provided a better understanding of "why they might seem a little bit more difficult on a page."

Natasha, now a trainee teacher, also noted that blocking exercises are important in this regard because they can redress an existing imbalance in criticism on early modern drama. Although there are plenty of studies that are alert to the performance conditions in which these plays were first written and performed, many other essays about dramatic texts refer to the "reader" rather than the "audience" for the work, which can significantly impede students' understanding. For Natasha, both blocking exercises and the related archival activities that might illuminate early modern theatrical culture are crucial to offsetting this potential bias, because of their shared focus on the audience: "It's like, OK, well what is the reaction of the peasant stood next to you in the theatre? Like, how are they going to engage with this? But what about the noble?"

Sofia, who graduated from Exeter in 2020, places a similar emphasis on such considerations in her work as a theatre director. While working as an assistant director and dramaturg at the Royal Shakespeare Company, she was tasked to research the original performance context(s) for plays so that the director could better appreciate how audiences today might receive a production. In that sense, as Sofia observed, engaging with archival sources and blocking episodes from *Tamburlaine* are activities that can nurture an ongoing understanding and appreciation of not only individual plays, but also "the culture that sits around the play." From the perspective of these students, and in terms of the skills and understanding that they have taken with them into their careers, the performance aspect of these early modern plays and understanding how they might work in performance is, as Sofia put it, "just as important as… [unpacking] the actual text." Natasha went further, stating that such exercises are vital, and arguing that we "need to revolutionise what we're doing" when teaching early modern drama to ensure that students at all levels with diverse skills can understand plays as works written to be performed.

Concluding Thoughts

Teaching Marlowe at university may no longer be a radical action in the present-day UK, even if instances in which Marlowe's plays are given equal weight to Shakespeare's remain

rare.[38] However, our experience as tutors and students on the "Theatrical Cultures" module, and beyond, suggests that approaches which prioritise their status as dramatic texts are more significantly underrepresented. While the use of blocking exercises or archival research centred on performance culture may be more common in disciplines other than English literature, we have found that incorporating such activities into our teaching and learning can significantly enrich undergraduates' knowledge and understanding of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, as well as early modern drama more broadly. As Jessica remarked, it can be challenging for students encountering such plays for the first time to picture how they might have been performed, even though "to be able to write about something well, you do have to visualise it"; exercises such as blocking can ease this concern by allowing students to appreciate how much space the actors would have had and how they might have utilised it.

Complementary research into archival sources can be equally valuable in enhancing students' appreciation of the themes and style of the plays they are studying. Several of our former students admit they found these early modern prose sources challenging at first, but they are happy to advocate for the benefits of such tasks. Natasha, who went on to write a dissertation on early modern masques, remembers learning about the expensive outfit that Alleyn wore to play Tamburlaine, and how the archival sources gave an immediate sense of how "luxurious that was to wear that and … how expensive," providing an additional layer of understanding and insight that "you can't get a sense of … from just reading the play."

As Natasha's return to one aspect of the source material she had encountered later in her studies hints, a further advantage of the workshop's student-centred approach is that it is not necessary to simultaneously introduce all the learning activities we have described here onto a course. Rather, we hope that tutors will be able to adapt and selectively utilise these resources as appropriate to individual teaching contexts and the needs of specific cohorts of students, both within the university setting and beyond. Indeed, graduates from the "Theatrical Cultures" course have found that the exercises they took part in provided them with important skills that they could draw upon beyond their undergraduate studies: from specific expertise in researching theatre history of the type that Sofia has utilised as a dramaturg and which Connor will be drawing upon in his postgraduate studies; to the

[38] A notable UK exception is the Marlowe-centred course "Sin, Sex, and Violence - Marlowe in Context" (EL6007), which Adam Hansen convenes at Northumbria University. Liam Semler's "Christopher Marlowe" (ENGL3651), which is offered at the University of Sydney by the author of *Teaching Shakespeare and Marlowe: Learning Versus the System* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), offers another example of a Marlowe-dedicated course.

confidence about teaching plays that Naomi drew upon while tutoring high-school pupils and which is currently guiding Natasha's approach in the classroom.

For those of us who have led "Theatrical Cultures" workshops over the years, the possibility that blocking Marlowe's plays is something that students will remember and benefit from throughout their lives is highly rewarding and makes the time we spent tangled up in measuring tape and string—or wandering the corridors of our department with an armful of rapiers—entirely worthwhile. That legacy is also especially apt for a module, and a set of exercises, that have been so extensively shaped by those who participated in the workshops. Since we introduced the blocking exercise ten years ago, it has also been shaped by generations of Exeter students; the versions that our student and graduate contributors have experienced and describe in this article have differed subtly, because each year those of us leading the workshops have learned from our dialogue with that group of students, and so the sessions that followed spun in a slightly different direction. It is our hope that, in providing this description and plan, such blocking workshops will now spin further out into the many classrooms, seminar spaces, and studios in which Marlowe's plays are being studied, experienced, and debated by the students and scholars of the future, as we continue to revisit Marlowe's "fond and frivolous gestures."[39]

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