Edward II: The Troublesome Reign and Lamentable End of Edward the Second, King of England, with the Tragical Fall of Proud Mortimer Study Guide

Edward II: The Troublesome Reign and Lamentable End of Edward the Second, King of England, with the Tragical Fall of Proud Mortimer by Christopher Marlowe

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Introduction

Christopher Marlowe's play *Edward II: The Troublesome Reign and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second, King of England, with the Tragical Fall of Proud Mortimer* is an intense and swiftly moving account of a king controlled by his basest passions, a weak man who becomes a puppet of his homosexual lover, and pays a tragic price for forsaking the governance of his country. The action takes place in early fourteenth-century England, during a period when England was surrounded by enemies in Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, and France. Edward, preoccupied by the banishment of his lover, Gaveston, barely acknowledges the nascent crises that threaten his realm; he indulges his passions and abdicates his duties, failing to recognize that his willful and persistent refusal to attend to state affairs is eroding his royal authority. It is this resulting loss of power, which he has brought upon himself by his own irresponsibility, that irks him more than the absence of his lover. He picks his battles, preferring those petty skirmishes over Gaveston's fate to those that would benefit his rule and enhance the power of the state. When a group of nobles has Gaveston executed, Edward's own execution soon follows, and the play closes by unveiling the Machiavellian vices of the would-be saviors.

Marlowe found most of his material for this play in the third volume of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587). He stayed close to the account, but he embellished history with the character of Lightborn (or Lucifer) as Edward's assassin. First played in 1593 or 1594, *Edward II* was printed in 1594. It has played sporadically throughout the twentieth century, usually to audiences surprised by the power of a work by one of Shakespeare's contemporaries.

Author Biography

Born in the same year as William Shakespeare, 1564, Christopher Marlowe was the son of an affluent shoemaker in Canterbury. Like Shakespeare, Marlowe eventually migrated to London, where he became a member of an erudite social circle that included Sir Walter Raleigh, Thomas Kyd, and others; these men were regarded as freethinkers, in part because they endorsed the new and controversial "scientific" thinking. Marlowe spent six years as a Cambridge scholar, reveling in subjects such as rhetoric, logic, and philosophy; he was especially drawn to the works of Aristotle, which he approached not from the religious perspective of most of his peers, but from a more philosophical and literary angle. Marlowe probably attended numerous university productions of comedies, satires, and tragedies, many of which dealt with the lives of scholars. His own plays tended toward the philosophic, probing the limits of human knowledge and power and exploring the implications of surpassing those limits. A poetic innovator, he set a new standard for blank verse, creating lines that are lyrical, cadenced, and intellectually taut. His inclination toward the abstract and his broad academic background made his work stand in sharp contrast to that of the young Shakespeare, whose plays and poetry demonstrate a keener interest in questions of human behavior and psychology and greater familiarity with people from all walks of life. Because Marlowe's plays were in the theaters before Shakespeare's, and because he was breaking new ground in poetics, Marlowe had a profound influence on his now more famous peer; Marlowe, however, did benefit from seeing Shakespeare's early plays.

The Elizabethan period of England was a time of fervid Puritanism, and Catholics were actively persecuted. Cambridge, where Marlowe studied, produced Protestant clerics, men who would go on to take positions of power and prestige in the Protestant church. Just before taking his Master's degree, however, he mysteriously disappeared. It was rumored that he had gone to a Catholic center at Rheims to convert, secretly, to Catholicism. UponMarlowe's return, however, and despite the rumors, he quickly obtained the queen's endorsement for his degree. Her allusion to "matters touching the benefit of his country" indicate that he may have been spying on catholic converts for his queen, merely pretending to practice heresy; it is speculated that she employed him in her extensive espionage network on several other intelligence-gathering missions too. Other aspects of his life are equally shadowy, partly because of an attempt to defame his character after his death. We can surmise, however, that he was bold, intelligent, witty, argumentative, and irreverent.

At the age of twenty-nine, while awaiting trial for a charge of atheism, Marlowe was stabbed in the forehead by a companion. His murderer was pardoned a mere month after the event. There has been much speculation over the nature of the argument that led to his death and whether his murder was planned and politically motivated. Whatever its genesis, his early demise cut down a promising talent whose genius had barely begun to flower.

Plot Summary

Act I, scene I

The first scene opens with Gaveston reading a letter from Edward II, newly crowned sovereign of England after the death of Edward I. Gaveston had been banished from court because of his corrupting influence on the young prince Edward. Now, with the elder Edward out of the way, Edward II is inviting Gaveston to return and share the kingdom with him. In a few quick lines, Gaveston's soliloquy makes clear the homosexual nature of their relationship ("take me in thy arms") as well as the theme of power that runs throughout the play. Gaveston muses about surrounding himself and the king with all manner of pleasure-seekers: "Wanton poets, pleasant wits," and "men like satyrs" who for sport might hunt down a "lovely boy" as they would a deer. When the king and his entourage enter, Gaveston steps aside to overhear their conversation.

What he hears displeases him. Lancaster and Mortimer, two noble lords, are counseling the king to break off his relations with Gaveston and attend to affairs of state. Edward bristles at their boldness, and his brother Kent warns them that the king would be within his right to behead them for their impertinence. They exit with a final threat to take up armsagainst Edward's "base minion." Gaveston steps forth and Edward professes that he would rather "the sea o'erwhelm [his] land" than suffer another separation from his lover. He confers several lofty titles on his lover, all of them in excess of Gaveston's station.

Now enters the Bishop of Coventry, the one directly responsible for Gaveston's banishment. Edward punishes the Bishop with exile, first performing a perverse baptism on him by stripping of his holy vestments and having him dumped into the channel. Gaveston leaves to take over the ruined man's worldly goods as the Bishop is transported to the tower.

Act I, scenes ii & iii

The Mortimers, Warwick, and Lancaster bemoan the "reign" of Gaveston. They are joined by the Bishop of Canterbury, who sees Edward's treatment of the Bishop of Coventry as violence against the Church itself. Gaveston learns of their plan to take up arms, which he announces to Kent.

Act I, scene iv

In this longest scene of the play, Edward commits further consecrations against the kingship by seating Gaveston in the Chair Royal, the queen's chair. This incites to nobles to exile Gaveston once again, and he is taken away, along with the Earl of Kent. The inclusion of the latter clouds the issue somewhat, since Kent has merely acted as a faithful and sober advisor to his brother. The angry lords admonish the astounded king

to "rule us better and the realm," but the king is obsessed with his lover, and he once again claims that he would let England "fleet upon the ocean / and wander to the unfrequented Ind[ia]" before he would willingly part with his lover. In a last ditch attempt to sway them, he offers each of the usurpers a new title. Alone again, the king wildly imagines slaughtering priests in revenge, then revises Gaveston's banishment by assigning him the governorship of Ireland, to which border he accompanies him. The queen, Isabella, realizes that being left alone with a mourning husband will not restore him to her, so she attempts to persuade the lords to return Gaveston. The plotters, however, decide that only Gaveston's death can break the spell he holds over their king. They enlist Isabella to pretend that Gaveston is being returned, which will facilitate his murder. The elated and unsuspecting king forgives all and heaps honors upon them as a reward. A renewed calm, as well as a reminder that other great leaders□Alexander, Hercules, and Achilles□were not impaired by their male lovers, persuades the plotters to leave this pair alone. They pronounce themselves ready, however, to rebel again the moment Gaveston flaunts his riches and power in their faces.

Act II, scene i

In this brief scene the innocent niece of the king, muses upon the affections of her avowed lover, Gaveston. She and two king's attendants, Baldock and Spenser, believe that Gaveston loves the young lady.

Act II, scene ii

A quarrelsome Edward refuses to perform his kingly duty and ransom one of his warriors, Mortimer's father, who has been caught by the Scots. The angry lords list the harms done to the realm by Edward's licentiousness: enemies from Ireland, Scotland, and Denmark have made inroads into England, and English garrisons have been routed from France. Edward's few military campaigns have made him a laughing stock. The court is a sham to which foreign countries send no worthy ambassadors. In fact, the state of affairs is so bad that Kent turns against his brother and joins Mortimer. Alone but for his lover and Baldock and Spencer, Edward promises his niece to Gaveston in marriage.

Act II, scenes iii & iv

Kent is accepted by the rebels and they leave together to attack Gaveston and Edward. The two try to escape, but Isabella betrays them to the arriving nobles. She and Mortimer exchange admiring words, setting the stage for their liaison.

Act II, scene v

Gaveston is captured and is to be executed for the "country's cause." The king sends a message with Arundel begging for one last visit with his lover. Mortimer refuses,

diabolically offering to send the lover's head instead. Both Arundel and Pembroke offer to vouch for Gaveston's return, and he is sent to await the king's visit.

Act III, scene i

While waiting for the king's visit, Gaveston is surprised by Warwick, who takes him away to be killed. The king will not see his lover again.

Act III, scene ii

Hugh Spencer senior comes to Edward with 400 men to defend him. For this display of loyalty, Edward confers a title on Spencer junior. The queen enters with bad news from France, where Edward's "slack in homage" has lost him Normandy. Edward blithely dispenses Isabella and their fourteen-year-old son to resolve this, being more interested in Gaveston's fate. Arundel arrives to announce that Gaveston is dead. This has two effects on the King, a decision to punish the nobles through war, and a transfer of his interests to Spencer. At this, the nobles once again overstep their authority and demand the removal of Spencer from "the royal vine." Edward, embracing Spencer, refuses to reply.

Act III, scene iii

The two factions meet in arms and Edward is victorious. He sends the errant nobles to the tower.

Act IV, scenes i through v

Kent proclaims the wrongs of Edward and once again joins Mortimer to meet the Queen and her son in France, where a friendly French lord offers to assist them against Edward. Back in England, the King receives news that his son has succeeded in frustrating the queen's attempts to enlist French support for their cause against him. The queen and her entourage return to England and succeed in routing King Edward, who flees for Ireland. Kent notices that Mortimer and Isabella "do kiss while they conspire," and so once again he switches sentiments; he again questions Mortimer's right to raise arms against his lawful king. The queen, perhaps sincerely, expresses sorrow for her husband.

Act IV, scene vi

The king has taken refuge at a monastery in northern England, where he is caught by Leicester. Edward resigns himself to his fate as he takes his leave of his remaining loyal nobles. A mower, the man who betrayed the king's presence at the abbey, asks for payment for his services as the scene ends.

Act V, scene i

The king is deposed, but his crown is needed to instate the new king. Edward at first refuses to give it up, knowing that it will effectively belong to Mortimer, not to his young son, who will be overruled by the powerful nobles. However, he finally relents, sending along with the crown a handkerchief, wet with his tears, to be given to his estranged wife. Berkeley comes to take him away, doing so with quiet respect for the broken king.

Act V, scene ii

Now Mortimer "makes Fortune's wheel turn as he please," as he controls the kingdom through the prince. Mortimer is content to let Edward II rot in his cell, but Isabella demands his death, so that she will not have to worry about the possibility of revenge. Mortimer complies, adding to the order that the king is to be treated harshly on his trip. The dissembling queen asks for her kind thoughts to be conveyed to her husband. Kent recognizes the grim situation and attempts to take the prince away, but Mortimer intercedes and carries Levune (the prince) off by force. Kent departs to attempt a rescue of the king.

Act V, scene iii

In a stinking dungeon, the guards shave off the king's beard with puddle water, a final insult against his sovereign person. Kent arrives and demands the king's release, saying "Oh miserable is that commonweal where lords / Keep courts, and kings are locked in prison!" Kent is bound and taken away.

Act V, scene iv

Mortimer hires Lightborn to commit the regicide (the murder of a king), planning to place the blame on the other lords if necessary. The newly crowned king enters and discovers that he will not be allowed to rule: Mortimer forces him to sentence his own uncle (Kent) to death. The queen offers to take her son hunting, to take his mind off of his sorrow.

Act V, scenes v & vi

Lightborn has the guards make ready a red-hot spit while he woos his victim into trust. Finally, the king's screams indicate that he has been impaled upon the instrument. (In Holinshed's account, the spit was thrust into the king's anus, in vicious contempt for his sexual proclivities. The guards, Matrevis and Gurney, kill Lightborn and toss his body in the moat; they carry the king's body to Mortimer. But by the time they arrive at the castle, Gurney has fled. Matrevis warns that Gurney may betray Mortimer. The queen enters to report that the young king is outraged and is busy planning retribution. The queen begs her son more urgently for mercy on Mortimer than she did for her king, but

Mortimer accepts his fate—fortune's wheel simply did not stop while he was at the top. Edward III shows himself decisive and fair; he sends his mother to the tower to await a trial and orders Mortimer beheaded. When Mortimer's severed head is presented, the king orders a proper burial for his father.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

This verse drama tells the story of the medieval British king Edward II, removed from power by powerful noblemen because of his apparently excessive attentions to a young favorite, Piers Gaveston. It is essentially a study of human weakness and frailty, and also explores themes related to the positive and negative aspects of loyalty.

Gaveston learns in a letter sent to him from Edward that he's been invited back to court after being banished by Edward's father (the previous king). Gaveston speaks in soliloquy about his joy at being the king's favorite, and vows to serve none but him. Three Poor Men appear, seeking employment. At first, he casually rejects two but engages one, but after hearing their rude comments about him tells all three that once he returns to the king's service, he'll seek employment for them all. They thank him and go out. After they've gone, Gaveston speaks in soliloquy about how none of them is the right sort of men to be employed by him, referring at poetic length to his fondness for musicians, dancers, actors, and "lovely boy[s]". He sees Edward and several courtiers coming, and withdraws to eavesdrop on their conversation.

As he enters, Edward disputes with Mortimer Sr., Mortimer, Warwick and Lancaster, who all want him to keep Gaveston at a distance. Gaveston comments approvingly in asides, as Edward vows that he shall have Gaveston with him at court no matter what anyone says. His brother Edmund reminds the other lords that the previous king also had a favorite but no one dared to speak against him, and urges Edward to execute anyone who opposes him. Mortimer loses his temper and threatens to execute Gaveston, while Lancaster warns that by promoting Gaveston, Edward risks civil war. As the angry lords leave, and as Edward complains about having his authority as king questioned, Gaveston comes forward. He and Edward greet each other with happy affection, and Edward gives Gaveston several important titles and responsibilities. Edmund comments that the rebellious lords will be unhappy when they see how much Edward has bestowed upon his favorite, but Edward tells him he'll give Gaveston anything and everything he chooses to.

The Bishop of Coventry comes in, on his way to perform the funeral rites for Edward's father. He reacts with surprise to see Gaveston, Gaveston threatens him, and Edward cheers him on when he makes to push the Bishop in the gutter. Edmund tells them all to calm down, reminding Edward that the Bishop can get them into trouble with the Pope. Edward tells Gaveston to let the Bishop go, and then endows Gaveston with the Bishop's goods and properties. That's not enough for Gaveston, who wants the Bishop sent to prison. Edward agrees. As he's taken out the Bishop curses them, but Gaveston curses him back, saying a prison is a much more appropriate home for him.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

This opening scene outlines in broad sketches many of the play's key elements. Most important of these is the initial presentation of its characters, whose traits and attitudes motivate the action of the play. Gaveston's selfishness and arrogance, Edward's infatuation with him and consequent inability to maintain appropriate royal control, the anger and resentment of the various Lords - all are plainly defined, and as such are the source of the second of the play's key elements introduced here: its central conflict over whether Edward is fit to be king. With the exception of one or two very minor subplots, the entire focus of the play's plot is on this core issue. The power struggle between the two rival factions, the Lords who are determined to get Edward to rule the country the way they think he should, and Edward, who clearly seems to believe in the divine right of kings to govern in whatever way they think best, begins in this scene and doesn't let up until the play's very last moments. This means that actions on both sides in this scene - Edward's defense and support of Gaveston, the threats of the Lords - foreshadow similar actions taken by both sides throughout the play.

A key question arising from this scene and from the play is a whole is that of what Gaveston's relationship to Edward is exactly. Throughout medieval and renaissance history, royalty always had "favorites", individuals whose company was sought by kings and queens and lords and ladies above all others. Those favorites were often treated the way Gaveston is treated here - banished at the whim of those who disapprove of their influence, endowed with money and land and jewelry by those who cared for them, resented, used, and often betrayed. The gender of those favorites could easily be the same as that of the monarch, as pointed out by the comments in this scene of Edmund, Edward's brother. Gender notwithstanding, however, in most cases the royal figures in those circumstances were not nearly as distracted by their favorites as Edward clearly is. This is the crux of the play's matter - that Edward seems to be a bad king because he can't appropriately focus, and not that he was homosexual. There are, in fact, no overt indications or hints in the text that this orientation existed in either Edward or Gaveston. If there was something between them that existed on those terms, chances are the Lords would have used it as another reason for their rebellion - words like "unnatural" may very well have appeared in their dialogue. Throughout the play, however, the Lords' reasons for hating Gaveston and eventually assassinating Edward are defined consistently by Edward's incompetence and easy distractibility, as well as by the Lords' personal ambitions. While the historical record of the situation dramatized in this play contains clear hints there *was* something sexual going on, the actual evidence of the text must be considered first. All the text reveals is that Edward and Gaveston had anything other than an excessively expressed, mutually adoring, and very distracting, non-sexual, relationship.

On a technical level, this scene contains two narrative devices commonly used in plays of this period; the soliloquy and the aside. Both are used to reveal the innermost thoughts, feelings and dilemmas of the characters speaking, but there is a significant difference between the two. Asides are employed when there are one or more other characters on the stage, and operate under the convention that those other characters

can't hear what the speaker is saying. As such, they are often ironic, in that they reveal truths about the speaker's attitudes towards the other characters of which those characters are unaware. Soliloquies are used when the speaker is alone on the stage, and are more often lengthier than asides. In addition, they are frequently used to help a character work through a dilemma or difficult choice. Their use in this play, however, is mostly to reveal the true depths of a character's feelings, or as in the case with Gaveston's soliloquies here, the meaning of his/her actions.

Act 1, Scenes 2 and 3

Act 1, Scenes 2 and 3 Summary

Scene 2 - The Mortimers, Warwick, and Lancaster discuss what was done to the Bishop, complain angrily about the titles Edward bestowed on Gaveston, and comment on how everyone at the court is starting to flatter him in the hopes that his close relationship with Edward will bring them favor. Mortimer vows to remove him from Edward's circle of friends, saying his arrogance will ruin the kingdom. The Bishop of Canterbury comes in, muttering angrily about what was done to the Bishop of Coventry and vowing to join with the Lords in their plot to get rid of Gaveston. Queen Isabella passes through, telling the Bishop and the Lords of her grief that Edward has turned his affection from her to Gaveston. Mortimer and the Lords promise to get Gaveston away from court, but Isabella tells them that, to avoid a civil war between Edward and his lords, she'll stay at court and endure Gaveston's presence. The Bishop of Coventry and the Lords, however, arrange to get together and make plans for getting rid of Gaveston. As the other lords go out, Isabella pleads with Mortimer, whom she calls "sweet", to not wage war on Edward for her sake. Mortimer says if Edward will listen to reason he will keep his sword sheathed - but if Edward refuses, he says, he will have no choice but to take up arms.

Scene 3 - In this very brief scene, Gaveston reveals to Edmund that the Mortimers, Warwick, and Lancaster have all left London to plot against them, and that he hopes they will remain away.

Act 1, Scenes 2 and 3 Analysis

The effects of the Lords' resentment of Edward and Gaveston are vividly defined in this scene, both through the plots set in motion by the Lords and through Gaveston's strongly contrasting over-confidence. Once again, indications are that the Lords' resentment is triggered by that over-confidence and Edward's consequent indulgence of it. It may be, of course, that the focus on Gaveston's arrogance and Edward's foolishness is all merely a cover for the real reason for the Lords' resentment - their homosexually intimate behavior. In other words, they talk the way they do about the things they do because they can - for the characters to talk about what's really bothering them, they'd have to acknowledge an aspect of the situation that either they nor the audience watching them would have been prepared to openly encounter. Again, however, it must be stated that nowhere in the text is anything *but* Gaveston's selfishness and Edward's foolishness mentioned as the cause for their rebellion.

The character of Isabella can likewise be interpreted in one of two ways. Either she truly loves Edward and continues to do so even in the face of his horrid treatment of her throughout the play, or she is an excellent politician, hiding her disgust with him and her intent to get rid of him behind the traditional unquestioning devotion expected, at that

time, of wives in general and queens in particular. Textual evidence tends towards the former, since throughout the play she's consistently portrayed as reluctant to do anything to hurt him. In addition, at the play's conclusion when Edward has died, she displays uncommon sensitivity, loyalty, and compassion toward him. It's likely, therefore, that her feelings are genuine, but so are her feelings of being betrayed. Just because these latter end up influencing her behavior and decisions, it doesn't mean the former feelings have disappeared. That beings said, the question of Isabella's motivation relates to another question - what, if any, intimate relationship does she have with Mortimer and when does it begin.

Edmund comments in Act 4 Scene 5 that Isabella and Mortimer are on intimate terms. As early as Act 1 Scene 4, Gaveston makes repeated insinuations about their involvement even before the rebellion begins, which Edward all too eagerly buys into. These latter insinuations are perhaps less relevant given Gaveston's character - his determination to remain Edward's favorite and his innate nastiness and manipulative-ness. On the other hand, there is evidence that *something* is going on between Isabella and Mortimer as seen in Isabella's comments at the end of the scene, in which she refers to Mortimer as "sweet" and asks him to not harm Edward "for [her] sake". Given that she doesn't speak to any of the other lords in the same way, these words indicate that she has some kind of special relationship with Mortimer, who, in response, notably uses no such endearments. One possible interpretation of this exchange is that Isabella flirts with Mortimer to get what she wants - freedom from persecution for Edward, the man she truly loves. If this is true, either she knows Mortimer is already attracted to her, an attraction she can use to manipulate him, *or* she causes him to believe that she's attracted to him; again, a method she uses to influence his choices. Mortimer's response is quite telling - as previously mentioned, he uses no endearments towards her, and he indicates that what he does next depends upon Edward. These give the very strong impression of a man who's all business, who who's not able or willing or prepared to be manipulated by any woman, even the queen, and probably has no feelings for her at all. Given Edmund's later comments on what's happening between them, however, somewhere along the way those feelings do develop. Perhaps the flirtatious seed Isabella plants here, which seems at first to fall on hard and unwelcoming ground, takes deeper root than she or Mortimer at this point believes.

Act 1, Scene 4, Part 1

Act 1, Scene 4, Part 1 Summary

The Mortimers, Lancaster, Warwick, Canterbury, and other lords sign an order banishing Gaveston. Edward comes in, accompanied by Gaveston and Edmund. The Lords speak contemptuously about Gaveston, leading Edward and Gaveston to speak threateningly in response. Mortimer Sr. orders his attendants to take Edmund and Gaveston out, and they do. Edward and the Lords taunt each other with increasingly violent threats as they argue over whether Gaveston can and should be banished, with Edward offering new titles to Lancaster, Warwick, and Mortimer in exchange for being allowed to keep Gaveston at his side. Mortimer asks why Edward is so determined. Edward says Gaveston "loves [him] more than all the world", and says that only rude and low-born men would seek to take Gaveston from him. Canterbury threatens to release the Lords from their vows of loyalty to the throne, implying that if he does so Edward will be in real trouble. Edward finally signs the order, saying he's signing not with ink but with tears. The Lords go out, glad that they've won and certain that the public will be just as glad. Edward speaks an unhappy and angry soliloquy about how the will of the king (e.g., his desire to be with Gaveston) should not be overruled by threats from the church (e.g., Canterbury's threats to free the Lords from their oaths). He fantasizes in poetic language about burning all the churches to the ground and destroying all the priests.

Gaveston returns, having heard the news of his banishment. Edwards comforts him, saying he (Edward) will take revenge. He then makes Gaveston governor of Ireland, and suggests that they exchange pictures of each other. They do, and Edward walks with Gaveston to the ship that will bear him across the sea to Ireland. Isabella appears and asks where he's going. Edward speaks to her with withering contempt, and Gaveston hints that she's having an affair with Mortimer. Isabella protests her innocence, but Edward believes Gaveston and accuses Isabella of being behind Mortimer 's determination to have Gaveston exiled. Again, Isabella protests. When Edward speaks sharply to her, Isabella says his words are breaking her heart. Edward says that while Gaveston is in exile, she is not to approach him, and goes out, taking Gaveston with him. Isabella speaks in soliloquy about her unhappiness, wishing that she had died on the voyage from her home in France to England rather than be subject to the pain and torture Edward is inflicting on her. She resolves to find a way to bring Gaveston home in the hopes that it will return her to Edward's favor.

Act 1, Scene 4, Part 1 Analysis

This section of Act 1 contains what can be interpreted as two penetrating revelations of Edward's character. One is the vicious way in which he treats Isabella, egged on by Gaveston. On the one hand his attitude can possibly be seen by modern interpreters as homosexual "bitchiness" towards women, and if the relationship between Gaveston and Edward is interpreted in homosexual terms this is indeed a valid, if stereotypical,

perspective. However, if the position is taken there is no homosexual component to the relationship, then how is Edward's attitude explained? This relates to the second revelation of Edward's character, his comment about the way he is loved by Gaveston. Yes, it could be regarded as superficial and impulsive as everything else about Edward, but it must be remembered that a royal life in medieval times was formal, ritualized, and very serious. In Gaveston, Edward seems to have found not only a fun-loving kindred spirit, he has also found someone who cares for him unconditionally. Gaveston's attitude towards Edward is also the opposite to that of the Lords, who seem determined that Edward should be the kind of king and the kind of man they want him to be. It may also be that Edward, perhaps spurred on by Gaveston's comments, sees Isabella as intending to manipulate him and control him in the same way as the Lords. In other words, he's contemptuous of her because she represents a life he loathes and knows he's unfit for.

At this point, it becomes possible to see that perhaps on some level, one of the play's themes relates to allowing a person to be the kind of person that s/he is, even flighty and indulgent persons like Edward and Gaveston, rather than the person that circumstances define him as being. Does this mean that the play is also a plea for tolerance and acceptance of homosexuals, if that is indeed what Edward and Gaveston are? Can Edward's comment be interpreted as suggesting a homosexually intimate relationship? The answer to both questions is not necessarily. Descriptions of love between men, particularly in the politically and rhetorically charged language of royalty and/or court life, were not necessarily or automatically associated with same-gender sexuality. There is no doubt that Edward feels something for Gaveston beyond the level of friendship. However, expressions of deep affection, such as those they each utter at their parting, were not automatically indicative of something that was then regarded as immoral, evil, and corruptive. What the Lords are responding to and angry about throughout the play is Edward's inattention to duty *resulting* from his feelings, not the feelings themselves.

Meanwhile, it's also possible to see an aspect of another key theme, the nature of loyalty, in the relationship between Edward and Gaveston. Throughout the play, references are made to loyalty. These include accusations that characters on both sides of the central conflict are disloyal to the country, and Edmund's and Isabella's long-suffering loyalty to Edward. The most vivid depiction of loyalty in the play comes in the relationship between Edward and Gaveston, whose mutual steadfastness in their relationship is taken to a dangerous extreme and, as such, is a warning of the hazards of obsessive loyalty. At other points in the play, there are also warnings against fickle loyalty (Edmund), shallow loyalty (Mortimer) and loyalty only to oneself (again, Mortimer). Only in young Prince Edward, later in the play, does uncorrupted loyalty manifest as a virtue, a vivid contrast to more tainted, distorted loyalties at war around him.

Act 1, Scene 4, Part 2

Act 1, Scene 4, Part 2 Summary

The Mortimers, Lancaster, and Warwick return, commenting on how upset Isabella seems and urging her to not be so unhappy, saying that because Gaveston is gone Edward's attention will return to her. Isabella urges them to revoke the banishment, telling them that until Gaveston is back at court, *she* has been banished. She and the Lords argue over what should be done, and then Isabella takes Mortimer aside to privately express her reasons for wanting the banishment revoked. As they talk, the other Lords assure each other of their determination to keep Gaveston away from court. Mortimer returns from his conversation with Isabella, saying he's changed his mind - not because he wants Gaveston around, but because Isabella has convinced him that for the sake of Edward's peace of mind, and therefore for the good of the country, Gaveston must be returned to court. When the other Lords react with angry disbelief, Mortimer tells them what Isabella told him - first, that Gaveston has stores of gold in Ireland that he can use to both raise an army and ingratiate himself with the Irish people, and second, that it will be easier to actually kill Gaveston if he's at court. He also says that if he's brought back, Gaveston will become even more over-confident, and therefore it will be easier to kill him. He assures the Lords that they're not actually attacking the king but rather a potentially dangerous threat. The Lords agree to his proposal, Isabella expresses her gratitude, and says that her love for Edward is much greater than his for Gaveston.

Edward returns, already deep in grief that Gaveston is gone. Isabella greets him, and responds to another insulting comment about her alleged involvement with Mortimer by telling him (Edward) that Gaveston's exile is to be repealed. Edward reacts with immediate joy, saying that from that moment on their relationship will be as good as if they had just gotten married. Isabella tells him to greet the Lords. He does, again offering them new titles and responsibilities. They, in turn, speak smoothly to him of their devotion and loyalty. Edward calls for a servant to send a message calling Gaveston back. The servant runs off, and Edward makes plans for a great feast to celebrate Gaveston's return and marriage, reminding the Lords that he's arranged for Gaveston to marry his niece.

Before they too go in, Mortimer Sr. tells Mortimer that he (Mortimer Sr.) has to leave for Scotland, and urges Mortimer to let Edward think all is well, referring to how other great leaders also had their young male favorites and saying that Edward will age out of his infatuation. Mortimer says that he's not bothered so much by Edward as he is by Gaveston - his arrogance, free spending habits, fancy manner of dress, and sarcasm. He vows to never yield his influence to that of Gaveston.

Act 1, Scene 4, Part 2 Analysis

Feelings and politics intertwine very effectively in this scene, as high emotions on all sides advance and subside in the face of political developments. The anger of the Lords, Edward's grief and then his joy, Mortimer's determination, Isabella's vulnerability - all affect, or are affected by, the characters' various political machinations. It's a fascinating portrayal of how one affects the other in a world in which emotion is believed to play no role whatsoever, but which in fact thoroughly defines every move and countermove on the political chessboard.

In terms of specific characters and relationships, Edward once again displays remarkable shallowness of character in his quick transformation from contempt for Isabella to complete adoration. The question is whether it's political or real - or both. The same question applies to Mortimer's sudden change of mind - is it political, or does it come out of some unspoken feeling between him and Isabella? The same can be said of Isabella's insistence that Gaveston be allowed to return - does she genuinely believe that engineering the situation in Edward's favor will make him love her, or is she politically manipulating Mortimer and the other lords into getting rid of a hated rival? The text provides no clear answers to any of these questions - a director in charge of a production of this play, however, could shape its thematic point quite definitely depending on which perspective s/he took. It would doubtless be enlightening to hear exactly what passes between Isabella and Mortimer in that secret conversation, but for whatever reason the playwright has not included that scene. What he provides is a series of intriguing questions that, in spite of their nagging ambiguity, nonetheless draw the audience deeper into the play's story.

There are two small points here worth discussing in relation to the question of whether Gaveston and Edward have a homosexual relationship. The first is the conversation between the Mortimers relating to Gaveston. Mortimer Sr.'s comments echoes Edmund's reference (Act 1 Scene 1) to Edward's father also having had a favorite, while Mortimer Jr.'s comments reinforce the idea that the key problems are the way Gaveston behaves and Edward's lack of attention to duty. The conversation, therefore, is another piece of (admittedly circumstantial) evidence that there is nothing sexual going on between Edward and Gaveston. The second point in relation to this question has to do with the question of Gaveston's marriage. This is no indication that Gaveston was heterosexual. In the climate of the time men in general, either homosexual or heterosexual, rarely if ever remained unmarried. Marriage and the procreation of children were considered social and religious duties that no one was allowed to shirk. Homosexual men, then as now, conducted their same-gender sexual intimacies under the cover of a conventional marriage. Therefore, Gaveston's marriage can be construed as nothing more than an adherence to the rules and beliefs of the time. This, of course, lends a poignant irony to the warm-hearted enthusiasms of Gaveston's bride-to-be, who makes her first of very few appearances in the following scene.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

In conversation with the elderly servant Baldock, Spencer reveals his determination to ally himself with Gaveston, and therefore with Edward. Further conversation reveals that both Spencer and Baldock are members of the household of Edward's niece, Gaveston's fiancye, who has apparently received letters from Gaveston and is happily awaiting his return. Spencer teases Baldock about how he's going to have to dress and act in the excessive and highly ornamented way Gaveston does. Baldock, however, says firmly that he does not intend to behave in any way other than straightforward and plainly.

Spencer is about to tease him further but is interrupted by the arrival of the King's Niece, who reads aloud a loving letter from Gaveston and says she's also had a letter from Edward, inviting her to live at court. She tells Baldock to make her carriage ready. As Baldock goes, the Niece tells Spencer it's very possible that his service to her will soon be required. Spencer expresses his hope that she's right.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

In this brief scene, the play introduces three new characters, each of whom varies in terms of their importance to the plot. Spencer is the most important, serving as he does as an ally for Edward during the rebellion. Baldock plays a similar role, but because his status is that of a servant, his relative importance to Edward is consequently lessened. The Niece, whom the playwright seems to think is so unimportant that she doesn't even have a name, serves in her three brief scenes as a reminder that in the midst of all the politics and game playing, there is hope, warmth, and humanity . . . somewhere.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Edward, Isabella, Edmund, Lancaster, Mortimer, and other lords await Gaveston's arrival. Edward can think of nothing but Gaveston, even when Lancaster reminds him that the King of France is invading English territory in Europe. Edward dismisses his concerns, instead turning his attention to the commemorative paintings he ordered the Lords to place on their ceremonial shields in celebration of Gaveston's return. Lancaster and Mortimer describe their shields, both of which portray incidents in which small animals are pursued by larger. Edward reacts angrily to the implication of the paintings (i.e., that Gaveston is to be pursued). Isabella tempts to calm him but Edward is having none of it, speaking with contempt about the Lords and vowing that their apparently intended destruction of Gaveston will never be allowed to happen.

Gaveston appears. Edward greets him rapturously, and Gaveston greets him with equal happiness. The Lords greet Gaveston with barely concealed contempt. In an aside, Isabella expresses her concern about things already going wrong. Gaveston tells Edward he can't stand being spoken to that way, but Edward tells him to speak to the Lords in the same way, adding that he (Edward) will protect him. Gaveston speaks with dismissive contempt to the Lords, leading Lancaster and others to draw their swords. In spite of Edward's telling him to flee, Gaveston taunts the Lords, leading Mortimer to attack and wound him. As servants take Gaveston away, Edward banishes Mortimer from the court. Mortimer refuses to go, Warwick and Lancaster back him up, and Edward vows to have them all executed if they continue to oppose him. He, Isabella, and Edmund go out.

Warwick and Lancaster restrain Mortimer, calm him down, and make plans to trigger a people's rebellion against Gaveston. At that moment, a messenger arrives with news that the Scottish army has captured Mortimer Sr., and that his ransom has been set at five thousand pounds. Mortimer claims that because Mortimer Sr. was fighting in the king's service, Edward should pay the ransom. He prepares to go to Edward to make his claim, while Warwick and other lords retreat to Warwick's castle to raise the rebellion.

After Warwick and the others are gone, Mortimer and Lancaster force their way into Edward's presence, demanding that he pay the ransom for Mortimer Sr. Edward refuses. Mortimer, saying that Edward's selfishness is the result of Gaveston's influence, prepares to draw his sword. Together he and Lancaster warn Edward that because he's giving Gaveston so much attention, the kingdom is falling apart. They warn him that unless he dismisses Gaveston and pays more attention to the kingdom, he'll face an open rebellion that they vow to lead. As they go out, Edward angrily vows to subdue this rebellion any way he can. Edmund, however, urges him to reconsider the attention he pays Gaveston, hinting that Mortimer and Lancaster might be right. Edward

reacts with outrage, banishing Edmund from the kingdom. Edmund leaves, expressing his lack of surprise that Edward is treating him so badly.

Isabella comes in, followed by the Niece, Gaveston, Baldock, and Spencer. At first, Edward accuses Isabella of being in league with Mortimer, but Gaveston, Isabella, and the Niece convince him to think more kindly of her. Gaveston urges Edward to imprison Mortimer, but Edward tells him Mortimer is too popular - to imprison him would heighten the drive for rebellion even more. He then changes the subject, and asks the Niece to introduce the newcomers. Baldock and Spencer are introduced, and Edward welcomes them into his service, promising to reward them well. He then leads everyone off to celebrate the marriage between Gaveston and the Niece, saying that he'll attack the rebels once the marriage feast is over.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

Once again, escalating personal emotions trigger an increase in political tensions in this scene. The angrily aggressive paintings on the shields trigger Edward's defiance, which triggers Gaveston's arrogance, which triggers anger in the Lords, which triggers fear in Isabella. It's a chain reaction of politically oriented but very personal cut-and-thrust, with Mortimer's comments about Gaveston's increased arrogance when he returns (Act 1, Scene 4, Part 1) proving prophetic as Gaveston now seems more confident of his position than ever. Meanwhile, Edward's casual dismissal of the threat from France foreshadows the revelation later (Act 3 Scene 2) that the French invasion has in fact succeeded. In this combination of events, as well in as the list of ways in which the country is falling apart later in the scene, can be seen the value of the Lords' point and perhaps one of the play's key thematic points - emotional distractions lead to danger and ultimately to ruin.

Meanwhile, the long-suffering Edmund's awareness of this aspect to Edward's situation leads him to finally speak up in support of the Lords' complaint. It's an example of Edward's self-centered superficiality that, rather than siding with his loyal brother who has stood by his side throughout his life and throughout the current tension, he turns on a dime and dismisses him from his court and his life without a second thought. Edward, now more than ever, is clearly an obsessive personality. This, rather than any kind of homosexual inclination, is clearly at the core of his complete inability to function as king.

A key question from this point on relates to Edmund's motivation for making the choices he does. One answer might be that he is simply confused about where his loyalties should lie: to his country, or to his brother. Up to this point, loyalty to his brother has won out. Now, however, Edward has tested that loyalty so strongly that, for Edmund, loyalty to the country has to win out. By the last act of the play, however, Edmund realizes just what a horrible thing is being done to *both* his brother and to the country by Mortimer, and tries to do what is best for both. All of this suggests that, in spite of his flip-flopping, Edmund is among the most honorable characters in the play in that he's always trying to act in the best interests of those to whom he feels responsible. These include his brother, whom he knows is weak, the kingdom, which he knows is vulnerable, and at the

end of the play, his nephew the new king, whom he knows could easily and fatally incur Mortimer's wrath. It's a sad irony that Edmund's sense of responsibility eventually leads him to a traitor's death on the orders of Mortimer, but what's truly important about Edmund is that he's a vivid contrast to the two other central male characters. Both Mortimer and Edward are, by the end of the play, self-centered and blinded to their responsibilities by their passions. Edmund is never blinded to his responsibilities - confused, but never blinded. As such, he is perhaps the embodiment of one of the play's key themes relating to the virtue of loyalty.

Act 2, Scenes 3, 4 and 5

Act 2, Scenes 3, 4 and 5 Summary

These three scenes document the capture of Gaveston.

Scene 3 - Edmund joins Warwick, Lancaster, Mortimer, and the other Lords as they plan their rebellion. Lancaster and the others tell him they think he's a spy. Edmund protests that he means what he says, Mortimer says he believes him, and the others welcome him into their plot. Lancaster reveals his plan to capture Gaveston, warning the rebels to not harm Edward, but urging them to show Gaveston no mercy.

Scene 4 - Edward tells Gaveston, the Niece, and Isabella to flee the castle, which he says is under attack from the rebellious Lords. He adds that he and Spencer will flee by land and bids everyone but Isabella farewell. When Isabella asks why he didn't say goodbye to her, he pointedly says goodbye in the name of her lover, Mortimer. She protests that she loves only him, but he goes out without responding. After everyone else is gone, Isabella speaks in soliloquy about how desperate she is to win back Edward's love.

Lancaster, Warwick, and Mortimer rush in, wondering how Gaveston managed to get away. They greet Isabella, who complains to them about how her plan to win Edward's heart back has failed; he, she says, still turns all his attention on Gaveston. Lancaster asks her to tell them where Gaveston has gone. Isabella tells him, and he and the others prepare to leave in pursuit. Mortimer tells Isabella to remain safely in the castle, and when she tells him she intends to journey to be with Edward, he then asks her to travel with him and the other rebels. Isabella explains that she can't - Edward is too suspicious, and if she travels with Mortimer, the honor of both of them will be called into question. Mortimer urges her to think well of him, and goes out. Again in soliloquy, Isabella comments on Mortimer's merits, resolves to try once more to win Edward's attention away from Gaveston, and says that if she fails, she and her son will travel to France and take refuge with the king, her brother. She goes out, expressing the hope that Gaveston will soon be dead.

Scene 5 - Gaveston appears, speaking in soliloquy about how he's managed to elude his pursuers and plans to be reunited with Edward. Warwick, Mortimer, Lancaster, and other lords catch up with him and capture him, calling him a disturber of the country and a corrupter of the king. They vow to execute him, but add that because he's such a favorite of the king's he'll be killed in the way a nobleman would be (by beheading) rather than the way a commoner would be (by hanging). A messenger arrives with a plea from Edward that he be allowed to see Gaveston once more before he's executed. Warwick refuses, Gaveston begs him to change his mind, and Mortimer suggests they let Edward see Gaveston by sending him his decapitated head. The Messenger says that Edward, on the honor of a king, promises to send Gaveston back to his captors, but Warwick refuses to believe him. One of the other lords, Pembroke, offers to escort

Gaveston to Edward and back, giving his word of honor that Gaveston will return. Warwick is persuaded, but reveals in soliloquy that he has another plan in mind. He and Mortimer go off as Pembroke tells Gaveston that he will be welcome in his home. Gaveston is taken away.

Act 2, Scenes 3, 4 and 5 Analysis

Aside from the escalating dramatic and emotional tension resulting from the political tit-for-tatting engaged in by Edward and the rebels, there are two elements worthy of examination in this section. The first is the development of the relationship between Isabella and Mortimer. While Edward's interpretation of their relationship seems initially to be the result of bitter paranoia, there are indications in this section that there are now grounds for his beliefs. These include Isabella's soliloquized reference to Mortimer's good points, her concern that *both* their honors are preserved, and Mortimer's concerns for her safety and that she think well of him. All seem to indicate that they're eager to develop the relationship beyond that of queen and subject but are unable to - at this point, probably as much a result of Isabella's reluctance to jeopardize herself politically as her weakening love for Edward. The point must be made, however, that Mortimer's feelings for Isabella play a very minor role in fueling in his determination to destroy Edward and Gaveston. Nowhere in the play, even after their affair apparently begins, does he express any kind of tenderness toward her. He seems, in fact, to be as much of an opportunist as Gaveston, by seizing the chance to gain from his influence with the Queen as much as Gaveston, for all his professed devotion, gains from his influence with the King. Herein is one of the play's most important ironies - that Edward is brought down by a man who's as prepared to exploit vulnerability as Edward is to *be* exploited.

The second element worthy of examination in this scene is the behavior of Pembroke. He has appeared throughout the play in the company of Mortimer, Warwick, and the other rebellious lords but hasn't said very much. He has nevertheless clearly been on their side. The question at this point is, why does now he act in a way that indicates at least a degree of sympathy for Edward? No motivation is explicitly defined in the text, but it must be remembered that one of the key motivators of action within the play is who has the most influence with the king. It can therefore be reasonably assumed that Pembroke does what he does in order to gain favor with Edward, who at this point in the play is still in charge, still has the most power, and therefore still has the most favor to give.

Act 3, Scenes 1, 2 and 3

Act 3, Scenes 1, 2 and 3 Summary

The three scenes of this act chronicle events following Gaveston's execution.

Scene 1 - As Gaveston bemoans his fate, Warwick arrives to forcibly remove him from Pembroke's care. Conversation reveals that Gaveston has not yet had his chance to speak with Edward. Warwick takes him away, paying no attention to his protests.

Scene 2 - Edward tells Spencer he's desperate for a response to his request to see Gaveston, commenting that he fears the willfulness and anger of the rebellious Lords. Spencer speaks flatteringly to him, urges him to remember his mighty royal lineage, and suggests he capture and execute the rebels. Edward says if Gaveston is not sent to him, he'll do exactly that. Spencer's father, at the head of an army, arrives to support Edward in his battle against the rebels. Edward greets him with happy gratitude, bestows a title on Spencer Sr., and promises increasing favors. As he's urging Spencer Sr. and his army to show no mercy to the rebels, Isabella arrives, accompanied by her son, Prince Edward, and an Ambassador. She tells Edward that the English territory in France, which Edward had earlier neglected to defend (Act 2 Scene 2), has been conquered by her brother, the French king. Edward distractedly greets the Ambassador, worries again for a moment about Gaveston, and then orders that Isabella go with their son to France and negotiate with the King. Young Prince Edward precociously vows to bring honor to his father, and Edward orders him and Isabella to leave immediately so he can concentrate on fighting the rebels. Isabella calls the war unnatural, and goes out with the Prince. A Messenger arrives with news that Gaveston is dead. He explains that Pembroke had agreed with the plan for Gaveston to be temporarily released, but Warwick ambushed Gaveston and his guards before they could reach Pembroke. As Edward collapses with grief, Spencer Jr. urges him to take action. Edward makes a vow of revenge, and speaks at length about the violent form that revenge will take. Another messenger arrives from the rebels, this one demanding that Edward remove Spencer from his circle of advisors, saying the advice of other, older, wiser families is better for the kingdom. Edward says he will not be told what to do by his subjects. He then embraces Spencer, sends the messenger to tell the rebel lords that he is on his way to take his revenge on them for murdering Gaveston, and prepares to lead the Spencers and their soldiers into battle.

Scene 3 - In the midst of battle, Edward hears a trumpet sounding a retreat and urges the Spencers and other soldiers forward. Spencer Sr. tells him the soldiers are beginning to tire, saying the retreat will give them a chance to regain their strength. Mortimer and the other rebels appear, jeering about Edward and the company he keeps. Edward and the Spencers jeer right back, calling them traitors and blaming them for the destruction of so much land and property. Warwick calls for the battle to be rejoined. The two sides depart, but shortly afterwards Edward returns, gloating over the newly captured Edmund and the other rebels. Edmund tries to tell him they only did

what they did for the good of the country, but Edward isn't interested and sends him away. Edward berates Warwick for not allowing him to see Gaveston again, and then when Warwick and the other lords respond defiantly, orders them to be taken away and executed - all but Mortimer, whom he says will be imprisoned. The captured rebels are all taken away as Mortimer shouts that his hopes for triumph will transcend his punishment. Edward orders that trumpets sound in celebration of his victory. As he goes, Spencer Jr. tells the Ambassador who came in with Isabella (Act 3 Scene 2) to take news of Edward's victory to her and lure her back to England so she can face the consequences of conspiring with the rebel lords. The Ambassador goes, and Spencer Jr. proclaims Edward's victories.

Act 3, Scenes 1, 2 and 3 Analysis

The most important element of this sequence of scenes is the manner in which Edward's incompetence is contrasted with one of the few instances in which he displays genuine kingship. The former manifests in his habit of throwing new titles at anyone who pleases him or helps him and in the consequences of not handling the French invasion of English territory. The latter manifests in his (admittedly offstage) victory over the rebels, which results in their capture. Given that the play offers no explicit details of either the progress of the battle or how it was won, it's interesting to consider other possible reasons for Edward's victory. High emotion is an obvious one - his sense of grief at Gaveston's death, his sense of betrayal resulting from the actions of Warwick and of Edmund, and his sense of frustration at not having his feelings and his authority respected probably all fuel his burning surge of military prowess. Another possibility is that all along he had the skills of kingship, but being the shallow kind of man he is he chose to focus his energy in other directions. A third possibility is that the Spencers did all the work, running the battle for him. This would mean that he has no kingly skills whatsoever. Given the overall content of the play, it would seem reasonable to suggest that a combination of the first and third factors were behind Edward's victory.

That victory marks a key turning point in the play, in that as a result of this conflict, the focus of the rebels' attention moves from Gaveston to Edward himself. It's possible to see this shift as a revelation of the rebels' true motivation - that all along they, and particularly Mortimer, wanted Edward out of the way so they could run the country the way they want. On the other hand, it's also possible to see this desire for Edward's removal emerging as a direct result of his victory here. In other words, Mortimer and the surviving lords see themselves as having been humiliated by a leader whom nobody thought could win a battle with *toy* soldiers, let alone real ones. It's possible, therefore, that Mortimer acts as he does in the rest of the play out of a desire for revenge. There is irony here, however, in the appearance of Prince Edward. Already much better at diplomacy and tact than his father, the Prince later turns out to be a much more forceful personality all round. The irony is that while this act sets the stage for Mortimer's eventual destruction of Edward, the appearance of the Prince in Scene 3 sets the stage for his eventual eviction of Mortimer from the scene.

Act 4, Scenes 1, 2, 3 and 4

Act 4, Scenes 1, 2, 3 and 4 Summary

Scene 1 - In soliloquy, Edmund prays for a good wind to get him quickly to France where he can join forces with the king against Edward. Mortimer arrives, having drugged his jailers and escaped. Together they depart for France.

Scene 2 - In France, Isabella complains to Prince Edward about how unhelpful her brother, the King of France, has been. Prince Edward tells her to go back to England and make Edward happy. It won't matter then how the King of France behaves. Isabella tells him he's fooling himself, and wonders aloud what will become of her, unwelcome as she is in both countries. A British Lord, Hainault, arrives to take them to his country estate. Prince Edward brags about how soon he'll be able to go back to England and attack the Spencers for aiding his father. As Isabella rejoices in her son's courage, Edmund and Mortimer arrive. As Isabella and Prince Edward rejoice in their escape, Mortimer reveals that he knows how badly they've been treated, and goes on to say that even though Warwick, Lancaster and other rebels are imprisoned, there are many in England who would rally to support Isabella if she returned. Hainault invites Edmund and Mortimer to travel with him and Isabella to the country house so they can make their plans. Mortimer and Edmund thank him, and they all leave together.

Scene 3 - Edward celebrates his triumph with the Spencers, asking whether they've published news of the reward Edward is offering for the capture of Mortimer. The Spencers question whether Mortimer is still in England, but Edward assures them he is. A Messenger arrives with news that Isabella, Mortimer, Edmund, and the Prince have joined forces. Edward rants with anger at hearing of Mortimer's escape and prays that he may soon see the day when he can encounter his rivals in the field. He goes out with the Spencers to make plans for the inevitable conflict.

Scene 4 - Isabella, the Prince, Edmund, Mortimer, and Hainault arrive on England's coast. Isabella muses about how unfortunate it is that they've had to return home under these circumstances, but comments that Edward's behavior has given them no choice. Mortimer calls on all the lords to swear loyalty to her and to England. They leave to begin their conquest of Edward's kingdom.

Act 4, Scenes 1, 2, 3 and 4 Analysis

This section of scenes is essentially plot-based, moving events along towards the final climactic conflict between Edward and Mortimer, a conflict which in some ways can be described as that between freedom and duty. Yes, there is a part of Mortimer that operates from a place of self-interest, of wanting power and influence. It must be pointed out, however, that it's not until relatively late in the play that this side of him emerges. All his actions to this point seem grounded in his determination to do well for,

and by, his country. The question is whether that's his true motivation or whether he's only giving lip service to it, using the right means to work towards achieving what might be described as the wrong end - his own power. Again, a director's interpretation would be key here - is a character more interesting if he has a core truth (hunger for power) eventually, inevitably, and fatally revealed? Alternatively, is that character more interesting if, as Mortimer seems to do, he starts in a place of moral authority and eventually becomes corrupted by the power that results from an assertion of that authority. The play offers no clear definition of which kind of character Mortimer is.

The play does, however, offer a definition of who Edward is. In spite of his occasional flashes of kingship he is ultimately flighty, superficial, and given to being governed by emotions. This combines with the technical fact that Mortimer is clearly set up, at least at the beginning of the play, to be a clear contrast in character to Edward in order to suggest that Mortimer is at first motivated by all the things Edward is not - a sense of loyalty, larger responsibility, and duty. This suggests, therefore, that he *is* corrupted by sudden power, by desire for an evidently willing (but manipulative) woman, and by his own anger. It's no surprise, in that context, that Mortimer ends up as dead as Edward - by the end of the play their journeys have become parallel, both having become self-serving and narrow minded. Edward just started out further along the road.

Act 4, Scene 5

Act 4, Scene 5 Summary

Spencer urges Edward to flee, saying Isabella and her forces are too strong to be withstood. Edward refuses, saying he won't be considered a coward. He calls for a horse so he can charge into battle. Baldock tells him this is not the right time, and leads him out. Edmund appears, speaking at length in soliloquy of his sympathy for his brother (Edward) and his belief that Mortimer is behaving treasonously. He realizes that he has to keep his true feelings a secret, since Mortimer and Isabella are now having an affair and there's no way of telling what will happen. Isabella, Prince Edward, Mortimer, and Hainault join him, with Isabella expressing thanks to God for their victories so far and proclaiming Prince Edward as protector of the realm. Edmund asks her what she intends to do with Edward once he's defeated. Mortimer comments that it's not up to her to decide, but rather, up to the parliament and the people. Spencer Sr. is brought in, having been taken prisoner. As the man who captured him, Howell, speaks flatteringly to Isabella, Mortimer asks where Spencer Jr. and Edward are. Howell tells him they've set sail for Ireland. Isabella comments that she still feels sympathy for Edward, but Mortimer reminds her of everything Edward has done, and then orders that Spencer Sr. be executed. As Spencer Sr. is taken out, Mortimer Junior compliments Howell and tells him to keep up the good work. As he goes out with Isabella and the others, Mortimer expresses the hope that Edward will soon be captured, too.

Act 4, Scene 5 Analysis

The key element of note in this section is the apparent change in the relationship between Isabella and Mortimer. What's particularly interesting here is that from Edmund's perspective they have apparently become emotionally (and presumably sexually) intimate, but when they're actually seen together Mortimer treats Isabella with what comes very close to being patronizing dismissiveness. This is perhaps the beginning of the process of his being corrupted by power. Having allied himself politically and sexually with the most powerful woman in the country and perhaps even in Europe (given her blood relationship to the king of France), Mortimer seems to sense great power within his grasp, certainly greater than he's hoped for at the beginning of the play. All he wanted at that point was to get rid of Gaveston. At this point, it's possible he might become, if not the actual king (that would be the Prince's position), at least a very powerful advisor. For her part, Isabella's behavior at this point gives no indication whatsoever that her relationship with Mortimer is any different - on the contrary, she expresses the same concern for Edward's welfare that she always has. Only in the following scene does a change in her attitude become evident.

Act 4, Scene 6

Act 4, Scene 6 Summary

The disguised Edward, Spencer, and Baldock take refuge in a monastery, where the Abbot assures them they will be safe. Edward expresses his gratitude, bemoans his current state of misery, expresses the wish to live the rest of his life as a monastic contemplative, and urges the monks to keep their presence secret. The monks reassure him, but Spencer comments that a farmer in a nearby field looked suspiciously at them when they arrived. Edward lays his head in the Abbot's lap, commenting on how tired he feels. Howell arrives, having been shown to Edward by the farmer Spencer just spoke of. Another nobleman, Leicester, places Spencer and Baldock under arrest in the name of Isabella. Edward dramatically tells Leicester to kill him then and there. Howell tells Leicester it's time to take Spencer and Baldock away. Edward and his allies say their farewells, Leicester tells Edward to get ready to return to Kenilworth Castle in England, and Edward says he might as well be taken there in a hearse, saying that he knows he's going home to his death. Howell again urges Leicester to hurry. Edward bids farewell to Spencer and Baldock yet again, and goes out with Leicester. Spencer speaks poetically about what a tragedy it is that Edward is gone, Baldock speaks poetically about how his and Spencer's lives are about to end, and Howell tells them both to be quiet and come with him, dragging them both out as he leaves.

Act 4, Scene 6 Analysis

The key element in this scene is Edward's behavior. His emotional state changes quite dramatically between the beginning of Scene 5, in which he's still a little defiant, and the end of Scene 6, in which he seems completely resigned to his fate. In terms of the play's actual events, the text gives very little indication of what's happened to him between those two points to explain the shift in perspective. It would be reasonable to suggest, however, that the act of fleeing rather than fighting played at least some role in triggering the transformation - he's run, therefore he's a coward, therefore he might as well give in. That being said, it would also be reasonable to suggest that very little credence should be given to his desire to live in a monastery. From what's been seen of him so far, the quiet, reflective, chaste, and austere life of a monk would not be a good fit with Edward's character. His eagerness is probably more the result of a sense of relief at having at least a few moments of peace. Meanwhile, his premonitions of his death eloquently foreshadow his execution, which takes place in Act 5 Scene 5.

Act 5, Scene 1

Act 5, Scene 1 Summary

Leicester and Edward, and the Bishop of Winchester arrive at Kenilworth. Leicester attempts to welcome Edward graciously. Edward thanks him for trying, but then speaks at poetic length about how he's about to be torn apart by Isabella and Mortimer in the same way as a deer that's been captured by a lion. He reminds himself that he's a king, but then muses on how kings, when their armies are gone, are "but perfect shadows in a sunshine day". In other words, he's king in name only - England is now in truth governed by Mortimer. Winchester tells him Prince Edward, not Mortimer is to be king, but Edward tells him that Prince Edward is like a lamb surrounded by wolves (i.e., Mortimer). Leicester asks him point blank whether he intends to yield his crown. Edward says he's reluctant to do so because it's what Mortimer wants, but realizes he has no choice. He takes off the crown, but asks to be allowed to remain king until the sunset. He talks himself into claiming himself king for the rest of the day, puts the crown back on his head, and angrily refuses when he's again asked to hand it over, ranting about how everyone in England is a traitor and how those who are forcing him to take these actions have blood on their hands. In a rage, he gives the crown to Leicester and begs to be allowed to die, shouting for Winchester to go away. He gives Leicester a handkerchief to give to Isabella, asks that he take good wishes from him (Edward) to Prince Edward, and prepares to die. Another English Lord, Berkeley, comes with an order from Isabella that Leicester is to surrender Edward to her and Mortimer. Edward furiously tears the letter apart. Berkeley reveals that he has orders to take Edward with him. Edward says it doesn't matter where he goes, he might as well die in one place as another. Leicester accompanies Edward and Berkeley as they go out.

Act 5, Scene 1 Analysis

Once again, Edward's unpredictable emotional volatility is the main element of note, as his emotions shift rapidly in this scene between defiance, rage, and grief. This state of being might easily be interpreted as his last stages of sanity, but might also be seen as the last desperate acts of a man who up until this point in his life has known nothing but absolute power. He was a king in an age of kings, accustomed to having his every whim become law. For such a man, even a foolish man in such a situation, to be removed from everything that defined who and what he was in such an emotionally and physically violent manner can be nothing but traumatizing. In short, Edward in this scene is in a frenzy, struggling to hold onto what remains of his life. By the end of the scene, however, he realizes he has no reason to struggle any more and surrenders himself - but not completely, as the action of the final scenes reveals.

In the midst of Edward's final struggles, however, is one of the play's few moments of pure, poetic imagery. For the most part the play's dialogue and action are quite lean and muscular. Characters speak in a generally straightforward fashion, with very little poetic

imagery such as that found in the plays of Shakespeare, who wrote at the same time as the author of this play and for several years afterwards. This stylistic sensibility creates a stark, unadorned context in which images like the captured deer and the sunshine/shadow reference stand out with unexpected vividness and poignancy. On another level, it's also possible to see these comments as functioning in the same way as Edward's earlier comment about being loved by Gaveston (Act 1, Scene 4, Part 1), to indicate that there is perhaps more depth to him than might have previously been believed.

Act 4, Scene 6

Act 4, Scene 6 Summary

Isabella and Mortimer celebrate their victory, with Mortimer urging Isabella to take his advice - put Prince Edward on the throne right away and name him (Mortimer) as his chief advisor. Isabella speaks lovingly to him and agrees to do as he says. A Messenger arrives with news that Edward is melancholy, and is soon followed by Winchester, with Edward's crown and news that Edward is now in Berkeley's custody. He also reveals that he's heard Edmund is putting together a plot to free Edward. Mortimer dismisses him and calls for two other servants, Gurney and Matrevis. He tells Isabella the only way for them to reclaim England and to survive is to have Edward secretly murdered. At first Isabella protests, but then agrees. When Matrevis and Gurney come in, Mortimer tells them to take custody of Edward, treat him badly and frighten him, and above all keep him from being rescued by Edmund. Isabella speaks fondly of Edward and gives Matrevis a ring for him to give to Edward as a token of her regard. As Gurney and Matrevis go out, Mortimer congratulates Isabella on being such a good liar (about her feelings for Edward) and urges her to continue lying, since he sees Edmund and Prince Edward coming. Edmund and Prince Edward come in, they all four speak politely to each other, and then Prince Edward says he's too young to reign and asks Isabella to ask Mortimer to let Edward free. Edmund asks Mortimer to re-consider, but Mortimer taunts him for the role he played earlier in having Edward captured. This, says Edmund, is all the more reason for him to ensure that Edward is treated well *now*. Mortimer tells Prince Edward that Edmund is not to be trusted. Prince Edward protests, Isabella tries to get him to leave, Prince Edward refuses to go with Mortimer, Mortimer threatens him, and Prince Edward appeals to Edmund for help. Edmund, however, is resolved to rescue Edward and goes out, leaving Prince Edward with Isabella and Mortimer.

Act 4, Scene 6 Analysis

Aside from increasing the sense of impending danger to Edward's life, the key element to note here is the continuing development of the relationship between Mortimer and Isabella. More and more, it's becoming clear that power, or at least impending power, is going to Mortimer's head. He clearly wants to run everything, and seems willing to do anything to make that happen, even completely dominate the woman whose support got him to this position in the first place. As for Isabella, she finally expresses her feelings for Mortimer even while he continues to treat her as a pawn in his new but infinitely exciting game of "who gets to control the kingdom?" That being said, Isabella in this scene seems to completely submit her will to that of Mortimer in the same way as she did with Edward earlier. This raises the question of whether she's weak, or whether she's merely continuing to play the political game, which in turn relates to another question - when she sends her message of love to Edward, is she in fact lying as Mortimer says she is, or does she still genuinely care for him? As was the case with all the other occasions in which she expressed affection for Edward, the answer lies in the

overall interpretation of her character. If she has throughout the play been genuine in her expressions of feeling, her doing so here not only is consistent, it also shows an admirable courage in defying the man (Mortimer) who so obviously wants to gain control over her. Her courage quickly fades, however, when faced with Mortimer's determination to kill Edward and gain control over the Prince. Evidence of this is the way she completely sides with Mortimer to face down the requests for mercy from Edmund and the Prince. The conclusion is that Isabella is ultimately as weak as her husband, completely unable to stand up for herself and her own beliefs.

Speaking of Edmund, there is a question of logic in this scene. After Edmund insists that he's going to try to rescue Edward, why does Mortimer let him go? The answer can be found in Scene 4 of this act, in which Edmund is arrested on charges of treason. It's never explained in the text, but it can be inferred from the action of the play that Mortimer knows that once the Prince has been declared king and Edward removed from the throne, any act against the new king can be regarded as treason. Edmund's actions in attempting to rescue the previous king and restore him to the throne would be just such an act. In other words, at the end of this scene, Mortimer knows he will have an ironclad case against Edmund in a short while, and will therefore be able to get rid of him. That's why he lets him go - he's merely biding his time before making his final, fatal stroke.

Act 5, Scenes 3 and 4

Act 5, Scenes 3 and 4 Summary

Scene 3 - Matrevis and Gurney assure Edward that they are his friends. Edward, evidently fatigued, asks when he will be allowed to rest, and then asks to be allowed to die, since he already knows that's what he's destined for. Gurney assures him Isabella loves him and is acting to protect him. Edward complains about the tortures he's forced to endure - bad smells, no water, and no food. Matrevis and Gurney, who seem to have had enough of his complaining, hold him down, take dirty water from a nearby river, and forcibly shave him. Edward struggles, crying out that his royal person is being wronged for the sakes of Gaveston and the Spencers. When Matrevis and Gurney are finished, they prepare to depart for Kenilworth but are confronted by Edmund. Matrevis and Gurney stand their ground, confident in their ability to overpower Edmund. Edmund demands the freedom to speak with Edward but Matrevis refuses, and he and Gurney take Edward away. Edmund complains aloud about how wrong things are when kings are treated like common prisoners.

Scene 4 - Mortimer, in soliloquy, speaks of the need for Edward's death, since the government is beginning to feel sorry for him. He reads aloud a letter that will be delivered to Matrevis and Gurney, in which they're told that the bearer of the letter has been assigned to kill Edward, and that once the deed is done they are to, in turn, kill the killer. He calls in professional Italian killer Lightborn, who assures Mortimer he's the right man for the job of secretly killing Edward. Mortimer gives him the letter and money to pay for his journey and sends him on his way. After Lightborn is gone, Mortimer (again in soliloquy) muses on how much power he has, on his plans for controlling Prince Edward and marrying Isabella, and on how happy he is that everything has turned out the way he planned. Prince Edward comes in with Isabella, Canterbury, and other lords. Just as the prince is being proclaimed king by Canterbury, soldiers bring in the captured Edmund, who confesses his attempt to rescue Edward. Mortimer calls for his execution, the new King cries out that he should be pardoned, Mortimer tells him it's for the kingdom's good, and Edmund says he will not accept Mortimer's authority. The soldiers take Edmund away, leaving the new king to wonder whether he (the king) will be safe around Mortimer. Isabella reassures him that he's perfectly safe, and urges him to stop thinking about Edmund.

Act 5, Scenes 3 and 4 Analysis

Edward's inevitable fate is sealed in these two scenes. Ironically enough, Mortimer's is as well, and what's interesting to note is that Mortimer's letter is the agent for the deaths of both men. Its role in Edward's death plays out in the following scene, while its role in Mortimer's plays out in Act 5 Scene 6.

Before the letter makes its appearance, however, Edward's humiliation and frustration increases with the shaving incident. In the period in which the play is set, kings were always shaved by others, but never forcibly and never with dirty water. This means that the circumstances of this shaving are perhaps symbolic of the disrespectful way the play suggests he treated his kingdom - Edward is being treated as badly as he treated his kingdom. The irony is that Mortimer behaves with parallel disrespect to the new King. Admittedly, Edward II is only a boy, but he is still the king, and for Mortimer to blatantly disobey his will is easily as treasonous an act as that of which he accuses Edmund. This is a vivid example of the way new power has corrupted Mortimer's perspective. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, his treachery catches up with him in the final scene of the play.

Act 5, Scene 5

Act 5, Scene 5 Summary

At Berkeley Castle, Matrevis and Gurney wonder how it's possible that Edward is still alive, considering the torture they're putting him through. Lightborn arrives, gives them the letter, and tells them to go away - nobody, he says, can know his methods. He asks them to bring him a red-hot poker, a table, and a feather bed when he calls, and then goes in to see Edward, complaining about the smell and telling Edward he's come with comfort and good news. Edward says he knows he (Lightborn) is there to kill him. Lightborn reassures him, telling him Isabella is worried about him and adding that anyone who sees Edward in this piteous state can't help but weep for him. Edward speaks at length about just how miserable his situation is. Lightborn urges him to lie down, but Edward says he knows what Lightborn is there to do and only asks that he be allowed to know when the final stroke is coming. Lightborn convinces him his intentions are innocent. Edward seems to want to believe him, but nevertheless gives him his last jewel as a bribe, saying he's still somewhat fearful. Lightborn urges him again to lie down, and at first Edward refuses, but then he realizes how sleepy he is. Lightborn calls for Matrevis and Gurney to bring in the gear, which they do. He instructs them to lay the mattress on top of Edward and the table on top of the mattress - lightly, so the body isn't bruised. Stage directions then indicate that Edward is murdered, while Matrevis comments on the intensity of Edward's cry in his final moments. There is nothing more specific than that. As soon as Edward is dead, Matrevis and Gurney murder Lightborn (as they were told to do in Mortimer's letter). They go out with the two bodies.

Act 5, Scene 5 Analysis

Edward does not die particularly well. He's far from defiant, humble, courageous, or any of the other things that are generally seen as indicative of nobility in the face of the ultimate unknown. He's honest about, and aware of, what's going to happen to him, but even then only to a point - ultimately he's weak, pathetic, spiritually frail, shallow, and feeble. This raises the question of what, if anything, can be gleaned about the play's themes from the manner of the central character's death.

On one level, Edward starts as he begins - a weak, vulnerable, and emotionally immature human being. In this way, the play can be seen more as a portrait or a study rather than as any kind of means to instruct or enlighten. It seems that audiences are intended to feel pity for Edward, and thereby feel pity for anyone afflicted with a similar weakness of personality - someone like Mortimer, for example, who doesn't have the strength of character to withstand the temptations of power. On another level, however, Edward's death can be seen as illuminating the play's thematic point about the dangers of giving in to those temptations. In this context, it's important to remember that Edward's death triggers Mortimer's eventual destruction, which means that it's possible that Edward's death is less about Edward than it is about Mortimer, and becomes a

warning not only about the dangers of excessive loyalty, but also against excessive self-righteousness.

It's important to note that the stage directions are deliberately vague when it comes to detailing exactly how Edward is killed. He's covered with the mattress, the table is put on top of him, and then he dies. The implication is that he's either suffocated or crushed. Fair enough - but if that was intended to be the means of killing, why did Lightborn ask for a red-hot poker? The answer lies in history, which reports that Edward died from having a heated poker inserted into his anus. Aside from the astonishing sense of pain this image evokes, it also evokes the sense of a vicious parody of anal intercourse, which in turn gives rise to the inference that Edward was killed in that way because he *did* in fact have a homosexual relationship with Gaveston. The point here, however, is that the insertion seems to be deliberately omitted from the stage directions. So, what killed him? Yes, Lightborn tells Matrevis to stomp on the table, an act which would almost certainly cause Edward pain, but would it have ended his life - and would it have given rise to the kind of intense final cry that Matrevis' comments suggest that Edward makes? If he dies as history suggests, that cry could probably be more accurately described as a scream of agony. Did the playwright assume that actors would already know the way Edward died, and would therefore need no specific direction as to how to do it? Were audiences intended to believe that the suffocation and crushing were enough? The question, given the paucity of information in the text, is puzzlingly unanswerable, but if the execution is carried out onstage in the way history suggests, it cannot help but give this climactic moment an even more horrific, pathetic impact than it already does.

Act 5, Scene 6

Act 5, Scene 6 Summary

Matrevis assures Mortimer that Edward is dead, but then confesses that he and Gurney are both troubled by their consciences and fear of arrest, and are desperate to flee. Mortimer lets them go, and then in a brief soliloquy brags about how unassailable his position is.

Isabella comes in saying she's heard Edward is dead and feels guilty about being part of the cause of it. She also says that the new King Edward III (the former Prince) is furious, and promising to take revenge on them. Edward III comes in, accusing Mortimer of having killed Edward and promising to have him executed. Isabella urges him to be calm, but Edward III speaks angrily to her and shows the haughty Mortimer the letter he wrote to Matrevis and Gurney. As Mortimer realizes that Gurney has betrayed him, Edward III orders that he be executed. Isabella pleads for Mortimer's life but Edward III refuses to listen. Mortimer accepts his fate and urges Isabella not to mourn for him. He's taken out by Edward III's soldiers, describing himself as "a traveler/[going] to discover countries yet unknown." Isabella again pleads for his life, but Edward III again refuses, saying her pleas are proof that she was in league with him, just like the rumors say. He places her in prison and tells her that just because he's her son, she shouldn't expect him to be merciful. She begs to be allowed to mourn properly for Edward, Edward III tells her to go, she begs, he refuses, and she finally goes out, pleading for death.

A soldier brings in Mortimer's head. Edward III orders that it be placed on Edward's hearse and then calls for his funeral robes, offering the head to Edward's spirit as a sacrifice and also offering his own tears as proof of his grief and innocence.

Act 5, Scene 6 Analysis

The first part of the scene, which concludes with Mortimer's bragging about his safety, is heavily ironic, in that not more than a few minutes of stage time later he has his head lopped off for committing treason. His final comments about being a traveler exploring unknown countries can easily be seen as bravado and/or defiance. Unrepentant to the end, he seems to have become completely corrupted by power, proving himself to be as spiritually weak in his own way as Edward II, the man whose life he destroyed for being similarly subject to human frailties and desires.

Meanwhile, her own weakness also catches the flighty and unreliable Isabella. She is desperate to mourn for both the men who loved her and whom she at least claims to love in return, but in their deaths as in their lives, she is unable to make up her mind who she should be loyal to. She is denied the chance to grieve for either of them by her strong-willed son, who seems to have a stronger awareness of personal integrity and responsibility than anyone else in the play. Who knows where he got it from, given the

weakness and lack of integrity of both his parents - maybe his uncle Edmund. In any case, the new king's actions in the play's final moments can be seen as finally portraying a positive aspect of loyalty, one of the play's main thematic interests. Edward III's grief for his father is genuine and appropriate, perhaps more than the audience, and history, believes that Edward II deserves, but which his son clearly thinks is his right. That right is to be seen and treated for what he is - a human being, whose death was as inevitable as his capacity for passion, his need for affection, and his ultimate frailty. Perhaps this is at the very core of everything in the play - that humanity is fragile and must be cared for. This can be seen as the thematic point to the otherwise gratuitous appearance of Mortimer's severed head. Like Edward, he succumbed to strong passion, and, like Edward, he ended up dead as the result of that passion.

Characters

Archbishop of Canterbury

The Archbishop is moved to act upon the king's immoral behavior when Edward deposes the Bishop of Coventry, sends him to the Tower, and then turns over his lands to Gaveston. He considers Edward's acts to be a form of violence against the Church itself.

Robert Baldock

Baldock is scholar who read to the king's niece when she was young and serves her.

Beaumont

A servant to King Edward.

Sir Thomas Berkeley

Berkeley is made to take the king from the abbey to his own castle. He does not keep him long, for Mortimer has the king moved to jail, where Matrevis and Gurney are his guards.

Bishop of Coventry

It is the Bishop of Coventry who pens the order banishing Gaveston the second time, and for this he is shamefully stripped of his symbolic gown and sent to die in the Tower by Edward II.

Bishop of Winchester

The Bishop of Winchester comes to Neath Abbey in Northern England where Edward has sought refuge; his mission is to carry back the crown to Mortimer. He tells the king that "it is for England' s good."

Piers de Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall

The historical Gaveston's father had loyally served Edward I, so Gaveston was, at an early age, consigned as companion to the young Prince of Wales (Edward II). It is generally believed that Gaveston was Edward's lover. When Edward I learned of Gaveston's corrupting influence, the king banished Gaveston. However, after the king's

death, Edward II recalled him. Now Gaveston added insolence to depravity, accepting titles from the king far beyond his lowborn social status and influencing the king's haphazard administration of the realm. Marlowe presents a Gaveston of unctuous deceit and depravity. He dreams of turning the court into a sybaritic playland filled with "men like satyrs grazing on the lawns." He nearly succeeds in making his dream a reality, a state of affairs that infuriates the nobility. They force Edward II to banish him once again; but they soon relent and he is recalled. He secretly hides and listens in to the noble's conversations, a physical posture symbolic of his presumptuous, unwelcome, and inappropriate status in court. He relishes the idea of destroying those of whom he is envious, urging the king to banish Mortimer to the tower for daring to question the king's refusal to ransom Mortimer senior, taken hostage by the Scots. Arrogant and spiteful while in command of his king, he wheedles and begs when the tables are turned and he has been captured. His death seems an expedient and necessary action to save the king and kingdom.

Earl of March

See Roger Mortimer

King Edward, II

The historical Edward took the throne at the age of twenty-three and managed to hold it through twenty years of intrigue, intoxication, and ineptitude. He was the pawn of his advisors, Piers Gaveston and Hugh Despenser. Reputedly he was Gaveston's lover as well. His French queen, Isabella, along with her lover, Roger Mortimer, successfully deposed him in 1327, whereupon they locked him in a cold cell in Gloucester Castle, hoping he would die there of disease. Some evidence points to the possibility that in 1328 he was murdered there. In Marlowe's play, which collapses more than twenty years of his reign into a matter of days, Edward is self indulgent, a playboy with little aptitude for or interest in the governance of his country. He reveals his misguided priorities when he says he'd "sooner the sea o'erwhelm my land / Than bear the ship that shall transport [Gaveston] hence." He never seems to comprehend the nobles's accusation that he has abandoned the country for his lover. It is not the king's homosexuality that bothers the nobles, but his neglect of the realm and his heaping of honors on this lowborn, manipulative man. When the nobles murder Gaveston, Edward merely transfers his interests to a new minion, Spenser. Marlowe's Edward earns no measure of respect until his imprisonment, when he recognizes what he has lost in losing the kingship. Although he fails to repent or to acknowledge the impact his folly has had on his country, he does become more human, vulnerable, and therefore a more sympathetic character; standing in the filth and mire of a cold dungeon, he asks a messenger to "Tell Isabella the queen, I looked not thus / When for her sake I ran at tilt in France." He becomes no longer a wicked figure, but a pitiable one, one who seems incapable of performing the duty he had inherited. He ends a broken and destroyed man who followed his impetuous heart instead of his sovereign duty.

Prince Edward, III

The young prince does not figure in the play until his father is imprisoned. At that point he shows his filial loyalty by disobeying his mother (who is French and seeks the English throne) and bribing the French king not to take up her cause by warring with England. In this he is successful. However, he cannot prevent his father's ultimate fate, and at the tender age of fourteen he ascends to the throne. At first he allows himself to be controlled completely by Mortimer. He accepts his father's overthrow, because he recognizes his father's faults. But when his innocent uncle Kent is also executed by Mortimer, the young king's resolve is galvanized□he asserts his power and, by the end of the play, shows himself poised to recover his kingship. Most importantly, he proves that his reign will differ from his father's because he won't allow his heart to betray his kingly obligations. He sends his mother to the Tower to await a proper trial, telling her that "If you be guilty, though I be your son, / Think not to find me slack or pitiful." He has the right balance of heart and leadership, holding a straight course between personal and public demands.

Edmund Fitzalan, Earl ofArundel

Fitzalan, the Earl of Arundel remains loyal to the king. He is the messenger who asks if Edward may see Gaveston before he is executed. With the denial of that request, he offers to take Gaveston in his own trust, a guarantee to offer up himself if Gaveston escapes. Although Arundel is honorable, the rebel nobles decide to put Pembroke, one of their own, in charge instead.

Guards

These guards at Killingworth Castle, Sir John Matrevis and Thomas Gurney, wash the king with puddle water and shave off his beard. After Lightborn murders the king, they murder Lightborn and throw him into the moat.

Henry, Earl of Leicester

Brother to Lancaster, Leicester attends the king in his exile, where he attempts to assuage Edward's grief and fear by telling him to imagine he is in his own court. When the Bishop of Winchester arrives, Leicester advises the king to go ahead and give up the crown, so that young Edward will not be hurt. He is trusted by the king and by Mortimer.

Levune

See Prince Edward III

Isabella

Isabella, daughter of the King of France and wife of Edward II, plays a small but vicious role in her husband's destruction. At first audiences sympathize with her because Edward abandons her for Gaveston, and she seems genuinely to mourn the loss of his attentions, saying "Witness this heart that sighing for thee breaks." This lack of faith in female loyalty comes straight from Holinshed's *Chronicles* and represents standard assumptions during the Renaissance about the fickle nature of women. She is accused the moment she comes on stage of being in love with Mortimer, and indeed, it comes out that they "kiss as they conspire." She begs her son to spare Mortimer with more sincerity than she had shown when asking Mortimer for mercy toward her husband.

Sir John, ofHainault

A French noble who hosts the queen when she goes to France to garner support for Mortimer against King Edward.

Kent

Brother of Edward II, Kent offers sage advice to his errant sibling and provides a weathervane for the audience's sympathies. At first he is offended by the noble's questioning of his brother's command, but he soon finds himself in league with them because he cannot abide Edward's self-indulgence. Kent remains on the outside of Mortimer's ring, however, and when he sees how his brother is treated by the vengeful Mortimer, he attempts to rescue Edward. Kent, the audience's representative in the play, recognizes that political expediency has given way to vile revenge. Mortimer, for the convenience of having him out of the way, foolishly orders Kent executed□a serious political mistake given that Kent had the trust of the new king and would have made an excellent advisor.

Hugh Le Despenser, Junior

Spenser is a lesser lord who serves Gaveston until Gaveston is banished. Edward transfers his attention to Spenser after Gaveston's death. Spenser encourages the king to stand up to the nobles.

Hugh Le Despenser, Senior

Spenser arrives in the nick of time with four hundred bowmen to defend Edward against Mortimer.

Lightborn

The paid assassin who murders Edward II. He in turn is murdered and thrown into the moat to cover up the king's murder. His name is a pun on Lucifer ("Luc" being a Latin root word for "light"), and he represents pure evil. His name can also be understood literally as someone of low birth, perhaps someone who simply does not comprehend the intricacies of court, but can be employed to carry out its evil acts because he does not have the sense nor the inclination to question them. It is the lower-born men who are forced to commit the foul deeds designed by higher-born, more powerful men.

Roger Mortimer

The elder Mortimer, uncle of Mortimer junior, does not appear in the play except briefly in the opening scenes. Nonetheless, he figures in the plot when he is taken hostage by the Scots. Edward, ignoring duty and honor, refuses to rescue him, thus setting off a series of events that will lead to Edward's deposition.

Roger Mortimer, the younger

The historical Roger Mortimer began his association with Edward II honorably enough as a solider in the Scottish wars of 1306-1307. He acquitted himself admirably and earned an assignment in Ireland with the rank of lieutenant. However, he was disturbed by the manipulation of Edward II by Gaveston and the Despensers; thus he joined with the other barons who attempted to oust them. He was captured, then escaped, and then become the paramour of Queen Isabella, who shared his disgust with her dissolute husband. Together they succeeded in deposing the king in 1327. However, the young Edward III, whom Mortimer aided to the throne, chose to eliminate Mortimer's controlling influence by having the rebel arrested and then hanged in 1330. The character of Roger Mortimer retains all of this material, with an added twist of Machiavellian excess. At his death, he accepts that the wheel of fortune, which he had ridden to its highest point, was now taking him back down.

Nobles

These noblemen, Guy Earl of Warwick, Thomas Earl of Lancaster, and Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, join with Mortimer to remove Gaveston from court, by force. Of them, Pembroke is seen as most trustworthy and honorable.

Themes

Politics: Machiavellian Style

In Elizabethan England, Niccolo Machiavelli's *// Principe* (*The Prince*, 1505) was considered a treatise on the science of evil statesmanship because it outlined how a cunning tyrant could, through brutal and forceful measures, take and maintain control over a region and a people. In fact, it seemed a veritable handbook for tyranny, with its exhortation that "It is necessary for a prince wishing to hold his own to know how to do wrong, and to make use of it or not according to necessity." Although *The Prince* advocates morality in a prince, it also urges the ambitious prince to use whatever means necessary to keep the state intact, and that could mean resorting to evil behavior, supposedly in the name of good. Use of force is an art, the most important one the prince has at his disposal: "A prince ought to have no other aim or thought. . . than war and its rules and discipline; for this is the sole art that belongs to him who rules." Marlowe's *Edward II* explores two aspects of Machiavelli's theory: the misuse of power, and the neglect of power. Edward breaks a Machiavellian cardinal rule when he lets go the royal reins in order to indulge his private desires; *The Prince* warns, "When princes have thought more of ease than of arms, they have lost their states." Edward abdicates his responsibility as head of state, and he pays a dear price for it because the nobles do not tolerate his neglect of power. Mortimer, on the other hand, does not let love interfere with his quest for power; in fact, his love for Isabella serves his larger purpose to take over the state. Thus, at first he seems the epitome of Machiavellian leadership because he does not shirk at using all available means, including executing the king's lover, to restore order to the kingdom. However, Mortimer becomes a Machiavellian despot when he misuses his power in overriding the young King Edward III and executing Kent, who could have become an important and trustworthy advisor to the king. Machiavelli emphasizes that it is always necessary to portray as much "liberty" and fairness as possible, in order to keep the people's trust. Mortimerbetrays this trust by stepping beyond the line of decency and political expediency, for his murder of Kent alienates him from the young king, who decides to gather forces against him.

Duty and Responsibility

Edward's preoccupation with Gaveston would not be a matter of concern to the nobles if it did not threaten the state. It is Edward's lack of interest in pressing matters, such as France's takeover of Normandy and the battle in Scotland, that drives them to the treasonable point of questioning their king. Edward's first order of business as king seems to have been to mail a letter to Gaveston, releasing him from banishment and offering to share the kingdom with him. This act of selfish interest would have been harmless in itself, but Mortimer junior and senior had sworn to Edward I on his deathbed to prevent the return of Gaveston at any cost. The dying king knew that his son's plaything would prevent him from ruling England properly. The titles Edward bestows on his lover shock even Kent, who says "Brother, the least of these may well suffice / For

one of greater birth than Gaveston." Edward admits that he cares for nothing but Gaveston, and when the nobles force him to sign a new banishment order, he tries to bribe them with lands and titles, desiring only to hold back "some nook or corner... to frolic with [his] dearest Gaveston." He is over-liberal in all of his gifts, not using them strategically to advance the state, but squandering them drunkenly. This lavishness and his constant reveling run the treasury dry, putting the entire country at risk, for he will not be able to conscript, feed, and arm a fighting force without money. Twice he acknowledges, using the same metaphor, that he'd rather England were overwhelmed by the sea than give up his minion; his carelessness nearly drowns his realm. Because of his behavior, honored peers and ambassadors have left his court, and his enemies in Scotland, France, Denmark, and Ireland have taken advantage of his weakness to make inroads into his territory.

Style

Blank Verse

Blank verse, unrhymed lines with a measured rhythm, was not invented by Christopher Marlowe, but he is credited with having instituted its use in English drama. The rhythm usually takes the form of iambic pentameter, ten syllables with the accent falling on every other syllable. Marlowe's blank verse demonstrates how the measure can be varied, using slight variations in accenting or in the placement of pauses (*caesura*) to retain the freshness of normal speech, while maintaining the formality of poetry. Because of its great flexibility, it is a medium that lends itself perfectly to the expression of natural sentences: "Here, take my crown, the life of Edward too, / Two kings in England cannot reign at once." Although balanced by the rhythm, these two lines also contain the spontaneity of unrehearsed speech. In the hands of Shakespeare, the same form became even more elastic: "For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground / And tell sad stories of the deaths of kings ..." {*Richard II*). Marlowe freed dramatic lyrics from the constraints of rhyming lines, thus paving the way for further lyric innovations. By taking greater liberties with the stresses but holding to the overall rhythm of iambic pentameter, Shakespeare produced his psychologically realistic plays, as he let his characters express even more realistic utterances than Marlowe was able to achieve.

Imagery

The images conveyed in the language of a play usually suggest or subtly foreshadow the general themes of the play. Also, whether it's purely linguistic or in the form of actual items on stage, imagery can serve to remind the audience of the settings and paraphernalia that accompany a person's status. Images of the external marks of status appear over and over again throughout *Edward II*, such as the crown, battle ensigns (flags), ceremonial robes, jewelry, hats, and so on. In many cases, the intended function of these items is perverted by the king, in his mania for entertainment and self-indulgence. For example, when the Bishop of Coventry angers him for having signed the order banishing Gaveston from court the first time, Edward punishes the holy man by stripping away his vestments. A priest's vestments hold symbolic importance, and to lay hands upon them is a form of sacrilege that to the Bishop of Canterbury□as well as Elizabethan audiences□represents an act of violence against the Church itself. This scene is essentially repeated with Edward as the victim at the end of the play when he is dressed in tatters in the dungeon, stripped of his crown. He tells Lightborn to convey a message to Isabella saying that he "looked not thus" when he "ran at tilt in France / And there unhorsed the Duke of Cleremont." His appearance is an integral part of his status. The tournament was a popular Renaissance pageant where the players dressed in their finest to perform mock battles with each other. Renaissance audiences were particularly attuned to the differences between real war and play war, both of which required the players to dress up. That Edward was willing to "undress" a priest marks him as dangerously irreverent. He is also depicted as overly concerned with pageants

and show. His nobles complain that he only once went to battle, at the Battle of Bannockburn, and there he was so garishly dressed that he made himself a laughingstock. Significantly, he lost the battle. His attention to show, rather than substance, led him to ruin. In another case, he asks the nobles to tell him what "device" or design they have put on their ensigns, or battle flags. Each of the nobles in turn describes a scene that can be read as a symbolical threat to the king, and one of their devices contains the Latin phrase *Undique mors es*t, which means "surrounded by death." Edward is thus surrounded by subtle visual images that symbolize the danger of his own obsession with image.

Historical Context

The Reigns of Edward I & II

The historical Edward I (1239-1307) was an effective king, although he made excessive demands on Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. He began the process of building an administration capable of taxing the people through a body called the Commons, adjunct to the Great Council (the king's advisors). The Commons consisted of locally elected representatives, who would be more inclined to collect much-needed taxes for the king if they had loyalties both to the throne and to their constituents. It would take another 500 years for this body to take on the democratic form of representation it has today. The Commons also served as a funnel for petitions requesting national statutes; this process resulted in the growing body of laws that steadily eroded the jurisdiction and power of the baronry and other local landowners and began the scaffolding of nationalism. The final blow to the nobility would be an act that made illegal the conscription of armed forces by any one other than the king himself.

Edward II was apparently as dissolute as Marlowe's play presents him. He lost the faith of the nobles and was imprisoned and probably murdered by them. He lost Normandy to France and his defeat at Bannockburn led inexorably to Scottish Independence. Edward II's deposition, at the hands of his wife and her lover Roger Mortimer, constituted the first deposition of a king since the instatement of William the Conqueror in 1066, but was in line with the slow path toward democracy begun by Edward I. The kingship was no longer seen as inviolable; a precedent was thus set for questioning the king's moral worth, and for taking steps against a king deemed unworthy.

Scottish War of Independence□ Bannockburn, 1314

In Marlowe's play, the only reference to Bannockburn comes in Act II, scene ii, when Lancaster mocks King Edward with a gibing song about his defeat there in 1314. Historically, the defeat was devastating for England because it led to the end of its rule of Scotland fourteen years later. In a way, Edward had no business losing the battle. He arrived with 16,000 men and a twenty-mile supply line. Robert the Bruce had only a band of 6,500 desperate but clever men. Edward had superior forces and armaments, but he lacked the drive of Robert the Bruce, a national hero in Scotland to this day. The immediate object of the battle was to assist the English-held Stirling Castle which was under siege by the Scots. English governor Philip Mowbray was about to surrender when Edward arrived. Edward made some strategic mistakes and led his men into a trap, a bog-filled area that was difficult to maneuver in. A handful of Scots were then able to herd them into a nearby river and slaughter them. Edward called a retreat that was so panicked that many English soldiers were shot by their own bowmen who couldn't tell who they were firing at. Edward and 500 men fled to Stirling Castle, only to be rebuffed by Mowbrey, who foresaw that Robert would win. Edward headed elsewhere and ultimately returned home, leaving behind scores of dead, prisoners, and

hostages, plus a fortune's worth of equipment. It was a great triumph for the Scots and a devastating blow to Edward's military credibility.

Critical Overview

Edward II first opened in 1594, played by the Earl of Pembroke's Men. The next record of its performance indicates that it was played at the Red Bull in 1617 by Queen Elizabeth's acting troupe. The innovative blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter) of *Edward II* led Marlowe's contemporary George Peele to dub Marlowe the "Muse's darling." When Puritanism closed the theaters in 1642, Marlowe's plays were all but forgotten, although his reputation as a poet (for *Hero and Leander*) survived. Not even Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* earned the attention of dramatists for two centuries. Marlowe the man, however, captured the interest of the nineteenth-century Romantics, who saw him as the unfettered genius of the Renaissance, partly because of the perpetuated myth that he had died in a brawl. It would not be until an American discovered the identity of Marlowe's murderer (Ingram Frizer) and the account of the crime, that Marlowe's reputation would be even partially restored. Nowhere near as popular as the Shakespeare histories, *Edward II* has appeared sporadically at theaters in England and the United States throughout the early twentieth century. Bertold Brecht produced his own inimitable Marxist interpretation of the play in 1924, soon to be followed by other reinterpretations of Western canonical plays with the typical Brechtian spin. Brecht's *Edward II* features a pared-down text, which focuses on the conflict between selfish interests and political obligations, and several ballads, a Brecht dramatic signature; a 1987 restaging of Brecht's version in Chicago was appreciated for its social commentary, with its emphasis on "the common suffering," and its sparse staging. An especially brilliant performance in the summer of 1958 in London brought wide acclaim and a rekindled interest in the play. It reached American theaters the same year, when it played at the Theatre de Lys in New York, directed by Toby Robertson. Then, in 1969, Ian McKellan' s Edward in a production at the Edinburgh International Festival elicited rave reviews for his portrayal of "this weakest of kings" because, according to Clive Barnes's *New York Times* review, Mr. McKellan "induces pity and understanding ... even though he never once plays for our sympathy." The play lay dormant in America for some time, even though director John Houseman recognized that the relaxation of sexual mores of the 1970s would enable him to de-emphasize the play's moral implications and focus on it's intense portrayal of psychological deterioration. In 1974 Houseman said that "With the fading of sexual inhibitions of our contemporary stage, it has become possible to realize a production [of *Edward II*] that I have been dreaming of for more than a dozen years." Although Houseman never realized this dream, a 1992 production at the Yale Repertory Theatre did create a play that focuses not on "Edward's sexual orientation, but his lack of political and social discrimination in choosing the distinctly foreign and unworthy Gaveston." The success of the production led the *New Yorker* reviewer, Randall Louis Anderson, to predict that "the decade of *Edward II* is now upon us." Perhaps this play about intense and selfish personal gratification at the expense of probity in the affairs of state, with its depiction of the brutal consequences that await a leader when he or she tries to evade the demands of an indignant group of officials, will soon find an audience in the United States, where in 1998 the president was impeached for lying under oath to avoid the legal consequences of covering up his illicit liaisons.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Hamilton is a Humanities teacher at Cary Academy, an innovative private school in Cary, North Carolina. In this essay, she discusses Marlowe's use of a particular image as the structuring device that organizes the play's action.

The details of a play's descriptive lines can often seem unrelated to the story being told; they are thus all too easy to dismiss as curious but rather outdated examples of the parlance of the day. Renaissance writers like Marlowe were well versed in the themes and stories of classical writers such as Ovid, Virgil, and Homer; it is not surprising then that the names of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses appear in their literary works. For example, in *Edward II*, Edward speaks of his heart beating like "Cyclop's hammer" and Gaveston is likened to Phaeton, who was unable to control his father's chariot and thus serves to intimate that Gaveston will not be able to control the chaos he causes. Certain images and allusions, however, carry more significance than others, and uncracking the code of these images can cast a revealing light on the entire play.

In *Edward II*, images of pageants and masques, jousts and tournaments, sports and pleasures abound; this is apt given that one of the play's themes is Edward's excessive fondness for entertainment and regalia at the expense of statecraft. The first pageant image, however, occurs oddly out of context, before we know of Edward's tastes. It comes at the very beginning of the play, when Gaveston receives a letter from Edward inviting him to come and share his realm. Gaveston is delighted and begins to daydream about the kinds of court entertainment comedies and Italian masques he will plan for his king. One game he describes in detail, with a great deal of relish. He envisions "men like satyrs" who lounge about the palace lawns watching a young boy adorned in pearls and hiding his genitals with a laurel branch. This young boy he likens to Actaeon, a character from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* who is turned into a hart (deer) as punishment for having seen Diana bathing. In Gaveston's daydream the young-man-cum-hart is brought down by "yelping hounds" and seems to die. Gaveston is quite pleased with his imagined entertainment, for "such things as these best please his majesty." His gruesome vision is interrupted by the arrival of the King, Mortimer, and the lords, and is never alluded to again. However, the brief image has set the scene for the action of the play to come, for it will be the king himself who will be brought to ground while he frolics in foolish games on the palace grounds.

Before the king is set upon, however, another man is made prey to the nobles. The nobles have Gaveston banished, but when they realize that he might raise an army in Ireland, they invite him back so that they can ambush him. It is an unfair hunt, one in which the prey does not know the rules of the game and blindly steps into a trap. While the king and nobles await Gaveston's return, Edward is in a jolly mood and the nobles are feeling more at ease with him than ever before. To bide the time, he inquires of them what device, or flag, they have designed for their battle insignia. To the king, the visible signs of status are more important than the reality. According to David Zucker, "His idea of royal dignity rests exclusively on such forms, which for him define what he is, both as a private and as public man." The king listens as the two nobles relate their designs.

Mortimer's, depicting a "canker " climbing the bark of a tree in which an eagle perches, clearly corresponds to his usurping actions against the king (the eagle is a common symbol for a king). Lancaster admits that his is "more obscure." On his flag, a flying fish "takes the air" and is brought down by a fowl. Lancaster's also bears the Latin motto *Undique mors est*, which translates to "death is on all sides"; his device portrays a creature leaving its natural element, water in this case, and being seized by a predator it would not normally encounter. Hearing of these symbolically threatening images, the king angrily confronts the two lords for their impertinence; he sees the threat in their symbolic representations, but he fails to respond to them on anything more than a superficial level. It will not be by granting titles to these men that their concerns will be abated. He will find out later that both images foreshadowed his own end: being set upon by social climbers then hunted and devoured by predators (courtiers) that would not normally threaten a king. Immediately upon Gaveston's return, Mortimer wounds Gaveston in the presence of the king, thus enacting the attacks symbolized on the flags. When Gaveston is next seen on stage, he is running from the nobles, "flying " to and fro, again enacting the metaphor in the image. Gaveston taunts his pursuers, saying he has escaped their "hot pursuits"; but his last words as they take him captive echo the Latin motto of Lancaster's ensign□he says "And death is all." He encounters his death not in his imagined Elysian palace grounds, but in a trench. The king threatens war, exclaiming that he will not allow them to "appoint their sovereign / His sports, his pleasures, and his company." In other words, he once again focuses not on the substance of the problem but on the surface, because his main concern is that theydenied him the right to pursue his private sport. Ironically, he will become their public sport, and the play presents this as a pageant for an Elizabethan audience.

Images and allusions to sport and game abound in this play; this is a staged masque with real-life consequences. When Mortimer escapes to France, he, the queen, and Sir John of Hainault (a French lord) speak of their upcoming confrontation with King Edward as a game. Sir John asks the young prince what he thinks of the "match" and likens it to a game called prisoner's base ("to bid the English king a base"). The scene of their arrival (Act IV, scene v) finds Edward and his cohorts "flying about the stage." Edward moans, "What, was I born to fly and run away?" He acts like the flying fish of Lancaster's insignia. When he escapes to Ireland, Mortimer says of him "he shall be started thence"; the word "started," in hunting terminology, refers to routing a wild animal from its hiding place. Edward has become nothing more than a wild animal being hunted for sport. Even Kent sees the king in this position, albeit with more sympathy: "Unhappy Edward, chased from England's bounds." Edward too casts himself in the position of a caught animal, defeatedly telling Leicester to "rip up this panting breast of mine." The motif of hunting appears overtly when, in Act V, scene iv, Isabella suggests it as a way of taking young Edward's mind off of his uncle's beheading. Poignantly, the young man asks, "and shall my uncle Edmund ride with us?" knowing full well that his uncle would not be going. This scene underscores the human devastation of the nobles' game of hunting a sovereign. Such games can lead to the death of worthy individuals.

In the last Act, Edward draws a direct parallel between himself and the hunted beast, comparing his state to that of the "the forest deer [that] being struck / Runs to an herb that closes up the wounds." Edward, however, cannot obtain the succor of nature, but

instead must "rend and tear" his gored lion's flesh, "scorning that the lowly earth / Should drink his blood." He must make of himself a formal sacrifice. Again he likens himself to "a lamb encompassed by wolves" and accuses his jailers of having been "nursed with tiger's milk" and Mortimer of having "tiger's jaws." Following the theme of the hunted animal, Mortimer tells Isabella that they have the "old wolf by the ears." Mortimer torments his prey by sending him from one foul prison to another and commanding that the jailers treat him roughly, as one would an animal. Edward feels "vexed like a nightly bird / whose sight is loathesome" and asks when Mortimer's appetite "for blood" will be satisfied. Edward has been hunted down like an animal, toyed with mercilessly, stripped of the symbolic crown that made him greater than human, and left to rot in filth; a piece of meat is tossed at him now and again for sustenance. His demise is in some ways a contorted and perverse manifestation of Gaveston's imagined scene of a hunted man turned into prey and brought down by his own courtiers. It is also a tragic reversal of the sport, pageantry, and erotic pleasure-seeking that was Edward's sole interest. He plays the central, sacrificial figure in his final pageant, instead of playing pageant-maker and royal audience, as he would have done.

How might an Elizabethan audience judge this play about the hunting-down of a king? Depicting an act of violation against a monarch bordered on treason in Marlowe's day, because such a depiction would have been seen as, in a way, inviting the questioning Elizabeth herself, and she actively suppressed such "treasonous" acts. In "Marlowe, *Edward II*, and the Cult of Elizabeth," Dennis Kay proposes that "Edward is a negative exemplum of Elizabeth." That is, Edward represented the antithesis of Elizabeth, and his character and the plot represent a kind of extreme "what if" situation: Elizabethans feared that their queen□as a woman□might fall prey to various temptations, like love. Although the play demonstrates the possible outcome of such a situation, the intent was not to incite the audience to "hunt" Elizabeth, but rather to assuage its fears with an exaggerated depiction of her opposite. She would not allow her love life to interfere with her rule, and her pageants were not the fulsome games of satyrs but legitimate demonstrations of her sovereignty.

Thus, Edward's cruel punishment at the hands of Mortimer serves as a catharsis for the audience, who had real worries about the consequences of Elizabeth's love life but no avenue to express any misgivings (for fear of being charged with treason). Viewing a play such as *Edward II* allowed the public to explore "treasonous" thoughts□thoughts about sovereigns who do not perform their duties and are therefore punished□and to explore these thoughts in the safe, external, performative space of the theatre. Furthermore, the courtiers portrayed in the play exhibit a variety of ways of working out "conflicts of loyalty implicit in the courtier's life"; models range from Spenser, who follows his king to the abyss, to Arundel, who maintains his integrity throughout. These characters would have had their counterparts in Elizabeth's court, and the play offers a means to assess their contributions as well as the justness of their rewards.

Edward II, then, served at least two purposes: it was a window through which one could view and appraise Elizabeth's court, and it was a means to stage a carnivalesque

pageant that celebrated Queen Elizabeth's qualities through an intentionally and extreme opposite depiction.

Source: Carole Hamilton, *Drama for Students*, Gale, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

In this essay, Clare provides an overview of Marlowe's play, contrasting its comparatively sparse narrative style to the playwright's other works, notably Tamburlaine *and* Doctor Faustus.

In *Edward II*, arguably his last play, Marlowe departs from the foreign and exotic landscapes of earlier drama and turns to English history to write a *de casibus* political tragedy. The King's infatuation with the young Piers de Gaveston leads to growing opposition from the barons, spearheaded by the Earls of Lancaster and Warwick, Mortimer, and his nephew, young Mortimer, who becomes the principal antagonist. Resentment of Edward's culpable neglect is fuelled by Gaveston's lowly origins; he is dismissed scornfully by Mortimer as "one so base and obscure". Edward greets such hostility with defiance but the barons are powerful enough to coerce the King into agreeing to Gaveston's banishment. However, they then work to have him recalled so that they can discredit Edward further in the eyes of the House of Commons. Gaveston returns and is treated contemptuously by the earls, who blame Edward's infatuation for the deterioration in national morale and in international status. This erosion of royal authority, coupled with the Mortimers' personal grievance at Edward's refusal to ransom their kinsman, leads to threats of rebellion and deposition. Gaveston tries to escape, but is captured and eventually executed. Edward's expression of grief "O shall I speak or shall I sigh and die?" is followed by avowals of revenge and the adoption of a new favourite, Young Spencer. The ambitious Mortimer is imprisoned in the Tower, but he escapes to France and creates a faction around the Queen and her son, the young Prince Edward.

As Mortimer gains ascendancy, Edward's fall appears imminent. The Queen and Mortimer, now lovers, land in England and gather support. Edward is taken captive and, having relinquished his power and craving death, he is passed between jailers until he arrives at Kenilworth Castle. In a scene of hideous cruelty, he is pierced with a burning spit and murdered by Mortimer's agent, Lightborn. Mortimer's triumph is short-lived: the newly crowned Edward III accuses him of treason and orders his death. The final tableau reveals Mortimer's head proffered to Edward's hearse as the young King dons his mourning robes.

Edward II explores the tragic effects of infatuation; in this context Edward is typical of the intemperate Marlovian figure consumed by an overriding desire. But there is little evidence of nobility in the wilful king who squanders his Kingdom because Gaveston is more important to him: "Ere my sweet Gaveston shall part from me/This isle shall fleet upon the ocean/And wander to the unfrequented Inde". The barons, however, do not act from moral outrage, but because they see in Gaveston a threat to their privileges. They loathe Gaveston because of his lowly birth and because of his foreign and effeminate ways. Gaveston, for his part, despises their uncouthness and hereditary privileges: "Base leaden earls, that glory in your birth,/Go sit at home and eat your tenants' beef". Edward can only respond to this conflict by helplessly following his self-destructive passion, steadfastly believing that Gaveston loves him "more than all the world".

Whether this trust is justly founded, or whether Gaveston is motivated by social ambition, remains uncertain.

The play is structured as a series of careers of individuals who scale the summit of their ambition and are destroyed by it. Baldock reminds his friend Spencer that "all rise to fall". Spencer's career as the King's favourite does, indeed, mirror (albeit less spectacularly) that of Gaveston. But it is Mortimer whose ambitions exemplify most fully the *de casibus* motif. He boasts of his authority which he believes to be unassailable, only to realize that it is unwise to presume upon Fortune's perpetual goodwill: "Base Fortune/now I see that in thy wheel/There is a point to which when men aspire/They tumble headlong down; that point I touched,/and seeing there was no place to mount up higher".

Marlowe's language in *Edward II* is uncharacteristically lean, pared of most of the evocative imagery and sensuousness of *Tamburlaine* and *Doctor Faustus*. This comparative austerity is relieved by Gaveston's expressions of sensual hedonism and by Edward's pitiful laments, which must have influenced Shakespeare in his portrayal of the deposition of Richard II. In the early scenes Isabella's language too is emotionally affecting, but as she aligns with Mortimer it acquires a plainness and loses the passion which underscored her earlier distress.

Source: Janet Clare, ''*Edward II; The Troublesome Reign and Lamentable Death of Edward II*'' in the *International Dictionary of Theatre*, Volume 1: *Play*s, edited by Mark Hawkins-Dady, St. James Press, 1992, pp. 213-15.

Critical Essay #3

Simon is a well-known drama critic. In this excerpt, he reviews an unconventional production of Edward II *that was staged in 1991. While the critic has mixedfeelings regarding the production's heavy emphasis of Marlowe's homosexual themes, he feels that, overall, the new interpretation is worthwhile.*

Back at the Pit, We get Marlowe's *Edward II* staged by Gerard Murphy as camp tragedy. Can you imagine a Charles Ludlam or Charles Busch putting all his extravagance□not to mention overexplicit homosexual acts□into a basically somber, almost unrelievedly grief-filled text? It is an eerie affair, by no means ineffectual, but its sensationalism outweighs its tragic dignity. This Edward's historic death□anal impalement with a white-hot poker□is acted out in full gory detail, but it is preceded by Lightborn, the murderer, stripping to the waist and mounting the muckcovered king in his nightgown in a quasicopulation scene, which the script nowise calls for.

On the other hand, the heavy kissing between Edward and his favorite, Piers Gaveston□as well as, later, between Edward and young Spencer□ seems appropriate and dramatically helpful. But I cannot condone a floor show by three not very acrobatic young men simulating sex à *trios* by way of a royal entertainment. And though there is some sort of desperate honesty in making every character in the play both physically and morally unprepossessing, if not repellent, it ends up being as unreal and unconvincing as the old Hollywood's overcosmeticized blanket glamour. Thus Ciaran Hinds, as young Mortimer, ... *Troilus*, Queen Isabella and Lady Margaret are both on the overweight and frumpy side, and so on.

Simon Russell Beale, the RSC's rising star, is uncompelling of face, squat of body, acrid of voice. Yet he is a consummate actor, and his Edward is not lacking in a grating, pitiful humanity. His passion for Grant Thatcher's pretty and effeminate□yet in some ways also boyishly loutish□Gaveston is credible enough, and his pathos as a starved and sleepless prisoner knee-deep in filth is as palpable as any stage can make it. But Beale finally lacks the charisma that would explain his queen's passionate yearning for him despite constant, brutal rejection and the flaunting of his affair with Gaveston. Perhaps the most satisfying performance comes from Callum Dixon as young Prince Edward, who makes the transition from boy to boy-king to full-fledged monarch authentic and compelling.

The other unqualified success here is Ilona Sekacz' s score for violin, viola, and cello, some of it live, some of it electronically amplified, which whips up a storm of feelings but is confined to transitions between scenes and never allowed to become a nuisance. There is much to be said for the simple set by Sandy Powell and Paul Minter: a neutral cloth artfully draped over a few poles, and brought to colored life by Wayne Dowdeswell's impassioned lighting. The designers' costumes have an aptly brooding color scheme: mostly black, some gold, Gaveston in white, and, here and there, some sea green flooding the black. But the mixing of exaggerated period elements (e.g., overassertive codpieces further enhanced in some cases with rubbery studs) and

contemporary touches (e.g., sneakers for Gaveston) may be too much of a muchness. This is an *Edward II* that keeps you intellectually stimulated but emotionally at bay□almost as if the RSC were performing Brecht's adaptation rather than Marlowe's original.

Source: John Simon, "London, Part I" in *New York*, Vol. 24, no. 34, September 2, 1991 , pp. 49-50.

Critical Essay #4

In this brief essay, Johnson focuses on the theme of music in Marlowe's play, particularly as it applies to the dialogue.

Gaveston's speech reflects the medieval and Renaissance conception of the power of music, which was thought to be capable of inducing specific psychological effects (see James Hutton, "Some English Poems in Praise of Music," *English Miscellany*, II [1951], 1-63, and the exchange of letter between Hutton and the present author, "Spenser's *Shepherds' Calendar*," TLS, March 30 [p. 197], May 11 [p. 293], and Sept. 7 [p. 565], 1951). Gaveston does not wish to retain the poor men who have just sued to enter his service; instead, in order to maintain his power over Edward, he will employ poets and musicians to stir Edward's less kingly desires. The pliancy of Edward accords with his unsympathetic characterization in the first half of the play, and his first "musical" image (of the noise of the Cyclops' forge) further rebuffs sympathy, since it serves to express his ignobly passionate harping upon his minion's enforced exile.

Both of these references, however, together with less significant allusions to the drums and trumpets of the battle field (lines 1494, 1526, 1569; xi, 185, 217, 259) and to Pluto's bells (line 1956; xvii, 88), lend added force to Edward's speech just before his murder. He has been characterized increasingly sympathetically since Gaveston's murder and his Queen's seduction. He is no longer the "pliant king"; one of his keepers remarks. "He hath a body able to endure More then we can enflict, and therefore now, Let us assaile his minde another while." Just as Richard II is at his most sympathetic in the dungeon scene in Shakespeare's play, so Edward II is in Marlowe's; and just as Richard hears "broken music" (and moralizes on the topic concord vs. discord, for which there is no parallel in Marlowe's play), so Edward hears the drum beats that ironically realize his own earlier fantasy of the Cyclops' forge and grotesquely parody the effects of Gaveston's music. The final irony is that Edward, unlike Richard II, again becomes a "pliant king" at the point of death: "I am too weake and feeble to resist" (line 2556; xxii, 106).

The musical images and allusions are hardly central to the meaning and power of Marlowe's play, but they serve to reinforce more obvious elements in its structure and are all too likely to be missed by contemporary readers who are unaware of the Elizabethan significance of Gaveston's "Musitians."

Source: S. F. Johnson, "Marlowe's *Edward II*" in the *Explicator,* Vol. X, no. 8, June, 1952, p. 53.

Adaptations

British director Derek Jarman produced a film called *Edward II* in the United Kingdom in 1991 (it is available on VHS video). Jarman uses Marlowe's text as a springboard for a gay liberation manifesto, taking lines from Marlowe, heightening the homosexual nature of the king's love interest, and encasing it in a modern context. The screenplay, with photos from the film, was published by Jarman and Malcolm Sutherland in 1991 for the Trinity Press, Worcester, under the title *Queer Edward II*.

Topics for Further Study

What consequences should there be for a sovereign who abandons his duties for personal pleasures?

Contrast the rise and fall of Mortimer with the fall of King Edward II.

Research the role of pageantry in Elizabethan England. How does Edward's interest in pageantry compare with Queen Elizabeth's?

William Shakespeare wrote *Richard III* about a year after Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* was first performed. Look for parallels between the two plays that indicate ways in which Shakespeare may have been influenced by Marlowe. Pay special attention to the structure of the plays, their use of contrasting characters, for example, and speeches.

Compare and Contrast

14th century: Homosexuality was a fairly common practice in the upper-classes and among courtiers. However, sodomy was officially considered anti-Christian and was punishable by law.

16th century: Homosexuality was not openly tolerated in Elizabeth's time, although it was common at the university and elsewhere. The many derogatory terms□sodomite, buggerer, and so on□attest to the negative stigma homosexual activity had in numerous circles of society; and, as in the 14th century, sodomy was punishable by fines, arrest, and placement in the pillory. The act of sodomy was widely considered a vile import from the continent, specifically from Turkey and Italy.

Today: More tolerant values tend to prevail in today's culture. A few states retain laws against sodomy, and though they are rarely enforced, they represent sites of legal and moral controversy for many people. Those who believe that society has progressed beyond such official intolerance and prejudice feel that these laws should be struck down; they also argue that existing laws and rights should be amended to explicitly protect homosexuals. Others, people who are more conservative and perhaps fearful, assert that such laws, and the moralism behind them, represent a kind of corrective for what they see as a lack of morality and discipline in society.

14th century: The King enjoyed god-like status, and his power was thought to be bestowed by heaven. No one dared question him openly for fear of being accused of treason, the punishment for which was death. It was even unlawful to express the thought that the king might die.

16th century: Queen Elizabeth I also reigned under this precept, and she acted upon treasonous activities by imprisoning or executing offenders.

Today: Leaders, of course, are no longer associated with godliness, and it is perfectly legitimate in a democracy like the United State to criticize the president's work (it is somewhat less legitimate, although very popular, to also criticize his life). Threats against a president or other world leader are nevertheless taken very seriously and quickly investigated.

14th century: Kings were expected to be warriors who would defend their territory using all of the means□men, money, arms□at his disposal. It would not be possible to remain king without a show of power, because many nobles could muster enough men, money, and arms to usurp the crown.

16th century: Queen Elizabeth I had to make use of all of her diplomatic skills to maintain her sovereignty in a world dominated by men. She established a veritable cult of herself in order to make her reign seem inviolable. A master strategist, she also used

her wiles to keep a bevy of powerful men loyal to her so that she could count on their armed support against the Spanish Armada, among other enemies.

Today: Modern leaders are not necessarily expected to participate in wars; the popular belief is that they should use diplomatic and other nonviolent means to avoid such conflicts. However, the taking of military action is still considered a sign of strong leadership.

What Do I Read Next?

William Shakespeare's play *Richard II* depicts another deposed king who laments his loss of status and power. Written just one year after Marlowe's play, *Richard II* reveals the influence that Marlowe had on his contemporary; notice especially the similarities between the speeches of the two kings as they surrender the crown.

The Renaissance play *Edward III*□which may have been written by Shakespeare, by Marlowe, or by both (scholars disagree)□takes the story through the next generation, as young Edward III, known as the Confessor, reigns during the Black Plague.

The 1995 film *Braveheart*, directed by and starring Mel Gibson, portrays the conflict between England and Scotland just prior to the action of *Edward II*. In *Braveheart*, Scottish commoner William Wallace unites Scotland in rebellion against the father of Edward II, Edward I (Longshanks), who demands the ancient right of *Prima Nocta*, the "right" to be the first to sleep with a new bride. The film includes realistic (and gory) depictions of Medieval battle.

Niccolo Machiavelli's Il *Principe* (*The Prince*, 1505) influenced Marlowe's development of Mortimer's character. It is a work that has been interpreted to suit widely differing values, and it makes fascinating reading

Further Study

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Explores the history and literary representations of homosexuality in the Renaissance.

Deats, Sara Munson. Sex, Gender, and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe, University of Delaware Press, 1997.

Finds instances of role reversals and androgynous characters in Marlowe's plays.

Gill, Roma. "Christopher Marlowe" in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Volume 62: *Elizabethan Dramatists*, Gale Research, 1987, pp. 212-31.

A fairly broad representation of critical theory applied to Marlowe's plays.

Godshalk, W. L. *The Marlovian World Picture*, Mouton, 1974.

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Grantley, Darryll, and Peter Roberts, editors. *Christopher Marlowe and English Renaissance Culture*, Scolar Press, 1996.

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Kay, Dennis. "Marlowe, *Edward II*, and the Cult of Elizabeth," *Early Modern Literary Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (September, 1997): 1-30.

Considers *Edward II* a negative exemplum of Elizabeth's monarchy, and thus a tribute to her style of reign.

Kuriyama, Constance Brown. *Hammer or Anvil: Psychological Patterns in Christopher Marlowe's Plays*, Rutgers University Press, 1980.

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Analyzes 300 years of commentaries on Marlowe and his plays, beginning with his contemporaries and ending with a George Bernard Shaw essay of 1896.

MacLure, Millar, editor. *Christopher Marlowe: The Critical Heritage*, Routledge, 1995.

Three hundred years of commentaries on Marlowe and his plays, beginning with his contemporaries and ending with a George Bernard Shaw essay of 1896.

Meehan, Virginia M. *Christopher Marlowe: Poet and Playwright*, Mouton, 1974.

A study of the aptness and musicality of Marlowe's poetic diction and metaphors.

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Pincess, Gerald. *Chistopher Marlowe*, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1975.

Brief biography and analysis of Marlowe's major plays.

Ribner, Irving. *"Edward II": Text and Major Criticism*, the Odyssey Press, 1970.

Includes nine essays on the play, plus the text.

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The famed biographer of William Shakespeare turns his attention to Christopher Marlowe.

Sales, Roger. *Christopher Marlowe*, St. Martin's Press, 1991.

A study of Marlowe's majorplays in light of the concept of the "theatre of hell" and the Elizabethan obsession with pageantry.

Thomas, Vivien, and William Tydeman, editors. *Christopher Marlowe: The Plays and Their Sources*, Routledge, 1994.

The three main histories used by Marlowe to compile his play□Holinshed's *Chronicles, Stow's Annals*, and Fabyan's *Chronicles*□are generously excerpted.

Zucker, David Hard. *Stage and Image in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe,* University of Salzburg, 1972.

A study of the impact of Marlowe's imagery and stage directions on the meaning of his major plays.

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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