MARLOWE'S SENSE OF HISTORY:

INTERNAL EVIDENCE FROM EDWARD II.

A Thesis

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by

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INTRODUCTION

Marlowe wrote plays which have been said to revolve around one central figure, and this figure, in most cases, is a historical personage--Tamburlaine, Dr. Faustus, Edward II. Marlowe also wrote on subjects from mythology--Dido and Aeneas and Hero and Leander. It would therefore not seem inappropriate to make some examination of how Marlowe understood the chronicles and history books that he read. In this particular case one has confined one's field of investigation to the text of Edward II. One knows that in writing this play Marlowe was aware that he was writing a history play. He had written earlier plays on characters from history books--Tamburlaine and Dr. Faustus--but these were not exactly "historical" in the manner that Edward II was historical.

Granting this, one must consider what the history play had been up to the time when Marlowe presented his play on Edward II. Since one's purpose is to discover what Marlowe thought of the days of Edward II and how they differed from life in his own times, one must consider the Tudor concept of history, Marlowe's sources, and his treatment of them. In so doing there are certain dangers which one must attempt to avoid, though it is hardly possible to achieve complete success in this. For instance, one must forget one's twentieth-century vision and scholarship, and try to assess the problem, as far as possible, in Marlowe's terms. It is only too easy to read into Marlowe's lines and into the lines of his sources what later research has revealed.

Further, in making assumptions regarding the state of learning and the availability of historical material, the measure of sophistication in an Elizabethan audience, and, above all, the mind of Marlowe, one must be particularly guarded. In the present age it has been seen only too often how a clever pattern with rich Freudian tones is fitted over a figure who lived centuries ago and the facts of whose life are scanty or uncertain--or both.

HISTORY AND DRAMA

In viewing the birth and development of drama from the most ancient times till the present one can not help but note the close relationship between history and drama. This is true not only in a survey of western dramatic literature, but of the drama of Asia as well. The earliest extant Sanskrit plays draw their themes and figures from the lives and deeds of the early Aryan settlers in the Indo-Gangetic plain. In the 5th century B. C. when the great Kalidas was writing those plays which were so admired by Goethe, he too borrowed from history and semi-historical narrative. The most notable example of such a debt incurred by Kalidas is his play Shakuntala. Shortly after Alexander's invasion the Machievelli of India--Kantilya--wrote the first Indian chronicle play Mrichikatika dealing with the intrigues and assassinations undertaken by his patron Chandzagupta to gain the crown. Similarly in the earliest Japanese drama there is a notable proportion of plays dealing with the Samurai and their lives. Early Chinese musico-drama very often undertook to relate the exploits of a warrior king who had marched northwards and westwards into the mountains conquering the tribes resident in these areas and capturing their women folk, amongst whom was the tragic heroine who died in an attempt to save her people from massacre.

History and legend gave to these early playwrights not only a series of related events, but also a set of persons and figures who

moved in a pattern of complex relationships, and finally these persons and events were convenient pegs on which the playwright could hang a moral if he chose to do so. In the western world, the earliest dramatists of note were the Greeks and there is little need to elaborate on their extensive use of history and contemporary events in the creation of drama. The Trojan war was an inexhaustible mine of themes and characters. Aside from the Homeric material, sometimes a more authentically historical source can be traced for some of the plays. Aeschylus, for example, in his play The Persians tells almost the same story as Herodotus does.

The Romans followed in the Grecian pattern and bequeathed the ways of historical tragedy to Christendom. With the fall of the Roman Empire and the breakdown of civilization in Europe drama declined as did the other arts. When Europe emerged from the Dark Ages and Christendom was instituted, drama was born again, this time under the aegis of the Church. It is worth noting that when drama came to be written in the Middle Ages and the accent was very strongly religious, the obvious source for dramatic material was the Bible. Yet in reading the Scriptures the writers of the mysteries saw the Bible not only as the revealed word but also as historical truth. Adam and Eve were for them as real human figures as Pilate and Peter. For them the Bible meant exactly what it said. Thus we see a close alliance between history and drama from the very earliest times continuing in an almost unbroken chain down to the present day when Anouilh and T. S. Eliot write of Thomas Becket and Shaw of Joan of Arc.

The connection between history and drama is closest in the field of tragedy. The death of man, especially of one well placed in society and a leader of the community, cannot help but deeply impress the beholders of it. Further, in the fall of a king the entire kingdom is affected and thus his fall attains a magnitude above that of the death of a common man. Lastly, history very amply and regularly furnishes events of such a nature that the twin passions of tragedy as noted by Aristotle--pity and terror--may be easily and naturally aroused.

In England during the Middle Ages when a strong native drama was being built up under the auspices of the Roman Church there was little history included to begin with, except that which was warranted by Scriptural texts. But as the mystery and morality plays developed, contemporary social commentary and reference to public events of note which were common knowledge began to be included. From this it was but a step to the introduction of actual historical figures on the stage. Finally, as the earliest thunder of the Reformation was heard and politics and religion began to mingle in a complex of motive, history made greater entrance into the field of drama. The Moralities depicted religious polemics, and from this it was but a short step to the portrayal of political controversy. For example there was a movement from a simple narration of the story of the Prodigal Son to a representation of all kinds of prodigalities. John Skelton's play Magnificence has a morality framework but deals with political ideas and those qualities necessary in a good king.

The interlude, which partook of both morality and mystery elements and was yet quite secular in tone, explored history for

convenient patterns and formulas as in Fulgens and Lucrece. In pointing a moral both history and theology were combined and thus in a play we may have two characters on the stage at the same time, one named King John and the other Ecclesiastical Corruption.

This happy fluidity and expansiveness enabled English drama to move forward at the rapid pace that it did and was partly responsible for that peculiar dramatic concoction--the chronicle play. Prof. Schelling in The English History Play makes it quite clear that the history play is, in his opinion, the peculiar gift of the English genius to the world of drama.

This type of play--the history play--was slow in evolving and drew upon many existing dramatic veins for strength and was in no little measure nurtured by changes in social and political patterns in society as a whole. It has been extremely difficult if not impossible to make any definitive statement as to the date and name of the first history play, but this much is certain, that by the middle of the sixteenth century it was a popular and easily recognizable dramatic form. However, it reached its fullest flowering and maturity in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

TUDOR HISTORY AND DRAMA

Renaissance enthusiasm galvanized several aspects of Tudor life. It is difficult to point with authority at new modes and concepts and attribute them to the New Learning. This would tend to suggest that such concepts and patterns had not existed before. There would be less fear of contradiction if one was to assert that several existing concepts and movements were re-vitalized, freshly accented and developed in new directions. One subject treated in this manner was history. Both the influence of the New Learning and the growing tide of nationalism which was intensified by the rivalry with Portugal and Spain, made their marks upon the kind of history that was being written in Tudor times.

With the flowering of the Renaissance in Italy there developed a new school of historical writers--the humanist—nationalist writers. Their method of writing history soon spread all over the European continent. In England the New Learning arrived almost simultaneously with the new dynasty of Tudors. Since Henry Tudor had waded across bloody battlefields for the crown and could lineally claim it only through his mother, once having obtained it he was very keen that everyone should know that the crown was rightfully his. History writing was encouraged along this propagandistic bent and the new Renaissance tendency towards national humanism did nothing to damage Henry VII's plans. The most

significant event in this context took place in 1501 when Polydore Vergil received a royal commission to write the history of England up to the death of Richard III. Another notable example of this kind of historical narrative was Sir Thomas More's History of King Richard III, written in English in 1513. This kind of history writing continued with growing fevour and national enthusiasm till the beginning of the seventeenth century. Later Tudor historians of note were Fabyan and Bishop Stow, but the most famous of all was Ralph Holinshed, whose Chronicles of England, Scotland, Ireland was published first in 1577 and again ten years later. It was to this Chronicle more than any other that Shakespeare and his contemporaries turned for information when they chose to deal with history.

By the time Hall and Holinshed were writing in the latter part of the century the necessity of justifying the Tudor claim was not as pressing as it had been in the years immediately after the Battle of Bosworth Field. The emphasis had shifted more in the direction of national glory. This was specially so after the defeat of the Armada and the successes of the English"sea-dogs" . With the medievalists history was a mirror to reflect the workings of God's plan in this Universe. Whatever happened was in the ultimate analysis all for the best as behind all events and figures was a just and good Deity. The Renaissance historians did not totally change this concept of history as being the will of God, but incorporated it into their nationalistic propaganda. For the Tudor chronicler the history of

England was part of the Divine Pattern and thus glorification of the motherland had divine sanction. This attitude also emphasized subtly but distinctly that the coming of the Tudors to the throne was also part of God's will and therefore a good thing.

Those dramatists who turned to the humanist-nationalist historians for material were motivated by just the same principles and national fervour as the authors of the chronicles. Further, the spectators in the Tudor theatre looked upon the dramatist as being a historian. Since both historian and dramatist were telling the same story their roles were equated in the minds of their public.

The definition of a history play itself has caused some trouble and various answers have been offered. Ribner suggests that a history play is a play dealing with English history and a chronicle play, one that deals with non-English history. Alfred Harbage differentiates between history and fable--in the former all relationships are primarily political and the main springs of the action are not personal vices and virtues but those of the faction and national bodies. In the fable, action and relationships are more personal and complex. However, these fine distinctions really do not apply too closely, for the evidence is rather clear in suggesting that for Shakespeare and Marlowe and the other Tudor writers history was history and that was all.

As has been pointed out earlier the distinction between dramatist and historian was faint in the minds of Elizabethans--one told of the past in a book, the other on the stage. Heywood wrote:

> Plays have made the ignorant more apprehensive, taught the unlearned the knowledge of many famous histories, instructed such as cannot reade in the discovery of all our English Chronicles; and what man have you now that cannot discourse of any notable thing recorded even from William the Conquerour, nay from the landing of Brute, until this day?[1]

A proof of how historical information had filtered to all classes is evidenced by a passage from "Her Borale":

> Mine host was full of ale and history;
> . . .
> Why he could tell
> The inch where Richmond stood, where Richard fell.
> Besides what of his knowledge he could say,
> He had authenticke notice from the Play.[2]

However, the kind of history that was being written in Renaissance England was not a mere recital of past events and a list of deceased monarchs. The growing wave of nationalism could not be satisfied with mere facts and often there was an emphasis upon some moral that was thought worth emphasizing. Since nationalism was one of the significant signs of the times it is not surprising that history and historical drama began to give a nationalistic bias to the actions of kings in the past to a degree greater than before. One of the most striking examples of such interpretations was the reign of King John. By his contemporaries King John was considered a rather obnoxious trouble maker who worked against the solidity of Christendom, for Shakespeare King John is a patriotic Englishman defying the power of a Pope who wished to

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[1] T. Heywood. Apology. ed. R. Perkinson. New York. 1941.

[2] Bishop Corbet. Poems of Bishop Corbet. ed Gilchrist 1807. p. 193.

curtail the privileges of honest Englishmen.

The older didacticism in history was tempered by humanistic concepts. The absolute reliance upon God's grace of earlier days was mixed with an emphasis on the resources of human will and strength. By his own will and reason man could determine political success or failure. Devotion to the Almighty was a good thing, but unless allied to political sagacity and a strong mind healthy politics was impossible.

That the Elizabethans were only too conscious of the human element in politics is evidenced by the stern censorship of all plays and the rigid ban on anything that could in any way be construed as subversive. The most obvious example of this kind of political surveillance of drama was the trouble that descended upon Shakespeare and his company because of Richard II and its Deposition Scene. When Essex's revolt and a performance of this play almost coincided the authorities were naturally inclined to take a rather dim view of the political integrity of the performers of such a play.

Another matter which must be assessed before one may be allowed to judge the Elizabethan understanding of history is the matter of historical information available at the time. We must remember that printing was becoming increasingly popular and the number of books available to the public was growing; the majority of the people were still illiterate and the world of books was a closed realm. We have already seen what the historians saw in history and how they wrote it; it remains now to examine how the average man came by his knowledge of history and the elements of this knowledge. Having come to some

conclusion on this matter we can then be in a fair way to knowing what Marlowe thought of the days of Edward II and how he expressed this in the theatre for an audience, which for the most part was without his university education.

The average Elizabethan learned of the past from those who had lived in the past, that is, by word of mouth. Sometimes past events were crystallized into folk ballads and tales of the kind that are employed to while away a long winter's evening. It is therefore understandable that legend, folk-lore and popular superstitions--those things which we nowadays reject at once as being unhistorical--came to be incorporated into history. Holinshed, it is to be remembered, includes all the details of Macbeth's meeting with the witches and other supernatural events in his Chronicles of Scotland. This kind of historical tradition--where knowledge and information on various subjects is stored in an oral tradition--still obtains in those lands where the majority of the population is illiterate, or at best semi-literate. India and China are examples of countries where information about the past is widespread by means of just such a tradition.

This would lead to the assumption that most plays dealt with themes and figures known to the audience. W. D. Briggs suggests a certain naivete in the audience which would account for their acceptance of familiar stories in dramatic form: "Like children they asked, what did he do? What did he say? What did the other man do then?"[3]

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[3] Edward II. ed. W. D. Briggs. London, 1914. p. liii.

What history appeared to mean to most Tudors was therefore not character, and why certain characters acted in a certain manner, but rather what happened to certain characters as against why it happened. Exciting and eventful stories giving details as to who killed whom and how it was done were what they demanded from a good history book or history play. Character was important chiefly in the light that it shed upon action and was generally revealed through significant action. In other words the dramatist was that kind of historian who could stage an epic, and in this epic fact and fiction, legend and actuality were all bound up together and accepted as the "truth". However, one must guard against an overstatement of the case as one finds in W. D. Briggs. Briggs tends to make action the focal point of the Tudor chronicle play. One has only to call to mind some of the more significant characters in Shakespeare's history plays to realize how one-sided is any view that just emphasizes the element of character. Richard II and King John, particularly the former, really do much less than they say and the kind of men they are makes the plays woven around their persons. Even Henry V as presented by Shakespeare is as interesting by virtue of his personality as by his deeds. To quote one final example of interest in character on the part of the historian there is Sir Thomas More's account of Mistress Jane Shore in his History of King Richard III where More takes great pains to indicate the kind of woman she was.

Critics are apt to stress the looseness in structure and the apparent carelessness in the conception and writing of the history

play. It is true that in the last years of the sixteenth century more history plays were written than any other kind of play and the supposition is that such plays were turned out with wild abandon to glut the maw of popular demand. Their very popularity argues a case for their careful composition as well, because after seeing so many plays of the same genre the public would quite easily cultivate a discriminating taste.

> We must remember also that Elizabethan dramas were written usually with great rapidity, since the public demanded a constant succession of new plays and that often it would be impossible for a playwright to devote much care and time to ensuring accuracy in detail; further, he could rely to some extent on the ignorance of his audience, that he expected his play to be discarded after being given 6 or 8 times, if as often, that nobody considered it to be a serious literary performance, that it was not likely to be printed and so undergo the test of being read.[4]

The above in the light of the numerous plays that were printed, of revivals of the more popular plays (e.g. Richard II), and the care that was taken by some playwrights in composition is obviously an overstatement.

There is a further confusion caused by examining an Elizabethan's concept of history from a modern standpoint. The modern tends to divide the time chart of history into Ancient, Medieval and Modern. This is really an oversimplification for again what is generally done in such a case is to have preconceived notions as to what each of these three terms signifies and then apply these notions to the facts of history.

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[4] W. D. Briggs. Intro. lxxiv-lxxv.

This concept of a tripartite division of time did not begin till the mid-eighteenth century. For Marlowe part of what is now called the Middle Ages was the fairly recent past and was looked upon by him in the same manner as one is inclined to look upon the eighteenth century today. One may be quite sure that the fourteenth century did not have for Marlowe the "Medieval" associations that it has for the contemporary. The absurdity of such a position is very succinctly stated thus:

> To accept the traditional classification would be to construct a time chart divided into three sections in the ratio of four inches (modern), ten inches (medieval) and one hundred and sixty seven YARDS (ancient).[5]

Sir Philip Sidney makes reference to the days of Chaucer in his Apologie and calls them "misty time", thus meaning to imply their remoteness in time. We may therefore conclude, without danger of too great an error, that Marlowe did not look upon Edward II as a "medieval" monarch in the full sense of that word as we understand it, but rather as one of the more singular English kings in the "past".

Finally, before passing on to a consideration of Marlowe's attempts to present a world nearly three centuries younger than his own, it may be well to consider what the Elizabethans saw as the prime forces in history. R. G. Collingwood in The Idea of History points out that the older tradition of Christian historiography was by no means dead or discarded. The theme of a Divine power that shapes our

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[5]F. J. C. Hearnshaw, Med. Contributions to Society. Barnes and Noble Inc., New York 1949. p. 18.

ends is consistently evident in the Renaissance drama and is perhaps the basic notion in Raleigh's History of the World. But, a new strain in historical thought, drawn largely from humanistic ideology, was incorporated with earlier theories of historical movements.

> Elizabethans generally conceeded that in addition to the will of God, the 'primary cause' of all human events, there were 'secondary causes' which could be found in the will of man.[6]

This inclusion of the human element in the destiny of nations was a very significant advance in the interpretation of history. For a kind of double pattern was established--in the ultimate over-all conspectus it was the hand of God that directed affairs, in the smaller time scale man was becoming more and more the measure of all things. This is seen very clearly in the works of both Marlowe and Shakespeare. Volumes have been written on the "fatal flaw" in the plays of the latter. The emergence of the almost super-human creature of tremendous will and power is the creation of Marlowe. Tamburlaine, Barrabas and Faustus show the working of both Providence and Humanity in their lives. Marlowe more forcefully than his contemporaries presents the possibilities of human will and power in the making of mortal history. Gabriel Harvey had given further proof of this spirit which stressed the human factor in life. In his Meditations Harvey had written this:

> He that would be thought a Man, or seem anything worth must be a great Doer and a great Speaker. He is a Cipher and but

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[6] I. Ribner. The Eng. History Play in the Age of Shakespeare. Princeton Univ. Press. 1957. p. 22.

a peakgoose, that is neither of both: he is the right man that is both: he that cannot be both, let him be one at least, if he mean to be accounted anybody, or farewell all hope of value.[7]

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[7]Gabriel Harvey. Meditations. London 1908. p. 23.

EDWARD II: DATE AND SOURCES

Having now concluded an attempt to set up assumptions about the Tudor concept of History and the history play one can move on to an examination of how Marlowe presents the story of Edward II as being of another time than his own and of the methods Marlowe employed to give his spectators a perspective of time.

A few preliminary remarks regarding the play will not be without relevance. This play was one of the last works of Marlowe before his untimely death and a consensus of opinion dates its composition in 1591-2, though H. B. Charlton and R. D. Waller argue an earlier date. The title page is significant, telling one that the play "was sundrie times publiquely acted in the honourable citie of London by the right honourable the Earl of Pembroke his servants".[8] The title page has Marlowe's name and also the date of printing as 1594.

This play is generally considered Marlowe's finest achievement in dramatic writing and one of the high water marks in the sphere of the history play. Ribner carefully points out that this play was the originator of a new tradition--the first historical tragedy not based on a Senecan formula.

> Marlowe's Tamburlaine had heralded in and shaped the tone of a wave of historical drama which was to reach its heights in

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[8] W. D. Briggs, ed. Marlowe's Edward II, London 1914. title page.

> Shakespeare's first tetralogy, Marlowe's Edward II gave rise to another wave which was to culminate in Shakespeare's great Lancastrian tetralogy.[9]

The Troublesome Raigne and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second tells one a good deal about the play in its title; and the title goes on to mention the tragicall fall of proud Mortimer. The subject of the play is therefore not only the personal history of an English monarch, but aspects of his troublesome reign and also salient facts about some of the leading contemporary nobility. The latter fact was again accented when later revivals of the play included in the already full title sheet another clause regarding the unfortunate death of the Earl of Cornwalle.

One finds therefore that the play presents events that took place over a period of over twenty years--from 1307 till 1330. The events of these years have been rigidly compressed and telescoped so that analysis of the text reveals that all that happens in the play could have been done easily in merely one year.

Like most of his contemporaries Marlowe used Ralph Holinshed's Chronicle of England, Scotland and Ireland as his informant and guide. But one must not forget to take into account the other sources that Marlowe drew upon to fill in details and to add dramatic colouring to his text. From Robert Fabyan's New Chronicles of England and France Marlowe got his satiric jig composed by the Scots after their victory at Bannockburn. After quoting the song Fabyan goes on to say:

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[9] I. Ribner. p. 33.

> This souge was after many dayes sungyn, in daunces, in carolis of ye maydens and mynstrellys of Scotlande, to the reproofe and disdayne of Englysshe men, with dyverse other whiche I overpasse.10

From John Stow's A Summary of English Chronicles Marlowe borrowed the episode of Matrevis and Gurney forcibly shaving Edward in a puddle.

> Moreover, devising to disfigure him that hee might not bee knowne, they determine for to shave as well the haire of his head, as also of his beard: wherefore, as in their journey they travailed by a little water which ranne in a ditch, they commanded him to light from his horse to be shaven, to whome, being set on a moale hill, a Barber came unto him with a basen of colde water taken out of the ditch, to shave him withall, saying unto the king, that that water should serve for that time. To whome Edward answered, that would they, noulde they, he would have warme water for his beard; and, to the end that he might keepe his promise, he began to weepe, and to shed teares plentifully.11

This evidence would disprove what Briggs says about the Elizabethans hastily putting plays together after careless and cursory research. In Marlowe's case in particular, it is to be remembered that he was a university man and his training at Cambridge would, one is naturally led to suppose, induce him to more careful research.

Having thus identified Marlowe's sources one proceeds to see what he did with them, particularly with regard to the historical perspective. One has already recognized that the Elizabethans did not have the same historical sense as the man of today and that they merely placed Edward II in "the past", along with Chaucer who lived half a century later and William the Conqueror who lived three centuries

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[10] R. Fabyan, Chronicle reprint of 1811, p. 420.

[11] J. Stow. A Summary of English Chronicles. edition of 1606. London. p. 350.

earlier. That Marlowe could have been more acutely aware of distinctions in time is not improbable, but in the last analysis, he was not writing primarily for men of his calibre. Given, then, this broad time scale--the present and the past--one comes now to the crux of the matter. How does Marlowe attempt to indicate to his audience in Edward II that what they were witnessing, in spite of any contemporary parallels, was a representation of events and figures already over two hundred years old?

There is little need for elaborating the idea that Marlowe himself realized that the days of Edward II were rather different from his own age. He was, as has been mentioned before, a university man. Further, as the statement by Richard Cholmeley would lead us to infer, Marlowe was of the select coterie of Sir Walter Raleigh at Sherbourne. Cholmeley reports in the Harleian Manuscripts No. 6849:

> That hee (Cholmeley) saieth and verely beléveth that one Marlowe is able to showe more sounde reasons for Atheisme than any devine in Englande is able to gieve to prove devinitie and that Marloe tolde him that hee hath read the Atheist lecture to Sir Walter Rawleigh and others.[12]

This should be evidence enough that Marlowe was no semi-literate dramatic apprentice, but a lettered and learned man. It therefore may be assumed, without too much fear of contradiction, that Marlowe realized that Edward II and his contemporaries were removed in time from himself. To present the story of Edward II, Marlowe went, as has been mentioned. to Holinshed, Fabyan, and Stow. From these historians

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[12]Harleian Manuscripts No. 6849.

he received information about past events. And here we may profitably begin our analysis of Marlowe's understanding of the early fourteenth century.

EDWARD II: MARLOWE'S OMISSIONS

A reader of both Marlowe's sources and his text cannot help noting the many details and events that Marlowe omitted in writing his play. Many of these details are such as would help to reinforce the historical perspective of the fourteenth century, and conveniently establish the time scale for his spectators.

W. D. Briggs enumerates at length historical details which Marlowe did not include in his play though every one of his sources mention them.

> Marlowe omitted the suppression of the order of the Temple; everything connected with the constant warfare with Scotland, except for the allusions in ll. 655-6, 913, 962, 975 ff: everything connected with the Irish Wars except allusions in ll 419, 960; everything connected with Edward's journey to France to do homage. . .all quarrels between Edward and the nobles on grounds other than his maintenance of lewd favourites. . .[13]

The omissions teach us a good deal about Marlowe's end in writing this piece and also about the care he took in structuring the play so that loose ends were minimized and the action made taut around the one central figure. Marlowe's omission of the suppression of the Templars is most significant for in presenting this on the stage he could have drawn on the popular anti-Roman Catholic sentiments of his audience. The suppression of the Templars is also an event very rich in dramatic possibilities.

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[13] W. D. Briggs, ed. Edward II. cii.

Marlowe's further omissions are often of such a nature that we are inclined to judge wrongly from what is left. A pertinent example of this is the omission of the comparative illiteracy of the fourteenth century nobility. Lancaster quotes Latin l. 827. Spencer indulges in Latin quips with Baldock l. 771 and Mortimer Senior is well enough acquainted with classical history and mythology to quote precedent for Edward's affection for Gaveston. In this respect these peers are much nearer contemporary Elizabethans than their historical originals. It is interesting to speculate as to why Marlowe made this change, but that is beyond our present scope in this paper. Maybe Marlowe was motivated by the exigencies of the situation and was forced to modernize his figures to make them more credible to his audience.

In his presentation of the Roman Church and its princes Marlowe has a golden opportunity to strike out at them, confident in the knowledge that his audience would roar approval at every diatribe. It was not merely the sharp religious differences between the English and the Roman Churches which led all honest Englishmen to a severe distrust of anything Papist. True, there were the bloody matyrdoms within living memory during the reign of Queen Mary, but the political and economic overtones that attended the basically religious controversy were assuming greater and greater proportions. The Roman Church was allied not only to "wrong believers" in the minds of Elizabethans, but also to dangerous political rivals--Spain, France, and Portugal. Yet Marlowe does not take full advantage of this opportunity to draw on popular anti-Roman feelings.

There is but one speech by Edward II which Briggs says is typical of those made at the time. However, it may be argued with equal force that given a weak willed, impetuous monarch with a very strong attachment in one direction, it is quite possible that he who thwarted the desires of such a monarch would provoke such an outburst.

> Why should a king be subject to a priest?
> Proud Rome, that hatchest such imperiall groomes,
> For these thy superstitious taperlights,
> Wherewith thy antichristian churches blaze,
> Ile fire thy crased buildings, and enforce
> The papall towers to kisse the lowlie ground.
> With slaughtered priests may Tibers channell swell,
> And bankes raisd higher with their sepulchers.[14]

Marlowe presents four princes of the church--the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishops of Winchester and Coventry and one unnamed who could possibly have been the Bishop of Hereford. These four are presented as strong and clever men--who stand for right and justice. There is nothing that they do or say which would forfeit for them the sympathy of the audience. Here again Marlowe had a rich prospect for vilifying the Roman Church and yet refrained from doing so. It might be suggested that his sources kept him from doing so for Holinshed makes it quite clear that Archbishop Melton was one of the most honorable and respected of men.

> The archbishop Melton, though he was most studious of things perteining to religion, bestowing almost his whole time about

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[14] Edward II. ll. 390-97. (All textual quotations from edition by W. D. Briggs. London 1914)

> the same, yet neverthe lesse he was not forgetful of that which belonged to the advancement of the commonwealth.[15]

At the same time we must remember that the Elizabethan dramatist was permitted to take great liberties with his sources, to change and rearrange them to suit his dramatic purpose. One of the most noteworthy examples of such a changed representation of a historical figure is Macbeth. Holinshed very unequivocally states that Macbeth was a good king who brought peace and welfare to his kingdom; Shakespeare's Macbeth grows from villiany to villiany once he seized the throne. This leads one to conclude that these omissions and neglect of popular tradition on the part of Marlowe were either because he was careless and unacquainted with the dramatic traditions of his age, or else that these are deliberate. Enough evidence against the former assumption has been shown already.

One possible explanation suggested for Marlowe's representation of the clergy in Edward II comes from H. B. Charlton and R. D. Waller. In their introduction to their edition of the play they suggest that Marlowe was attempting a naturalistic play and therefore kept to the facts as he found them in Holinshed.

> Edward II, in fact, owes something of its grim power to a certain naturalistic quality, more akin to the spirit of Arden of Feversham than to that of Shakespeare's play.[16]

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[15] R. Holinshed. Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland. London 1807. Vol. II. p. 552.

[16] Edward II. Charlton and Waller. Intro. p. 55.

This on the face of it is an exaggerated statement because naturalism in 1933 as understood by Charlton and Waller was a notion undreamt of by Marlowe and one that would certainly have been quite unacceptable to his audience. From this negative evidence--that is, what Marlowe omitted--one may assume certain things. For one, it may be well to assume that Marlowe was no careless writer and that he omitted for a purpose. What this purpose was is difficult to define exactly, but one may presume that these omissions made for greater dramatic unity and a certain tautness of effect. No dramatist could possibly include all the material in his sources and expect to produce a commercial success, and one cannot afford to ignore the practical and economic aspects of play writing. A careful and judicious selection of materials is inevitable for good writing and there is no reason why Marlowe should not have practiced this. He was more concerned with the story of a few men than with representing an age.

HISTORY IN EDWARD II: KINGSHIP

When we reverse the process and examine the text for positive evidence we emerge with some rather striking information which would give the lie to both Briggs, who speaks of careless composition of Elizabethan playwrights, and also to Charlton and Waller whose statement of "an uneasy effect" of a play where the facts have been "dully imagined" must be modified.

The most obvious point from which to start an investigation of a sense of time past in Edward II is in the central figure--the king himself. Ribner and Levin make mention of the fact that this is the first tragedy in which Marlowe abandons the Senecan formula, and instead tells the story of a potentially good man who is ruined by his own incapacities. For this play Marlowe chose a king--a real king of a real country unlike Tamburlaine who though a historical figure for most Elizabethans was conceived of as inhabiting the never-never land of the exotic. The questions the seeker after historical realism must ask are how does Marlowe present this king of days past? What are the significant differences, that would be easily recognized by his audience, between Edward II and their own reigning monarch? It is very difficult indeed to postulate with any definitiveness the Renaissance idea of kingship as opposed to the Medieval. The Renaissance was in many ways an emanation of the Middle Ages drawing on it for many of its theories and practices. The man of the Renaissance was not born

complete within himself with no roots in the past. We must therefore be chary of being too eager to spotlight "medieval" attitudes and aspects in Edward II.

The first notion we have of kingship in the play is one of absolutism. The king has almost limitless power and it is not dutiful for his subjects to question his prerogative. Almost the very first words spoken by Edward are a sign of the power of kingship.

> Ile haue my will, and these two Mortimers,
> That crosse me thus, shall know I am displeased.[17]

Throughout the play Edward continues to make reference to his authority, and to express amazement that he should be challenged.

> I will haue Gaueston, and you shall know
> What danger tis to stand against your king.[18]

When Edward is coerced into abdicating, in the midst of his sorrow and agony he does not forget that he is a king.

> See, monsters, see, ile weare my crowne againe.
> What, feare you not the furie of your king?[19]

The king's power over his subjects and their property is absolute. The Bishop of Coventry is divested of his posessions and these are bestowed on Gaveston at the king's order. Edward rebukes Mortimer when that worthy chides Gaveston for being too casual in his ways before the king.

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[17] Briggs. ed. ll. 78-9.

[18] ll. 96-7

[19] ll. 2027-8

> VVere he a peasant, being my minion,
> Ile make the prowdest of you stoope to him.[20]

This absolutism, however, cannot be emphasized too strongly as a political theory of the days before Marlowe. The Tudors, and Elizabeth in particular, have been recorded in history as amongst the most absolute monarchs that the world has ever seen. Queen Elizabeth had as much power over her subjects as Edward II had over his. Like Gaveston, Raleigh was raised from the obscurity of a semi-successful nobody to equality with the highest in the land. Then with equal authority he was sent down to Sherborne in disgrace. The despotic power of the Queen was too well known for a show of absolutism on the stage to be enough to date a play. It is true that medieval kings did have such power in their hands, but such power was not peculiar to them alone.

It is therefore in other aspects of kingship that we must look for signs of a historical perspective. Here Michel Poirier has something pertinent to affirm.

> The plot can be summed up in one sentence: It is the story of a Feudal monarch who attempts to govern as an absolute sovereign and fails.[21]

Marlowe has not forgotten the feudal aspect of his history: the complex hierarchy of classes and social distinctions is presented. The king is after all only the greatest amongst equals and his nobles are every bit as good as he. True, Edward is a Plantaganet and the son

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[20] ll. 324-5.

[21] Michel Poirier, Christopher Marlowe. Chatto and Windus. London 1951. p. 173.

of a king. But aside from this, Warwick, Lancaster, Penbroke, and the other nobles are as good as Edward is. To think of the Elizabethan Earls of Essex, Leicester, and Surrey as approximating in any respect to their Queen was quite impossible. The very word that Edward's nobles used to describe themselves is "peers", that is, one of the same rank and quality. The concept of the noblemen being courtiers was developed after the fourteenth century. This notion of being Edward's peers helps to indicate yet further why the nobles disliked Gaveston and Spencer. Gaveston and Spencer were not of noble birth and therefore not peers, but merely courtiers. Yet, Edward's regard for them gave Gaveston and Spencer the rank and privileges of the peerage. In the eyes of the nobles Gaveston and Spencer had no claim to the peerage either by right or by merit.

The feudal political system was a highly stratified one, and each person fitted into a convenient slot with a handy label. Each person was bound to maintain his position in society, and this was formalised by a system of fealty and oaths whereby each individual acknowledged his duties and enjoyed certain rights in return. This was an expertly contractual system whereby everyone had a function to perform. If one broke the oath and thus did not fulfill the function that was expected social harmony and order were overthrown. For the feudal mind there was no more heinous crime that that of not honoring this "social contract" that one was obligated to adhere to.

In the case of kingship this pattern was quite clear. The king was born the eldest male child into the royal household, but he

maintained his kingship by fulfilling his share of the feudal oath. The importance of oaths is seen almost at the very beginning of the play when Mortimer Jr. angrily declares that Gaveston's return from exile could not be brooked by him because he had sworn to Edward's father, the late king, that he (Mortimer) would not permit Gaveston to return.

> Mine vnckle heere, this Earle, & I myselfe,
> Were sworne to your father at his death,
> That he should nere returne into the realme:
> And know, my lord, ere I will breake my oath,
> This sword of mine, that should offend your foes,
> Shall sleepe within the scabberd at thy neede;[22]

A more forceful expression of this sense of sworn duty is seen when the nobles are furious at Gaveston's monopoly of royal favour.

> Mor. se. Lay hands on that traitor Gaveston.
> Kent. Is this the dutie that you oweyyour king?
> War. VVe know our duties, let him know his peeres.[23]

The barons over and over again emphasized the fact that Edward is not fulfilling his duty as a prince, he is being unjust, he is favouring one of lower birth. This militated against the feudal sense of propriety where one was expected to move with familiarity only with equals. The king had attacked the curia in the person of the Bishop of Coventry and had wrongfully seized the Bishop's possessions. In the scene between Edward and the leaders of baronial opposition beginning l. 934 the nobles present Edward with a list of occassions where he had failed to fulfill his function as a king: "the prodigall gifts bestowed

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[22] Briggs ed. ll. 82-87

[23] ll. 315-17.

on Gaveston have drawne thy treasure drie and made thee weake,"[24] "thy garrisons are beaten out of France,"[25] "the haughty Dane commands the narrow seas,"[26] "What forraine prince sends thee embassadors?"[27]

> Thy court is naked, being bereft of those
> that makes a king seeme glorious to the world,
> I meane the peeres, whom thou shouldst dearly loue.[28]

Since the king has broken his coronation oath the nobles are automatically absolved from any obligations on their part and are justified in raising the banner of revolt. So argued the barons.

When meeting to discuss the banishment of Gaveston we find the nobles expressing such sentiments as :

> Lan. VVhat we confirme the king will frustrate.
> Mor. iu. Then may we lawfully reuolt from him.[29]

When Edward expresses his exasperation with the nobles he is thus replied:

> Edw. VVas euer king thus ouer rulde as I?
> Lan. Learne then to rule vs better and the realme.[30]

Even the Queen who should naturally be the last to rise against her husband is forced to do so because Edward is a "misgoverned kinge". We

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[24] ll. 954-5.

[25] l.958.

[26] l. 964.

[27] l. 966.

[28] ll. 970-3.

[29] ll. 279-80

[30] ll. 332-3

must note here a great respect for the office of kingship which is shown by all the peers, but disaffection only against the unworthy holder of that office. The nobles always offer their love and loyalty should Edward purge the kingdom of the canker that he nurtures.

A situation such as Edward II created was quite unthinkable in Elizabethan times. The monarch was expected to fulfil certain royal duties, but she was not the greatest amongst equals. No one amongst the Tudors worked harder at always reminding her subjects that the gulf between monarch and subjects was a great one. No further evidence is needed for loyalty to the crown in spite of the actions of the ruler than in the case of Mary Tudor. She attacked the national church with vigour, allied herself by marriage with England's most hated rival, and yet there were no widespread revolt against her in which both commons and nobles joined. Further, it was quite impossible for Elizabethan nobles to speak to their queen in the terms employed by Edward's nobles--Elizabeth would have made short shrift of any such bold speaker.

> Mor. iu. Cosin, our hands I hope shall fence our heads,
> And strike off his that makes you threaten vs.
> Come, vnckle, let vs leaue the brainsick king,
> And henceforth parle with our naked swords.[31]

Open insolence is depicted thus:

> Edw. Lay hands on that traitor Mortimer.
> Mor. se. Lay hands on that traitor Gaueston.[32]

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[31] ll. 123-26.

[32] ll. 314-15.

And again:

> Mor. Mine vnckles taken prisoner by the Scots.
> Edw. Then ransome him.
> Lan. Twas in your wars, you should ransome him.
> Mor. iu. And you shall ransome him, or else--
> Edm. What, Mortimer, you will not threaten him?[33]

This attitude of revolt against a king who does not uphold his coronation oath is confirmed by the Church. The Archbishop of Canterbury, throughout a man of few words, makes it quite clear that the king has overstepped the bounds in attacking the Bishop of Coventry.

> God himselfe is vp in armes,
> When violence is offered to the church.[34]

Again it is the Bishop who forces the issue of Gaveston's exile:

> Remember how the Bishop was abusde:
> Either banish him that was the cause thereof,
> Or I will presentlie discharge these lords
> Of dutie and allegeance due to thee.[35]

It is also significant that amongst those empowered by the barons to ask Edward to resign the crown is a prince of the church.

Wherein has Edward chiefly offended? Here again Marlowe gives us an answer that would have been very satisfactory to the middle ages. To accept Poirier's view is certainly too extreme.

> The King he has portrayed is an unintelligent man, who allows himself to be swayed by his emotions, in whom

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[33] ll. 938-42.

[34] ll. 247-8

[35] ll. 353-56

> the least incident is liable to cause a sudden alteration of mood. . .This despot is entirely devoid of realism and even of intelligence.[36]

Holinshed indicates Edward's shortcomings as a king thus:

> he wanted judgement and prudent discretion to make choise of safe and discreet counsellors, receiving those into his favour, that abused the same to their private gaine and advantage, not respecting the advancement of the common-wealth.[37]

In other words Edward gave a poor account of his stewardship. Edward puts his personal pleasure above his duties as a king and will not brook interference with his private inclinations even though they harm his public efficiency.

> Directly it is suggested that his position as king must encroach upon or limit his private life, his fury is loosed and with confusing irrelevance he urges his kingly right of freedom.[38]

That Edward mistakes and neglects his stewardship is proved by his words to Gaveston:

> Ile give thee more; for but to honour thee
> Is Edward pleazd with kinglie regiment.[39]

Yet there is another point on which Edward failed politically--he alienated his peers, the nobles of the realm.

Lastly, most historians of the Feudal Age in recording the history of any country have never failed to maintain that strength was a prime virtue in a king. In the fourteenth century more than in later

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[36] M. Poirier - Christopher Marlowe. Chatto & Windus. London 1951. pp. 178-180.

[37] R. Holinshed. Chronicles. London 1587. Vol. III. P. 327.

[38] U. Ellis-Fermor. Christopher Marlowe. Methuen & Co. London 1927. p. 112.

[39] ll. 164-5.

years the length of the sword determined the limit of sway. A physically and morally weak man could, by practising astute displomacy and that kind of statecraft which Elizabethans were wont to call Machiavellian, rise to control a kingdom in the middle ages, and by making Edward himself confess to his fault Marlowe has lifted history out of his own times.

> Commend me to my sonne, and bid him rule
> Better then I; yet how haue I transgrest,
> Vnlesse it be with too much clemencie?[40]

This passage brings to mind a similar confession of Richard II when he too reflects upon his failure as a king. "I wasted time and now doth time waste me."[41] The emphasis on Edward's acts of injustice leads one to infer that Marlowe might have been drawing a moral of some kind. Over and over again Edward does not give just due to one who deserves it--the Bishop of Coventry is badly treated, Edward refuses to have anything to do with the Queen unless she persuades the barons to recall Gaveston from Ireland, he refuses aid to Mortimer in ransoming of his uncle, and Edward is unduly harsh to his own brother. It would appear that Marlowe modifies the bolder political schemes set out in his more grandiose earlier plays. In this play Marlowe tends to suppose that public efficiency in a ruler is not enough unless it be confirmed and supported by private virtue. The above theory is one that centuries earlier than Marlowe's own would have thoroughly confirmed--but Machiavelli had tainted the Renaissance political arena. More misunderstood than rightfully employed, Marchiavelli gave an impetus to

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[40] ll. 2074-6.

[41] Richard II, ed. W. Bright. Act V Se. V. l. 50.

the rising tide of brilliant diplomats who were certainly not blameless in their private lives but were highly successful in the world.

Marlowe appears to double this feudal political view by presenting Mortimer as a foil to Edward. In this he changed the historical facts by giving to the Mortimers a larger share in the baronial revolt than history warranted. However, it is interesting to note that in one aspect Edward and Mortimer are one--both fail in the duties expected of them in the hierarchical system. Mortimer fails as a peer of the realm, his ambition unseats him and he goes too far in his attempts to usurp the royal power. It is also a clever balancing of character on Marlowe's part in that both Edward and Mortimer lack what is the other's forte, the good man Edward against the good politician Mortimer.

> All of Edward's weaknesses are mirrored in Mortimer's strength; what private virtue Edward may have is set off by Mortimer's total lack of it. Those elements which cause Edward to fall cause Mortimer to rise.[42]

Finally, with regard to the king, Marlowe does not mention the Divine Right Theory of kingship even once in the course of the play, whereas Shakespeare is conscious of it in the writing of Richard II. "Not all the water in the rough rude sea, Can wash the balm off from an anointed King."[43] Such sentiments are never expressed by Edward though he is often enough in a similar situation to Richard. Yet Marlowe makes it clear that rebellion against the king is wrong, and

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[42] Ribner. p. 129.

[43] Richard II ed. W. Wright. Act III. Sc. II. ll. 44-5.

though there is no outspoken Bishop of Carlisle to prophesy dire consequences of treason, there are hints all through Edward II to show the wrongness of revolt against the king.

> But yet lift not your swords against the King.[44]

> Proud traytor Mortimer, why doost thou chase
> Thy lawfull King, thy sovraigne, with thy sword?[45]

The above point should not be emphasized too much in indicating an earlier historical attitude. The Elizabethans had similar ideas, and these were fostered by the National Church. The Queen was the head of the church and therefore champion of true religion, and any revolt against her was not only treason, but sacrilegious as well.

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[44] l. 268

[45] ll. 1761-2.

HISTORY AND EDWARD II: DEMOCRACY

Marlowe has included a few other matters of a political nature to indicate a distance in time. Democracy as one understands that term in the present day was quite unknown both by Elizabethans, and the fourteenth century. However, there had been some democratic progress from 1327 to 1593. The commons had gradually acquired more political power. In the days of the Tudors the mercantile class was emerging from the ranks of the petty merchants and commercial men, and was growing in political power. This section of the population was the bulwark of both the middle-class and Puritanism. The mention of them in Shakespeare gives instance of their growing influence. The City of London was forced to proscribe the building of theatres within its precincts because of Puritan pressure. On the other hand, the commons were still more or less ignored by Elizabeth, but like the rest of the Tudors, she could cleverly manipulate them for her own purposes. The Tudors had a happy method whereby they always got their own way and yet made it appear as if they were doing the general will of the people. The national enthusiasm in Tudor times over political and religious issues was unparalleled in earlier history.

As compared to this, we find in Edward II that the commons are generally objects of contempt for the nobles and are only mentioned when their aid is needed. The barons are angry for their own sakes and plead

their own causes against the king. Only when open revolt breaks out and Mortimer and the Queen lead the rebel army, is the general cause of "the realm" proclaimed. In recalling Gaveston from exile Mortimer wishes to maneuvre things so that "we have the people of our side."[46]

> And when the commons and the nobles ioyne,
> Tis not the king can buckler Gaueston.[47]

Only after all other persuasion has failed to draw Edward away from the evil influence of Gaveston and the play well advanced do the nobles bring before Edward the cause of the commons. They plead that Edward's prodigality and neglect of foreign invasions have been a trial to the commons. "The murmuring commons overstretched hath."[48] One can imagine the Elizabethan spectators of such deeds saying, "Well might this have happened in King Edward's reign, but Milords of Leicester or Essex dare not treat us in this fashion!"

The political machinery of feudal times did not give the ruler the latitude that was afforded the Tudors. There operated a more effective system of "checks and balances," to use a term employed by Montesquieu in later years. The King could not ride rough-shod over the nobles in the fashion that the Tudors were wont to do. It is inconceivable to see Pembroke, Warwick, Lancaster and Mortimer of the play appearing before the Court of Star Chamber as Henry VII ordered some of his courtiers to do. The system of feudal fealty had within

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[46] l. 576.

[47] ll. 584-5

[48] l. 956.

itself this perception of checks and balances. If an ordinance was passed exiling Gaveston and the King agreed to it, Gaveston could not legitimately return, for not even the King could by his own authority annul the decree of banishment. Even the King was bound by the ordinance. This system was not one that was normal in Renaissance times when the ruler often acted on bold personal initiative regardless of existing laws. Here again Marlowe has harkened back to the fourteeth century and attempted to place his drama in its historical context. It is interesting, in connection with Gaveston's exile to note that history records that Edward solicited the Pope himself to bring his influence to bear upon the nobles so that Gaveston could be recalled from Ireland. Marlowe adds drama to history by making the Queen solicit the nobles for Gaveston's recall.

HISTORY AND EDWARD II: RELIGION AND MORALITY

Leaving the political picture as presented by Marlowe and moving to another sphere where time past is depicted, one is led to examine the religious and moral aspects of the fourteenth century as seen by Marlowe. It is common to speak of the Medieval Age as being one in which religion and the church played dominant roles. The medieval concept of history has been generally assumed to be one where all history was a reflection of God's will working itself out in the world. The rise and fall of nations, as of men, was a part of the Divine Pattern of the universe.

However, in this play there is little moralizing on the basis that Edward's misrule was part of the Divine plan for humanity. Marlowe in this aspect seems to be very much a Renaissance secularist for judging from his works we find great emphasis on the power and possibilities that lie with the individual to make for his success. It is man who holds the key to his own destiny. Edward's defiance of the Church and his treatment of the Bishop of Coventry could be explained in the light of Marlowe's humanist views; also the strong anti-Catholicism of his contemporaries would support those speeches and actions of Edward that were against the Church.

However, Marlowe does present the Church as being a very strong agency and influence upon Edward. The Bishops are decisive in the crises

that face Edward. The bishops are men of few words, but when they do speak they speak directly and from a position of strength. The Bishop of Coventry is honest and bold with Gaveston.

> As then I did incense the parlement
> So will I now, and thou shalt back to France.[49]

The Church makes its position against Edward quite clear. The nobles revolt for a variety of reasons, some personal and others patriotic. The Church appears to have but one grievance against Edward--he has attacked the Church in the person of the Bishop of Coventry.

> First, were his sacred garments rent and torne,
> then laide they violent hands vpon him; next,
> Himselfe imprisoned, and his goods asceased:
> This certifie the Pope; away, take horsse.[50]

The Archbishop of Canterbury makes his position clear.

> Lan. My lord, will you take armes against the king?
> Bish. What neede I? God himselfe is vp in armes,
> When violence is offered to the church.
> Mor. iu. Then wil you ioine with vs that behhis peeres
> To banish or behead that Gaueston?
> Bish. What els, my lords? for it concernes me neere;
> The Bishoprick of Couentrie is his.[51]

When Edward and the nobles are shouting threats at each other over Gaveston's exile, it is the Bishop who firmly steers both parties towards a decision.

> Bish. And see what we your councellers haue done. (Handing Edward the paper.)[52]

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[49] ll. 184-5.

[50] ll. 242-5.

[51] ll. 246-252.

[52] l. 338.

Again when decision is lost in words the Bishop interposes one short sentence:

> Bish. Nothing shall alter vs, wee are resolu'd.[53]

And finally:

> Bish. Are you content to banish him the realme?
> Edw. I see I must, and therefore am content.[54]

Edward makes it quite clear that when the Bishop threatens to absolve the nobles of their oaths of allegiance, "the Legate of the Pope must be obeyed."[55] The nobles bluster, the prelates use the iron hand in the velvet glove. Is it therefore surprising that Edward explodes in frustration? "Why should a king be subject to a priest?"[56]

The Elizabethans knew only too well that no Tudor monarch would be subject to a priest of any Church. Henry VIII had beheaded Bishop Fisher and dismissed Wolsey, Mary Tudor had burnt Latimer and Ridley, and Elizabeth was more than capable of holding her own against any ecclesiastic.

The Bishops again display their strength in the Abdication Scene; the king rages and the nobles argue; the Bishops firmly convinces Edward in a few well chosen words to give up his crown. It is significant that it is to the Bishop that the crown is finally surrendered.

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[53] l. 368.

[54] ll. 378-9

[55] l. 358.

[56] l. 390.

By giving this picture of the power of the Church Marlowe pointed to a time other than his own as the scene for the action of his play. His audience would at once see the difference. The Elizabethan attitude has been described thus:

> Apologists found that the 'true' religion was best defined by terms of moderation, decency, order and pratical reason. The need of the hour was for political loyalty and for ethical idealism to support it.[57]

Marlowe underlines the powerful position of the Church in his play by making it a haven and a place of refuge from the troubles of the world. It is symbolic that Edward should fly from an unsuccessful battle and take refuge in an abbey and actually be represented with his head in an abbott's lap. There would appear to be a less direct way of indicating that the life in a religious order is a better and more contented one than life in the busy material world.

> Father, this life contemplative is heaven.
> O, that I might this life in quiet lead.[58]

In the Renaissance the benefits and pleasures of the speculative and unworldly life were over and over enumerated and extolled, but there was an equal, if not greater emphasis laid upon conduct in the world of human affairs: "The only end of knowledge ought to be to live well."[59] The world to come was anticipated as eagerly by Elizabethans as by their predecessors--but the world around them was not ignored.

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[57] R. W. Battenhouse. Marlowe's Tamberlane. Vanderbilt University Press, 1941. p. 21.

[58] ll. 1856-7.

[59] T. Nashe. Anatome of Absurditie. Vol. I. ed. McKerrow p. 48.

Edward's confession to the Abbot could be interpreted as the attitude of a fourteenth-century man who had always been basically of the opinion that the life of the religious order was better because it was not one of action in this world.

Aside from the emphasis that is conspicuously put upon the power and workings of the Church as exemplified in the words and deeds of both laymen and priests, there are other evidences that Marlowe was depicting an old story. The general morality and ethics that are reflected in the political intrigues and quarrels also have a medieval flavour. However in making any assumptions on these matters one is on very dangerous ground as much feudal morality was inherited by the Elizabethans.

There is a question of expediency. Mortimer, while pleading for the recall of Gaveston from his exile, adds that if he (Gaveston) continued to be troublesome a convient assassination could always be arranged. Mortimer seems to imply in his speech that though the assassination may be wrong the expediency of the situation would warrant the deed.

> But were he here, detested as he is,
> How easilie might some base slaue be subbornd
> To greet his lordship with a poniard,
> And none so much as blame the murtherer,
> But rather praise him for that braue attempt,
> And in the Chronicle enrowle his name
> For purging of the realme of such a plague.[60]

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[60] ll. 558-563.

Again Edward in his exasperation with his peers says:

> Would Lancaster and he (Mortimer) had both carroust
> A howle of poison to each others health.[61]

However these poisonings and political murders were more allied in the Elizabethan minds with the Renaissance princes (especially those of Italy) than with English dukes of time past.

Again the belief in witchcraft which is exhibited in Edward II is as much as part of Macbeth and Renaissance England. A decade after the writing of this play King James I himself wrote a treatise on daemonology. The nobles in attempting to account for Edward's unusual passion for Gaveston believe that magic is involved in the relationship.

> Mort. Jr. Is it not strange, that he (Edward) is thus bewitcht?[62]

Another notion which scholars are apt to accept as showing attitudes of earlier times is the concept of the fall of great men. The fall of the great man had to be due in a large measure to Fortune and not so much because of his own failings. The human element in the tragic ruin of mortals was present, but subordinate in influence to the ways of Providence. Boccacio's De Casibus illustrates this point very well. The Renaissance tended to put greater emphasis on "human choices." This spirit was not entirely lost, for Raleigh in his History of the World says that "chance is the idolatory or god of fools."[63]

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[61] ll. 1033-4

[62] l. 262

[63] Raleigh. History of World I. i. 15.

There appeared to be a tendency towards equating chance with the Christian God, the implication being that all things come from God and so as He wills, He withdraws what he has given. All mankind is in the hands of God totally.

> Providence binds together human acts and fortunes by the indissoluble connexion of causes.[64]

The "tragic flaw" as understood by the medieval thinker was in reality in a theological context a lack of grace, and in a philosophical context a lack of knowledge and moderation.

One may apply the above very fruitfully to Marlowe's play. Holinshed, Marlowe's source, was fully conscious of the concept of the fall of great men and throws over his account of Edward II a moral tone and sums up all events as "the pitifull tragedie of this Kings tyme." The Mirror for Magistrates is one other such literary composition where the fall of princes up to Tudor times is the subject matter. That Marlowe was fully aware of this earlier attitude is evidenced in his title, "The troublesome raigne and lamentable death of Edward the Second, King of England: with the tragical fall of proud Mortimer."[65]

That it is "pride" which is specifically mentioned is interesting, pride being one of the Seven Deadly Sins. These Seven Sins were a regular feature in morality plays of an earlier age than Marlowe's.

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[64] T. Aquinas. Theologica. ed A.C. Pegis. PT. I, ques. xxii. art. i.

[65] W. D. Briggs. ed. Edward II. London 1914. Title page.

Behind all these attitudes regarding the fall of man and the other ethical standards of the fourteenth century, was a basic faith in a moral order that was eminently just. This moral order had laid down inflexible laws and those that broke these laws had judgement here on earth even before they left this earth. Edward and Gaveston and Mortimer all are destroyed because they do not do what the moral order expects of them. Edward is a King--but he puts his private desires and feelings above his royal duties. He would gladly forfeit his realm for Gaveston's company:

> Make seuerall kingdomes of this monarchie,
> And share it equally amongst you all,
> So I may haue some nooke or corner left,
> To frolike with my deerest Gaueston.[66]

Gaveston does not do unto others as he would they should do to him, but uses his position in the King's favour to advance his own favourites such as Spencer and Balduck. He speaks rudely to the nobles and is guilty of pride. Being the king's confident and minion he says:

> I think myselfe as great
> As Ceasar riding in the Romaine streete
> With captive Kings at his triumphant Carre.[67]

He intends to abuse his enviable position at court to "draw the pliant King which way I please."[68]

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[66] ll. 364-67.

[67] ll. 172-4.

[68] l. 53.

Marlowe incidentally paints a more favorable portrait of Gaveston than Holinshed does.

> For having revoked againe into England his [Edward's] old mate the said Peers de Gaveston. . .through whose compaine and societie he was suddenlie so corrupted, that he burst out into most heinous vices; for then using the said Peers as a procurer of his disordered dooings, he began to have his nobles in no regard, to set nothing by their instructions, and to take small heed unto the good government of the commonwealth, so that within a while, he gave himselfe to wantonnes, passing his time in voluptuous pleasure, and riotous excesse: and to helpe them forward in that kind of life, the foresaid Peers, who (as it may be thought, he had sworne to make the king to forget himselfe, and the state, to the which he was called) furnished his court with companies of jesters, ruffians, flattering parasites, musicians, and other vile and naughtie ribalds, that the king might spend both daies and nights in jesting, plaieng, banketing, and in such other filthie and dishonorable exercises.[69]

Mortimer at the outset of the play is a high minded patriot with the noblest and most worthy motives for his action. He sees that Gaveston's evil influence on the king "will be the ruin of the realme and us."[70] But as he acquires greater power, and his illicit amour with the Queen progresses, the love of power corrupts him and drives him even to murder.

> And others are but shrubs compard to me.
> All tremble at my name, and I fear none.[71]

All three have gone beyond that which was ordained for them and the Divinity that shapes our ends struck down all three--Edward, Gaveston and Mortimer.

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[69] Holinshed. 1586. 318.

[70] l. 239.

[71] ll. 2538-41.

Before one leaves the matter of moral standards of the Middle Ages as reflected in this play there is one other question which must be examined--the nature of the relationship between Edward and Gaveston. Nearly all Marlowe scholars have something strong to say about it, but with the evidence at our disposal, perhaps any final statement on the question is difficult. Holinshed tells us that Edward "was of nature given to lightnesse" and that in the company of Peers "burst out into most heinous vices." The Monk of Malmesbury in Vita Edwardi Secundi says:

> Indeed I do not remember to have heard that one man so loved another. Jonathan cherised David, Achilles loved Patroclus. But we do not read that they were inmoderate.[72]

In the play, the only hint that we receive directly from the lives, that would lead us to conceive of an unnatural affection between Edward and Gaveston comes from the Queen. (l. 254-261).

Miss V. Ellis-Fermor and Professor Mario Praz in no uncertain terms label this relationship homosexual. Mr. Praz explains also why Marlowe chose this subject:

> To a normal Elizabethan Edward II would have appeared no less of a monster than any of the incestuous and murderous petty lords of Renaissance Italy. . .The degenerate King is the most successful of Marlow's figures because the poet saw in him a soul akin to his own, disturbed by the same idiocyncrasy of sense.[73]

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[72] Vita Edwardi Secundi ed. and trans. N. Denholm-Young. Thos. Nelson and Sons. London 1957. p. 261.

[73] Mario Praz. Marlowe. English Studies Vol. 31. 1931. p. 211.

Speaking of Marlowe's treatment of history Miss Ellis-Fermor writes:

> the notorious fondness for favourites, bluntly set down by the historian as perversion, becomes a not unbeautiful love story against a dark background of storm and danger.[74]

> He [Edward] is also a sodomite whose whole life is subordinated to the exclusive passion he feels first for Gaveston, then for Spencer, and which will be the cause of his downfall.[75]

Paul Kocher is apparently of the same opinion as those quoted above for he says that Marlowe "colours the friendships of Edward with the forbidden passion of homosexuality."[76] Most scholars argue a case that Marlowe himself was a pervert and was therefore both naturally led to a similar subject in history, and naturally led to make it a beautiful and sympathetic relationship. To argue further on this would go beyond the scope of this paper. However, there is little doubt that the medieval church and legal code both took an unfavourable attitude towards homosexuality, and as such, they fully expected a just Deity to strike down the guilty.

In this connection it may be worth remembering that L. J. Mills sees Edward II as a Friendship Play along with many others of a like nature written during Elizabethan times, such as Endymion and Two Gentlemen of Verona.

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[74] U. Ellis-Fermor. Christopher Marlowe. Methuen & Co. London. 1927. p. 117.

[75] M. Poirier. Christopher Marlowe. Chatto and Windus. London. 1950. p. 178.

[76] P. Kocher. Christopher Marlowe. Chapel Hill University of N. Carolina Press. 1946. p. 205.

> Marlowe very clearly shows Edward as a man loving association with his fellows in a high and honourable manner, and it is altogether unnecessary, if not wrong to see in the relationship anything of an immoral character.[77]

Judging from Renaissance writings, one tends to assume that friendships between men were much closer in nature than during any of the succeeding centuries. In the play itself, for we cannot allow the chronicles to prejudice our opinions, any charge of unnatural affection is almost totally absent. It is noteworthy that when the nobles bring charges against Edward and Gaveston there is no mention of immoral living.

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[77] L. J. Mills - One Soul in Bodies Twain. Principia Press Inc. 1937. p. 248.

HISTORY AND EDWARD II: SOCIAL LIFE

In the sphere of social matters and mores Marlowe has taken care to indicate earlier times in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most constantly recurring notion is the great emphasis placed on social rank. The sense of belonging to a well-born family and the privileges of birth were emphasized by feudal hierarchy more than in Elizabethan times. This has been dealt with in a measure when the concept of kingship was examined.

The most frequently cited grudge against Gaveston on the part of the nobles is his unaristocratic origin. Lancaster calls him "that base and obscure Gaveston."[78]

> Mort. Jr. Thou villiane, wherefore talkes thou of a King
> That hardly art a gentleman by birth.[79]

Warwick says to Edward:

> You that are princely borne should shake him off.[80]

Even the patient Kent is perturbed at the titles heaped on Gaveston and attempts to teach his brother moderation.

> Kent: Brother, the least of these may well suffice
> For one of greater birth then Gaveston.[81]

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[78] ll. 101-3.

[79] ll. 322-3.

[80] l. 375.

[81] ll. 158-9.

As regards their own position the nobles are very conscious that their duty and allegiance is due the king, yet they are the peers of the realm. Mort. Jr. asks the Archbishop of Canterbury:

Then will you joine with us that be his peers?[82]

Later when the nobles demand the banishment of Gaveston,

Kent: Is this the dutie that you owe your King?
War: We know our duties, let him know his peeres.[83]

This clear social pattern and the strong emphasis on birth was not so apparent in Marlowe's own times. Francis Drake and Walter Raleigh were knighted and the latter for a while had the same influence with the Queen as did Gaveston with Edward. Yet the peers of the realm did not take offence at this, or if they did, they did not express themselves as the nobles do in Edward II.

Chivalry was not yet quite dead and the elaborate chivalric code of conduct was still operative in the reign of Edward II. Certain things were just not done, no matter what the provocation. A notable instance of this is found when Arundell brings the news of Gaveston's death to Edward. The first amongst the listners to react to this news is the younger Spencer.

A bloudie part, flatly against the law of armes.[84]

It is not the death of Gaveston so much as the manner of it that motivates Spencer's speech.

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[82] l. 249.

[83] ll. 316-7

[84] l. 1409.

When Gaveston is captured by the baronial forces Warwick says:

> But for thou wert the favorit of a King
> Thou shalt have so much honour at our hands.[85]

It must be remembered that Gaveston had been created Earl of Cornwall, Lord of Man, and Lord Chamberlain. He therefore could not be hanged in the fashion of ordinary criminals. As a gentleman he could claim the axe rather than the noose.

These niceties of civil conduct would be well appreciated by Marlowe's audience, although in their own times the notion was yet dying.

Spencer's advice to Baldock regarding the behaviour of a courtier savours of calculated hypocrisy and possibly a little malicious fun at Baldock's expense. But there is exphasis on how "to court it like a Gentleman"[86] so that Baldock may fit into court circles.

In Elizabethan times the court was far more heterogeneous in composition than in Edward's rule--drawing on all spheres of life. The days of chivalry demanded a uniformity of courtly behaviour from all who aspired to enter royal circles.

Regarding the position of women a sharp contrast is drawn between Gaveston's wife and the Queen. The latter is certainly one of Marlowe's finest and most convincing creations because she does not

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[85] ll. 1184-5

[86] l. 749

remain static. However, as she changes from the suffering wife to the cunning mistress she loses the sympathy of the audience. It is true that she turns from Edward under very grave provocation and never shows any inclination to put Mortimer on the throne. On the other hand, she wishes to secure the succession for her son. However, Gaveston's wife is also deeply in love with a husband who apparently neglects her--yet she never deserts him as the Queen does her husband.

The humanistic Renaissance man would be more inclined to give his sympathy and understanding to Queen Isabel than the man of the fourteenth century. In earlier times a wife was supposed to remain faithful and forgiving, true to her marriage vows no matter how rough the marital path. One does not intend to imply that the Renaissance condoned marital infidelity if the provocation was strong, but only that the Renaissance took a more tolerant attitude towards infidelity. On the other hand Edward's treatment of his wife was totally unforgiveable by medieval standards. It is true that the fourteenth century was a man's world, but that did not permit neglect of one's wife, even though she was the inferior being for in the Theologica it is written "The woman is subject to the man, on account of the weakness of her nature, both of mind and body."[86]

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[86] Theologica. Vol. VI. quest. xi. art. 7.

The Queen's complaint is touching:

> O miserable and distressed Queene!
> Would, when I left sweet France and was imbarkt,
> That charming Circes, walking on the waues,
> Had chaungd my shape, or at the mariage day
> The cup of Hymen had beene full of poyson,
> Or with those armes that twind about my neck,
> I had beene stifled, and not liued to see
> The king my lord thus to abandon me.[87]

Family ties as reflected in this play point to certain ideals. Edward is very negligent of almost every tie of blood. None could be more patient and long-suffering than Kent, but Edward is ungentle even to him.

> Edw. Art thou an enemie to my Gaueston?
> Kent. I, and it greeues me that I fauoured him.
> Edw. Traitor, be gone, whine thou with Mortimer.
> Kent. So will I, rather then with Gaueston.
> Edw. Out of my sight, and trouble me no more.
> Kent. No maruell though thou scorne thy noble peeres,
> VVhen I thy brother am reiected thus.[88]

Kent however repents for bearing armes against his brother and king.

> Vilde wretch, why hast thou, of all unkinde
> Borne armes against thy brother and thy king?[89]

He tries to save the young Prince from falling into the hands of Mortimer and attempts to rescue the captive Edward. To the end he remains the loyal brother and protective uncle. This is the ideal kind of blood relation.

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[87] ll. 464-71.

[88] ll. 1008-1014.

[89] ll. 1702-3.

The Prince too is a loving son and will not take the crown without his father's consent.

> Prin. Mother, perswade me not to weare the crowne;
> Let him be king; I am too yong to raigne.
> Queene. But bee content, seeing it his highnesse pleasure.
> Prin. Let me but see him first, and then I will.[90]

The Prince pleads for his uncle's life and at the close of the play takes revenge on Mortimer for his father's death. The Queene is punished for her share in the baronial revolt and the imprisonment of Edward by being sent to the Tower.

The immediate history of the Tudor family was well known to the populace. Henry VIII had not been by any means an ideal father. Mary's treatment of her sister Elizabeth and her cousin Lady Jane Grey, and Elizabeth's treatment of Mary Queen of Scots left much to be desired. Edward VI was a puppet in the hands of his uncles. The Renaissance imagination was filled with tales of treachery and intrigue within families in high places. Yet, one cannot lay too great an emphasis on these factors as contributing to a historical perspective.

The ceremonies and revelry mentioned in the text are of medieval times. Gaveston in the opening of the play mentions "Italian maskes by night" which is an obvious anachronism. However, there are a few other references made to entertainments of the time. Edward remembers his youthful sports to Lightborn.

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[90] ll. 2199-202.

Tell Isabel the Queene I lookt not thus
VVhen for her sake I ran at tilt in Fraunce,
And there vnhorste the duke of Cleremont.[91]

The nobles sent their formal declaration of war through a "Heralde from the Barons, with his coate of armes." Another tournament is declared to celebrate Gaveston's marriage.

Against our friend the earle of Cornewall comes,
Weele haue a generall tilt and turnament,
And then his mariage shalbe solemnized.[92]

At the coronation of Prince Edward a touch of pageantry is introduced with the declaration of the King's Champion.

If any Christian, Heathen, Turke, or Iew,
Dares but affirme that Edwards not true king,
And will auouche his saying with the sworde,
I am the Champion that will combate him.[93]

Another touch of the past was the custom of eating together once a quarrel had been resolved. When Edward learns that the nobles have agreed to recall Gaveston from Ireland he declares a feast and invites all.

Lord Mortimer, we leave you to your charge
Now let us in and feast it roiallie.[94]

This custom of rival parties ratifying agreements at a banquet table is not peculiarly medieval as this practice continues in our own time.

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[91] ll. 2475-7.

[92] ll. 667-670.

[93] ll. 2368-71.

[94] ll. 666-7.

HISTORY AND EDWARD II:
LEARNING AND SCHOLARSHIP

There are only a few references to learning and scholarship in the text that would indicate a fourteenth-century setting for the play. There can be little doubt that literacy was much higher in Marlowe's days than during the reign of King Edward, but Marlowe's nobles all appear to be educated men. Spencer, Mortimer and Edward quote Latin and nearly every character makes allusion to classical mythology. The most notable instance of this is the long list of mythological precedents for homosexual friendship enumerated by the elder Mortimer. To speak in this fashion argues an education and cultural background nearer to that of a Renaissance gentleman. However, there is one conspicuous omission--there is not a single Biblical allusion. Considering that this was a church-dominated age and one in which religious drama brought the facts of the Bible to all men, it is strange that Biblical allusions are absent. This omission may argue a point in Marlowe's favour as a craftsman.

For the Elizabethans the age of the Roman Church was an age of ignorance and superstition as is evidenced by this remark from Ascham's Scolemaster:

> In our forefather's time, when papistry, as a standing pool, covered and overflowed all England. . .[95]

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[95]Ascham - The Scolemaster quoted in Golden Hind ed. Lamson and Smith. Norton and Coy. New York 1956, p. 107.

If, therefore, ignorance, and chiefly ignorance about the "true religion" was fostered by the Roman Church it was clear that the dwellers of the fourteenth century could not know their Bible and therefore could not make any reference to it. By arguing thus, one may show how an absence of Biblical allusions is a help in dating the action of Edward II.

The attitudes towards the world, and how man should face the vicissitudes of life are clear enough in the play. There is the conventional division of life into the contemplative, and active life in the world. The attitude of patiently bearing all one's troubles and griefs is implied, if it is not specifically mentioned in the text. The stoic forbearance under all vicissitudes is a heritage from classical times, for in the midst of sorrow one can always find comfort in the imagination. This attitude of "my mind to me a kingdom is" is reflected in the advice given to Edward as a prisoner, by Leicester.

> Be patient, good my lord, cease to lament.
> Imagine Killingworth castell were your court,
> And that you lay for pleasure here a space,
> Not of compulsion or neccissitie.[96]

This stoic acceptance of adversity is reflected again in the lines where Edward after his capture bids farewell to his friends.

> Well, that shalbe, shalbe; part we must.
> Sweete Spencer, gentle Baldocke, part we must.[97]

Kocher speaking of religious thought in Edward II writes:

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[96] ll. 1954-57.

[97] ll. 1930-1.

> Religion appears almost solely in the farewells of the defeated as they go to their deaths. These evince scorn of the world and expectation of bliss in heaven, all in the best traditions of Christian handbooks on holy dying and de contemptu mundi. [98]

This contemptus mundi was a popular concept in both Medieval and Renaissance times on one's death-bed. The Earl of Warwick when sentenced to death exclaims:

> Tis but temporall that thou canst inflict.
> Farewell, vaine worlde.[99]

When Spencer is captured, he expresses great fortitude:

> Edw. Spencer, a, sweet Spencer, thus then must we part.
> Spenc. We must, my lord, so will the angry heavens.[100]

Baldock expresses similar sentiments:

> To die, sweet Spencer, therefore live wee all.
> Spencer, all live to die, and rise to fall.[101]

As has been mentioned, this was the contentional frame of mind in which one was supposed to meet death even in Tudor times. However, one tends to think that Elizabethans had good reasons for not despising the world as much as their forefathers. True, that death was all around them, but the Dance of Death was a creation of earlier ages. Even though the Tudors might have realized that in the midst of life we are in death, apparently they did not allow this concept unduly to restrain their activities.

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[98] P. Kocher. C. Marlowe. Univ. of N. Carolina Press. 1946. p. 131.

[99] ll. 1529, 1536.

[100] ll. 1908-9.

[101] ll. 1996-7.

CONCLUSION

Having thus examined the text of Edward II in an attempt to discover where Marlowe endeavours to give a historical perspective to his play we find that overtly there is comparatively little evidence. Marlowe had come a long way from the days of Tamburlaine Pt. I and his dramatic technique had acquired strength and subtlety. His basic story is medieval and one that his audience presumably was acquainted with in some measure. Edward II should have been remembered for two things if nothing else--he was the first Prince of Wales and the first English King who was forced to resign his crown. His military disasters with the Scotch and his diabolic murder were also events that were long remembered.

The facts of history, it is true, were changed and telescoped by Marlowe, but that was inevitable if he was to produce a play that could be acted in a normal period of time--Kent and the Queen are both made much older than they actually were when the events enacted took place, the Mortimers are given a greater share in the baronial revolt than Holinshed warrants and a few other details are changed. Marlowe also invented some things of his own, such as the scene where the Queen with Mortimer's aid persuades the nobles to recall Gaveston from exile and the character of Levune.

However, a close reading of the text shows that Marlowe did not forget that his play is set in the early fourteenth century and by the methods elaborated above throws out hints as to the historical perspective. Some of these indications are lost on a contemporary audience, but the Elizabethans would apparently understand Marlowe's intentions better.

This method of writing history plays and this play in particular is said by critics to have influenced Richard II.

> More than at any other time he [Edward] speaks like a poet, as will speak Shakespeare's Richard II, who owes much to him.[102]
>
> In every respect Marlowe prepared the way for Shakespeare's great historical tragedy Richard II, and not least in that he gave a new tragic significance to the de casibus theme of rise and fall which we have already noted in the Henry VI plays and in Richard III.[103]

There is the same stress on conduct and the chivalric code of honour, the same social customs (the position of women), and the same political scheme as in Edward II. One must not forget that Edward II was great-grandfather to Richard II, so that they are not so far apart in time.

Finally, whatever history and historical perspective Marlowe may or may not have introduced one should not forget the fundamental motive for the writing of this play, and in a sense, of all plays. Marlowe wrote Edward II to be acted and wished to compose a successful play. That he found very promising material in English History and that

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[102] M. Poirier. C. Marlowe. Chatto and Windus 1951. p. 181.

[103] I. Ribner. The Eng. History Play in the Age of Shakespeare. Princeton Univ. Press, 1957. p. 129.

there was a flourishing tradition in a genre that would accept historical drama was fortunate for Marlowe. Also it was fortunate that there was an audience prepared for the kind of play he was writing as there had already been many plays in the same tradition. There was a resurgence of the national spirit and a popular movement towards dramatizing events of national importance that were alive in the national memory. But after all this has been said, perhaps one should remind oneself that in the last analysis Edward II would be judged by Elizabethans, not for its historical realism or for any chauvinistic material it contained, but by whether it gave them something to see, for which they would gladly pay money.

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