

# Performative Masculinity and the Crisis of Kingship in Shakespeare's Henry V and Marlowe's Tamburlaine the Great

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines how performative masculinity underpins and destabilizes legitimate kingship in Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine the Great (1587–88) and William Shakespeare's Henry V (1599). Drawing on gender theory and New Historicist approaches, it argues that both plays stage male authority as theatrical performance rather than divinely ordained or innate virtue. Tamburlaine constructs an exaggerated, histrionic warrior masculinity through spectacle and rhetoric, exposing kingship as conquest-driven artifice. Henry V, by contrast, masters performative kingship through calculated rhetoric, disguise, and appeals to brotherhood, yet his success reveals an underlying crisis: royal power depends on audience belief and theatrical efficacy rather than essential legitimacy. The comparison highlights a shift from Marlowe's subversive spectacle to Shakespeare's more contained, patriotic performance, reflecting late-Elizabethan anxieties about monarchy, succession, and masculine authority in an age of theatrical politics.*

**Keywords:** performative masculinity, kingship, New Historicism, gender theory, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, Tamburlaine the Great, Henry V, theatricality, early modern drama

