

On the Inverted World in *EDWARD II*

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So far many critics have argued about the arrangement of Marlowe's plays, and agree that *Edward II* belongs to one of Marlowe's later plays. Especially W. L. Godshalk tells us about the arrangement of his plays: "Although scholars are becoming increasingly aware of the tenuous evidence upon which the present order has been built, still it has become 'standard' to see *Dido, I and 2 Tamburlaine* as 'early' plays, and *The Jew of Malta, The Massacre at Paris, and Edward II* as 'late'. Only *Faustus* seems to be disputed."¹ And *Edward II* has been generally agreed to be the most mature of Marlowe's plays, and assigned on this and other evidence to the period 1591-3. Indeed, many critics do not reach an agreement about the precise year of composition.² But H. B. Charlton and A. D. Waller have a very remarkable opinion concerning the date as other critics. They surveyed *Edward II* from all angles including internal and external evidence and have reached the conclusion that "*Edward II* was written in the autumn of 1591, but was not performed in London until Pembroke's men played it in December 1592, before which, however, they may presumably have played it in the provinces."³ When we put all accounts together, it may be said that *Edward II* was written between 1591 and 1592. In writing *Edward II*, Marlowe seems to have relied heavily on four books. "Marlowe used Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1587) as his primary source for the story of Edward II, and it is not unlikely that he read in the 1587 edition of *A Mirror for Magistrates* the account of 'The Two Mortimers' by Thomas Churchvard. In addition, he apparently consulted John Stow's *Summary of English Chronicles* and possibly was familiar with Robert Fabyan's *New Chronicles of England and France*."⁴ Moreover, Marlowe exerts his another ingenuity in his sources; "The chronological sequence, which extends from Edward's accession in 1307 to Mortimer's execution is concentrated into a time scheme which seems fairly short and consecutive, albeit Edward progresses from youth to old age."⁵

Apart from the source materials, we are often confronted with textual problems in Elizabethan plays including Marlowe's. But fortunately we do not have to worry about the collaboration or revision. Poirier asserts it positively: "Apart from *Tamburlaine*, it is the only one that has come down to us in its original condition. The text is correct, of normal length and without any visible signs of collaboration or revision."⁶ The early correct texts indicate Marlowe's emphasis on 'the troublesome reign and lamentable death of Edward the Second, King of England: with the tragical fall of proud Mortimer', but after reading the play, we cannot help thinking that the title 'The Tragedy of Edward the Second' represents the play better. Moreover, when we read *Edward II*, we will feel that Marlowe's dramatic focus shifts from the spectacle of perfect evil to the spectacle of tragic suffering, and that the exaggerated inhumanities of Barabas or Guise and the superhuman energies of Tamburlaine's desire for conquest are absent, too. At the same time, we will feel that this play is Marlowe's only major play that is not dominated by a gigantic person, though it is still chiefly concerned with the experience of the title character. M. C. Bradbrook writes very justly concerning its verse: "*Edward II* is generally acclaimed as Marlowe's greatest dramatic success; but this is only possible by ignoring Elizabethan standards, and judging purely on 'construction.' As poetic drama, the last speech of Edward is inferior to the last speech of Faustus or even to the early soliloquies of *The Jew of Malta*, and how it is possible to fail as poetry and succeed as drama is not easy to understand."⁷ Apart from some difference of opinions concerning its quality, critical disputes over *Edward II* seem to be grouped

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roughly into three classes. Irving Ribner contends: "In it [*Edward II*] we have a conscious and deliberate moulding of chronicle matter into the shape of tragedy, but I believe that at the same time the identity of the work as a history play is in no way destroyed."⁸ The majority of critics, however, regard the political and historical themes as incidental or secondary to Edward's personal tragedy.⁹ At any rate, the most remarkable difference between *Edward II* and Marlowe's other major plays, it seems, is "the degree of conscious design manifested in it, most evident in Marlowe's skillful handling of his historical raw material."¹⁰ Indeed J. B. Steane notes a remarkable feature of the construction; he calls it "symmetry" and divides into two main blocs. In the first bloc "the subject is the homosexual king and his favourite; in the second it is the rise of Mortimer and the fall of Edward."¹¹ At the same time he points out that there exists an important middle section in which Edward is for a short time strong, determined and victorious. This middle section holds the balance between the two blocs, in both of which Edward suffers loss and humiliation. Moreover, Steane examines the contents of the two blocs minutely and points out the same kind of symmetry; in the first bloc, Gaveston returns from exile; Edward agrees to exile him again; the lords revolt at Tynemouth; Gaveston is killed. And in the second bloc, Edward is captured; Mortimer wins the battle and Kent is killed; Edward is assassinated; Mortimer falls down. C. B. Kuriyama agrees with Steane's opinion, but especially he uses "antithesis" as the very word that covers the basic pattern of the play, and pays attention to the Leicester's speeches, pointing out the fact that "this overall structure is reflected in miniature in Leicester's neat Senecan antithesis"¹² as he watches the defeated king: "*Quem dies vidit veniens superbum, / Hunc dies vidit fugiens jacentem.*"¹³ Thus the rising and falling pattern implied by this "antithesis" is repeated in the fortunes of the main characters and in their own speeches.

As above-mentioned, *Edward II* is a well-balanced play with the pattern of "symmetry" or "antithesis," but in addition to the symmetrical pattern, we see many images (including stage and verbal images), emblematic speeches, and mythical allusions, and ironies through the main characters' actions and speeches. When we examine these signs minutely, they seem to show the abnormal situation of the main characters and at the same time to foreshadow their downfall. We cannot help thinking that Marlowe taxed his another ingenuity in *Edward II*. As we have seen, Marlowe relied heavily upon the chronicles of his time in writing *Edward II*, but as Ribner says, Marlowe seemed to have contrived a conscious and deliberate moulding into the shape of tragedy. What world did Marlowe intend to depict, then? The answer to the question seems to be presented by way of the various images, emblematic speeches, mythical allusions, and ironies acted and spoken by the main characters. Therefore, in the following chapters, by paying attention to the symmetrical structure, we will demonstrate how many signs predict the downfall of the main characters, and what world Marlowe intended to depict in *Edward II*.

I

As above-mentioned, the first bloc contains Gaveston's returns from exile; Edward agrees to exile him again; the nobles revolt at Tynemouth; Gaveston is killed.

When the play begins, we see Gaveston enter the stage reading a letter that was brought him from Edward II, who has just become King. Although Gaveston was banished from England by Edward I, the new King invites him back because this childhood friend is his favourite companion.

'My father is deceas'd. Come, Gaveston,
And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend.'

Ah, words that make we surfeit with delight!
 What greater bliss can hap to Gaveston
 Than live and be the favourite of a king?
 Sweet prince, I come; these, these thy armourous lines
 Might have enforc'd me to have swum from France,
 And, like Leander, gasp'd upon the sand,
 So thou wouldst smile, and take me in thy arms.

(London) harbours him I hold so dear,
 The king, upon whose bosom let me die. (I. i. 1-9 ; 12-13)

Here we will find an abnormal situation between Edward and Gaveston, because Gaveston hints at the unnatural relationship he shares with Edward by calling himself “the favourite of a king” and sighing, “Sweet prince, I come.” Moreover, Gaveston compares himself to Leander, the masculine lover of the priestess Hero, and imagines that the King will embrace him. The phrase “upon whose bosom let me die” is very significant, because it implies a double meaning as Godshalk says: “The first is conventional and alludes to Leander’s swimming the Hellespont for his lover just as Gaveston has crossed the Narrow Seas for his. The allusion is, of course, a piece of dramatic irony, since Gaveston, like Leander, will die for his love. . . . He is probably punning on the Elizabethan meaning of “die” as sexual consummation, implying that the king will become his homosexual partner.”¹⁴ Here we will acknowledge the first example of the inverted world in *Edward II*. In this intoxicated situation, Gaveston resolves neither to bow to the lords, nor to help the commons. The following encounter with the three poor men shows his egotism and his lack of social responsibility. These men see Gaveston as he is, and the old soldier’s curse, “Perish by a soldier’s hand”(I. i. 37), foreshadows his death at this point of his career.

In his second soliloquy of scene one, Gaveston reveals his intention of doing the fantastic diversions which Gaveston fancies for distracting and manipulating the King:

I must have wanton poets, pleasant wits,
 Musicians, that with touching of a string
 May draw the pliant king which may I please.
 Music and poetry is his delight;
 Therefore I'll have Italian masks by night,
 Sweet speeches, comedies, and pleasing shows;
 And in the day, when he shall walk abroad,
 Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad;
 My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns,
 Shall with their goat-feet dance an antic hay.
 Sometime a lovely boy in Dian's shape,
 With hair that gilds the water as it glides,
 Crowns of pearl about his naked arms,
 And in his sportful hands an olive-tree,
 To hide those parts which men delight to see,
 Shall bathe him in a spring; and there, hard by,
 One like Actaeon peeping through the grove,
 Shall by the angry goddess be transform'd,
 And running in the likeness of an hart
 By yelping hounds pull'd down, and seem to die; —
 Such things as these best please his majesty.
 My lord!

(I. i. 51-72)

This soliloquy is perhaps well-known because Aldous Huxley used part of it as an epigraph for *Antic Hay*. Moreover, this speech not only foreshadows Edward's tragic fate, but also indicates that his faults proceed from an excessively pleasure-loving nature, characterized by a special fondness for music and poetry. One of the sensuous and exotic entertainments which Gaveston imagines for the King is an outdoor drama representing the mythical story of Actaeon and Diana. By emphasizing the sexual appeal of the gorgeous young boy whom he visualizes in the part of Diana, Gaveston suggests that Edward is a homosexual and shows his own abnormal inclination. Here again, we find the significance of the torment Edward endures following his infatuation with one whose love is morally forbidden. At the same time, the Actaeon myth is more related to his own situation than Gaveston notices because, like Actaeon, he is brutalized and finally destroyed. Further, it is noteworthy that Gaveston's speech ends with the word "and seem to die." As we have seen, his entrance is introduced with the announcement that Edward I is dead, and then he imagines himself dying on the king's breast. The repetition of death in two soliloquies seems to reveal something about Gaveston's character, "a kind of morbid sexual preoccupation with dying."¹⁵ And the old soldier predicts Gaveston's death. Marlowe suggests, it seems, that Gaveston's function in the play will be destructive. He is, as it were, the agent or the Vice who causes the personal and political catastrophes of the play. In Act V, Edward cries, "O Gaveston, it is for thee that I am wrong'd" (V. iii. 41). Thus Gaveston's two speeches give the keynote to the play.

In the next scene, we see Mortimer Junior and other lords speak their disgust against Gaveston. Mortimer (as Mortimer Senior and Spencer Senior are minor characters and seldom speak, I will use the name Mortimer and Spencer in referring to the younger men) angrily calls Edward "the brain-sick king" (I. i. 125) and recommends to the lords that they settle the issue by force. But the threatened King pledges to take up arms against the lords who oppose him and "either die, or live with Gaveston" (I. i. 138). Edward's response to the threat anticipates his behaviour for the rest of the play. Gaveston stands in the same relationship to Edward as Ithamore does to Barabas: he is "an embodiment of Edward's fallen nature, an extension of his anarchic, dangerous passions."¹⁶ When the King embraces Gaveston on his arrival at court, he calls himself "Thy friend, thyself, another Gaveston!" (I. i. 143), thus establishing the unseparability of Gaveston and Edward. In response to Edward's speech, Gaveston replies:

And since I went from hence, no soul in hell
Hath felt more torment than poor Gaveston. (I. i. 146-147)

Gaveston describes his own love as the pain of loss, but his speech foreshadows the shocking scenes of Edward's downfall.

Then by assertion of his power, Edward heaps titles on Gaveston's head, and Gaveston takes revenge on the Bishop of Coventry who caused Gaveston to be exiled by disrobing him, confining him to the Tower, and confiscating his estates. Moreover, Edward encourages Gaveston to re-christen the Bishop with channel water. Here we see a visual foreshadowing of his own terrible re-christening with puddle water by Matrivis and Gurney in Act V. At this folly of Edward's, Mortimer is ready to do battle to rid England of Gaveston, and he counsels the other lords to oppose the King by force of arms. The nobles' opposition to the King seems to derive from the hurt pride they feel when Edward chooses a low-born person for his minion. The lords decide that Gaveston must again be banished, and they force Edward to sign the order of exile that will be made public. Edward reluctantly consents to sign the banishment decree. Then, after his capitulation to the lords, he joins Gaveston in an exchange of pictures, which shows the erotic theme

again. Gaveston's actual banishment is indeed a symbolic projection of Edward's exile from power over his own kingdom, for nothing that he does will be able to restore the lords' confidence in his capacity for dominion. Thus Edward begins to experience anxiety and frustration: "Rend not my heart with thy too-piercing words: / Thou from this band, I from myself am banish'd" (I. iv. 117-118). Edward's frustration is changed into anger and directed at his wife Isabella. Gaveston utilizes this opportunity to estrange them by planting in the King's mind suspicion of his wife's infidelity, and naming Mortimer as the object of her affections. In spite of her protestation of innocence, Edward banishes her from his sight. In hope of regaining his favour, Isabella begs the lords to repeal their banishment of Gaveston. The repeal is decided upon when Edward comes back on stage, mourning aloud to himself and noticing neither Isabella nor the lords who watch him:

K. Edw. He's gone, and for his absence thus I mourn.
 Did never sorrow go so near my heart.
 As doth the want of my sweet Gaveston;
 And could my crown's revenue bring him back,
 I would freely give it to his enemies,
 And think I gain'd, having bought so dear a friend.

Q. Isab. Hark, how he harps upon his minion.

K. Edw. My heart is as an anvil unto sorrow,
 Which beats upon it like the Cyclops' hammers,
 And with the noise turns up my giddy brain,
 And makes me frantic for my Gaveston.
 Ah, had some bloodless Fury rose from hell,
 And with my kingly sceptre struck me dead,
 When I was forc'd to leave my Gaveston.

Lan. Diablo! What passions call you these? (I.i.304-308)

The isolation in brooding self-pity, this lack of awareness of other people around him, are emblematic of his whole career. "The distance between the king and the others is not merely one of physical space, but of psychological space as well."¹⁷ Lancaster's comment provides a distanced view of the unmanliness of the speech. It is another foreshadowing of the damning nature of the King's love-sickness. But there is a temporary reconciliation for Edward, Isabella, and the lords; for a time peace and harmony seem possible. Edward, awakened by his happy mood, plans a banquet and a "general tilt and tournament" (I.iv.375) in celebration and informs that he has betrothed Gaveston to his niece, the daughter of the Earl of Gloucester. The lords pledge their loyalty to the King, and Mortimer Senior accepts a mission against the Scots for him. When he is leaving for Scotland, Mortimer Senior tells his nephew that great kings have always had their minions and that Edward will outgrow his infatuation with Gaveston. But Mortimer tells him that it is not the King's unnatural loves that bother him, but his preference for a low-born friend with social aspirations is an insult to the lords:

Uncle, his wanton humour grieves not me;
 But this I scorn, that one so basely born
 Should by his sovereign's favour grow so pert,
 And riot it with the treasure of the realm.
 While soldiers mutiny for want of pay,
 He wears a lord's revenue on his back,
 And, Midas-like, he jets it in the court,
 With base outlandish cullions at his heels,

Whose proud fantastic liveries make such show,
 As if that Proteus, god of shapes, appear'd.
 I have not seen a dapper Jack so brisk;
 He wears a short Italian hooded cloak,
 Larded with pearl, and, in his Tuscan cap,
 A jewel of more value than the crown.
 Whiles other walk below, the king and he
 From out a window laugh at such as we,
 And flout our train, and jest at our attire.

(I.iv.401-417)

In this speech, Mortimer makes an allusion to Proteus, which shows another example that the tragic fate of Marlowe's characters in *Edward II* is influenced by the ancient myths. And the speech emphasizes the fickleness of the dress, thereby linking Gaveston with the excesses of Edward's fantasies.

At the court awaiting Gaveston's return from exile, discord begins again because the King speaks of no one but his minion. Mortimer and Lancaster show on the shield their former opposition to his minion. In reply to the question of the King, Mortimer says:

A lofty cedar-tree, fair flourishing,
 On whose top-branches kingly eagles perch,
 And by the bark a canker creeps me up,
 And gets unto the highest bough of all:
 The motto, *AEquae tandem*.

(II.ii.16-20)

And Lancaster explains his emblem:

Pliny reports there is a flying fish
 Which all the other fishes deadly hate,
 And therefore, being pursued, it takes the air:
 No sooner is it up, but there's a fowl
 That seizeth it; this fish, my lord, I bear,
 The motto this: *Undique mors est*.

(II.ii.23-28)

Mortimer's motto, "Equally at last," and Lancaster's, "Death is on all sides," show the undeserved eminence toward which Gaveston aspires and the tragic end he encounters by his arrogance. But the King ignores their warnings and welcomes back with a reference to still another myth:

Thy absence made me droop and pine away;
 For, as the lovers of fiar Danae,
 When she was lock'd up in a brazen tower,
 Desir'd her more, and waz'd outrageous,
 So did it sure with me:

(II.ii.52-56)

Here we will notice another emblem that Edward will be imprisoned as Danae was.

Soon after he came back, Gaveston is mocked and insulted by the lords of his enemies. When Gaveston talks back, Lancaster tries to draw his sword, and after that Mortimer actually wounds Gaveston with his sword. This attempt renews the struggle between Edward and the lords, and when the King refused to pay the ransom for Mortimer Senior, who has been captured by the Scots, open rebellion follows. When Mortimer leaves the court, promising the King a fight, he rebukes Edward with a description of the King's only appearance on the battlefield:

When wert thou in the field with banner spread?
 But once, and then thy soldiers march'd like players,
 With garish robes, not armour, and thyself,
 Bedaub'd with gold, rode laughing at the rest,
 Nodding and shaking of thy spangled crest,
 Where women's favours hung like labels down. (II.ii.180-186)

Here again, we see the same pattern of the downfall as found in Marlowe's other protagonists. Just as a barbaric aspiration for power corrupts Tamburlaine, and the attraction of magic tempts Faustus to give up his religious faith, Edward's sensuality dooms him. Edward is not interested in reigning over a stubborn nobility and a nation in competition with other European states, but prefers to live in a world of artistic delights and illusions, but never perceives the tragic implications his egoistic attitude brings for himself and the kingdom. In a sense, Edward, like Marlowe's other aspiring protagonists, fails to recognize that his fantastic illusions cause his downfall.

After Edward banishes his brother Kent for speaking against Gaveston, his resolution to love none but his minion hardens, his abuse of his wife increases severely, but at once he pardons Isabella by Gaveston's advice, "My lord, dissemble with her, speak her fair" (II. ii. 227). This scene reveals that Gaveston really rules the King and the kingdom, because Edward dismissed Kent and the others who have advised against his minion. Gaveston is, as it were, the Bad Angel in the King's soul as we see in *Doctor Faustus*.

When Gaveston is forced to leave Edward in order to avoid capture by the lords, Edward at once charges Isabella with being Mortimer's lover and then exits. Isabella's lament brings us sympathy, but a few lines later, we find that her love for the King begins to change in favour of Mortimer; she informs the pursuing lords where Gaveston fled; then, she shows in a soliloquy that her gratitude and unsatisfied longing are turning to the love for Mortimer. Indeed her confused feelings contain hate for Gaveston, affection for both Edward and Mortimer, and an increasing conviction that she cannot win back the King. This conviction determines her future course. Here Isabella comes to the fork of a road.

Gaveston is caught by the lords and murdered by Warwick. At the news of Gaveston's death, Edward kneels to curse his opponents and now revenge. Here kneeling stands out in sharp contrast with the later scene (IV. vi.) where he kneels before the Abbot and the monks when he is stripped of all royal power. But the King refuses to give up his dependence on a minion and adopts Spencer as his new favourite. His acceptance by the King calls forth a new threat of rebellion from the lords. A messenger sent by the lords gives Edward another chance to cast off the favourites and have his kingship fully restored:

This Spencer, as a putrifying branch,
 That deads the royal vine, whose golden leaves
 Empale your princely head, your diadem. . . (III.ii.162-164)

In answer to this, Edward embraces Spencer, and gives up to his new minion. He leads his troops into battle against the lords, and, with the aid of Spencer Senior's army, defeats them on the field. Now have reached "middle section" pointed out by Steane.

Lancaster and Warwick are executed and Mortimer is imprisoned in the Tower. The King's brother Kent, also taken prisoner, is banished for the second time. At this point of his career, Edward is at the peak of power and exposes his arrogance. Though Mortimer is at the ebb, his heroic defiance prepares us for his escape in the next scene. He addresses the audience and declares his virtue in Tamburlaine style:

What, Mortimer! can ragged stony walls
 Immure thy virtue that aspires to heaven?
 No, Edward, England's scourge, it may not be;
 Mortimer's hope surmounts his fortune far. (III.iii.71-74)

In this speech, we will notice the keynote of the presumptuous Marlovian overreacher. Mortimer is limited by "stony walls," but he will aspire to heaven, oppose Edward, and glorify his career with "virtue". The word "fortune" uttered by him foreshadows a gloomy fate. In this aspiration, Mortimer is indeed one of Marlowe's genuine protagonists.

II

Now we have come to the second half of the play. The contents of the second bloc are as follows; Edward is captured; Mortimer wins the battle and Kent is killed; Edward is assassinated; Mortimer meets his downfall.

In IV. i., we see Mortimer easily escape from his prison, flee to France, and join Isabella, who transfers her affections completely to him and soon plans with him to depose Edward. It may be that Edward's abuse of her, and her ill treatment in France, and Mortimer's imprisonment arouse their emotions against Edward, and they try to revenge themselves on him. Thus they lose her tenderness and his manly act, and inflict cruel acts on the King in later scenes. At this point of their career, they degenerate into, as it were, the moral level of the flattering minions. In a sense, they have come to live in the inverted world where most of the characters in *Edward II* are inhabited. The word "unnatural" often used throughout the play imply Edward's homosexuality with Gaveston, the rebel against the King, and Edward's execution of Lancaster and Warwick; it also implies Isabella's love for Mortimer, Mortimer's rise to power, his hatred for the King's minions, Kent's brief joining in the rebel force, and his last banishment.

When the King's army is defeated near Bristol by the army under Mortimer, Edward, after failing in making an escape to Ireland, takes refuge in the Abbey of Neath, followed by his two favourites Spencer and Baldock. They are now in disguise, which symbolizes the deception which Spencer and Baldock have practiced and the King's self-deception. Later Edward throws off his disguise. It reveals "gesture that defines his resolve to face his present destitute reality."¹⁸ At the same time, the scene makes a remarkable contrast between past glory and present humiliation of Edward; Edward, hitherto seen in graceful majesty, is now disguised in plain garb. His pathetic action strengthens this contrast as well. He lays his head in the Abbot's lap, and deplores his fate with closed eyes:

... Good father, on thy lap
 Lay I this head, laden with mickle care.
 O might I never open these eyes again.
 Never again lift up this drooping head,
 O never more lift up thy dying heart! (IV.vi.39-43)

After a brief rest the Earl of Leicester surprises and captures Edward and the favourites because the Mower, the "gloomy fellow in a mead below" (IV. vi. 29), has seen them entering the place. In this scene, Marlowe strengthens the visual image by an effective use of symbolism. Douglas Cole suggests us; the Mower, "whom Marlowe invents as the man who betrayed Edward's hiding-place to his pursuers (there is no informer in Holinshed), carries him a scythe. The stage directions do not provide this detail, but it remains

as a felicitous possibility, in which case the presence of this 'gloomy fellow' quietly but effectively suggests the cutting down of the King."¹⁹ Therefore, he is, as it were, a messenger of the Death, and predicts Edward's destiny.

Edward's mad behaviour at the arrest of his favourites, Spencer and Baldock, is quite in keeping with his early suffering at Gaveston's departure, and serves to emphasize his heavy dependence upon his minions. And with the arrest of his favourites, Edward is sent to "Killingworth" (IV. vi. 81) Castle, a symbolically proper spelling for Kenilworth Castle. Before he goes there, as above-mentioned, he casts off the monk's habit he assumed as a disguise. It is a gesture that symbolizes the new reality the King must accept as well as a gesture that defines his resolve to face his present miserable reality.

Death moves swiftly. From the Mower's chilling farewell to Rice ap Howell as he asks him for a coin, we are suddenly in Kenilworth Castle. In his long answer to Leicester Edward sees himself as the figure of Actaeon in Gaveston's earlier speech, and also estimates his plight as a fallen King and wronged husband:

The griefs of private men are soon allay'd,
But not of kings. The forest deer, being struck,
Runs to an herb that closeth up the wounds;
But, when the imperial lion's flesh is gor'd,
He rends and tears it with his wrathful paw,
[And] highly scorning that the lowly earth
Should drink his blood, mounts up into the air.
And so it fares with me, . . .

(V.i.8-15)

Edward at first compares himself to a wounded lion, a lordly animal whose powerful nature is superior to that of other animals. But at once he understands that this description is a blind daydream; though he wears the crown, he is really controlled by the lords:

But when I call to mind I am a king,
Methinks I should revenge me of the wrongs,
That Mortimer and Isabel have done.
But what are kings, when regiment is gone,
But perfect shadows in a sunshine day?
My nobles rule, I bear the name of king;
I wear the crown, but am controll'd by them,
By Mortimer, and my unconstant queen,
Who spots my nuptial bed with infamy;
Whilst I am lodg'd within this cave of care,
Where sorrow at my elbow still attends,
To company my heart with sad laments,
That bleeds within me for this strange exchange.

(V.i.23-35)

Edward gives us the most exalted expression of kingship when he is captured. Now that his favourites have been executed, there remains but two things left for him; his crown and his life. The crown on his head becomes for him the last external symbol of stature and dignity. The crown is associated with the sun, and, after this speech, he removes the crown, holds it out to his captors, and then puts it on again. In spite of his awareness of his bleeding heart and his generalizations of the lives of kings as shadows, he cannot see himself as the cause of all this misery. In contrast with Edward, Mortimer and Isabella become more hateful and dangerous than Edward, in his folly, could have been. After Spencer and Baldock are hanged, Mortimer places his trusty followers Gurney and Matrevis in charge of Edward, and Isabella overlooks the

injustice done the king by consenting in advance to all the brutalities Mortimer decides to inflict. Indeed, it is she who makes the initial suggestion that they are not safe while Edward is alive. Mortimer orders Matrevis to write a letter which will release Edward into Matrevis' and Gurney's cruel authority. This act of writing makes the transfer of power clear:

As thou intendest to rise by Mortimer,
Who now makes Fortune's wheel turn as he please,
Seek all the means thou canst to make him droop,
And neither give him kind word nor good look. (V.ii.54-55)

Mortimer boasts that he controls Fortune and orders his men to torture the King. By this bold arrogance, he inevitably begins proceeding to his downfall.

In the next scene, we see Mortimer's order is immediately carried out, for his henchmen take Edward to a dungeon. The way into the dungeon symbolizes "a descent into hell, since it leads to the grim retribution Edward suffers for his transgressions."²⁰ When we think of the suffering of Marlowe's other protagonists, such as Barabas and Faustus, we will notice that their suffering is likewise dramatized as a descent into a place of punishment. Now the deception of Matrevis and Gurney turns to sadism, and the physical torture of Edward begins, though the self-inflicted mental suffering has been going on since his arrest. Matrevis and Gurney allow the exhausted King no sleep or rest. They sneeringly offer him sewer water to drink; when he refuses it, they bathe and shave with it. It is said that Marlowe used John Stow's *The Annals of England* as his source material for this scene and omitted some of the more heinous details of Edward's humiliation except for the basic ritualistic one of the shaving and washing in channel water. "The washing suggests an initiation into the suffering that is henceforth his lot."²¹ Even if Matrevis and Gurney play the role of tormentors, they are only minor ones, because Mortimer summons up the major tormentor in order to perform the ugly acts. Mortimer invokes him in a way that reminds us of Faustus' calling on Mephistophilis: "Lightborn, come forth!" (V.v.21). His name, as Harry Levin remarks, "reveals the cloven hoof; for it had also belonged to one of the devils in the Chester cycle, and is neither more or less than an Anglicization of 'Lucifer'."²² Moreover, "there is an almost pun-like appropriateness in his entrance to Edward's black dungeon, since he bears with him a light—a light which, like that of his namesake, is at the same time the herald of a fall."²³ Therefore, by the entrance of Lightborn, the damnation of Edward is symbolically predicted. Lightborn appears on stage in garb similar to what Gaveston wears. Like Ithamore in *The Jew of Malta*, Lightborn takes joyful pride in his ability to kill.

You shall not need to give instructions;
'Tis not the first time I have killed a man.
I learn'd in Naples how to poison flowers;
To strangle with a lawn thrust through the throat;
To pierce the windpipe with a needle's point;
Or whilst one is asleep, to take a quill
And blow a little powder in his ears:
Or open his mouth and pour quicksilver down.
But yet I have a braver way than these. (V.iv.29-37)

The horror of Lightborn consists really in the humorous conception of his torturous executions as "tricks." This speech also reveals Lightborn's identity. As Masinton says,²⁴ the hissing sounds (especially the throat tightening alliteration in the fourth line) and plosives are predominant. This impression reminds us of the

serpent in the Garden.

When Lightborn goes away to murder Edward, Mortimer delivers a rather long soliloquy (V.vi.48-72), where he arrogantly declares that his highest ambitions are being realized. And he says, quoting from Machiavelli's *Prince*: "Fear'd am I more than lov'd;—let me be fear'd" (V.iv.52). At this point of his career, Mortimer really rules the kingdom, because he has been called the Lord protector of young Edward. Besides, in this soliloquy, Mortimer boasts in Latin that "*Major sum quam cui possit fortuna nocere*" (V.iv.69), foreshadowing again his final downfall. As Lord protector, Mortimer has Kent beheaded because Kent tried to set Edward free. Here again, Mortimer shows his power over Edward III, and Isabella approves his order of sentencing Kent, saying "He is a traitor; think not on him" (V.v.114).

The scene presenting the death of Edward not only shows Edward's suffering, but also presents a view of the hell. F.P. Wilson, referring to the Edward's death scene, says: "There is a cruelty in these last scenes which we do not find in Shakespeare," and tells us about the impression of Charles Lamb: "Charles Lamb said that this death-scene moved pity and terror beyond any scene ancient and modern with which he was acquainted."²⁵ The physical horror contrived for Edward is described by Matrevis:

Gurney, I wonder the king dies not,
Being in a vault up to the knees in water,
To which the channels of the castle run,
From whence a damp continually ariseth,
That were enough to poison any man,
Much more a king brought up so tenderly.

• • • • •
He hath a body able to endure
More than we can inflict: and therefore now
Let us assail his mind another while.

(V.v.1-6; 10-14)

Through Matrevis' explanation, we know what terrible sufferings Edward undergoes. It must be remembered, however, that these men are henchmen of Mortimer and it is his order to ill-treat Edward. But the King shows a surprising capacity for suffering under Matrevis and Gurney. By passive suffering Edward redefines himself as a man. When Lightborn appears on stage to begin his job for Mortimer, the deposed King faces a more terrifying torture. Lightborn asks Matrevis and Gurney to bring him the red-hot spit, the table, and the feather bed, and begins to bring false comfort to Edward before he kills him. Lightborn, like the Vice, piously dissembles to Edward: "Far is it from my heart to do you harm" (V.v.46) and "O speak no more, my lord; this breaks my heart" (V.v.70). Though Edward sees through Lightborn's pious speech to the "tragedy written in thy brows" (V.v.73), he gives him a jewel, the one thing he has left. Here we must pay attention to the fact that Edward notices his end is near, for "the jewel is the traditional offering to the executioner."²⁶ Here Edward's suffering lies in looking back in agony at the lost chance, yearning for the crown that he did not grace and can no longer possess. His hell is the hideous present tormented by the glory of the past.

O, if thou harbourst murther in thy heart,
Let this gift change thy mind, and save thy soul.
Know that I am a king: O, at that name
I feel a hell of grief! where is my crown?

(V.v.86-89)

His last speeches, mixed between sleep and wake, reveal only confusion and a weakened physical state ready

to receive death; he tries to sleep but he cannot. Edward's suffering is more akin to the suffering of Faustus than to that of any other Marlovian protagonists. His weakened physical state cannot make him flame out in these last moments, except for the final scream that links his death with that of Faustus. Like Faustus he falls victim to his own deliberate vice, but unlike Faustus, he has not the awareness of his own vice.

Now Lightborn commits the horrible murder, aided by Matrevis and Gurney. We see the table holding him down, the flaming spit thrust into his anus, and the feather bed muffling his cries. The picture of the red-hot spit thrust into his anus "is a grotesque parody of the homosexual relationship he has shared with Gaveston."²⁷ And after the murder is finished, Gurney stabs Lightborn according to Mortimer's directions in the puzzling message.

Soon Edward III learns of the complicity between Mortimer and Isabella in these atrocities, and he moves swiftly to punish the traitors. Mortimer's downfall clearly shows the same pattern that Marlowe assumes in the structure of *Tamburlaine*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *The Massacre at Paris*. Before Mortimer goes to be beheaded, he laments:

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 touch'd,
And, seeing there was no place to mount up higher,
Why should I grieve at my declining fall?
Farewell, fair queen; weep not for Mortimer,
That scorns the world, and, as a traveller,
Goes to discover countries yet unknown. (V.vi.59-66)

The calculating and cruel Mortimer revives here the sense of his earlier characterization as an heroic man. This speech resembles Tamburlaine's final resignation. Stoically submitting to his fate, Mortimer goes to death, and Isabella goes to the Tower to wait for trial, and Edward III inherits the disordered kingdom. The play ends with no promises of political or personal renewal, for young Edward is as ruthless and uncompromising as Mortimer. Therefore, looking back at the play, we may feel that we are impressed not by the political state of England, but by the terrible suffering and agony endured by a man for overreaching the bounds of moral and permissible act.

III

As we have seen, *Edward II* is a well-balanced play with a symmetrical pattern or the rising and falling pattern. At the same time, we have seen how many signs (verbal images, emblematic speeches, mythical allusions and ironies) predicted the final downfall of the main characters. The word "unnatural" is frequently repeated throughout the play. The word implies Edward's relationship with Gaveston, the revolt against the King, and Edward's execution of Lancaster and Warwick, Isabella's love for Mortimer, Mortimer's rise to power, Kent's brief alliance with the conspirators, and his eventual banishment. Beginning with Edward's adoption of Gaveston as his favourite, unnatural behaviour prevails throughout the kingdom. Moreover, these characters have the fundamental feeling of frustration. This frustration distorts their personality, leads to their abnormal conducts, and thus smashes every hope for wish fulfillment. Driven by unsatisfied passions or suppressed ambitions, they all follow self-defeating career and lose sight of their primary goal. Therefore, in Marlowe's dramatic world, evil is man-made, or at least gains force through man's willing consent.²⁸ As the result, they inevitably fall down.

In *Edward II*, Marlowe blends unnatural love with unnatural disturbances in the kingdom. As we have seen at the end of Chapter II, Marlowe seems to be concerned not with the state, but with the individuals; the unnatural acts of the main characters are part of the play, and at the same time form the setting for the Edward's solitary journey to his downfall. In a sense, "what Marlowe has done is to make us deeply conscious of a humanity that we share with this man who happened to be also a king."²⁹ At the same time, we may feel that *Edward II* contains another implication. When we look back at the play, we remember Kent's sorrow: "O miserable is that commonweal, / Where lord keep courts, and kings are lock'd in prison!" (V.vi.63-64). It may be that Marlowe's another intention is to depict "that commonweal, / Where lords keep courts, and kings are lock'd in prison." This is the inverted world. The unnatural acts of the main characters, and the images of reversal and of downfall, it seems, are repeated in order to depict this inverted world. Therefore, *Edward II* is not only an approval of Renaissance aspiration, but also "a critique of a society which allows selfishness and ambition to destroy itself utterly."³⁰ It is said that Marlowe, with the savage indignation of Swift, looked at inhumanity to man with the severe eye. Judging from this inclination of Marlowe's, the inverted world in the play is a reflection of Renaissance society.

NOTES

- 1 W. L. Godshalk, *The Marlovian World Picture* (Mouton, 1974), p. 8.
- 2 C. F. Tucker Brooke in the Introduction of *The Works of Christopher Marlowe* (Oxford U. P., 1962), says, "The year 1591, or the early part of 1592, seems then the most likely date for the completion of *Edward II* and its first theatrical presentation" (p. 307). Michel Poirier in *Christopher Marlowe* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968) explains in detail after referring to the textual problem: "Unless a play were pirated, its manuscript used to be handed to the printer only when it could no longer fill the house. This means that *Edward II* cannot have been written in the last months of Marlowe's life. Since the title-page states that it was acted by the Earl of Pembroke's company, who seem not to have performed in London between 1576 and the end of 1592, the play was probably written in 1592" (p. 173). Frederick S. Boas in *Christopher Marlowe; A Biographical and Critical Study* (Oxford U. P., 1960), has the same opinion as Poirier: "Unless therefore Pembroke's company was in being earlier than we have any record it seems that *Edward II* cannot have been acted in London before December 1592, and it probably was written in that year" (p. 173). Charles G. Masinton in *Christopher Marlowe's Tragic Vision* (Ohio U. P., 1971) also says: "*Edward II*, written in 1591 or 1592, marks a new stage in the development of Marlowe's dramaturgy" (p.86).
- 3 Introduction, *The Works and Life of Christopher Marlowe* ed. by H. B. Charlton and R. D. Waller (New York, Gordian Press, 1930), p. 20. By the way, A. L. Rowse in *Christopher Marlowe; His Life and Work*, points out the same opinion as Charlton and Waller's; ". . . in 1591 it seems that both Marlowe and Shakespeare were connected with Pembroke's company. It may be that Marlowe was looking for another patron, and offered his new play, *Edward II*, written in 1591, to Pembroke's men, who certainly performed it (p. 131).
- 4 Masinton, *op. cit.*, p. 153.
- 5 Harry Levin, *The Overreacher; A Study of Christopher Marlowe* (Cambridge: Harvard U. P., 1952), p. 90.
- 6 Poirier, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
- 7 M. C. Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Cambridge U. P., 1960), pp. 160-161.
- 8 Irwing Ribner, *Marlowe's Edward II and the Tudor History Play*, ed. by Max Bluestone and Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare's Contemporaries* (Prentice-Hall, 1961), p. 140.
- 9 Douglas Cole in *Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Princeton U. P., 1962) says: "Marlowe found him in the chronicles of English history, and built around him at the first of the English history plays that is the same time a personal tragedy" (p. 161). F. P. Wilson in *Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare* (Oxford U. P., 1951) also puts it: "In the young Edward's words there is grief for his father and righteous anger with his murderer, but the words rather enforce the feeling that the

- dramatist does not deeply feel the sacredness of royalty, that the tragedy is in the main a personal tragedy without wider repercussions, . . . " (p. 102). In addition to Cole's and Wilson's opinions, Harry Levin and Clifford Leech have the similar opinions.
- 10 Constance Brown Kuriyama, *Hammer or Anvil; Psychological Patterns in Christopher Marlowe's Plays* (Rutgers U. P., 1980), pp. 175-176.
 - 11 J. B. Steane, *Marlowe; A Critical Study* (Cambridge U. P., 1965), p. 205.
 - 12 Kuriyama, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-177.
 - 13 Charlton and Waller, *op. cit.*, IV, vii, 54-55. Subsequent quotations from *Edward II* will refer to this edition.
 - 14 Godshalk, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, p. 63.
 - 16 Masinton, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
 - 17 Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
 - 18 David Hard Zucker, *Stage and Image in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Austria: Universität Salzburg, 1972), p. 131.
 - 19 Cole, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-173. Moreover, Cole supplements his opinion: "The sickle or the scythe was the most frequent attribute of the personification of Time in Renaissance art, but from the late fifteenth century it had been carried over as the attribute of the Death-figure as well."
 - 20 Masinton, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
 - 21 Zucker, *op. cit.*, p. 136.
 - 22 Levin, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
 - 23 Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
 - 24 Masinton, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
 - 25 Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.
 - 26 Zucker, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
 - 27 Masinton, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
 - 28 This section of our discussion is heavily indebted to Masinton and Godshalk. See Masinton, *op. cit.*, p. 105. Godshalk, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-224.
 - 29 Clifford Leech, *Edward II; Power and Suffering*, ed. by Judith O'Neill, *Critics on Marlowe* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969), p. 79.
 - 30 Godshalk, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

(昭和58年9月16日受理)