BASELY LED BY FLATTERERS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE FLATTERERS AND FLATTERIES IN SHAKESPEARE'S RICHARD II AND MARLOWE'S EDWARD II

By

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PREFACE

I dedicate this work to my mother Mrs. Joseph McVeigh, who took me to see Harvey with James Stewart and Helen Hayes when I was eleven years old,

to Dr. Naomi Leibler: "I'll burn my books!"

to Dr. Morris G. McGee: "This is the winter of our discontent."

to Dr. William R. Wray: "For Woe, my wits are in a whirl here."

to Dr. David S. Berkeley: "When the hurlyburly's done."

to Dr. Paul Klemp: "For delight, for ornament, and for ability."

to Dr. Leonard Leff: "Here's looking at you, kid."

to Neil R. Houghton: "I may, I must, I can, I will, I do
Leave following that which it is gain to miss.
Let him go! Soft, but here he comes! Go to,
Unkind, I love you not! Oh me, that eye
Doth make my heart give my tongue the lie!"

Finally, to the "wild O"Neill" and "rough, rug-headed kerns" that they may someday have a country which is truly their own.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the Golden Age, focus was laid not so much on the uniqueness of theme or plot, but on the poetic beauty, rhetorical elegance, or human truth rendered by the author. To say that Shakespeare modeled his Richard II (1595-1596) on Marlowe's earlier Edward II (1591-1592) is neither a value judgment nor a scurrilous accusation of plagiarism. That Shakespeare borrowed, and therefore complemented, some of Marlowe's ideas is evident; indeed, there are many links between these two plays. Both kings are deposed; both are killed. Both plays concern the issue of the monarchy and its power. Some aspects of the characterization in the plays are also similar. Homosexuality is an overt and important theme in Marlowe's play; whereas Shakespeare suggests it as a minor theme that might receive more emphasis in stage business. Edward, a reckless and passionate king early in the play, becomes eloquent and poetic when he is victimized by the barons. Initially a corrupt and derisive monarch, Richard speaks in exalted medieval speech style when he contemplates his own grief and misfortune during the final acts of the play. Both protagonists are accused by the antagonists Mortimer and Bolingbroke of being addicted to flattery, swayed by self-seeking advisors, and overcome by vain pleasure.

The theme of flattery seems to bond these two plays, but actually

this theme is the major idea which separates them. Although there is much more emphasis on apparent and manifest flattery in Richard II, the flatterer in Marlowe's play is a greater catalyst to the action. Flattery is a key issue that has been glossed over by most critics who merely repeat the antagonists' accusations that the kings' obsession with their minions has weakened or destroyed them. In this paper, I will discuss the relevance of flattery to these two plays by explicating the use of the term *flattery* in each drama, referring to appropriate works of criticism of the plays, and analyzing the major differences in the approaches to this theme by Marlowe and Shakespeare. All references to Richard II are taken from The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Ribner/Kitteredge, eds.), and all citations from the Marlowe play are taken from Marlowe's Edward II (William Dinsmore Briggs, ed.). Notations are cited parenthetically in the text.

CHAPTER II

FLATTERY AND ITS CONNECTIONS WITH THE PREDOMINANT IMAGERY SYSTEMS OF *RICHARD II*

The basic conflict of Shakespeare's *Richard II* lies between the reigning monarch's claim to the English throne by Nature and the Divine Right and the usurper's desire to seize power by force and law. Though Shakespeare deals more favorably with Richard in the historically later English plays, it is difficult to tell, as Hardin Craig reminds us, whether Bolingbroke or Richard II is in the right.[1] Though both characters are surrounded by various parasites, supporters, and advisors, they are uniquely individual, and the conflict between them is a distinctly personal one. Whereas the predominant imagery in this play, as it is in most of Shakespeare's history plays, involves sickness, disease, and death, Shakespeare's primary purpose in *Richard II*, as F. P. Wilson states, "is to illuminate weakness, not strength."[2] The clash between Richard and Bolingbroke casts a bright light on their flaws and diminishes their strengths. Richard is a rash and indulgent king who relies too heavily on personal charm and the Divine Right to assert power. Bolingbroke is proud, pride being the first and worst of all sins. To disguise his own proud ambition, Bolingbroke resorts to the conventional accusation that, according to William Dinsmore Briggs, the "King's ministers, and not himself, are responsible for misgovernment."[3] Bolingbroke becomes the traditional rebel of history and

drama who attempts to disguise his real motives by feigning an interest in the public welfare while still pretending to be humble before the king. Flattery in Richard II takes many forms, but the most important one lies in the difference between words and deeds, the significant divergence between sincerity and courtesy. Everyone flatters the king, including himself, but all are caught up in a ring of form without meaning.

The first incidence of the use of the term *flattery* occurs when Richard asserts that "We thank you both, yet one but flatters us" (I.i.25). He here addresses Mowbray and Bolingbroke, who sue to the king for the opportunity of trial by combat. Since each accuses the other of treason, one must be a flatterer who lies and performs mere duty. As Mowbray's complicity in Gloucester's death is evidenced by the doleful lamentation of The Duke's widow, Bolingbroke, in this early case, is sincere in his homage to the king (I.ii.9-36). However, Bolingbroke's first rebellion occurs in this scene when he disregards the pleas of lawful Gaunt to forego his challenge of Mowbray. After Richard prohibits the battle trial to take place at Coventry, Gaunt urges the first role-reversal of king and subject as he attempts to assuage the venomous anger of his newly banished son: "Think not the King did banish thee / But thou the King" (I.iii.279-80). The most significant players in this game of flattery are also introduced during Act I: Bushy, Bagot, and Green.

Only Margaret Webster in Shakespeare without Tears marks any clear distinction among the personalities of the king's parasites:

> Green seems to be the executive caterpillar. He brings up questions of finance and is the first to receive the official

> tidings of Bolingbroke's return; Bushy appears to be the dandy, talking to the Queen in language of precious affectation; Bagot turns king's evidence and tries to save his own skin by framing an accusation against his former confederate Aumerle.[4]

Bushy, Bagot, and Green, though collectively not without a certain loyalty to the king whose confidence they have shared, are a band of spendthrift flatterers. Along with Richard, they have observed Bolingbroke's "courtship to the common people," and they mock his deference and courtesy to common types (I.iv.22-36). Richard, Aumerle, and the flatterers revel in the recent banishment of "High Hereford," the proud man who is stiff-kneed at court but who bows to the common English: "As were our England in reversion his / And he our subjects' next degree in hope." Richard then proclaims his intention to usurp the birthright of Bolingbroke by proclaiming himself the heir of John of Gaunt, whose money he intends to use to finance the Irish wars. The money is absent from his own coffers due to "too great a Court / And liberal largess" (I.iv.43-44). The size of his entourage of "Duketti," as Sir D. Plunket Barton calls the parasites, has cost the king large and "generous" expenditures of the national treasury.[5] So while Bolingbroke purchases the easily won love of the common people, Richard buys friends.

Richard's conflict with Gaunt begins the chain of prophecies that dominate Richard II. Gaunt's belief that the "tongues of dying men / Enforce attention like deep harmony," is useless against Richard's deafened ears which are "stopped with other flattering sounds" (II.i.5-6, 17). York anachronistically compares Richard to the youths who "limp after" the Italians in base, apish imitation (II.i.18-23).

Gaunt's famous patriotic oration about England during this scene is Shakespeare's great love poem to his native land which serves the dramatic purpose of illuminating Richard's weakness, inconsistency of behavior, and luxurious excess. Gaunt, though he lauds the defense of England, is on the offensive during his conversation with Richard. Following the elaborate passage about "this blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England," Gaunt engages in the word-play of flattery with Richard:

> Gaunt: Misery makes sport to mock itself
> Since thou does seek to kill my name in me,
> I mock my name, great king, to flatter thee.
>
> Richard: Should dying men flatter with those who live?
>
> Gaunt: No, no men living flatter those who die.
>
> Richard: Thou, now a-dying, say thou flatterest me.
>
> Gaunt: Oh no, thou diest, though I the sicker be.
> (II.i.84-91)

In this example of Shakespearean stichomythia, Richard plays the straight man to Gaunt's wry comments on the state of the realm, his family, his name, and Richard's monarchy.[6] Gaunt's first use of the term *flatterer* is used to "please with the belief, idea, or suggestion."[7] Gaunt sarcastically intimates that Richard would be pleased to hear his (Gaunt's) family name ridiculed. According to R. J. Dorius, Gaunt's assertion that his watching has bred "leanness, leanness is all gaunt" characterizes the dying lord as the lean, vigilant loyalist who observes the new farmed-out tenantship of England.[8] The dramatic irony of the situation (the audience is aware that Richard is anxious to seize Gaunt's estate) is heightened because of Gaunt's deathbed perception of

Richard's motives for visiting him. Richard's reply can be interpreted as a use of *flatter with*, an unusual construction for Shakespeare, to mean "to praise or compliment unduly or insincerely."[9] In other words, Richard rebukes Gaunt for lying on his death bed and risking the damnation of his soul. Gaunt retorts that living men flatter those who die, using *flatter* here to mean "to inspire with hope usually on insufficient grounds."[10] Gaunt could mean that living men often cheat the dying of the nobility of their deaths by denying it and talking about the future. Certainly, Richard does mean to cheat Gaunt of his immortality by "killing his name" on earth through the banishment of his son, the usurpation of his lands, and the destruction of the realm. Richard then retorts that he is not dying, and therefore should not be misled. Only truth should be told to the living, though Richard, who has ignored Gaunt's "life's council" will certainly pay little attention to his dying words. It is ironic that truth must present itself through the language of flattery. Yet Gaunt persists and says that the king is dying or losing power, while he himself is merely physically ill. Richard, in Gaunt's opinion, deserves the kind flattery given to a dying man who has been "wounded by his physicians," the flatterers who follow him everywhere. Gaunt says that "a thousand flatterers" sit within Richard's crown, weigh him down, and destroy England. Richard's first wounds at the hands of his physician / Flatterers made him bleed the royal blood and waste himself. When Gaunt collapses at the end of this emotional speech, Richard's statement that the old man is lean-witted has a double meaning: lack of wit or contrived, untrue speech or the wit of a lean person or watcher.

After Gaunt dies, Richard refers to him as the "ripest fruit" that

falls first and begins the garden imagery which is a major source of symbolism in the play (II.i.153). Caroline Spurgeon states, "the most constant running metaphor and picture in Shakespeare's mind in the early historical plays as a whole is that of growth as seen in a garden or orchard, with the deterioration, decay, and destruction brought about by ignorance and carelessness on the part of the gardener."[12] In Richard II, the gardener image is alternately applied to Richard and Bolingbroke. Richard should have tended the "too-fast growing sprays," and Bolingbroke vows to "weed and pluck away" the caterpillars of the commonwealth. Northumberland asserts that "the king is not himself, but basely led / By flatterers" (II.i.241-2). Michael Quinn's assertion that Richard II is the personal tragedy of a historical figure is not altogether true.[13] Though Richard is an individual in this play, the recurrent imagery of the history plays makes his problem the tragedy of the monarchy, rather than simply Richard's personal defeat. Northumberland, Ross, and Willoughby use this occasion of the king's absence at the Irish Wars to bring vengeful Bolingbroke back to England. This entire scene's function in the play as a whole is summarized by Margaret Webster when she states, "Shakespeare has split a very pretty issue and left us Richard the man, not Richard the King, whose doom is already certain."[14]

During the following scene, the Queen discovers Bolingbroke's arrival in England after Richard has set forth for Ireland; she calls Green the midwife to her woe and names Bolingbroke the heir of her sorrow (II.ii.61-62). She acknowledges both sources of her misfortune: those who take from Richard by whatever means they can. She vows that she will despair, as hope is a "cozening . . . flatterer, a parasite"

(II.ii.67-69). York heralds the arrival of the sick hour of Gaunt's dying Richard which becomes the trial of the flatterer's loyalty. Significantly, Bushy, Bagot, and Green are seen together for the last time in this scene; they separate, and as Bagot's heart "presages," never to meet again (II.ii.141). The ensuing occurrences of flattery involve not Richard, but the rising Bolingbroke.

Bolingbroke and his supporters arrive at Berkeley Castle during the "absent" time. Hereford, greeted royally by Ross, Willoughby, Percy, and Northumberland, pays homage to his Uncle York with a flattering gesture to which York replies truthfully: "Show me thy humble heart, and not thy knee, / Whose duty is deceivable and false" (II.ii.83-84). York rejects the outward show of flattery when he speaks to his nephew, whom he sees as a traitor paying false veneration to a family hierarchy, which is merely a microcosm of a state hierarchy for which Bolingbroke has apparently no regard. Bolingbroke then proclaims himself the holy gardener who will "weed and pluck away" the accomplices Bushy and Bagot. If the parasites <u>are</u> criminal accomplices, they are judged by "lawful Bolingbroke" at the beginning of Act III.

Bushy and Green are condemned to death by Bolingbroke for three reasons: misleading a king, dispossessing a queen, and degrading a prince (III.i.1-30). Bolingbroke claims that they have "unhappied" the king by controlling him through flattery. The queen's remark that Green (who may serve as representative of the flatterers) was the mid-wife to her grief is echoed here. Some critics suggest that a homosexual scandal between the king and the flatterers is evidenced in this scene--"broke the possession of a royal bed"--but Isaac Asimov asserts that this is a false note implying too strong a connection between <u>Richard II</u>

and Marlowe's earlier Edward II.[15] Bolingbroke's strongest contention against the parasites, however, involves the personal injuries which they have done to him. He accuses them of complicity in his original banishment. There is no evidence in the play that the flatterers were directly involved in Richard's decision to send Bolingbroke away, but their complicity is evident at their joyous behavior upon Hereford's banishment and usurpation of the family lands, which Bolingbroke says they have defiled. It is significant that Bolingbroke at no time mentions any national harm that the parasites have done, a point constantly reiterated by his father John of Gaunt. The flatterers are really condemned because they have done him a personal injury; Bolingbroke here calls himself a prince and becomes a self-seeking Machiavel, as Irving Ribner characterizes him.[16]

The following scenes show Richard bearing the strain of repeated onslaughts of bad news, though he reacts most vehemently to the supposed disloyalty of the parasites:

> Richard: O villains, vipers, damned without redemption,
> Gods easily won to fawn on any man!
> Snakes in my heart-blood warmed,
> that sting my heart!
> Three Judases, thrice worse than Judas.
> (III.ii.129-132)

Caroline Spurgeon asserts that Shakespeare's most recurrent use of imagery concerning flatterers and false friends involves the image cluster of dogs, fawning, and melting. This cluster, most strongly evidenced in Timon of Athens, is used here to display Richard's disaffection with the flatterers, whom he assumes have deserted him. According to Spurgeon, "He [Shakespeare] who values so intensely--above all else in human life--devoted and disinterested love, turns almost

sick when he watches flatterers and sycophants bowing and cringing to the rich and powerful purely in order to get something out of them for themselves."[17] Richard then, more typically, compares his friends to ungrateful snakes and disloyal Judas.[18] Upon hearing of the loyal deaths of his friends, Richard then breaks down and questions his own position as king, hating everlastingly the man who bids him "be of comfort any more" (III.iii.208). Richard realizes too late that he is done double wrong by the person who wounds him with the "flatteries of his tongue" as snake-like flatterers, being double-tongued, do double harm (III.ii.215-6). Only Aumerle and the Bishop of Carlisle now remain loyal to Richard, who must face the uncompromising light of Bolingbroke's "fair day."

At Richard's first meeting with the newly-victorious Bolingbroke, he rebukes him and his followers for not being "fearful" and "awful" at his presence and for foregoing the courtesy of kneeling when he appears. However, when he comes down to meet Bolingbroke he says as the prince kneels, "Me rather had my heart might feel your love, / Than my unpleased eye might see your courtesy" (III.iii.192-193). He knows that this display is mere flattery by Bolingbroke, who aspires to the crown. During this scene occurs the manifestation of Richard's surrender to Bolingbroke and the turning point in his character. He no longer is satisfied with the ritual of friendship and loyalty; however, his new wisdom is gained tragically late.

The famous "Gardener Scene" in Richard II further extends the analogy of the orchard/garden tended by the vigilant gardener to the kingdom tended by a watchful lord. The gardener compares his herbary to a "commonwealth" in which "fast-growing sprays," overripe fruit, and

"noisome weeds" disturb order and harmony. As the "dangling apricocks" make a healthy plant stoop, Bolingbroke and the English peers "weigh King Richard down" (IV.i.86-90). The gardener realizes, as did the Queen, that the king's problems lie half in the cause of the flatterers, half in the cause of the antagonist. Ultimately though, the untended garden is the responsibility of the king/gardener. Flattery here is in vain opposition to nature, as is the deposition of the king, which causes, as the Queen suggests, the "second fall of cursed man," and as we know, the herbaceously named War of the Roses.

Bagot deserts Richard and accuses Aumerle; the Bishop of Carlisle appropriately defends the anointed king, prophesying the bloody revenge of nature. By the beginning of Act IV, Richard has come down, and according to the turn of the Wheel of Fortune, Bolingbroke has risen: "That bucket down and full of tears am I, / Drinking my grief, while you mount up on high" (IV.i.88-89). Northrop Frye believes that "the organizing conception of the history play is the wheel of fortune, which, according to Chaucer's monk, started turning with the fall of Lucifer, and is repeated in the fall of every great man."[19] Richard, at Bolingbroke's determined stroke, has come down, but he has not yet learned to "insinuate, flatter, bow, and bend my knee" (IV.i.165). Though he succumbs to the power of the wheel, he still clings to old ideas and ways of thinking. He must see his face in a glass, which "beguiles" and flatters him, as his reflection registers no change in his physical appearance. His reflection is only a shadow, like the praise and deference of his "followers in prosperity," as it does not portray the change which has so significantly altered his state. Richard goes on to sardonically recognize his reversal of position

with Bolingbroke:

> Richard: Fair cousin? I am greater than a king
> For when I was a king, my flatterers
> Were then but subjects, being now a subject,
> I have a king here to my flatterer
> Being so great, I have no need to beg.
> (IV.i.306-310)

Richard equates Bolingbroke with the flatterers whom he so despised. Seeming to fawn upon Bolingbroke and praising him for his wisdom, he begs to be anywhere but in the sight of Bolingbroke, in much the same way that Bushy claimed before his execution that "more welcome is the stroke of death to me, / Than Bolingbroke to England" (III.i.30-31). Michael Quinn underscores this idea of Richard's final gestures of contempt, no matter how futile they are, as signs of the character's inner strength and nobility of mind: "Richard dies as a Somebody, a lion overpowered, a king deposed, and not as one who becomes nothing."[20] Richard does not, as his loving queen suggests he may, "fawn on rage with base humility" (V.i.33). He is still king of his griefs.

Imprisoned in Pomfred Castle, Richard is confined with his thoughts. Some of his thoughts "tending to content flatter themselves, / That they are not the first of fortune's slaves, / Nor shall they be the last" (V.v.23-25).[21] Richard's death at the hands of Sir Pierce of Exton, a deed which is "chronicled in hell," shows him to be no fawning spaniel to Bolingbroke. He dies after having spent his final hours in brooding contemplation and whimsical thought.

NOTES

[1]Hardin Craig, The Enchanted Glass (New York: Oxford, 1936), p. 157.

[2]F. P. Wilson, Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953), p. 92.

[3]William Dinsmore Briggs, ed., Edward II by Christopher Marlowe (London: Nutt, 1914), note on IV.iv.25-30. (See also Henry VI, Part 2, V.i.36-37: "To remove proud Somerset from the King / Seditious to his Grace and to the state.")

[4]Margaret Webster, Shakespeare without Tears (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1961), p. 119.

[5]Sir D. Plunket Barton, Links between Ireland and Shakespeare (Dublin: Maunsel, 1919), p. 80.

[6]For another use of ironic stichomythia, see Richard III IV.iv. 343-378.

[7]OED, Flatter, def. 6 (See also Venus and Adonis [11.977-8], "Reviving joy bids her rejoice / And flatters her it is Adonis' voice.")

[8]R. J. Dorius, "A Little More than a Little" in Shakespeare the Histories, Eugene M. Waith, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 113-131 passim. (Dorius provides many examples which show the difference between "lean watchers" like Gaunt and "fat ignorants" like Falstaff. He sees these characters as "central organizing figures" in the histories.)

[9]OED, def. 4.

[10]OED, def. 7.

[11]Richard echoes this sentiment later when looking into a glass: "O flattering glass, like to my followers in prosperity, thou dost beguile me." IV.i.79-81.

[12]Caroline F. Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells Us (New York: Macmillan, 1936), p. 216.

[13]Michael Quinn, "The King is Not Himself," SP, 56 (1959), 184.

[14]Shakespeare without Tears, p. 128.

[15]Isaac Asimov, Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare Volume II (New York: Avenel, 1970), p. 293.

[16]Irving Ribner, "Bolingbroke, a True Machiavellian," MLQ, 9 (1948), pp. 177-184 passim.

[17]Shakespeare's Imagery, pp. 195-199.

[18]See also Henry VI Part 2 III.i.343: "the starved shake, / Who, cherished in your breasts, will sting your hearts."

[19]Northrop Frye, A Natural Perspective (New York: Columbia, 1965), p. 120. (See also Henry VIII, III.ii.371-372: "When he falls, he falls like Lucifer, never to hope again."

[20]"The King is not Himself," p. 184.

[21]OED, def. 6 (See also Richard III, IV.iv.245. "Flatter my sorrow with report of it."

CHAPTER III

FLATTERY AND ITS IMPORTANCE TO THE DRAMATIC PROGRESSION OF EDWARD II

Christopher Marlowe's Troublesome Raigne and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second King of England and Tragicall Fall of Proud Mortimer is, as the title suggests, a play with a double-plot structure. The main plot involves the conflict between Edward, an immature monarch beset by domestic strife among his unruly barons, and Mortimer, a Machiavellian aspirant to the throne whose calculating deliberations serve as a sharp contrast to Edward's flights of passion. They fight, respectively, for "England and King Edward's right and England and the Barons' right." The second plot concerns Edward and his relationship to his lover Gaveston, to his flatterers Spenser and Baldock, and with himself. Edward's homosexual relationship with Gaveston, because of his excessive bestowing of gifts, money, and titles on the unworthy lord, causes his downfall as it provides the unscrupulous Mortimer with an opportunity to seize power. According to Douglas Cole, "Edward's fall is depicted as the result of his weakness and wilfullness--the result of a disordered tendency recognized as evil by all except the protagonist himself and those flatterers who profit from it."[1] Flattery in Edward II becomes the central issue which causes all major upheavals and dramatic action. It is the catalyst that forces each character to reveal, in typically Marlovian fashion, his negative side. Marlowe makes no judgment

that favors either Edward or Mortimer; the key to this play, however, is the switch of sympathy towards Edward. Initially, despite his genuine love for Gaveston, he is an unsympathetic figure because of his obsession with vice, his disregard for the kingdom, and his encouragement of domestic instability. However, when he is delivered into the hands of Mortimer and Isabel, his faults diminish when compared to Isabel's infidelity and Mortimer's lust for power.

The opening scene of Edward II, during which Gaveston encounters three poor men who seek his patronage, is most important as it reveals many aspects of the soon-to-be Lord of Cornwall's character. Gaveston compares himself to Leander "gaspt upon the sande," awaiting his reunion with Edward (8). Gaveston's reference to Leander, the passionate lover of Hero and the object of the lust of Neptune, is the first indication of the nature of his amorous relationship with the king. He will lie in peace, though the rest of the world hates him, upon the bosom of the king. Though he initially appears to be concerned only with Edward, he revels in the fact that he can say farewell to the obligatory acts of debasement before the peers (18). He also speaks contemptuously of the multitude and their powerlessness due to poverty. When he encounters the three poor men, he has no intention of employing them, but says, "I'll flatter these and make them live in hope" (43).[2] Through the use of the Marlovian aside, first evidenced in The Jew of Malta, Gaveston shares his first confidence with the audience: he is telling a lie. When the men leave, Gaveston describes the means by which he "May draw the pliant king" which way he pleases (53). Gaveston's use of "Italian masks" identifies him as an evil character to Elizabethan audiences, as does his donning of "a short Italian hooded cloak" (55,

706). John Bakeless asserts that the revels which Gaveston describes here are actually much more Elizabethan than medieval and that Gaveston, by using them to manipulate the king, becomes a contemporary villain, linked to the foulest of Italian courtiers: "Marlowe, with an eye upon the groundlings in the pit, . . . quietly inserts descriptions of Her Majesty's Revels as they existed in his own time."[3] However anachronistic, the description of the revels is a decidedly sexual one. Gaveston here displays his acknowledgment of his ability, says John P. Cutts, to sexually exercise power over Edward II.[4] Like the traditional Vice figure, Gaveston then steps aside to observe the action.

When Edward first appears in this play, he is already in the midst of a furor with the barons. Consistently throughout the play, Edward is described as "brainsick" and "lovesick" for his minion Gaveston (125). Edward behaves in the manner of the courtly lover who is alternately exultant and desperate, inflamed by passion, subdued by depression. His love for Gaveston is the only important thing in his life. The first reunion of the lovers demonstrates Edward's debasement and loss of self:

> Edward: What, Gaveston, welcome! Kis not my hand,
> Embrace me, Gaveston, as I do thee.
> Why shoulds't thou kneel? Knowest thou not who I am?
> Thy friend, thy selfe, another Gaveston.
> Not Hilas was more mourned of Hercules,
> Than thou has been or me since thy exile.
> (140-145)

Already the court requirements of deference to the king have been waived for Gaveston, as Edward greets him as an equal. Edward proclaims himself "another Gaveston," and thereby not only raises Gaveston's station, but also lowers his own. Gaveston has yet to flatter Edward, and he is

already raised up to the king's station. Indeed, Edward flatters Gaveston by becoming a copy of him, rather than creating Gaveston as another king. Gaveston responds to the king's gifts of high titles to him by proclaiming his "unworthiness" (156). Gaveston here refers to his low birth, but Edward's retort, "thy worth, sweet friend, is far above my gifts," shows that the king only perceives worth in relationship to himself, rather than that to established hierarchial order (161). Gaveston now thinks himself as great as Caesar riding in triumph with captive kings (171-5).[5] The "captive kings," judging by Gaveston's aforementioned contempt for the barons, seem to be the English peers. In this opening scene, F. P. Wilson sees "a Gaveston who is not the mere self-seeker of the chronicles but as much infatuated with the king as the king with him, both men have a 'ruling desire' which counts the world well lost for love and pleasure."[6]

When the barons meet as a group, "aspiring" Lancaster decries the court's dotage on Gaveston: "The guard upon his lordship waites: / And all the court begins to flatter him" (227-8). Apparently, some time has passed during which Gaveston has taken full advantage of his new status as the king's favorite. The queen enters bemoaning her state now that Gaveston claims the total affection of the king. Douglas Cole, like the majority of Marlowe critics, is somewhat too sensitive to the plight of Isabel, who enters the play weeping and alone and leaves it in much the same way.[7] Isabel's dramatic purpose seems to be that of consistent lamentation for her own wrongs; she cares little for England and even less for Edward. She is concerned about her marriage and position. Her state--a wife deserted for a male consort--is a distressful and pitiable one; however, she lacks nobility and pride and

her displays of anguish inspire little dramatic sympathy. When she first appears in this scene, she pleads her case to the disloyal barons, her husband's enemies. Mortimer, eager to find fault with Gaveston, vows to exile that "sly inveigling Frenchman" who stands between the throne and the barons. Isabel calls him "sweet Mortimer," a name that "shall fright the king" (288,301). However, Mortimer suggests that Edward may be "declinde" from the base-born Gaveston; that is, he fears that Edward's behavior has become so immoral that he can no longer logically distinguish right from wrong.

To further infuriate the peers, Edward seats Gaveston at his throne's right hand. Mortimer Senior comments on the favorite's "scornful look," a constant irritant to the barons, especially the Mortimers. Gaveston's flattery of Edward is balanced by his contempt for the barons. Humor in Edward II, says Paul H. Kocher, "lies in the personal sarcasm developed as the various contending factions snarl and bark at one another through all five acts of the drama. Its components are scorn, hatred, and wit."[8] Mortimer's obsession with Gaveston lies not so much in his sexual behavior with Edward, but in his manifest contempt for the English hierarchy. As Kocher suggests, there is a sardonic humor in Edward II while the king momentarily basks in Gaveston's bright illumination of his dreary, overpowering court.

Pembroke's question, "Can Kinglie Lions fawn on creeping Ants?" illustrates the role reversal of king and minion through an analogy to the Great Chain of Being, the hierarchy of all things in heaven and earth described by Tillyard in The Elizabethan World Picture (309).[9] It is clear that the king flatters Gaveston to a greater extent than he is flattered by him. Warwick compares Gaveston to Phaeton, who sought

to achieve the greatness of Apollo. In the ultimate presumption of power, Gaveston begins, "Were I a King" (320). Gaveston has now usurped the name of the king, pushing the barons beyond endurance. Mortimer calls him "villaine," a double-sided name meaning either base-born, evil, or both. Edward vows to make the proudest of the barons kneel before Gaveston, a vow which causes the removal of both Gaveston and Kent. Prophetically, Edward bids high-minded Mortimer to sit in his throne and again complains of being "over-ruled" (332). Edward begs for a "nooke or corner" of England in which he may "frolike" with Gaveston, after attempting to bribe the peers into allowing his minion to remain. To Elizabethan audiences, still smarting from the effects of the Yorkist-Lancastrian feuds, the thought of creating "several kingdoms of this monarchie" must have been abhorrent (364).

Mortimer asks of Edward, "Why should you love him, whom the world hates so?" (370). And Edward passionately and truthfully replies, "Because he loves me more than all the world" (371). If Edward is not sincere in his love, he is a fool and his life is a farce. Without this love that has, as Patricia Collins Samsey observes, "Edward's persistence, intensity, and sincerity to recommend it," Edward II becomes bitterly ironic.[10] For his personal tragedy to have any meaning, Edward must love Gaveston. He sues to Mortimer that the high-born lord should pity Gaveston, and the insensitive baron retorts that the "princely borne" Edward should shake him off. Mortimer is cruelly insistent that Gaveston must go and manipulates the bishop to force Edward to subscribe to his minion's banishment.

After Gaveston is banished, Edward broods and behaves contemptuously towards sobbing Isabel. Seeking to regain his favor, the queen sues for

Gaveston's return by the barons. Again, her pleas fall most heavily onto Mortimer's ears. Mortimer is becoming a figure of strength to Isabel, who is floundering as a queen even in Gaveston's absence. Mortimer agrees to Gaveston's return, ostensibly for the queen's benefit, which agreement further ingratiates him with Isabel and provides an opportunity to kill Gaveston, who still haunts the court. His father, however, encourages Mortimer to be patient, reminding him, through typically Marlovian classical references, that Edward will grow out of his homosexual preoccupation:

> Mortimer Senior: The mightiest kings have had their minions,
> Great Alexander loved Ephestion,
> The conquering Hercules for Hilas wept,
> And for Patroclus stern Achilles droopt;
> An not kings only but the wisest men:
> The Romaine Rullie loved Octavius,
> Grave Socrates, wilde Alcibiades.
> Then let his grace, whose youth is flexible,
> And promiseth us much as we can wish
> Freely enjoy that vaine, light-headed earle,
> For riper years will weane him from such toyes.
> (688-698)

Marlowe's predominant themes of "lewd loves" and classical reference are evidenced in this speech. Homosexuality, then a capital crime in England, is clearly a major motif in Edward II, but appears also in Marlowe's poem Hero and Leander and his play Dido, Queen of Carthage and is usually associated with mythical figures and classical imagery. Most often, Ganymede, the lover of Jove, is used as a symbol for the ideal homosexual lover. Kocher notes that the self-referential Marlowe inserts "some degree of personal passion" into these works, and it is relevant here to observe that, as Samsey states, Edward's love for Gaveston is "the central vice *cum* virtue of the play" which causes

his downfall.[11] Mortimer Senior's attempt to dissuade his son from murdering Gaveston, then, is actually quite a wise observation of both the king's impetuous youth and the true nature of the homosexual relationship. Mortimer Senior is no Senex, yet his determined son insists that Edward's desires are no concern of his but that he hates Gaveston, who "riotes with the treasure of the realm." John P. Cutts suggests that, however unfoundedly, Mortimer suffers from a sexual frustration and jealously watches Gaveston's relationship with the king.[12] However, it is more accurate to say that the Machiavel and the flatterer will always be in opposition, as their goal is the same and only their means differ.

At their entrance, Spenser and Baldock seem to be totally unscrupulous flatterers, ready to desert the "factious" lords for a secure relationship with Gaveston and Edward. Spenser's advice to Baldock to be "proud, bold, pleasant, resolute, / And now and then stab, as occasion serves" mirrors Gaveston's behavior in court. Baldock, though outwardly curate-like, is inwardly "licentious enough" to court and fawn for his own benefit (748-765). This expository scene promises much more flattery than the rest of the play actually delivers. As Cutts suggests, Spenser and Baldock, here clearly delineated as individual characters, merely serve as a means to an end: "Their flattery is never obsequious enough to justify the baron's charge of 'smooth, dissembling flatterers' (1478) and they are only Edward's means to his all-consuming end--revenge for Gaveston."[13] Clearly, Spenser and Baldock's dramatic purpose is to be a further agitant to the barons, even after Gaveston's death. Though Marlowe develops their characters in this scene, the exposition is a false clue, as both men, as well as

Old Spenser, remain loyal to the king and aid him in his one victory over the barons.

After introducing Baldock and Spenser, Marlowe portrays the "love-sick Edward as drooping and pining for his absent minion, even though Gaveston is on his way from Ireland. Upon his favorite's entrance, Edward passionately greets Gaveston, again fawningly comparing him to Danae in her tower. At Edward's request, the barons sarcastically salute Gaveston, echoing their reactions at his first return:

> Warwicke: All Warwickshire shall love him for my sake.
>
> Lancaster: And Northward Gaveston hath many friends.
> (128-129)

Sarcasm lurks everywhere in the scenes of "belligerent retort," says Kocher, and in this scene in which the barons welcome the "Lord Chamberlaine," "maister secretarie," and "Lord Governour of the Ile of Man," Gaveston reacts sharply and suddenly.[14] Gaveston says that his "mounting thoughts," perhaps a sexual pun here, never crept so low as to "looke" upon the infuriated barons. This scene is most characteristic of the play because of the bandying of insults, violent threats, and sarconic compliments that dominates the language of the play. Though flattery appears to be a major theme of Edward II, it seldom manifests itself. The only undue praise given in the play is Edward's promotion of Gaveston. However, if Edward's love is true, then even that flattery takes on a new meaning: it is the flattery between lovers, so common in Medieval romance and Elizabethan poetry.

Mortimer complains that the king and Gaveston have "drawn thy

treasure dry" through the misuse of the royal seal. Mortimer's uncle, a captive of the warring Scots, becomes the tool with which he threatens the king, as the Northern lords, lands, and citizens are terrorized. To Mortimer, Gaveston is the root of all evil, the cause now of not only domestic but also external conflict. He isolates Edward saying that he has no friends but a "sort of flatterers" (967). In fact, the word *flatterers* is most often associated with Mortimer's repetitious rhetoric. The Machiavellian baron is obsessed by the king's infatuation with Gaveston, Spenser, and Baldock. At every opportunity, he seeks to isolate the king by reminding him of the baseness of the flatterers' births or encouraging him to believe that his friends are faithless or disloyal. His ambitious nature prohibits comprehension of the king's sensitive needs for love, sincerity, and friendship. Mortimer believes that his life is decided by Fortune and manipulated by himself. His "love" for Isabella is a selfish one: he is interested in controlling her and the prince (2341). His constant references to Edward's flatterers say more about his preoccupation with the issue than they do about Edward's need for flattery.[15] The implication made by Mortimer is that Edward is either extremely vain or incredibly insecure; the troubled king is neither of these things. Edward's minions are loyal until their bloody ends, and Edward never loses confidence in their love: "Gaveston, it is for thee that I am wronged; / For me, both thou and both the Spensers died; / And for your sakes a thousand wrongs I'll take" (269-271). Mortimer, who "scorns the world," cannot understand any unselfish relationship, and his insistence that the friends of the king are merely flatterers shows his overwhelming desire to "overrule" the king.

Morbid punning and black humor concerning the different meanings of the word *flatter* are also evident in Edward II. The Queen, Mortimer, Kent, and Sir John of Hainault conspire to overthrow Edward and seize the throne. Several meanings of *flattery* are used by Marlowe to ironically state the goals of the usurpers:

> Mortimer: We may remove these flatterers from the king,
> That havocs England's wealth and treasury.
>
> Sir John: Sound trumpets, my lord, and forward let us march.
> Edward will think we come to flatter him.
>
> Kent: I would he never had been flattered more.
> (1744-1748)

Mortimer uses the term in the traditional sense; he therefore seeks to remove the bad influence from the king. However, more of his motive is seen through his accusation of Edward's--"King, that havocs . . ."--misuse of the treasury and, if we assume that Marlowe is not a redundant author, the wealth of England which he perceives to be the power of the barons. Hainault uses *flatter* to mean "gratify the vanity or self-esteem of someone." He cruelly suggests that the vain Edward might think that the military train and its colorful banners might be some sort of parade to please the majesty. He, under Isabel's and Mortimer's influence, mocks the king's supposed conceit. However, Dr. Johnson uses the term *flatter* in a "sense purely Gallick," "in which it means to caress or gratify the eye, ear, etc." Hainault, a Frenchman, could be using irony here by saying that the sounding trumpets and their mellow tones gratify Edward's ear rather than, because of his vanity, alert him to the call of war. Kent may take *flatter* to mean *flatten*, as he may here wish that the king be overwhelmed by the baron's army.

This passage illustrates the wordplay of flattery under the influence of Mortimer.

Until Gaveston's death, Edward II is a string of intermittent broils, character expositions, and comic indulgence. The murder of the king's minion is the catalyst to all further action. Edward and the Spensers wage war against Mortimer and the barons; the queen seeks aid in France; the king is captured by the Machiavel. Matrevis and Gurney, whose names mean *evil-doer* and *trap* respectively, are the dramatic voils to the king's flatterers during his period of power. They are ordered by Mortimer to never give him "kinde word nor good looke" (2161). Matrevis and Gurney harass and abuse the king, who bears the strain nobly and, Christ-like, endures his pain for his loved ones. Mortimer's cunning letter,--*"Edwardum occidere nolite timere bonum est"*--which means both "Fear not to kill the king, tis good he die" and "kill not the king, tis good to fear the worst," states the main problem of the play. While the king is in captivity, Mortimer is at his most vicious and contemptible.

Edward Meyer asserts that Mortimer is not the great Machiavellian villain--Marlowe's Barrabas in the Jew of Malta had already claimed that position--that he appears to be initially.[16] Two of his ideas, however anachronistically, relate directly to *Il Principe:*

> Mortimer: The king must die or Mortimer goes down:
> The Commons now begin to pity him.
>
> and
>
> Mortimer: Feared am I more than loved;--let me be feared,
> And, when I frown, let all the court look pale.
> (2296, 2345-2346)

Meyer cites these specific passages because they are almost literally drawn from The Prince; however, Mortimer is much more skilled at subtle manipulation and behaves according to Machiavelli's rule, whether he recites the Italian's axioms or not. His reference to the king's "lightbrained" and "lovesick" behavior demonstrates his lack of respect for Edward's intelligence: "The first opinion that is formed of a ruler's intelligence is based on the quality of the men he has around him."[17] Mortimer has already said that Edward is "declined" by Gaveston. The avoidance of flatterers is also advised by the Florentine, who sees them as a disease which "swarms the courts."[18] Although Mortimer is the central Machiavel in the play, Lightborn's elegant, luxurious evil overwhelms even the calculating baron. Lightborn is the executioner of the king and a totally anachronistic figure who represents the most evil characterization of the Italian courtier/cutthroat seen on the Elizabethan stage.

Lightborn enters Richard's chamber in the sewers of Berkeley Castle, greeting him with words of comfort and joyful news. Lightborn continues to flatter the king, until Edward, who hasn't slept for several days, begins to fall asleep. He awakes, and the murderer and the victim dissemble, each lying to the other. Edward pays his last jewel, which may be either a ring sent by Isabel or his portrait of Gaveston, to his executioner. His murder, says Charles Lamb, "moves pity and terror beyond any scene, ancient or modern, with which I am acquainted."[19] The gratuitous violence and the graphic horror of Edward's death is emblematic of the horror caused by the inversion of natural order. Mortimer's death soon follows. The deaths of Edward and Mortimer touch what Samsey terms "the absolute in poetic justice."[20]

Mortimer's severed head symbolizes the break between knowledge and power, and Edward is most painfully punished for his illicit love.

NOTES

[1]Douglas Cole, Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 183.

[2]OED, def. 6.

[3]John Bakeless, The Tragicall History of Christopher Marlowe, Volume Two (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1942), p. 10.

[4]John P. Cutts, The Left Hand of God: A Critical Interpretation of the Plays of Christopher Marlowe (Haddonfield, N.J.: Haddonfield House, 1973), p. 200.

[5]See also Tamburlaine Part II and Antony and Cleopatra.

[6]F. P. Wilson, "The Massacre at Paris and Edward II" in Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays, Clifford Leech, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1964), p. 131.

[7]E. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture (New York: Macmillan, 1942).

[8]Suffering and Evil, p. 166.

[9]Paul Kocher, Christopher Marlowe (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina, 1946), p. 289.

[10]Patricia Collins Samsey, "The Themes of Evil in Man's Nature in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe," Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1950, p. 72.

[11]Christopher Marlowe, p. 209.

[12]The Left Hand of God, pp. 200-217 passim.

[13]The Left Hand of God, pp. 229-230.

[14]Christopher Marlowe, p. 290.

[15]To Gaveston, "Thou proud disturber of thy countries peace, / Corrupter of thy king, cause of these broiles, / Base flatterer, yield!" (1167-1169); to the peers, "Look, Lancaster, yonder is Edward among his flatterers" (1483); to Edward, "No, Edward; thy flatterers faint and flie" (1645).

[16]Edward Meyer, Machiavelli and the Elizabethan Drama (New York: Burt Franklin, 1964), p. 55.

[17]Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, George Bull, trans. (Baltimore; Penguin, 1967), p. 124.

[18]"How Flatterers Must Be Avoided," in The Prince, pp. 125-128.

[19]As quoted by Havelock Ellis, ed., Edward II in Christopher Marlowe: Five Plays, by Christopher Marlowe (New York: Hill and Wang, 1956), note 79, p. 337.

[20]"The Themes of Evil in Man's Nature," p. 73.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Flattery in these two plays, though ostensibly a common bond between them, is the criteria by which they can be examined for contrast. Though the plots of Edward II and Richard II are similar, the relationship between the protagonist and antagonist, and hence the basic conflict of each play is glaringly different when viewed through the veil of flattery. Flattery in Richard II displays the difference between appearance and reality. The bending knee and empty courtesy become symbols of the hypocrisy and inverted order within the kingdom. Richard's inability to discern any difference in his face when he looks into a mirror attests both to his kingly blood and to his incapacity to separate illusion from reality. Shakespeare's play abounds in imagery and symbolism which the author continued to use in the rest of his English history plays. Flattery is part of that imagery system. The flatterers, Bushy, Bagot, Green, Wiltshire, and Aumerle are never developed sufficiently enough as characters for us to be able to perceive any dramatic purpose for them outside of their relationship to Richard. Flattery becomes a game between Bolingbrake and Richard as their true natures are revealed behind a veil of decorum.

In Edward II, the flatterer Gaveston becomes supremely important as his relationship with Edward and Mortimer dominates the play. In this drama, the king is the flatterer of the subject in the manner of

the fawning courtly lover. Gaveston is everything that Edward wishes he could be. Mortimer's obsession with Gaveston is the result of both his own ambition and Gaveston's arrogant behavior. The flatterer and the Machiavel compete for the same goal--control of the king. The imagery in this play is predominantly classical and reinforces the homosexual love theme. The play is characterized by bullying, backbiting, and bickering, and smooth, fawning flattery contrasts the bitterness of the harsh court atmosphere.

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