

Marlowe's 'Edward-II': An Introduction

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Christopher Marlowe

- A Great Renaissance Playwright
- Born at Canterbury in February 1564 & Died in 1593
- One of the Champions of University Wits
- Wrote Four Great Plays :
 - i. Tamburlaine the Great, Parts I & II
 - ii. The Tragic History of Dr. Faustus
 - iii. The Jew of Malta
 - iv. Edward II

Prominent Themes in 'Edward II'

Following are the prominent themes of the play 'Edward II':

- **Homosexuality:** It is one of the most prominent themes in the play, as Edward II is in love with a man named Gaveston. Homosexuality is ultimately what leads to the death of Gaveston and shortly afterwards, Edward II.
- **Betrayal:** It is another theme within the play. Edward II is betrayed by his wife, Isabella in two ways. The first is that she is keeping a lover, Mortimer, and the second is that she calls for Gaveston's exile to be recalled in order to murder him more conveniently. Edward is betrayed once again when he attempts to hide in Neath Abbey but is found by a mower and brought back to the castle where he is eventually murdered.

Character Description of 'Edward II'

Following are the main characters in the play 'Edward II':

1. King Edward II: He was the main character in Marlowe's 'Edward II'. He was a "brainsick king" with a homosexual lover, Gaveston. Edward II gives Gaveston some of his power after his father dies and he becomes king. His understanding of his role as king is to be "cruel and grow tyrannous."
2. Piers de Gaveston: He was known to be king Edward II homosexual lover as well as "the favourite of the king ." Gaveston is a manipulative character. He is described as a "flying fish" and a "canker".

3. Mortimer: He was a crafty and deceitful character who convinces Isabella to “Be ruled by me and we will rule the realm.” He convinces her into turning against the king, her husband. Mortimer knows that **“the king must die, or Mortimer goes down.”** He ensures the king’s death as well as Lightborne’s after he completes the deed (murdering the king).

4. Isabella of France: She was the Queen and was Mortimer’s lover. Isabella partners up with Mortimer and travels to France with her son in search of allies to bring down the king. Isabella believes that “misgoverned kings” are the cause of the problems and that a king **“of [his] own people patron shouldst thou be.”**

Analysis of Marlowe's 'Edward II' as a Historical Play

Man's eternal quest is to know the unknown, to see the unseen and is to discover the undiscovered things. That's the very spirit of the Elizabethan Age. They have the nostalgia to sink into the historical past and fetch the pearl of spirit undaunted. Thus, Christopher Marlowe, the excellent Elizabethan writer, squares the juice of historical background and unlocked them in full-throated ease in his play 'Edward II'. He just poured the "new wine into old bottles" and stimulates the dozing spectators into frenzied drunkards. So if anyone raises the question "Edward II—as a historical play", we must not hesitate to apt for other answers.

- ‘Edward II’ is a marvel still in historical plays; it is modern in its outlook and anti-heroic in its approach. Edward, the king is not important, Edward, the man claims our sympathy.
- This play is the finest flowering of a historical play. The historical fervour and the spirited zeal are well conceived here.
- This play has a plot, well unite and it is the direct outcome of Marlowe’s realism that a plot has to be coherent. Such scenes grow out of and are a continuation of the previous scene and it has beginning, middle and an end.
- The characters in this play are not puppets tied to strings; they are not wooden and flat-line Shavian characters. They are vividly decorated rather than the historical figures. Like ‘Pygmalion’ Marlowe injects the new blood to the petrified characters. In actual life Edward was not so great a voluptuary figure as he is

presented in the play. To quote Prof. Tout : **“He has no other wish than to amuse himself.... If he did not like work he was out very vicious, he stuck loyalty to his friends and was fairly harmless, being nobody’s enemy so much as his own.”**

- The play may lack the vigorousness and vitality of Shakespeare’s ‘Richard II’, but to quote Charles Lamb we can say: **“The death scene of Marlowe’s King moves pity and terror beyond any scene, ancient or modern with which I am acquainted.”**

- History is a platform to Marlowe to test the limit of human indulgence. Una Ellis Fermor remarks: the excellence of the play lies in Marlowe's delineation of Edward's character, **“he is not a king but a man as a whole, a truly pathetic figure, the victim of maladjustment of circumstances.”**

To conclude, Marlowe's 'Edward II' owes to history and is historical. But the play should not be interrelated as the two words — “history” and “historical”. History is only a record of events in the order they took place. But a play is a piece of art, meant to transport the readers to the world of “beauty and truth”. It is an amalgamation of these two genres.

FINALLY I FINISH MY LECTURE WITH FOLLOWING SLOGAN:

STAY AT HOME

STAY SAFE

STAY HEALTHY

SEE YOU ALL IN NEXT CLASS

Thank You