

PART TWO: PERFORMANCE

7 *TAMBURLAINE* IN AMERICA

Although it is certain that *Tamburlaine* was performed in the 1580s, we have no record of performances before those recorded in 1594–95 in Philip Henslowe's famous *Diary*. It also seems likely that *Tamburlaine* was on stage well into the seventeenth century, but, in fact, the next recorded performance after 1595 is an abridged version of both parts produced in America on 14 June 1919 by the Yale University Dramatic Association as the annual commencement play. The abridged acting text was prepared by Edger Montillion Woolley (who also directed the play) and Stephen Vincent Benét and was considered important enough to be published by the Yale University Press (1919). The all-male cast of amateurs received high praise in reviews in *The Yale Daily News* of 17 June 1919 from Professors C. F. Tucker Brooke and William Lyon Phelps, both on the English faculty, and one T.N.W., undoubtedly the now famous playwright Thornton (Niven) Wilder, Yale graduation class of 1920. There was also an extensive favourable review in the *Boston Evening Transcript* of 17 June 1919. However, an examination of the printed text reveals that the Benét-Woolley version was little short of the sort of butchery exhibited in *Tamburlaine's* slaughter of the Virgins of Damascus (which was, in fact, omitted by them). They compressed Part I's five acts into five scenes and Part II's five acts into seven scenes. They cut several minor characters, large parts of speeches and much stage business.

Part I as presented by Benét-Woolley reveals a peculiarly different play from the one that Marlowe wrote. In terms of action, for example, there is no indication that when *Tamburlaine* enters in i ii that he is followed by retainers carrying treasure nor that he casts off his shepherd's garb to reveal his armour. The change into battle dress signifies not