

EDWARD- II

Joan Parks' History, Tragedy and Truth in Edward II

Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* is typically applauded as an aesthetic achievement, a history play that brings form and meaning to the incoherent material of its chronicle source by retelling the king's slightly dull, twenty-year reign as the fierce and deadly struggle of a few willful personalities. Within the development of Elizabethan drama, *Edward II* is granted a crucial role in bringing to the English "chronicle play"--including Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*--the unity and purpose of the mature "history" play, epitomized by Shakespeare's later, more aesthetically sophisticated tetralogy. In this narrative of literary development, the episodic chronicle play fails to show the disparate events of the past contributing to a single action -- fails, like the chronicle, to comprehend the past -- while the history play successfully makes sense of those events. Considered in context of the Marlovian oeuvre, *Edward II* again demonstrates the triumph of art and order over inchoate historical material: it is Marlowe's "most perfect achievement in dramatic structure" and the "most finished and satisfactory of Marlowe's plays, evidently carefully written, with the refractory chronicle material skillfully handled."

These readings of *Edward II*, however, have relied upon too superficial an understanding of the chronicle tradition, and they have kept the play's formal success separate from the Elizabethan debates about historiography within which both play and source participated. The social and political stakes of Marlowe's historiographical practice emerge when we reread *Edward II* against a conception of the chronicle not as mere "material" but as a coherent and influential projection of national identity and historical process. Such a comparative reading shows us not merely that Marlowe's play is more aesthetically satisfying, but also that it significantly redefines the nation and the forces of historical change. In particular, Marlowe delineates and focuses on a private realm, which he sets up in opposition to the public as a volatile source of decisions affecting the state. In addition, reading Marlowe's play with a new understanding of the chronicle foregrounds the metadiscursive elements in *Edward II* that, referring back to the source accounts, help to illuminate Marlowe's sense of his own artistic refashioning. The chronicle form, as Marlowe's principal source and one with considerable cultural authority, challenged him to set up his drama as a more "true" history and to defend his very different understanding of both political process and history writing.

The chronicle is characterized as "material," an apparently amorphous grouping of value-free facts for the artist to choose or reject. For the modern reader, accustomed to finding meaning in tales of causality, the disparate events recorded by the chroniclers -- events only related to each other by their shared chronological structure -- seem to lack meaning and purpose. But we can no longer read these important histories so carelessly. In her recent analysis of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicle*, Annabel Patterson has shown that the chronicle's form and content actually worked to address the concerns and convey the values of the citizen and artisan Londoners who were its principal readers and producers. Maintaining that the *Chronicle* reveals not its authors' "incompetence" but their "different set of historiographical principles," Patterson argues that the *Chronicle*'s perplexing inclusivity -- the quality that brought John Donne's scathing dismissal of chronicle content as "trivial household trash"--in effect creates a national history that will encompass not just king and court but also citizens and even the artisanal and laboring classes. Patterson also traces, in passages throughout the *Chronicle*, the authors' recurrent, approving attention to rights theory, to the "ancient constitution," and to the value of Parliament in limiting the monarch's power. She persuasively demonstrates that they make a strong case for certain liberties of the individual and the laws that protect them.

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The assessments of *Edward II* that began this article define the play against the chronicle, which is in turn characterized as "material," an apparently amorphous grouping of value-free facts for the artist to choose or reject. For the modern reader, accustomed to finding meaning in tales of causality, the disparate events recorded by the chroniclers - events only related to each other by their shared chronological structure - seem to lack meaning and purpose. But we can no longer read these important histories so carelessly. In her recent analysis of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicle*, Annabel Patterson has shown that the chronicle's form and content actually worked to address the concerns and convey the values of the citizen and artisan Londoners who were its principal readers and producers.⁽²⁾ Maintaining that the *Chronicle* reveals not its authors' "incompetence" but their "different set of historiographical principles," Patterson argues that the *Chronicle*'s perplexing inclusivity - the quality that brought John Donne's scathing dismissal of chronicle content as "trivial household trash" - in effect creates a national history that will encompass not just king and court but also citizens and even the artisanal and laboring classes.⁽³⁾ Patterson also traces, in passages throughout the *Chronicle*, the authors' recurrent, approving attention to rights theory, to the "ancient constitution," and to the value of Parliament in limiting the monarch's power. She persuasively demonstrates that they make a strong case for certain liberties of the individual and the laws that protect them.

Patterson also steps back from her identification of the *Chronicle*'s pervasive themes in order to suggest the work's importance as a compilation of public records and diverse opinions - its creation of a public sphere, accessible to all readers, in which debate over issues of national concern could take place.⁽⁴⁾ The authors' refusal to censor a diversity of historical interpretations, their characteristic citation of conflicting authorities on a single event without ever choosing between them, and their inclusion of actual state documents and records, Patterson argues, all demonstrate a self-conscious "drive toward completeness and multivocality."⁽⁵⁾ She concludes that the *Chronicle* is a proto-democratic, "hands-off historiography designed to encourage independent judgement in the reader."⁽⁶⁾

Patterson's work suggests that Elizabethan poets and playwrights had to grapple with much more than just "material" in drawing on the *Chronicle*, and my reading of the ways in which *Edward II* was shaped by its chronicle sources is greatly indebted to her detailed examination. I depart from her interpretation in a number of ways, however. Patterson's verdict that Holinshed's *Chronicle* is a "hands-off historiography" seems not only to lose sight of her own research into the authors' recurrent concerns but also to replicate the very conception of the

Chronicle that she hopes to overthrow: that it is mere "material" not yet subjugated to a meaningful interpretation of the past. This conclusion is facilitated by her focus on the fuller and less unified record of years close to the chroniclers' own time. While the chronicle accounts of Edward II's reign also cover, as we will see, a great diversity of concerns and subjects, they rarely cite the variety of conflicting authorities that Patterson finds in accounts of the sixteenth century, and they usually deliver definite judgments on their material. Indeed, I find the chroniclers' historiographical claims in this context to be more descriptive of how they want their accounts to be perceived than of how they really are: by asserting their refusal to override the opinions that they cite, the chroniclers negotiate their authority to interpret the nation's past. In addition, while several passages in the Edward II accounts illustrate clearly the interest in rights theory and the law that Patterson identifies, my interest here is in how the various elements of the chronicle accounts work together, as narrative, to form a cohesive interpretation of English history.

Finally, although Holinshed's Chronicle has long been acknowledged as Marlowe's principal source, my reading here looks at chronicles besides this "greatest" one for a few related reasons. First, scholars agree that Marlowe was familiar with other chronicle accounts, as is evident from his inclusion, for instance, of the Scots' "Ballad of Bannockburn," mocking the defeated English troops (from Robert Fabyan), and the shaving of the imprisoned king with puddle water (in John Stow). More importantly, the aspects of the chronicles that I find most significant here - their organization by chronology and resulting capacity for diverse actors and concerns - are shared by the narrative form in general. It is not that there are not salient differences among the goals and visions of the different chroniclers: Stow and Fabyan both work closely within the tradition of the city chronicle, Richard Grafton emphasizes moral questions and religious concerns, and Holinshed focuses on Parliament such that it limits his attention to the citizens. But much of what Patterson claims for Holinshed - its distinctive class affiliation, formal elements, and emphasis on the law, the greater realm, and the life of the citizen - is also true of the other chronicles, and too narrow a focus on the particular authors and artifact of Holinshed's Chronicle actually diminishes the role played by the chronicles in the culture's historiographical debates. Both individually and as a group, the chronicles wielded considerable cultural authority in early modern England: they were the principal vehicles for representations of English history for at least three-quarters of the sixteenth century, and their inclusive narrative structure, disregard for closure, and theoretical claims provided many Elizabethans with their most complete image of the country's past.(7)

In order to see what is at stake in Marlowe's revisions, we must re-read the chronicle accounts of Edward II's reign. The lengthy narratives of Fabyan, Stow, and Holinshed balance a number of different concerns, intermingling the story of the growing rift between Edward and his barons with recurrent attention to London events and citizen concerns, with accounts of the weather, and with the record of trials, battles against Scotland, and famine. London crowds viewing Edward's wedding procession trample a citizen to death, the Turks are forced from Rhodes and the Knights Templar arrested, natural disasters and livestock disease afflict the countryside, and a tanner's son claims to be the throne's rightful heir, later confessing that he was urged to this treason by his feline-shaped familiar. One day the sun appears "in colour like to bloud, and so continued six houres." (8) The narratives break at the start of each year, and Stow and Fabyan use this opportunity to include, in the form of a list, the names of London's new sheriffs and mayor. Frequent references to "the people," to citizen affairs, and to happenings in diverse regions of the nation create an inclusive perspective: the citizens protect their liberties, resent taxes, and decisively support the queen in her rebellion, for instance, while the "comons" protest the confiscation of "their possessyons and moveable goodes." (9) These disparate events are not explicitly brought into relationship (other than chronological) with each other: transitions are abrupt if they exist at all, and while the chronicles may identify immediate, local causes for events, they rarely offer more far-reaching or complicated analyses.

The accounts are, however, unified by a consistent theme and purpose. First (and most conspicuously), Edward's story comprises only part of the continuing record of all of England's past up to the present moment. Some chronicles, like Holinshed's, begin with the settling of England and others, like Stow's, start with Creation itself. All tell the history of the enduring country at the expense of individual historical actors, and all create a nation centered not on the monarch but on the land and its continuing traditions and customs. The grand recit Patterson identifies in the Chronicle's recurrent concern with constitutional law and ancient rights, then, forms only part of a larger narrative of the nation, manifest in all accounts and not limited to specific passages: the narrative form itself, in this sense, creates the nation. Thus, in the accounts of Edward II, the nation is an abiding presence, the result of a combination of related concerns that includes the preservation of civic order and the maintenance of ancient laws and traditions.

None of the historical actors themselves embodies these central values. Instead, their actions are depicted in terms of their adherence to (or neglect of) laws and order, and their protection of (or threat to) the nation and its traditions. While the accounts begin by associating the barons, queen, and "the people" with this ideal state and with civic order, they conclude still invoking the ideal but observing all the actors' disassociation from it. The early attention paid to Isabel, for instance, is meager but positive (Stow even praises her sound political judgment), but, after she invades England, she is presented as ruled by her passions, seeking revenge rather than justice. Thus, even though the elder Spencer commits himself "unto the mercy of the angry and outrageous woman," both father and son are executed savagely, "without question or answer" and "without sentence or judgement." Likewise, when Edward asks the Londoners for support against the invading queen, their response makes it clear that they value the continuing, legal monarchy and the nation over the particular king: they assert that "they would with due obedience, honour the king and Queene, and their sonne, who was lawfull heire to the realme, and that they would shutte their gates against all forraine traytours of the Realme." When Edward flees, however, civil chaos erupts, and the citizens, "Without respect of any, beheaded such as they tooke to be the queenes enemies" and "did also wrest the keyes of the Tower of London out of the Constables handes, and delivered all the prisoners."(10)

Similarly, the concept of "the people" is invoked as a kind of moral standard early in the accounts, where it points to the general suffering caused by Edward's extravagances. Later on, the phrase tends to be used rhetorically, by the historical actors themselves, for personal ends hostile to the nation. In prison, for instance, Edward is threatened with the "evill will" of "the people" in order to get him to resign willingly, and the queen claims that she will not visit him "for feare of the peoples displeasure." At Edward III's election the Archbishop preaches a sermon "taking his theame, Vox populi, vox Del." The chronicles also suggest that the ideals of law and deliberation come to be emptied of significance. At the parliament deposing the king, all participants are in agreement, but only because "none durst speake to the contrarie"; similarly, after Edward's resignation, Holinshed states somewhat scornfully that "great joy was made of all men, to consider that they might now by course of law proceed" to crown Edward III (Holinshed, pp. 584-6).

As these passages suggest, the chroniclers associate the state and its laws and traditions with more general ethical principles calling for reason and deliberation in all things. In Holinshed's Chronicle, for instance, when the Knights Templar are arrested and imprisoned, their activities are only invoked as "hainous crimes" (p. 548) while three paragraphs describe the method by which they are gathered together and tried. Similarly, in the following passage, the barons debate whether or not to assassinate Piers Gaveston after his capture:

The same night it chanced, that Guie erle of Warwike came to the verie place where the erie of Cornwall was left, and taking him from his keepers, brought him unto Warwike, where incontinentlie it was thought best to put him to death, but that some doubting the kings displeasure, advised the residue to staie; and so they did, till at

length an ancient grave man amongst them exhorted them to use the occasion now offered, and not to let slip the meane to deliver the realme of such a dangerous person, that had wrought so much mischeefe.

(pp. 551-2)

Here, an action first "incontinent" and unwise can, after proper deliberation, be proper and just. Indeed, Holinshed later approves of Gaveston's murder as "a just reward for so scornfull and contemptuous a merchant" (p. 552). This goal of deliberation, furthermore, is modeled by the chroniclers' method of narration, the citation of diverse and conflicting authorities before a final interpretation is reached.

Most significant is that the power of the king himself is consistently subordinated to national laws and ideals. In part, this meaning emerges from the inclusivity of the narrative form, in which Edward's conflicts with his barons and wife and his ensuing fall comprise only part of the continuing record of all of England's past up to the present moment. But the chronicles are also more specific in their insistence that the king was bound to the laws of the land. When insulted by Edward's preference for Gaveston, for instance, Stow's barons react by presenting the king with petitions that request his obedience of the laws "contayned in the Charters of the Kings his Predecessours." Stow proceeds to enumerate these laws at length, and he does so in language that clearly marks his belief in their value and significance: the laws protect the property of "any man" and require "that justice and judgement might bee done in the Lande, as well to the rich as to the poore, according to the auncient and olde approved Lawes and Customes of Englande, and that no man shoulde bee restrayned by the kings writte from prosecuting his right, or to defende himselfe by Lawe" (p. 322). Although Edward agrees to abide by these laws, he soon returns to his former disorderly behavior. In Holinshed's account, too, Edward's barons war with him because he "would not observe the Articles so often demaunded and promised" (p. 571).

Furthermore, Edward is consistently described in all of the chronicles as a source of disorder, a force negative to the reasonable operations of the state and a man whose lack of self-government parallels his inability to govern the realm. Stow portrays the king as "given wholly to the pleasure of the body, not regarding to governe his common weale by discretion and justice";⁽¹¹⁾ Holinshed recounts that Edward "began to... take small heed unto the good government of the commonwealth, so that within a while he gave himselfe to wantonness, passing his time in voluptuous pleasure, and riotous excesse" (p. 547). Both chroniclers also describe Edward's military campaigns in terms of order and control, opposing the drunken rioting of the English troops to the quiet determination and self-discipline of the Scots. Edward is repeatedly defeated, for example, because he "rashlie and with not good advisement ordered his dooings," while the Scots attack "in good order of battell" (p. 558). The national crisis is caused not through the exertion of Edward's will on his surroundings, in fact, but through his disorderliness, distraction, or absence. He continually falls away from the role of an ideal governor because he is weak - and not, as we shall see in Marlowe's play, because his will moves him in a different direction.

Marlowe offers a radical retelling of the story. Those scholars who have undertaken detailed comparison of Marlowe's play with its sources - John Bakeless, H. B. Charlton and R. D. Waller, and, more recently, Vivien Thomas, William Tydeman, and Charles R. Forker - have agreed upon some central points of comparison: Marlowe, by focusing on Edward's favoritism and fall, and narrowing the chronicles' scope and diversity of actors, telescopes the twenty-year reign into a short sequence of inevitable actions, introduces the Spencers as an immediate continuation of the problems first represented by Gaveston, foregrounds the adulterous relationship between Mortimer and Isabel, and makes Mortimer the one, central figure in Edward's opposition, obscuring the roles of the other barons.⁽¹²⁾ Marlowe's attention to the fierce passions underlying the conflict, these scholars have observed, replaces the chronicles' concern with civic order.

I propose that these and other revisions would have played a significant role in Elizabethan debates over who and what gets represented in accounts of the nation's past and that Marlowe aimed to create a substantially different depiction of the realm of governance. If we consider his revisions, first, within the context of national definition, we can see that Marlowe's omission of references to the larger realm and almost all mention of the citizens or "people" effectively excludes these actors from portrayals of the nation. And, although both play and chronicles show willful individuals threatening the country's stability, the chronicles delineate a conflict between English law and tradition and the individuals they work to regulate, while Marlowe pits his historical actors solely against each other. There is a nation at stake in his play, but that nation is composed primarily of a few powerful individuals, figures it transcends in neither authority nor time. The implications of this aspect of Marlowe's achievement should not be underestimated, for such late Elizabethan literary histories played a central role both in national definition and in "teaching" form, focus, and interpretation to later Jacobean histories - histories that were beginning to draw more and more clearly the disciplinary boundaries between their goals and those of "poetry."

That Marlowe's version excludes the chronicles' diversity of concerns and historical figures is in itself an obvious, though rarely made, point, but it is also only the surface of deeper transformations in his understanding of the public realm. Just as Patterson finds in Holinshed's Chronicle a drive to make public knowledge the documents and activities of the state, so my reading of the several accounts of Edward II's reign suggests the chroniclers' interest in open deliberation and in legal and political actions as they relate to ideal structures of governance. Marlowe, in contrast, delineates a distinctly private realm and makes it the source and even the space of much political action. Several passages suggest that we are meant to see Edward and Gaveston's relationship as private, inaccessible to the public eye. Edward wishes that he might have "some nook or corner left / To frolic with my dearest Gaveston" (I.iv.72-3), and a nostalgic contrast is drawn between Edward II's diverted gaze and Edward I's "look," able to appease the rebellious spirit of his barons (I.i.112).(13) In addition, the relationship is often described using mirror imagery: Edward greets his lover: "know'st thou not who I am? / Thy friend, thyself, another Gaveston!" (I.i.141-2); later, he asks the banished favorite to govern Ireland "in my stead" and underscores the identification with an exchange of images: "Here take my picture, and let me wear thine" (I.iv.125,127). It is not that the chronicles do not make much of Edward's love for Gaveston, but there the love is relevant only in terms of its political favoritism and as the "iesting, plaieng, blanketing" that are symptoms of Edward's failure as a governor (p. 547).

Perhaps the most important vehicle for Marlowe's delineation of the private is the figure of Isabel. In the chronicles, Isabel is described as more driven by emotion than the other figures, and her refusal to return from France occasions Holinshed's most bewildered narrative interlude, one which depicts her as mysterious or, at least, unintelligible (p. 336). Still, she is primarily a public figure in these earlier accounts - the most prominent single figure after her return to England at the head of foreign military forces, when she begins leading the barons in deposing the king. In contrast, we first meet Marlowe's Isabel as she retreats "Unto the forest ... / To live in grief and baleful discontent" (I.ii.47-8), vowing that she will endure "a melancholy life" rather than see Edward "oppress'd by civil mutinies" (I.ii.66, 65). Although Mortimer convinces her to "return unto the court again," she continues to evoke a secretive and destructive private realm throughout the play. She originally proposes the murders of both Edward and Gaveston, that of the former masked by a question ("as long as he survives, / What safety rests for us, or for my son?" [V. ii.42-3]) and that of the latter in a private conversation. While Holinshed's barons model a kind of reasoned deliberation as precedent to the act of murder, the play's lords cannot hear or participate in the decision, distinctly concealed and sexualized, to murder the favorite. As Marlowe's Isabel argues for the repeal of Gaveston, the conversation is staged as a lovers' tete a tete. The other nobles look on anxiously, alternately denying and fearing that Mortimer could be swayed to betray their compact and call Gaveston back, and Marlowe carefully positions the audience with the barons, excluding both from

hearing Isabel's arguments. The adulterous and exclusive relationship between queen and baron furthers Marlowe's thesis that the public, political world is constituted and determined by private forces.

In addition, Marlowe continually establishes Mortimer's public power specifically by asserting his control - sexual and emotional as well as political - over the queen. Leicester thus explains recent events with "What cannot gallant Mortimer with the queen?" (IV. vi.50); Isabel asserts that she "will willingly subscribe" to Mortimer's decisions (V. ii.20); and Mortimer himself claims, "The prince I rule, the queen do I command" (V. iv.48). Mortimer's ambition, already forcefully aligned with his singular aggression and disdain, then with sexual power, thus replaces the chronicles' concern with law.

Marlowe's designation of private space as the origin of historical action becomes an important factor in his play's analysis of history writing, which traces the shapes and concerns of historical narrative to their origins in personal motive. He begins this inquiry by recalling, within the play's dialogue, both some of the general rhetorical claims of history writing and some assertions specific to his chronicle sources. It is well known that history writing in the early modern period was not a distinct discipline from poetry - that its claims to fact and objectivity were greatly tempered by its understood functions: to provide didactic lessons and to tell the past in a way that makes it illuminate the present. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of early modern historical prefaces, like that of their classical and medieval predecessors, consistently professed their accuracy, the quality which grounded the accounts for good (the chroniclers called it "truth") or for bad (Philip Sidney considered the historian unhappily "tied not to what should be but to what is").⁽¹⁴⁾ Historians frequently supported such claims by opposing their writings to "poetry," thus suggesting that the imagination spawned fictions rather than higher truths, and by invoking highly conventional claims to have witnessed, or to rely on other writers who had witnessed, the events recounted.

Prefatory apologies for a simple, unadorned prose style also worked to acquit historical writings from the charges of artifice and rhetorical embellishment that might call their accuracy into question. The chroniclers, I would argue, had particular reason to stress these qualities, since their frequently limited social status and experience in state affairs already restricted their claims to authority. They strenuously sought to present the simplicity of their prose as a sign of truth and objectivity rather than as a sign of meager schooling in classical rhetoric. Stow, for instance, apologizes for his lack of art but adds that "though it be written homely, yet it is not (as I trust) written untruly," while Holinshed claims to have "never made any choise of stile, or words ... thinking it sufficient, true and plain to set forth such things as I minded to intreat of, rather than with vaine affectation of eloquence to paint out a rotten sepulchre."⁽¹⁵⁾ The chroniclers thus asserted their authority precisely by denying the artifice - and their authorship - of the stories they told.

In writing tragedy, a genre consistently considered high rhetoric by Renaissance literary theorists and believed by some to be the highest of poetic forms, Marlowe chose a form with characteristic claims far distant from those bolstering the authority of his sources. In fact, the historiographical claims made by Edward II are complicated and seemingly paradoxical. In several passages, Marlowe imitates the historian's strategy for asserting his drama's truth. Establishing a strong opposition in his play between art and political reality, he suggests that his own subject is the latter and that he wishes his own play to be read as a history of what really happened. At the same time, Marlowe foregrounds the artistic decisions informing his telling, thereby identifying artifice as an inevitable element of history writing, just as the will, in his assessment of historical process, determines history itself. Finally, Marlowe specifically draws on and alludes to elements of the chronicles in order to establish his account as both like, and unlike, his historical sources.

Marlowe begins to direct his audience's perspective on these matters in Edward II's first scene, where the newly returned Gaveston describes an entertainment that he plans to have performed for his king:

... in the day, when he shall walk abroad, Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad; My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns, Shall with their goat-feet dance an antic hay; Sometime a lovely boy in Dian's shape, With hair that gilds the water as it glides, Crownets of pearl about his naked arms, And in his sportful hands an olive-tree To hide those parts which men delight to see, Shall bathe him in a spring; and there, hard by, One like Actaeon peeping through the grove Shall by the angry goddess be transform'd, And running in the likeness of an hart, By yelping hounds pull'd down, and seem to die; Such things as these best please his majesty.

(I.i.57-71)

This passage has long been cited as evidence for both Gaveston and Edward's attraction to drama and the extravagant sensuality of the Ovidian tale - thus, for their fatal rejection of the political world. We later learn that, as Gaveston dons extravagant Italianate dress, Edward devotes too much of his attention to triumphs, tournaments, and masques, and Mortimer complains of Edward's soldiers marching "like players, / With garish robes, not armour" (II.ii.181-2). These associations are always coupled with the recognition, seen in the description of Edward's ineffectually attired troops, that such art is inappropriate and even destructive to the realm's proper governance. Similarly, Gaveston's speech above is preceded by an encounter that demonstrates his refusal to participate in the hierarchy of patronage and dependence that binds the state together. Approached by three poor men who ask to serve him, Gaveston ridicules and dismisses them, admitting to the audience, "these are not men for me:/I must have wanton poets, pleasant wits" (I.i.50-51). His reverie is, in turn, interrupted by the real forces of power and history within the play, the entrance of "the king, and the nobles / From the parliament" (I.i.72-3).

The encounters that flank Gaveston's vision act in opposition to the Ovidian entertainment: they suggest that the play about to unfold will reflect a world different from that created and controlled by Gaveston's (or Edward's) imagination; it will be history rather than art. Marlowe explicitly invokes, as a part of this alignment, the historical concerns peculiar to his source. As the play opens, the recalled favorite joyfully extols London as "Elysium to a new-come soul" but adds that it is "Not that I love the city, or the men" (I.i.11-2). Gaveston's dismissal, first of London and its citizens, then of the poor servants, from his purview, and his disregard for the "multitude that are but sparks, / Rak'd up in embers of their poverty" (I.i.20-1), suggest that ordinary citizens and "the people" - important figures in the chronicles - can have no place in his world. The private court entertainment he projects would, in addition, exclude nonaristocratic viewers.

But even as we associate the drama of Actaeon with a speaker whose artistic preoccupations fatally keep him from seeing the realities of power around him, we must also recognize the ways in which Gaveston's drama prefigures the play's action. The drama described is classically conceived tragedy, a transgression and fall with Aristotelian characteristics, precisely the much praised form of Marlowe's play. Actaeon's overweening desire to penetrate the divine secrets of the goddess's beauty finds expression in a single, irrevocable action that brings on his bestial transformation and death. The "antic hay" of the goat-footed satyrs points toward tragedy's origin with satyr plays and toward the etymological origins of "tragedy," origins quite familiar in the early modern period (even Dante's largely medieval "Letter to Can Grande" [13181 notes that *tragedia* derives from *tragos*, "goat"). And the king's "pleasure" as he watches Actaeon "seem to die" recalls Aristotle's observation in chapter 4 of the *Poetics* that we are pleased by the most accurate representations of things that would, if we actually witnessed them, distress us. Gaveston's imaginative vision thus anticipates the ensuing play's action - the fatal transgressions of Mortimer and Gaveston as well as of the tragic hero Edward. Actaeon's gaze toward the ambiguous, hidden "parts" of the boy-goddess in particular prefigures the dangerous eroticism of the relationship we will see between king and favorite. In this context, Marlowe's previous allusion to the figures of the chronicles - the citizens, the poor men - underscores his play's dissimilarities with his source and shows how

artifice affects history, for Gaveston's turn away from the city and its inhabitants in this first scene dismisses, in effect, those figures from the play itself. With the exception, perhaps, of Edward's murderers and the taciturn Mower, characters from outside the ranks of courtier are banished from the history.

Before considering the implications of Marlowe's paradoxical presentation of his drama's claim to be "history," it will be useful to examine another, similar passage. In two short speeches by Lancaster and Mortimer at the play's center, we find Edward II's only suggestion that England is threatened by more than rivalry between the barons and the king's favorites. Mortimer begins this passage by noting that Edward's governance, thriving on spectacle and image, has ignored the reality of diverse societal forces, and Lancaster continues the list:

Mor.jun. The idle triumphs, masques, lascivious shows, and prodigal gifts bestow'd on Gaveston, Have drawn thy treasure dry, and made thee weak, The murmuring commons overstretched hath. Lan. Look for rebellion, look to be depos'd; Thy garrisons are beaten out of France, And, lame and poor, lie groaning at the gates; The wild Oneyl, with swarms of Irish kerns, Lives uncontroll'd within the English pale; Unto the walls of York the Scots made road, And unresisted drave away rich spoils.

(II.ii.155-65)

This passage, like the opening scene, suggests that the history play will chronicle the real forces that threaten to pull the king from his throne - that it is not itself a distracting, artificial "idle triumph" or "lascivious show." And again, the depiction of the encroaching powers recalls the chronicles: they reach throughout the realm and include a diversity of actors, and the barons' list-like report even echoes the chronicles' form.

At the same time, Mortimer and Lancaster describe political forces notably unfit for the heroic actions and emotions of the current tragedy. They warn of rebellion without intimating actual rebellious agents. The people of England are represented only by inarticulate masses, and the "commons" and the "lame and poor" "garrisons" only produce "murmuring" and "groaning." And, just as the commons's grammatical position (they are, amorously, "overstretched") presents them as the senseless object of Edward's actions, the poor outside the gates, while they are implicitly identified with the foreign forces threatening national integrity (e.g., the "wild Oneyl"), have even less agency than those forces: they "lie" rather than "live." The lines demonstrate that Marlowe's play, chronicling the extreme passions and tumultuous falls characteristic of early modern tragedy, can have no room for such actors.

Marlowe may align his own history with the artifice that he identifies in the self-centered and nonhistorical perspective of the tragic king, yet he simultaneously suggests that his tragedy is real - that it records history. He invites us to consider his history as true, furthermore, precisely because it recognizes the self-interest that lies behind all history and political action. Indeed, Edward II repeatedly shows how people can obtain control through the narrative and interpretation of events, just as Gaveston's tragedy was designed to "draw the pliant king which way I please" (I.i.53). For example, Marlowe's curiously short scene marking Isabel and Mortimer's invasion, composed of a single speech and counter-speech, explores two ways of presenting England's dire circumstances. Isabel delivers a tragic complaint, a lament of the "heavy case" where "kin and countrymen / Slaughter themselves in others, and their sides / With their own weapons gor'd" (IV. iv.4, 6-8). Her emphasis on loss refuses, like Marlowe's tragedy itself, to find order within or beneath history's disorder. In his own speech rousing the invading troops, Mortimer offers a corrective to the queen's perspective. Warning that Isabel "must not grow so passionate in speeches," Mortimer suggests that his own narrative will be more objective because less emotional (IV.iv.16). Indeed, his speech recalls the reasoned deliberation and emphasis on retention and continuity of the chronicles:

Lords, sith that we are by the sufferance of heaven Arriv'd, and armed in this prince's right, Here for our country's cause swear we to him All homage, fealty, and forwardness; And for the open wrongs and injuries

Edward hath done to us, his queen and land, We come in arms to wreck it with the swords, That England's queen in peace may repossess Her dignities and honors.

(IV.iv.17-25)

Invoking reason and laws in place of the chaos of battle, Mortimer aligns the coming struggle with the re-establishment of order and the continuation of the state in the person of "this prince." The values invoked recall those of the chronicles, but we later learn definitely (if it is not already clear) that Mortimer is only acting for himself. Mortimer's ability to mask self-interest with principled rhetoric, presumably effective in animating the troops, demonstrates that the usurper's power is secured by historiography.

Marlowe suggests that, like all political action and claims to power, all history writing is achieved through artifice. Thus Edward II's final scene, counterbalancing the tragic and violent dismemberment of Actaeon that marked the play's first scene, offers us a tableau of the continuing state, the young Edward III presiding over his father's body and the severed head of rebellious Mortimer. The scene is, importantly, undercut by our knowledge of the preceding violence: what Marlowe has made horrifyingly clear by staging the murder is that this image of legal succession and justice done masks a bloody disruption in English history. Crucially, the appearance of the state's orderly progression - not coincidentally the persistent subject of the chronicle - is only made possible by means of the artifice through which Lightborn, skilled in elaborate, Italian ways to kill, has concealed the unnatural means of Edward's death.

Edward II helps bring about, through the infusion of literary form, the type of unified interpretation - with beginning, middle, and end - that we have come to think of as "history," and its author explores the significance of such history writing through his meditation on the nature of power. The play participated, like all late sixteenth-century English history writing, in a struggle over who would get written into narratives of the nation and over what forces and agents determined historical change - a struggle necessitated and made more intense by the period's dramatic social and cultural transformations. Within this debate, Marlowe presents a monarch-centered nation, driven by private forces; in addition, he examines his own forceful re-fashioning of history. Denying his own artifice while aggressively reworking the chronicle account in the elevated style of classical tragedy, Marlowe identifies artifice and fiction as fundamental principles governing not only the writing of history but also historical action itself. He thus establishes the historical significance of his own play even as he acknowledges its fictionality.